

Unfazed by the Upheavals

‘There was a [Christian] lady that had to do a lot of traveling for her business, so naturally she did a lot of flying. Flying made her extremely nervous, so she always took her Bible along with her to read, since it helped relax her on the long flights. One time, she was sitting next to a man. When he saw her pull out her Bible, he gave a little chuckle, smirked and went back to what he was doing. After a while, he turned to her and asked, “You don’t really believe all that stuff in there do you?” The lady replied, “Of course I do. It is the Bible”. He said, “Well, what about the guy that was swallowed by the whale?” She replied, “Oh, Jonah. Yes, I believe that, it is in the Bible”. He asked, “Well, how do you suppose he survived all that time inside the whale?” The lady said, “Well, I don’t really know. I guess when I get to heaven, I will ask him”. “What if he isn’t in heaven?” the man asked sarcastically. “Then you can ask him”, replied the lady.’

This lady had an aversion to flying. But she had to. How? By reading her Bible. Just that can be a whole sermon. Read your Bible. A recent study clearly revealed that people, even if they claim to be Christians, who read the Bible fewer than four times a week, behave no differently than people who never read it. Those who read the Bible four or more times a week exhibited

behavioral traits that identified them as being actual followers of Christ Jesus. So. How often do you read your Bible? Better not just four times a week, but rather seven times a week. Every day. Read an accompanying devotional to help you understand and apply the Scriptures to your life. Doing so truly makes your life easier to live, that is, it makes it much easier for you to deal with all the problems that life throws at you from day to day. Reading God's word is the next closest thing to actually talking with Him in prayer. But in prayer, we often dominate the "conversation", and never really stay quiet long enough to hear Him.

The sermon hymn this morning, titled in the Lutheran Book of Worship by its first line, "When Peace, like a River", is usually called by its refrain, "It Is Well with My Soul". Its author 'Horatio Gates Spafford[,] was born in New York, on 20th October 1828, but it was in Chicago that he became well-known for his clear Christian testimony. He, [a Presbyterian layman,] and his wife Anna were active in their church, and their home was always open to visitors. They counted the world-famous evangelist, Dwight L. Moody, among their friends. They were blest with five children, and considerable wealth. Horatio was a lawyer, and owned a great deal of property in his [adopted] home city.' But like Job in the Bible, 'tragedy came in great measure to this happy home. When four years old, their son, Horatio Jr., died suddenly of scarlet fever. Then only a year later, in October 1871", [the Great Chicago Fire] swept through downtown Chicago, devastat-

ing the city, including many properties [along Lake Michigan] owned by Horatio. ... Despite their own substantial financial loss, the Spaffords sought to demonstrate the love of Christ, by assisting [the 100,000 newly homeless, and the] grief-stricken Two years later, in 1873, Spafford decided his family should take a holiday in England, knowing that his friend, the evangelist D. L. Moody, would be preaching there in the autumn. Horatio was delayed because of business, so he sent his family ahead: his wife and their four remaining children, all daughters, 11 year old Anna, 9 year old Margaret Lee, 5 year old Elizabeth, and 2 year old Tanetta. On 22nd November 1873, while crossing the Atlantic on the steamship, Ville du Havre, their vessel was struck by an iron sailing ship [, the Lochearn]. ... The Ville du Havre sank within only twelve minutes [claiming 226 lives]. All four of Horatio Spafford's daughters perished, but remarkably Anna Spafford survived the tragedy. Those rescued, including Anna, who was found unconscious, floating on a plank of wood, subsequently arrived in Cardiff, South Wales. Upon arrival there, Anna immediately sent a [two-word] telegram to her husband: 'Saved alone'.

'Receiving Anna's message, he set off at once to be reunited with his wife. One particular day, during the voyage, the captain summoned him to the bridge of the vessel. Pointing to his charts, he explained that they were then passing over the very spot where the Ville du Havre had sunk, and where his daughters had died. It is said that Spafford returned to his cabin and wrote the

hymn “It is well with my soul” there and then, [beginning with] “When peace like a river, attendeth my way..” ... Horatio’s faith in God never faltered. He later wrote to Anna’s half-sister, “On Thursday last, we passed over the spot where she went down, in mid-ocean, the waters three miles deep. But I do not think of our dear ones there. They are safe ... dear lambs”. After Anna was rescued, Pastor Nathaniel Weiss, one of the ministers travelling with the surviving group, remembered hearing Anna say, “God gave me four daughters. Now they have been taken from me. Someday I will understand why.” Naturally Anna was utterly devastated, but she testified that in her grief and despair, she had been conscious of a soft voice speaking to her, “You were saved for a purpose!” She remembered something a friend had once said, “It’s easy to be grateful and good when you have so much, but take care that you are not a fair-weather friend to God.” Following this deep tragedy, Anna gave birth to three more children, but she and Horatio were not spared even more sadness, as on February 11th, 1880, their only son, Horatio (named after the brother who had died, and also after his father), also died at [age 4]. In August 1881 the Spaffords left America with [some other] Christians, and settled in Jerusalem. ... Their desire was to show [there] the love of Jesus [through philanthropic works].

‘The [music of this hymn] written by Philip Bliss, was named after the ship on which Horatio and Anna’s daughters had died—Ville du Havre. Horatio Spafford died of malaria on 16th October

1888 [, 4 days from turning 60]. Anna continued to work in ... Jerusalem until her own death in 1923. Both Horatio and Anna were laid to rest in Jerusalem. ... "It is well with their souls."

I doubt any of us have gone through even a fraction of the tragedy that the Spaffords endured, while still remaining not only faithful, but devout servants of Lord Jesus, diligently doing Kingdom work. Each of us, in our own little places and ordinary lives, are no less called to follow our Lord. He said to all His disciples, "Follow Me". They asked Him about the future. He told them and us, in Luke 21 and Matthew 24, what to look out for, and what to do. Luke 21:10-11 says, 'Jesus continued, "There will be upheavals of every kind. Nations will go to war against each other, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be terrible earthquakes and seismic events of epic proportions that result in famines in one place after another. There will be horrible plagues and epidemics, cataclysmic storms on the earth, and astonishing signs and cosmic disturbances in the heavens"' (TPT). Verses 17-19 tell us: "everyone will hate you because you are My followers. But not a hair of your head will perish! By standing firm, you will win your souls". Verse 28 concludes: "So when all these things begin to happen, stand and look up, for your salvation is near!"

Wikipedia reports right this minute, there are 5 major wars, 18 other wars, 17 minor wars, and 16 minor conflicts ongoing worldwide in over 20 countries. Also, in 2023, there were 15,600 earthquakes, with over 64,100 deaths. Dozens of deadly major

storms and floods with extensive loss of life struck, many in our own country. But our current domestic conflicts are based in conflicting cultures. This “culture war” is threatening to become a hot, kinetic war as the current lawless, federal regime seeks to completely overthrow historic America. Out of necessity, Texas has taken the lead to control its border with Mexico, and is in direct legal conflict with Washington, D.C. Twenty-five other states have expressed support; many even sending National Guard troops to help Texas. Surely a second Civil War can be avoided as the feckless D.C. establishment will probably back down.

New year 2024 has already witnessed more birth pangs, showing us that a tumultuous year is upon us. Psalm 62:5-8 and 11-12 instruct us, “Let all that I am wait quietly before God, for my hope is in Him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress where I will not be shaken. My victory and honor come from God Alone. He is my refuge, a rock where no enemy can reach me. O my people, trust in Him at all times. Pour out your heart to Him, for God is our refuge.” “Power, O God, belongs to You; unending love, O Lord, is Yours. Surely You repay all people according to what they have done”. We just need to keep living holy and righteous for the Lord, while taking precautions and making preparations for power outages, food shortages, and even some breakdown of social cohesion. We may find ourselves in shooting wars, domestically and internationally. Don’t be alarmed, but remain unfazed and faithful, for it is well with your soul.

