



I Hear the Bells

Description

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests. (Luke 2:14)

There are so many things I enjoy during the Christmas season, but one of the things I enjoy the most are the Christmas carols. They seem to be playing everywhere I go. My favorite thing about it all is hearing people join in and sing to them. It doesn't matter if the songs are playing in the grocery store, the mall, or the coffee shop. Everywhere I go I hear someone singing along. The joy of Christmas sweeps through every heart, even if they haven't experienced the full meaning of it.

This has led me on a journey to discover the story behind some of the Christmas carols. I know I will sing them with more conviction and more meaning in my heart, if I know the full story behind them. So I'm going to take you on this journey with me. Let's start with "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day."

This song was written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. In 1860, Longfellow was celebrating the peak of his poetry career. It was during this time that Abraham Lincoln had just taken office and given hope to our nation.

Unfortunately, not long after Lincoln's arrival things turned grim for America and for Longfellow in a personal way. It was in 1861 that the Civil War broke out. In this same year, Longfellow lost his wife to a tragic house fire. During this house fire, Longfellow sacrificed himself to save his wife. He threw himself around her in hopes to keep her from burning to death and in the process suffered severe burns.

Here are a couple of Longfellow's journal entries during his hard times...

"How inexpressibly sad are the holidays." ~Christmas Day, 1861

"A merry Christmas say the children, but that is no more for me." ~Christmas Day, 1862

In 1863, Longfellow's despair grew worse as he found out that his son was severely wounded in the war. He did not make an entry in his journal that Christmas.

It was in 1864, that Longfellow decided to pen the words to the now familiar Christmas carol. He made a decision to pull out of his despair and find the joy of Christmas again. It was the Christmas bells that reminded him of the joy of Christmas. They pulled him from his despair and reminded him of God's faithfulness. There are a couple stanzas in the song where the bells seemed to mock him, as if to say "what peace?" These stanzas came from the turmoil that America was in during the Civil War. It was not long before that it had just gone through The Battle of Gettysburg. Longfellow had a hard time penning the words of peace when his own country was fighting man against man, brother against brother, father against son. But as he wrote, the bells continued to ring and God continued to speak. God's peace broke through Longfellow's defense, as he caught on to the eternal perspective of Christmas. Here are just some of the words that Longfellow wrote. Maybe you can see the journey that he took through his poem!

I heard the bells on Christmas day

Their old familiar carols play,

And wild and sweet

The words repeat

Of peace on earth, good-will toward men.

And in despair I bowed my head:

"There is no peace on earth," I said:

"For hate is strong,

And mocks the song

Of peace on earth, good-will to men,"

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:

"God is not dead, nor doth he sleep!

The Wrong shall fail,

The Right prevail,

With peace on earth, good-will to men.”

Longfellow was reminded by the bells that peace had been brought to this earth. God would not fail him. God was not sleeping. God would not leave him. God had his good will in mind. Sometimes life looks chaotic and things don't make sense. The war that was taking place in America during Longfellow's days is not too unlike a lot of the wars we face during our own lives. We need to remember that God is still sitting on the throne. He is not sleeping. He still promises peace. He never promised things would be easy, but He did an eternity worth fighting for.

Stop to hear the bells this Christmas. Take time away from the gift shopping, the party hopping, the baking, and all the festivities of Christmas. And simply find time to listen to the sweet sound of the bells. The bells that remind us peace comes from God. The peace that passes all understanding. The peace that guards our hearts and our minds. Will you find peace in God this Christmas?

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7)

Dear Father God, This Christmas I want to take time to hear the bells. I want to remember that You are the One who brings peace on earth. I pray that the songs we sing during this Christmas season will take meaning in a new way. May we worship You with the songs we sing and love You to our utmost!

Taking time to hear the bells,

Category

1. Holidays

Tags

1. Christmas
2. Christmas Carols

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