

Christmas is for Times Like These
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Christmas is only for times like these.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote a fantastic Christmas poem that has been turned into a beautiful carol, "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day." He starts out remarking on the joyful bells that remind him of God's peace and hope, but toward the end the poem falls into a downward spiral. He writes,

*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!'*

Longfellow wrote this during the American Civil war. His wife recently died suddenly in a fire and his son had been severely injured in battle. For a couple verses he sounds hopeless. Can you relate?

We enjoyed a wonderful Christmas pageant with our preschool children this past Sunday. We love the shows because the kids are cute, and they clearly love Christmas. Watching them enjoy Christmas helps us to enjoy it as well, as we recall, and maybe wish, we could hear those bells like we once did.

But as we get older, or worse, endure suffering like Longfellow, the joy of Christmas seems out of place in our lives. Christmas seems to be a holiday only for little children or 'those people' who have it together. It looks nice on TV but not in real life.

But consider what Christmas really celebrates. God coming into a sinful, war torn, broken world in order to save it. We gather around a baby in a smelly feed trough surrounded by a working-class couple, a bunch of guys on their way to the bar after working the 3rd shift, and animals. Jesus didn't come for people who have it together. He came to rescue us from what we have done with our lives. He has come to rescue us from death. And He has! He is risen!

So, if you are sad, mourning, lonely, guilty, ashamed, scared, tired, weak, poor, then Christmas is for you specifically! God has proven He loves you on the cross. He has backed up His promise of care and a future in the resurrection. You don't need anything to celebrate Christmas rightly except your empty hands!

Longfellow might not have felt it, but he believed it and clung to God's promises,

*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!'*