



The Mustard Seed



Rehoboth Baptist Church Newsletter ~ December 2017



What I'll Remember This Christmas

By Steve Brown

During the worship service, my pastor, Kevin Labby, taught us about the “normal means of grace” (worship, the sacraments, prayer, Scripture, etc.).

As an illustration, he told us about working in a factory when he was younger. Kevin said that they hired a lot of people and there was little, to no, training. They put him in front of a computer with no instructions. Kevin even tried to look over his co-workers' shoulders to learn from them, but it never made sense. He didn't have the foggiest. Kevin wanted to ask questions; but the longer he waited, the more difficult it was to ask...without looking really stupid.

So Kevin sat there doing nothing and collecting his paycheck. Finally he couldn't do it anymore and resigned. But they still kept sending him paychecks. Kevin started to feel guilty about the paychecks, so he returned to work. When he got back to work, nobody even knew he had left.

Kevin used that very funny illustration (you had to be there :) to show the difference between believers and unbelievers. He also talked about how much he admired Ernest Hemingway—his writing, his full and exciting life, and his fame. Then he referenced Hemingway's suicide. Kevin said that the normal means of grace God gave his people are places where we can be reminded of who we are and Whose we are. He contrasted that with the meaninglessness of the lives of those who don't believe...who have no resource when it gets dark and scary.

There was more than that in the sermon and I may have gotten some of it wrong. (You know, I do have this hearing problem and a little sympathy would be in order.) Not only that, there is zero chance that I'll clear this with Kevin. His correction might mess it up. Besides, my late mentor, Fred Smith, used to take notes while I was preaching. I was quite flattered until I realized that he wasn't taking notes on what I said, but writing down the thoughts that came to mind while I was preaching. “A good sermon,” he would say, “is one that makes me think, and it will often result in things I write and teach.”

So Kevin's sermon was a great sermon for a lot of reasons...and one is what he made me think of while he preached. In fact, I've been thinking about Kevin's sermon since Sunday and it still haunts me.

Remembering really is the difference between Christians and those who aren't Christians. It's what Luther meant when he said that we should “preach the Gospel to one another lest we become discouraged.” He was saying that it's important we never forget.

There is no place where that is truer than at Christmas.

As you know, I'm not big on Christmas. It's not the commercialism. I know that Christmas is the time when most merchants have to make it or they don't make it at all. I don't begrudge merchants selling stuff at Christmas. I also like the parties, gifts, decorations and family things that happen at Christmas. I don't even mind that the secular world has taken over the “holy day” and made it into something that doesn't have a thing to do with Jesus. You don't get mad at trees because they have leaves, at the sun because it shines, at dogs because they bark, or at birds because they sing. All of that is as to be expected. It often seems, as someone has said, that we Christians—knowing that eternity will be long and unpleasant for those who don't believe in Christ—want to rob unbelievers of anything that's fun before they get there.

The thing that really bothers me about Christmas is that so many don't have memories. On social media, everything begins now and nothing important happened yesterday. Only the latest “thing” is important and everything else is...uh...well...so yesterday. At Christmas that makes me sad. In my mind's eye I can picture a man taking down the Christmas tree and his wife putting the ornaments back into their box. They look at each other, both knowing that “there was something there” and they missed it.

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6) but “...you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). “The Word became flesh...from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:14, 16-17).

I'll remember at Christmas. I'll remember that everything has changed. I'll remember that, no matter how dark, no matter the pain, and no matter what everybody else says, there is hope, meaning and a reality behind the façade of what those who don't know call “reality.” I'll remember that it's not just a nice story to make us feel better, a fairy tale to help us sleep at night, or a religious myth for religious people. I'll remember the actual time and place where God's laughter spilled over into a dark and meaningless world.

I'll remember at Christmas. I'll remember that everything has changed. I'll remember that, no matter how dark, no matter the pain, and no matter what everybody else says, there is hope.



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I once saw a bumper sticker on maybe the most dilapidated and junky car that I've ever seen: "This is not an abandoned car!" We don't live in an abandoned world. Everything is moving toward God's good purpose until finally "every knee will bow and every tongue confess" (Philippians 2:10-11) that the one who came is Lord of all.

This Christmas, remember that we're not alone. So many can't.

I'll also remember my own existential Christmas...the place where he found me. I'll remember the time and place where the Messiah who was given to the world... was then given to me. "Born again" is what they call it because there is no other way to describe everything becoming new...kind of like Christmas. When I simply can't be as good as I think I should be or as good as people think I am, I'll remember Christmas. In that memory I'll rejoice that I'm free and forgiven where, as a playwright put it, "a man can feel clean and pure and close to his God." When the world has turned its back and they don't understand, at Christmas I'll remember that I'm loved beyond anything I can imagine. When there seems to be no purpose, meaninglessness begins to look me in the eyes, and the questions come (Who am I? What's my purpose? What's it all about?), I'll remember Christmas and rejoice in the essential value and meaning of history and my life.

This Christmas, remember where he found you. So many can't.

This Christmas I'll also remember you and the family Jesus created by his coming. He "loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). That would be us. It's why he came. I'll think of those who said kind things about me and those who said some not-so-kind things. I'll remember those who loved and forgave, and those who, for whatever reason, couldn't pull it off. I'll remember those who joined hands in the fight and those who were too scared to do so. I'll remember the "saints and the sinners," the "broken and the fixed," and the ones who got it right and the ones who missed it a lot. And I'll remember the times I've been—and continue to be—all of that.

And then I'll make a Christmas celebration of being a part of the only club in the universe where the only qualification is need, the only barrier is being qualified, and the only person who is kicked out is the one who never came.

This Christmas, I'll rejoice in the memory of you. So many can't.

Kevin was right. The means of grace are the places of remembering. Christmas is when we remember. This Christmas, enjoy the wine.

The world says, "Drink up and forget."

Jesus says, "Drink and remember."

Speaking of memories, he asked me to [remind](#) you.

Mustard Seed ~ December 2017

What I'll Remember This Christmas.....	1
MISSION NEWS.....	2
The Stories Behind The Best-Loved Songs of Christmas.....	3
The Story Behind 'O Holy Night'	4
December 2017 Calendar.....	5
January 2018 Calendar.....	6

Visit us at: www.RehobothBaptistChurch.org
Ideas & Comments: dla85@dlittlehale.com

MISSION NEWS

Chaplain Daniel Croce's Biography and Testimony:

I saw The Light in 1985, while serving a 2 year sentence at the Plymouth County Jail. Someone gave me a Bible and I read about Jesus of Nazareth. I was never so amazed when I read of the things that Jesus both said and did. Touching the blind and they see, the deaf and they hear, the lame and they walk. I fell in love with Jesus.

But, when Jesus started to talk about sin – Matt. 5:21,22,27,28, etc., I soon began to realize that I was in trouble. Especially, when I read that, "And these will be cast into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." When I saw Christ, as He is portrayed in Holy Scripture, I began to see myself. When I saw Perfection (Jesus), I saw how far short that I had missed the mark.

On the following Sunday, when the call for Chapel came from the Correctional Officer (C/O), I yelled out my cell number – "16!" I grabbed my Bible and went to the Chapel! After the Chapel service was over, I went up to Chaplain Bob Hanson and told him, "I'm in big trouble!" Bob asked what the matter was. I told him, "I've been reading this Book (the Bible) and I've been doing wrong for a long time. The outer darkness, weeping and gnashing of teeth – are we talkin' about hell?!" Bob then said, "Yes, we are. You need to be saved!"

As the C/O motioned with his head, for me to move on, Chaplain Bob said, "Wait a minute! When you get back to your cell, get on your knees and tell God that you know you are a sinner, and you believe that Jesus died for your sins and that God the Father raised Him back up again, and ask Jesus to come into your heart!"

I did what Bob said. I did it so many times I cannot count them. I knew that if I was judged according to my sins, I would surely go to hell. Jesus soon began to change my life. He took away the desire to smoke cigarettes. I had smoked for almost 20 years. Then we went to the marijuana, free-basing cocaine, drinking, gambling and swearing. The Lord took away the desire to do these things and replaced them with a desire to love and serve Him.

When I was released, I was told by Chaplain Bob, to find a good Bible-believing Church and to become involved. I did that too. After serving God in various ministries(teaching Sunday school at Boston



The Mustard Seed



Rehoboth Baptist Church Newsletter ~ December 2017

Children's Hospital, visiting the mentally and physically handicapped children and sharing Christ with them, starting the Christian Basketball Outreach League, and visiting jails and prisons to tell others about the Lord), I began to sense the Lord's calling.

I was asked by Barry Nilson, the area director for Prison Fellowship, "What are you going to do in life, Danny?" I told Barry, "I don't know. All I do know is that I want to serve the Lord." Barry asked me if I had a college education and I told him, "No." Barry then said, "Well, you are going to need one. I want you to pray about applying for the Charles W. Colson Scholarship. It is for ex-offenders, and you meet all the prerequisites." I thanked Barry and I did pray. I was accepted at Wheaton College for the following year.

In September of 1991, I began my freshman year at Wheaton College in Illinois. As my wife and I were praying about God's leading and guidance for His will in our lives, in 1993, Chaplain Bob Hanson called us from Plymouth, MA., and said, "Danny, they have built a new jail here. It is three times as big as the old jail. The Sheriff wants me to come on full-time and I can not do it. I want you to pray about coming back here after you finish school and be the Chaplain." My wife and I prayed and after four years of College, I graduated in 1995 with a B.A. in Bible/Theology. I was ordained in July of 1995 and was able to begin serving as the full time Chaplain in the Plymouth County Correctional Facility (PCCF) on October 1, 1996. Chaplain Bob Hanson, who has served as Chaplain there for 22 years, has helped me, and continues to help in any and every situation. The name of our ministry is: New Hope Correctional Ministry!

My wife Kim and I have 5 children. Melissa, who is married and 4 children at home: Daniel 17, Thomas 15 1/2, Elizabeth 14, and Dara Jane 11. We also have taken in a handicapped man named Duane, who is 47 years, but only 3 years old mentally. Duane fell off a porch when he was 7 years old and has suffered some brain injury. With the help of some supporters, we were able to add-on a bedroom and bath for Duane in 2003! Duane has been living with us for 3 years now and he is a blessing to our family!

Pastor Croce preached for us many times in the year before we called pastor Steve. Once at Thanksgiving time, he asked us to pray for the inmates this time of year, because homesick people are cranky people, and there is more unrest in the prison. May the Lord make homesick people think of him, and study his word, "No Bible, no breakfast."

The Stories Behind The Best-Loved Songs of Christmas

By Ace Collins

God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen

Oddly enough, understanding the original meaning behind this song, one of the most misunderstood carols of Christmas, also helps explain one of the most

misused words describing Christmas itself. What Americans hear when they listen to "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" is not anything like what the English peasants meant when they first sang this song more than 500 years ago. Because of how wonderfully it told the Christmas story, the song even earned a prominent spot in Dickens's classic novel *A Christmas Carol*, [—because of the author's understanding of the true meaning—] add?? Or add why you put this in] and if people today fully understood its unique lyrics too, most would probably designate "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" as one of the most profound and meaningful hymns in the world.

Like so many early Christmas songs, this carol was written as a direct reaction to the music of the 15th Century Church. During this period, the songs of organized religion were usually written in Latin and their melodies were somber and dark, offeringsingers and listeners little inspiration or joy. In fact, though few admitted it in public, most church members secretly disliked the accepted religious songs of the day. Yet the laymen of the time had no power over the way they worshipped and had to accept things as they were. So, while they continued to go to worship, they created their own church music outside the walls of the cathedrals and chapels. In this way, the peasant class led a quiet rebellion against the tone of religious music by writing religious folks songs that were light, lively and penned in common language. Their Christmas folk songs became the foundation of what are now known as Christmas carols.

"God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" was the most famous and most loved of all the early carols. Written with an upbeat melody and speaking of the birth of Jesus in joyful terms, the song may have shocked early church leaders, but it charmed their flocks. Not only did they sing to this carol, they danced to it.

"God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen's" lyrics reveal that the song's unknown writer knew the story of Jesus' birth well. He included the high points of the gospel throughout the carol's verses. The writer also fully understood the power of Christ and what His arrival meant to all who embraced it. In the case of this writer, comprehending the full and personal meaning of the birth of the Son of God brought forth enthusiasm and joy simply not found in any other church songs of the period. Though it might have been rejected by the church leaders, "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" better presented the message of the first Christmas and the life of Jesus than did many of the songs used in formal worship of the day.

"God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" was sung for hundreds of years before it was finally published in the nineteenth century. By that time—thanks in part to Queen Victoria's love of carols—the song found favor in the Anglican Church. Soon even the protestant English clergy of the Victorian era were enthusiastically teaching "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" to their parishioners. Crossing the ocean to both Europe and America, the carol became a favorite throughout the Christian world and it is still



The Mustard Seed



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sung in much the same way as it was five hundred years ago. The only problem is that few of today's singers fully understand the beginning of each of the carol's many verses. This is a result of the evolution of the English language.

When modern people say "Merry" Christmas, the word merry means happy. When "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" was written, merry had a very different meaning. Robin Hood's "Merry Men" might have been happy, but the merry that described them meant great and mighty. Thus, in the Middle Ages, a strong army was a merry army, a great singer was a merry singer, and a mighty ruler was a merry ruler.

So when the English carolers of the Victorian era sang, "merry gentlemen," they meant great or mighty men. Ye means you, but even when translated to "God rest you mighty gentlemen," the song still makes very little sense. This is due to another word that has a much different meaning in today's world and a lost punctuation mark.

The word rest in "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" simply means keep or make. Yet to completely uncover the final key to solving this mystery of meaning, a comma needs to be placed after the word "merry." Therefore, in modern English, the first line of "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" should read "God make you mighty, gentlemen." Using this translation, the old carol suddenly makes perfect sense, as does the most common saying of the holidays, "Merry Christmas."

You might wonder why, when most didn't fully understand the real meaning of "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen," the old carol remained popular. The world's love for this song is probably due to its upbeat musical piece paired with the telling of the most upbeat story the world has ever known. Those who sing it naturally get caught up in the celebratory mood of the message and embrace the same kind of emotions that those first to visit the baby Jesus must have felt. As the angel told the shepherds, "I bring you news of great joy." That joy and the power of faith can be felt and experienced in every note and word of "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen." You just have to know how to translate the words into the language of the day to have a very Mighty Christmas!

The Story Behind 'O Holy Night'

By Dr. Jeff Sanders

It's a tough song to sing isn't it? Also hard to play on the piano (so I've been told). But it is the "show stopper" at many Christmas cantatas. You just can't help but get a thrill when you belt out the chorus "Fall on your knees. . . ." But the carol "O Holy Night" was actually banned by church leadership, and if it were not for the common people, the powerful song would have faded into obscurity.

In 1847 a commissioner of wine in France, Mr. Placide Cappeau, was asked by his parish priest to write a

poem for the Christmas Eve service. On a hard carriage ride to Paris, the gentleman imagined himself a witness to the birth of Christ. The wonder of that glorious moment flowed through his pen, and he gave us the poem "Cantique de Noel" ("Song of Christmas). Cappeau had the words, but now he needed the music to lift souls heavenward in song.

He asked his friend, Adolphe Charles Adams. It was an unusual request. Adams was a trained classical musician, but he was of the Jewish faith. Nevertheless, he goodnaturedly received his friend's request and began at once to compose an original tune for the poem. It was a perfect match and the song was performed for the congregation on Christmas Eve. The French people loved the carol, but later after Cappeau left the church for the philosophy of socialism, and after it was discovered that the composer was not of the Christian faith, the church leadership banned the song from its liturgy throughout France.

However, the French people would not let the song die and continued to embrace it--even if they had to sing it outside the official approval of the church. Ten years later, an American abolitionist, John Sullivan Dwight, heard the carol and loved its vibrant message of hope--especially the verse that says "Chains shall He break, for the slave is our brother, and in His name all oppression shall cease." His English translation quickly became popular in the North during the American Civil War.

Legend has it that the French Catholic Church finally received the song back into its worship services after an encounter between French and German troops during the Franco-Prussian War. During a lull in fighting, a French soldier began singing "Cantique de Noel." The Germans were so moved that they responded by singing one of Luther's hymns. The "songfest" encouraged the soldiers to honor a truce for 24 hours on Christmas.

The end of this story involves the beginning of modern technology--the invention of the radio. On Christmas Eve, 1906, Reginald Fessenden (a former colleague of Thomas Edison) was experimenting with a microphone and the telegraph. Fessenden began reading the story of the birth of Jesus from Luke chapter 2. Around the world, wireless operators on ships and at newspaper desks began to hear a man's voice come out of their machines. It was the first radio broadcast of a man's voice. . . . and it was the Gospel of Christ. But it doesn't end there. Fessenden then picked up a violin and began to play a tune. You guessed it. . . . "O Holy Night."

The song written by a wine merchant, set to music by a Jewish composer, banned by church leaders, kept alive by the French, adopted by American abolitionists, sung by troops in the trenches, and at last broadcast to the whole world by invisible radio waves. The first song ever played over the radio: **"O Holy Night." Fall on your knees. O hear the angel voices. O night divine. The night when Christ was born. O night divine.**

December 2017

Rehoboth Baptist Church Mustard Seed

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January 2018

Rehoboth Baptist Church Mustard Seed

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28 9:00 AM Sunday School 10:30 AM Worship 6:00 PM Evening Service	29	30	31 7:00 PM Prayer Meeting 8:00 PM Choir	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p style="text-align: center; margin: 0;">Dec 2017</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <tr><th>S</th><th>M</th><th>T</th><th>W</th><th>T</th><th>F</th><th>S</th></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>1</td><td>2</td></tr> <tr><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td><td>8</td><td>9</td></tr> <tr><td>10</td><td>11</td><td>12</td><td>13</td><td>14</td><td>15</td><td>16</td></tr> <tr><td>17</td><td>18</td><td>19</td><td>20</td><td>21</td><td>22</td><td>23</td></tr> <tr><td>24</td><td>25</td><td>26</td><td>27</td><td>28</td><td>29</td><td>30</td></tr> <tr><td>31</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> </table> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p style="text-align: center; margin: 0;">Feb 2018</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <tr><th>S</th><th>M</th><th>T</th><th>W</th><th>T</th><th>F</th><th>S</th></tr> <tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>1</td><td>2 3</td></tr> <tr><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td><td>8</td><td>9</td><td>10</td></tr> <tr><td>11</td><td>12</td><td>13</td><td>14</td><td>15</td><td>16</td><td>17</td></tr> <tr><td>18</td><td>19</td><td>20</td><td>21</td><td>22</td><td>23</td><td>24</td></tr> <tr><td>25</td><td>26</td><td>27</td><td>28</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr> </table> </div> </div>			S	M	T	W	T	F	S						1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31							S	M	T	W	T	F	S						1	2 3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28			
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