IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL!

1. We have been justified
2. We are at peace with God
3. We have been reconciled to God

There once was a lawyer from Chicago named Horatio G. Spafford who had suffered great personal tragedy. His only son died of scarlet fever as a young boy. A year later he lost most of his investments in the great Chicago fire. He decided to take his wife and four daughters on a vacation to England. A last minute business matter came up and Horatio sent his wife and daughters on ahead on a ship and he would soon follow. That ship sank and his four daughters died. His wife Anna survived and sent a telegram saying: Saved alone.

Horatio took the next ship over and during the voyage the captain called him to the bridge and told him that they had reached the exact spot where the ship had gone down in water 3 miles deep.

I wonder what he was thinking as he went to his cabin. All had been lost except his wife. First his only son died at age 4, then a great portion of his wealth was wiped out in a fire, and now his daughters were dead. How his soul must have cried out in great anguish when the captain told him: This is the spot where your children downed and went to the bottom of the sea. Under such circumstances, how would you answer the question: Is all well with my soul?

As we contemplate the words of our God from book of Romans, let them speak to your soul and then take them to heart and so have reason to say in the best of times and in the worst: IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL!

Leading up to this reading, Paul has shown how simple our faith truly is. God simply says believe and be saved. Paul has shown that at the moment a person begins to believe in Christ that believer is saved. He is justified before God. That means to be without sin. And not only are all sins removed and forgiven but God also credits the believer with the perfect obedience of Christ to all God’s law. This gives the believer the status of being perfect in God’s eyes.

Then in the words just before the reading Paul wrote: Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.

Think about that simple statement, because we have been justified we have peace with God. This is the unending peace that comes from sins forgiven and that is why we have access into the grace in which we stand. This is the grace that declares us righteous before God.

Where it says we rejoice in our sufferings, the word for rejoice means to have a confident joyful boasting. We confidently rejoice and boast in the face of suffering because we know we have been justified and nothing can take that from us or from our loved ones who believe. Suffering indeed produces perseverance, which is the ability to endure suffering and maintain faith. Perseverance in turn produces character which is the Christian character that does not give up hope. Hope is our confident expectation that God will keep all his promises to us. This hope, this confidence, does not disappoint us because God has poured out his
love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. How can we be sure of all this?

Paul answers that in our reading today: **You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.**

The idea behind **just at the right time** is not so much the time in history of the world, but the time in the history of the salvation of our souls. The reason our hope and confidence in God does not disappoint us is because God has poured out his love into our hearts. We can be sure of this because God demonstrated his love in sending his Son our Savior to die for us when we were but lost sinners. The love of God is his agape love, his unconditional love that is self-sacrificial and which always has the best interest of the object of love at heart.

Consider how, though it would be rare, it happens that a person would be willing to die to save a man, not because the man was important to the world in any way or well loved, but simply because he lived a righteous life. We can imagine someone dying for a good man; a soldier jumps on a grenade to save his fellow soldiers who are good people. We can imagine a stranger jumping to save a child from a car though it meant certain death for the person. But can you imagine anyone willing to die for a despicable, violent, hateful person who has done great harm to others?

But now consider what God did. He died for us when we were neither righteous nor good, but were sinners, despicable in his eyes. God tells us that our sin makes us unclean so that we cannot come into his presence. We were not sinners just part of the time but that was our status before our Most Holy God all the time. God has made it clear that he hates sin and he hates sinners. That is why he decreed that wages of sin is death, both physical death and spiritual death. Paul pointed out early in Romans that the wrath of God is pouring out on those who suppress the truth by wickedness. He goes on to describe how all of us have done this by sinning. What do we deserve from God? We deserve only his wrath and punishment. Yet in spite of all this, God demonstrated his unconditional love by dying for us who deserved it not in the least.

There is great comfort in this because it removes the smallest possibility that there has to be something good in us for God to love us. It forever sets aside the search to find some reason for God to love us. Instead, we can rejoice in his love for us and know that God loves us simply because he loves us. There is no reason for this other than the goodness of our God. In light of this, ask yourself, in the best of times and in the worst of times: **Is all well with my soul?**

There will be a time when your soul finds self in turmoil and isn’t at peace, for we all sin and will question if God will really forgive us. If so, prepare your soul by listening as Paul goes on to say in this reading: **Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! For if, when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.**

Consider Paul’s argument or point for a moment. We who have sinned were justified before God who hates sin and sinners, not by anything good we did, but only by the great suffering and death of his one and only Son. This suffering and death came about, not by the power of man, but by the will and decision of our Triune God for his Son to die in our place by becoming the thing God hates most - sin. What is more, he became every sin of every sinner of all time. Did this bring God’s wrath upon us? Not at all, but it brought us peace. By his
blood we have been justified before God. If God justified us by the blood of his Son, how could he not save us from his wrath over our sin?

God wants you to understand your status with him and so he guided Paul to point out that being justified through faith in Jesus means we have been reconciled to God. Reconciliation means to make friendly again or win over to a friendly attitude, to make peace between parties. When a married couple has problems and separate, there is always the chance of reconciliation, meaning they will be able to set aside their differences, their hurt feelings and pains and become one again in marriage. Our sin separated us from God and made us enemies of God, but the death of his Son changed all that. It gave us peace with God and thus reconciled us with God.

God reconciled us to him, not by setting aside our differences, but through the death of Christ. By his suffering and death he removed the cause of the separation between us - our sin - and brought us back to him through faith in Jesus. Now if the death of our Savior actually brought us peace and reconciliation, then what would it mean that he rose from the dead? Paul’s point is that because Jesus lives, we have even more reason to know we have been reconciled to God. In all this, God demonstrated his love for you by dying for you while you were but a sinner. In view of such great love, can you say in any given circumstance, in pain so great it threatens to overcome you: All is well with my soul?

Paul closes by saying: Not only is this so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. He uses the same word for to rejoice he used earlier which means again to have a confident joyful boast. Earlier he said we rejoice, confidently boast in the face of suffering because we have been justified and now have peace with God. Now he says we confidently boast or rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ through whom we have received this reconciliation. We have reason to boast. God did everything necessary to reconcile us and nothing can change that as long as we believe.

When Horatio Spafford was told that the ship he was on had reached the location of the downing of the ship his wife and children were on he went to his cabin. I imagine how his soul must have been in great anguish, yet in the anguish of losing so much, he then and there wrote the hymn Peace Like A River, with the refrain It is well with my soul! Horatio and his wife were devout Christians who understood our faith makes all things well for our soul even in the midst of great sadness, tragedy, and loss.

You and I may never pen a hymn, but may we ever take to heart the message of God that we have been justified, are at peace with him and thus have been reconciled to God. May we cling to his love for us demonstrated in the death of his Son and let his love ever warm and cheer our hearts so that then in those moments of life when sadness seeks to overwhelm us, we each rejoice and sing: It is well with my soul. Amen!

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