



How Firm a Foundation



"How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!
What more can He say than to you He hath said -
to you, who for refuge to Jesus have fled?"

"Fear not, I am with thee - O be not dismayed,
for I am thy God, I will still give thee aid;
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand.

"When thru the deep waters I call thee to go,
the rivers of woe shall not thee overflow;
for I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless,
and sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.

"When thru fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all-sufficient, shall be thy supply:
the flame shall not hurt thee - I only design
thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.

"The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not, desert to his foes;
that soul, tho all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never - no, never - no, never forsake!"

"So we say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?' " - Hebrews 13:6

We cannot be sure who wrote the stirring lines of "How Firm a Foundation," but it is easy to see the promises expressed so well in each verse. In these days of moral confusion, it is good to know that a firm foundation is laid for our faith in His excellent Word. While others debate the definition of truth, we know that there is only one, and His name is Jesus, who says in John 14:6, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life."

In Matthew 7:24-27, Jesus ends his Sermon on the Mount with the parable of two builders. The wise man built his house on the rock, so that when a violent storm hit, the house did not fall, "for it had been founded upon the rock." But Jesus compares him to a foolish man, who decided that a firm foundation was not that important. He quickly erected his building on the sand, but when the rain poured down, and the winds slammed against the house, "it fell - and great was its fall."

I have always loved the question posed in the first verse of today's hymn, which asks boldly, "What more can He say than to you He hath said - to you, who for refuge to Jesus have fled?" You may find yourself asking someone else - perhaps a child - "What part of what I just said did you not understand?" It sounds a bit sarcastic when we say it, but not when the words come from the mouth of God who has given us His Word to live by.

Stanza 2 is based on Isaiah 41:10, which begins: "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not look anxiously about you; for I am your God ... " We are often dismayed when we feel weak and helpless, but He has promised to be there in those moments to help us and hold us up by His gracious, omnipotent hand.

The third verse comes from Isaiah 43:2, which gives us this promise: "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you." There are times in our lives when we may feel like we are about to go under as the "rivers of woe" overflow all around us. It is at those times that our sure hope is found in knowing that God has called us to go through the deep waters, but He will not leave us there. Just as Peter uttered his brief, heartfelt prayer, "Lord save me!", we can call out to the Lord and He will be there to rescue us from danger and pull us back to safety.

Verse 4 talks about "fiery trials" that come across our pathway, and the all-sufficient grace of God that will be our supply. Paul prayed fervently for God to remove his "thorn in the flesh," but the Lord answered, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is perfected in your weakness." When he was reminded that God had a divine purpose in his suffering, Paul could then say, "Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, persecutions and difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

God will never forsake us in those difficult times; rather, He draws closer as we instinctively reach out to Him in our need. He is always at work, in ways we may not sense, to bring about blessing in the midst of the most hopeless situations. And we rest in the truth of Romans 8:28, which says, "We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

One consolation in our suffering is that Christ gives value to it. As the hymn writer says, He is able to sanctify our deepest distress, so that we can know that there is meaning and purpose behind our struggles. That makes all the difference when challenges confront us, and we can't help but wonder how those who do not have the Lord at their side can face such times. Let us be determined to know God's Word better each day, so that we will stand upon the firm foundation, trusting in the security of His sure promises for this earthly journey.