



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS



God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen!

HEAVEN & NATURE SING

Jude 24–25

Tim Badal | December 18, 2022

Turn in your Bibles to the book of Jude this morning. We're continuing our series titled "Heaven & Nature Sing," looking at our Christmas playlist. We're looking at some songs we sing during the Christmas season, investigating them in order to understand why they were written and what their words really mean. Hopefully, this will bring greater substance and meaning to our celebration of Christmas.

Let's face it. The Christmas celebration, unlike any other holiday we have on our calendar, is all about music. We don't have specific music, for the most part, for Valentine's Day, St. Patty's Day, Flag Day, Veterans Day, Halloween or Thanksgiving. But when Christmas comes around the music starts to play.

I saw this firsthand this past week. We were catering a luncheon at a huge distribution center where there were hundreds upon hundreds of employees. The room probably seated about 300 people and it was full. They were busy eating, yet there was nothing special about what was going on in the moment.

Then my eye caught sight of this lady with the Christmas spirit. She was dressed to the Christmas nines. She had a big Santa hat on with a big sleigh bell ornament on the end of it. Everywhere she went, that bell was jingling and she was exuding Christmas. She walked into the lunchroom and looked around, but I could tell she was unhappy with what she saw.

The people weren't very festive. This was a holiday party. They brought in a caterer. It should have been festive. She said, "There's no music! Where's the music?" Then she did the unthinkable. She started belting out "Joy to the World" in front of 250-300 people.

I remember thinking, "Oh boy, this is not going to be good." But wouldn't you know it? By the time she was done with the first line, the vast majority of the people in that room joined in singing "Joy to the World." It was awesome. Nobody stopped and said, "Okay. Our HR department said that in our holiday celebrations we can only do this or that." Nobody in the PC department said, "Ummm, we can't do this; it talks about Jesus." No. Everyone just enjoyed the opportunity to sing.

There's something about Christmas that makes our hearts glad and makes us want to sing. Now, there are some songs in our Christmas celebration that are so uniquely connected to the person who sings them that you can't separate the two. To hear someone else do that specific song does a disservice to it. I asked our video team to put a montage together of songs that are connected to the musician who sings them. This is just a way of reminding us that sometimes our Christmas celebrations are so uniquely connected to the ones who sing them that they can't be separated. So enjoy this and sing along with some songs we never can separate from the singer.

- "I'll have a blue Christmas without you, I'll be so blue just thinking about you." I don't hear you singing.
- "I just want you for my own, more than you could ever know, make my wish come true, all I want for Christmas is you, baby." How many of you have heard this too many times this year?
- "I'm dreaming of a white Christmas, just like the ones I used to know."
- "Okay! Christmas, Christmas time is here, time for toys and time for cheer. We've been good, but we can't last. Hurry Christmas, hurry fast."
- "Oh, there's no place like home for the holidays, 'cause no matter how far away you roam, when you pine for the sunshine of a friendly gaze, for the holidays, you can't beat home sweet home." Let's sing it out.
- "It's the most wonderful time of the year—ding, dong, ding, dong—with the kids jingle belling and everyone telling you be of good cheer, it's the most wonderful time of the year."

This just draws us in, but there are certain songs in our Christmas celebration that have no musician. There's no author that we know of. There's no person who's been put on the map because of that song. Our Christmas hymn today is one of those songs: "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen."

Did you know that we have no idea who wrote this song? We don't know when exactly it was written. I'll give you a couple pieces of information from a date standpoint. The first time we see mention of this song is about 1650, when someone alludes to it. Then in 1760 we see the first piece of sheet music of the melody and words of this song.

This song became popular because of an upstart novelist from London, who in 1843 wrote a Christmas classic called "A Christmas Carol." Charles Dickens used this song as the melody that a London street choir sang as Ebenezer Scrooge was making his way from work to home on that fateful night.

Yet, not knowing who wrote it, not knowing why they wrote it, not understanding the circumstances behind its writing, this song has stood the test of time—and here's why. It doesn't need a musician because of the words in its lyrics. This song gives us great truth about why we should celebrate Christmas. But here's the problem. We think we now why it was written from its title. That's easy. During the Christmas season, God gives us rest. He gives us a couple days off and we're happy for that. Therefore it makes us a merry group of people. But that is not the intention of its writing at all, because we are thinking in modern English, not in old English.

Let's deal with a couple words. First, when it says, "God rest," it doesn't mean that God is giving you a nap. Literally, in the old English, it meant "God keep you," "God protect you," "God watch over you." God would keep and protect merry gentlemen. Now, that starts to bring some meaning to it, doesn't it? Then we have the word "merry" and we think happy, joyful, but that's not the word being used there. In old English, merry meant something altogether different. To help you with that, go back to the old English story of Robin Hood. He had his group of associates called his "merry men." Were they just these goof-off guys who were happy all the time? No. That's not what it was. They were the mighty men in Robin Hood's group.

Putting these two phrases together, we have, "God protect and watch over the mighty men and women of the faith." That's the purpose of this song. It's going to go on to tell us why we should have "tidings of comfort and joy" this Christmas, because of what God is doing. So let's look at the lyrics, then we'll pivot into the Scriptures.

This carol reminds us that we have all blown it with God.

This song reminds us of a truth that we so often forget at Christmas which is that we have all blown it with God. The writer says: "God rest ye merry gentlemen, let nothing you dismay. Remember Christ our Savior was born on Christmas Day." Why? Have you ever asked why was Jesus born? Why did He come?

The writer gives us the answer. "Remember Christ our Savior was born on Christmas Day to save us all from Satan's power when we were gone astray." Think about what happens to every man, woman and child on this earth. God creates us, He endows us with incredible gifts and abilities, and we start to enjoy them. Then we begin to read our own press and accolades, telling God, "Thank You for the gifts, but I don't need You. Thank You for the world You created and all You've given me for life and breath, but now I'm going to enjoy it on my own." So we wanted to do things our own way. This song reflects what the prophet Isaiah told us many years ago, "*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way*" (Isaiah 53:6). Christmas reminds us to say, "Wait a minute. Why did Jesus come?"

Jesus came because you and I were far from God. We ran away from Him, all the while taking all He had given us and using it for ourselves—for our good and glory. Then Jesus in His love, mercy and grace said, "They're lost without Me. I need to go to them and help them.

Who cares if we went astray? The song tells us that when we go astray, it puts us under Satan's power. The Bible makes it clear that we're going to serve a master. We're either going to serve God, a benevolent and gracious Master Who is able to turn slaves into sons, or when we go our own way, we become slaves to ourselves and the devil. When we choose to go our own way, we begin to reap the consequences of our sin. We will not be able to experience what the songwriter describes as "tidings of comfort and joy." Instead, as Ephesians 5:6 tells us, we will become objects of God's wrath. There's no joy there, but a fiery expectation of what God is going to bring.

So how do we go from being people who are far from God to, as the song says, people who are given "tidings of comfort and joy"?

The carol reminds us that Someone bigger and better came to fix our problem.

The reason for Christmas is because Someone bigger and better than us came to fix our problem. We begin far from God, our hearts are dismayed and we realize we can't figure this out or make it on our own. We thought we could, but the consequences of our sin are beginning to mount up. We feel the bondage of the devil as the result of our sin, so we are lost and without hope. We have no way to remedy this on our own. But on that night in Bethlehem, the angels told the shepherds, "Someone bigger and better has come. He is called Immanuel, God with us. He will save His people from their sins." Christmas is a celebration of the fact that although we were lost, God in His mercy and grace sent His Son Jesus to be bigger and better than two things.

Jesus is bigger than your sin.

If you have found forgiveness in Jesus Christ, then no matter how big or heinous your sin, whether you are filled with shame and regret—either publicly or privately—God says, "My grace is greater, and it covers your sin." There's no sin that will ever be able to separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:31-39). We have to receive this as our gift of forgiveness that is greater than any sin we'll ever commit in our minds or in action.

Jesus is bigger than your enemy Satan.

Now there's an even greater enemy than our sins and that is the devil himself. I love what one pastor said about this. "God's capacity to forgive is greater than our capacity to sin." Take heart from that. While our sin reaches far, God's grace reaches farther. It's a message revealing the radical contrast between the sinful hearts of men and the gracious heart of mankind's Creator.

So this deals with the sin—but what about Satan? The song tells us that we are under his power. For a long time, because of our rebellion, we have followed the devil. As a result, we find ourselves in his clutches. But then Christmas comes when Christ puts on flesh and makes His dwelling among us.

Here's the hilarity of the story of Christmas. Don't forget this. Jesus was about to address our greatest enemy and His sworn enemy. If you and I had to take on an enemy, we would prepare for it. We'd do a little working out. We'd make sure our muscles were strong. We might take a couple classes on how to fight. We'd make sure we were ready. Then when the enemy showed up, we'd puff out our chest, suck in our gut and look really angry in order to scare our enemy and prove our supremacy over him.

So here comes Jesus, Who is about to fight His enemy. He doesn't pump up His muscles or clench His fists. He doesn't look frightening at all. No, when Jesus comes to deal with our greatest enemies of sin and Satan, He shows up on earth as a baby in a manger. Why does He do that? I think He does this to mock the devil. "Hey, devil, you think you can beat Me? I'll make Myself a harmless baby. I'll put myself in a manger. Come and get Me. You've wanted to destroy Me from the beginning. You thought you were equal to Me. Then come and get Me. And by the way, I'll help you. I'll tell you where I'm going to be born, hundred of years in advance. I'm going to be born in Bethlehem. I'm going to be born of a virgin. I'm going to give you prophecy after prophecy. You meet me at the O-K Corral. I'll give you the head start."

Then He says, "But maybe you're not as smart as I thought you might have been. You need a sign? Let Me put a star in the sky and tell you exactly where I am. Come get Me, devil. Bring all your sin, debauchery, hatred and evil. Let's have a show-down. Why don't you follow the wise men as they follow the star?"

He continues: "Then I'm going to give My earthly enemy Herod an opportunity to get Me. Herod will say to the wise men, 'Hey, tell me where the Child is, the baby King, and I'll come and worship with you.' But he wants to kill Me. So I tell him the place and give him the opportunity, then when they come, I'll give My earthly father a dream and we'll leave town just in time, so your plan will be thwarted."

Christmas is a time when Jesus Christ spikes the football and says, "Devil, I'm bigger and better than you'll ever be." So let's read what the Scripture tells us about what Jesus does. In Colossians 2:15 (NIV) we read, "*And having disarmed the powers and authorities, [Jesus] made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.*" He's mocking the devil. "I'm bigger, I'm better, I'm greater than you are, having done this by triumphing over everything on the cross of Calvary."

So brothers and sisters, this means you and I no longer have to be in bondage to our sin. We no longer have to be in bondage to the devil because Jesus saved us in the past and He's still saving us now. He is mocking the devil by saying, "Look at the people I'm saving. Look at how I'm changing them."

However, herein lies the problem. This is where the book of Jude comes into play. God has saved us from our sins, but what do we do? We still sin more. God has uniquely given us His grace and mercy, then what do we do? We go our own way. We go astray. What happens then? Notice in Jude 24-25 that as he closes his letter, he breaks out in song:

²⁴ Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, ²⁵ to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

This is what Jesus is doing this Christmas for you and me. The God Who is bigger and better than our sin and Satan himself is doing what these verses say. *“Now to him...”* Who is that—you or me? No, *“Now to Jesus, who is able...”* Jesus is mighty enough to do what He needs to do. What is that? *“To keep...”* God keeps you, mighty men and women of the faith. What does God keep us from? He keeps us from sin and Satan. Then what does Jude write? God is *“able to keep you from stumbling.”* Listen, on your own and on my own, we will never keep ourselves safe—never. So Who keeps us safe? Jesus! He is saying, *“I am able to keep you from stumbling.”* Literally He’s saying, *“I’m able to protect you from fouling up your life.”*

Someone needs to hear this today. Someone got beat up by the devil this morning, because last night you fell into that same sin, doing that same thing you promised God you would never do again, but there you were doing it again and even enjoying it. Now this morning you’re thinking, *“Why would God want me?”* God is saying, *“Child, I’m bigger than that and I’m going to keep you from fouling up this thing.”*

What else does Jude tell us Jesus will do? He is going to *“present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy.”* That means God will get you to the finish line. Jesus will save you all the way to the end. When you’ve given your life to Jesus Christ, the reason the tidings bring great comfort and joy is because Jesus, Who began a good work in you, is faithful to see it to completion.

It may be ugly. It may not be fun. It may be filled with trials and tribulations. But Jesus will get you to the finish line and you will arrive there with great joy. Why? When you stand alone before the almighty, infinite, all-knowing Judge, you will cower with the worst fear. You will be filled with the greatest shame. You will scream at the top of your lungs, *“Remove me from the presence of the holy and righteous God.”* Now remember, what Christ gave us at Christmas will do this for each of His children: When you stand before your Maker, you will stand with the confidence of Jesus Christ Himself. No shame. No regret. No remorse. No sorrow. No pain. With Jesus, you will be able to say, *“I was lost, but Christ found me. I was dead, but Christ made me alive. I was blind, but Christ let me see. I was sinful, but Christ took my sin on Himself. Then in exchange, He put His righteousness and goodness on me.”*

We get to stand before the almighty presence of God with great joy. How is it that those who have gone astray under Satan’s power can experience glad tidings of comfort and joy, as this song says? The answer is because of what Christ did that first Christmas. Christmas is the celebration of that little Baby. It’s the mockery of sin and Satan and it promises us that He is bigger and greater than any temptation, any sin, or anything else the devil can throw our way.

So stand with confidence this Christmas, knowing that the One Who gave you saving faith didn’t just do it in the past, but He’s doing it now and will continue doing it until you see Him in heaven. When we can grasp that truth, then we will be filled with tidings of comfort and joy.

We will always be blessed when we rest on Jesus.

In this song, the writer speaks of us being blessed. The only way we will experience that blessing is when we rest on Jesus. Do you want comfort and joy this holiday season? Trust, rest, hope for and lean on Jesus alone. When we do that, God won’t cause us to escape all our issues and struggles, but He will give us exactly what we need in order to not stumble. Then He will present us once and for all before our Maker, blameless in God’s sight.

If you need hope, joy and comfort this Christmas, this song—*“God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen”*—serves as an anthem for any troubled heart, because it doesn’t tell us what we did—it glorifies in what God did. Amen?