

It Is Well with my Soul

By
Bill Dagle

More than likely you have heard or read the story behind the writing of *It Is Well with my Soul*. The author, Horatio Spafford, born October 22, 1828 in Troy, New York, grew up to become a successful lawyer in Chicago. He wrote the words to *It Is Well with my Soul* after receiving the tragic news of the death of his four daughters. On the fateful night of November 22, 1873, the *Ville de Havre*, a passenger ship, sank in a mid-ocean collision. Out of his entire family, only his wife survived. The rest of the story would take me all the way to Jerusalem.

During February of 1997, my wife, Linda, two Christian friends, and I boarded a plane in New York City for the Holy Land. During our ten day stay, I was able to visit the American Colony Hotel and the Children's Hospital—both establishments founded by our author, Horatio Spafford. To add more intrigue to the story, I met the last living member of the Spafford family. It was there in the lobby of the American Colony, I found the chilling details of that horrible voyage plus the explanation of how a descendant of Spafford has always owned the hotel even though all his children had died in that horrible accident.

Back in 1873, Horatio had decided to take his family to France and then on to Switzerland. That's why passage had been booked on the French liner, *S. S. Ville de Havre*. Because of last minute business, Horatio planned to stay behind a few weeks, then catch up with his family. Having gone to New York and after boarding the ship, an uneasy feeling caused him to have the family's cabins changed to the bow of the ship. I would be just a few days later, at two in the morning, that the ship would be cut in two right at the cabins the Spaffords had left. In less than twelve minutes, the children succumbed to the rushing water, but Anna survived. If the changing of cabins hadn't happened, she too would have died.

Had Anna died, history would have taken a different course because it was when Spafford was in route to reunite with his wife, after the accident, that he penned the words to the song. When finally back in Chicago, they would eventually have three more children: a boy, Horatio Jr., who died of scarlet fever at the age of four, and two girls, Bertha and Grace. Both of the girls would eventually travel to Jerusalem with their parents—starting the legacy of American Colony ownership and the beginning of the hospital.

The shipwreck of the *Ville de Havre* would remain one of the unexplained tragedies of the sea and its greatest disaster up until the sinking of *Titanic*. For many of us, when troubles come our way, it is hard to understand why. If only we too could say, "When sorrows like sea billows roll, it is well, it is well with my soul." I believe, with Christ Jesus, we can. Horatio Spafford did.