



THE BEREA PAGE

“Examining . . . to see if these things are so” ~ Acts 17.11

“It Is Well with My Soul” — A Personal Reflection

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Although now nearly thirty years in the past, memories of events from the weekend of May 17–20, 1996 remain vivid. Shortly after 8:00 AM EDT on Friday, as I was completing the notes for the auditorium Bible class I was to teach on Sunday, I received a call from my youngest sister to tell me my other sister had been taken to the ER after collapsing at home. A little more than an hour later, my mother called with the news I both dreaded and expected. Jan, age 38, had died. (The autopsy revealed an enlarged aorta.) She left behind her husband and two children, ages 10 and 7.

My parents lived near my sisters, in a small town not quite an hour’s drive from our suburban Atlanta home. I called my wife at her office, gathered a few things I thought I might need, and hurriedly drove to their home. Dad, who, at the time I talked to Mom, had not been told of Jan’s death, had suffered a stroke five months before and, while he would grow stronger and live another 18 years, I knew I would have to tend to some things that would not previously have been mine to do.

The next four days seemed to both fly and crawl. Accompanying my mother and brother-in-law to make the arrangements. Calls to out of town relatives. Doing numerous other things in support of a devastated family. Friday was packed. On Saturday, my wife, sons, and I were able to decompress. Immediately after church on Sunday, we returned to my parents’ home and then to the funeral home for a visitation period that, because of the numbers who kept coming, stretched well past the allotted afternoon time block. We returned home Sunday night and left again Monday morning to prepare for the afternoon service.

One of the first things my brother-in-law asked me on Friday was to take care of securing a song leader and choosing the hymns we would sing congregationally at Monday’s funeral. I have long since forgotten most of the list, but not the first song I immediately added and placed prominently in the order: Horatio Spafford’s “It Is Well with My Soul.” It had provided comfort in previous crises and was a go-to song of encouragement and praise in the congregation where I had been the principal song leader for over a decade.

In the hymnals we once used, the song includes three verses. The first affirms wellness in times of both peace and sorrow. The second celebrates the bliss of being forgiven. The third ties it all together:

And, Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll,
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
“Even so” – it is well with my soul” (Spafford 1977, # 280).

In the hundreds of times I’ve sung it, never has “It Is Well with My Soul” affected me as it did on May 20, 1996. As we sang the last verse, a sense of calm, almost indescribable, enveloped me. Without consciously forming the thought to do so, I found myself nodding in agreement. At that moment,

it was well with my soul. I neither tried nor managed to hold back my tears, but the grief was a little easier to navigate. I was calmed by the reminder that we followers of Jesus need not grieve as those who are without hope (1 Thess 4.13); because he lives, we can face a crisis with a confidence many do not enjoy.

When asked a few weeks later to preach in the absence of our pulpit minister, I used the above as the introduction and developed the sermon body around the reasons things can be well. I reviewed why Christ matters, surveying Acts 2.22–36. I addressed how we can appropriate soul wellness, utilizing other verses in Acts 2 and Romans 6.3–7. I spoke of the certainty of judgment, the necessity of deciding for Jesus, and the importance of not taking time for granted (Heb 9.27; 2 Thess 1.7–9; Jas 4.13–14; 2 Cor 6.2).

But the heart of my sermon that day was a review of and excerpts from Romans 8, the chapter bookended with the assurance that we who believe are “in Christ Jesus” (vv. 1, 2, 39).

- We have no condemnation (v. 1)!
- God’s Spirit lives in us (vv. 9–11)!
- We are God’s children and fellow-heirs with Christ (vv. 16–17)!
- God works for the good of all who are called according to his purpose (v. 28)!
- Because Jesus conquered death, we are more than conquerors (vv. 34–37)!
- And *nothing* can separate us from God’s love (vv. 38–39)!

And so, we sing—and live—with confidence: “It is well, it is well, with my soul!”

Works Cited

Spafford, H. G. 1977. “It Is Well with My Soul.” *Songs of the Church*, # 280. ed. Alton H. Howard. Howard Publishers.

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