

## CAN JESUS HAVE A HAPPY CHRISTMAS?

By Paul Penno, Jr.

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Has anyone sent a Christmas card to Jesus? We've sent them to each other, perhaps hundreds of them. Has anyone wished Jesus a happy Christmas?

You say, "How foolish! You can't send Christmas cards to Jesus! No postal service reaches Him."

We may send Him a Christmas card. Most of the time Christmas cards seldom mean very much, but occasionally they are filled with a lot of news updating on the goings-on in the family that you haven't heard throughout the year. But isn't it time we got around to wishing Jesus a Happy Christmas by thinking of Him and sympathizing with His feelings.

It's not fair to be wishing everybody else a Happy Christmas, and not to think about Him—i.e., about His feelings. I'm not talking about putting Christ back into Christmas, as so many do these days. I don't mean what they do. I see nothing wrong with devoting special attention to events connected with the birth of Christ. But Christ has feelings, like we do. Since, supposedly, this is a time to remember His birth into the world, isn't it right and proper to think of Him and what would make Him happy.

One of the most precious expressions in the Bible is the backward prayer, "Master, you eat." John 4:31. Almost all the prayers the Lord receives in His communications center are the opposite: "Master, give us something to eat!" God is thought of as

mankind's great Santa Claus, and it is hoped that Christmas will come every day. "Thanks, Lord, for what You gave me yesterday. Now, for today I need this and that. And thanks again for keeping me in mind! Amen."

The Master rarely hears a prayer like this one—a prayer in reverse gear: "Master, *You* eat, because we can sense that You are hungry. *You've* had a long, hard journey today, and it's hot and dusty. Look, we've been to the shops in town and bought bread, butter, milk, raisins, figs, almonds—a tasty safari feast. Master, we've been thinking about *You*, and we understand how *You* feel. We know it's no fun to be tired and hungry. *Master, You eat!*"

It's a rare child who thinks of giving his benefactors anything. He may give Santa Claus credit for his Christmas gifts, but he finds it hard to think in terms of Santa-centeredness. Fat, jolly Santa with his toy factory at the North Pole—how can Santa need either toys or food? And what else could he need?

How does Jesus feel? God is Santa Claus to many people. He gives you anything He feels like, if you've been a good boy or a good girl. Most prayers are quite like these children's letters asking for a whole list of things.

Dear Santa,

My name is Ricky, but you probably know this already, I am 12 almost 13. I didn't had to think hard what I wanted this year for Christmas. I really wish for a mongoose Bike, so that I can hang out more with my friends. I have a bike, but I outgrew it and I

thought maybe someone smaller than me could use it.

I also would like a playstation 2, my friends tell me how much fun they have on it.

I need some clothes, too. They mean a lot to me. I get teased alot in school, because I wear sometimes the same clothes. I just don't want to give my Mom everyday laundry. So no matter what I do, I get teased. I also wish you could stop the wars. Why is it that people just can't get along?

I know I didn't do to good in school this year, but I'll promise to try harder. I hope most of my wishes can be made true. Merry Christmas,

Sincerely Ricky

Dear Santa,

I am so excited about you coming to our house this year. We have put up the tree and the stockings. I think I have been a good girl this year. I hope you bring me a Barbie Singing Machine this year. I also hope that you can bring my daddy home for Christmas. He is in the Air Force and he is off fighting the bad people that hurt our Country. It would be very nice to have him home for Christmas. I will leave you milk and cookies again this year because you seem to really like my mommies cookies. I hope you stay warm and safe on Christmas Eve.

Your Friend, Morgan

But at Christmastime is it possible for greedy children and parents to think of Christ born a Baby in Bethlehem, having feelings like we do. He was born with our heredity. He still today has feelings.

There is "Joy in heaven". But there is sorrow in the heart of God now too. "Those who think of the result of hastening or hindering the gospel think of it in relation to themselves and to the world. Few think of its relation to God. Few give thought to the suffering that sin has caused our Creator. All heaven suffered in Christ's agony; but that suffering did not begin or end with His manifestation in humanity. The cross is a revelation to our dull senses of the pain that, from its very inception, sin has brought to the heart of God. Every departure from the right, every deed of cruelty, every failure of humanity to reach His ideal, brings grief to Him."<sup>1</sup>

Can Christ have a happy Christmas? You say, "Yes, when He sees all the children eating their Christmas candies, pies, puddings, ice cream, when He sees them opening presents, toys, playing with video games, bicycles, girls dancing for joy over a new dress or coat, ladies and sweethearts elated over gifts of perfume or jewelry, men happy over getting a new speedboat, or set of golf clubs, or computer, new sports car—millions opening presents at this moment. Isn't Christ happy to see them pleased with their gifts?"

Well, Christ rejoices when He sees people happy, but He knows something we don't see. Happiness is not to be found in material possessions. No, Christ is never deceived by superficial effervescent happiness! In the first place, I don't think He's happy over children eating candy, surfeiting, and frivolity. I know He's never happy about the

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<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 263.

hundreds who are killed on the holiday highways because of alcohol. He's not happy with all the sorrow and bereavement that brings. In fact, He is deeply pained when His name is dragged into so much evil and soul-destroying frivolity in name of Christmas.

As Christ looks down on the world today, with its debit or credit side, most joy is materialism. This is not deep, lasting peace, and happiness. Real joy is something which eludes most. "Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." Ps 16:11. "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." John 15:11.

That shows us that by receiving and retaining what Jesus says to us, we receive and retain his joy. Joy comes by believing the words of the Lord. By receiving his words we get fullness of joy—perfect joy.

But that shows us also that He had perfect joy—fulness of joy; for it is *His* joy that we are to receive. We get fullness of joy through Jesus, simply because His joy is perfect. His cup of joy was full. When was it that He expressed the wish that His perfect joy might remain in His disciples?—The very night when He was betrayed; while He was on the way to the place where He knew that He would be delivered into the hands of cruel men, to be mocked, and beaten, and scourged, and crucified. Ah, that is joy worth having,—a joy that is perfect in distress and affliction, a joy that is perfect in itself, and does not depend on circumstances! It is the

possession of such joy, and that alone, that enables one to endure affliction. Jesus, because of the joy that He had continually before Him, and present with Him, "endured the cross, despising the shame." Heb. 12:2.

This joy is found, not in doubting, not in experimenting, but in trusting. There are millionaires that would give all their possessions for such joy, that delivers from painful anxiety, when the poorest man can have it by simply taking the words of the Lord and letting them work out their fulfillment in him. How can Christians be otherwise than glad, when they serve a Master who is gladness itself?

But the world does not know that joy. We hear about the swirl of expensive parties going on now, but afterward the inebriates burst into tears. How long shall human hearts be oppressed with empty, vain, frivolity that only mocks the deepest longings for joy?

Christ sympathizes with the needs of human hearts. He cannot have a happy Christmas so long as human hearts are in pain and estrangement from joy in God.

What will make Christ happy? Ask boys and girls what do you want for Christmas? Every boy and girl in the whole world would like to have big bag of candy? Or new ipod? Or a new doll, or "in" clothes? Granted, Christ does not want to see people go hungry or naked. He knows that if everybody in the world had a million dollars for Christmas, that joy would not increase. Look at the millionaires who are unhappy. How many suicides there are at this time of year! In many poorer homes of developing

countries today, there is no turkey, no ham, not even steak—no plum pudding, no ice cream, but the special treat is a loaf of store bought bread in place of rice, or beans, or white sweet potatoes. But there is more simple happiness.

What will make Christ happy? When those who profess His name know His joy.

What was His joy? How was He happy? He was a Man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, but He knew joy; deep, sustaining joy. He was never glum, never discouraged.

Well, first, He was born in stable and not the Holiday Inn where there was frivolity in the bar. But angels were in the stable. His friends were not the town mayor of Bethlehem, nor the president of the chamber of commerce, but humble shepherds. What they talked about was the wonder of the child's birth.

Secondly, He grew up as a peasant. He was much different than the other youths of His village. He was a painful youth. He was despised, "there is no beauty that we should desire Him" (Isa. 53:2). His peers taunted Him. Young people face many painful, awkward experiences. Christ knew them all, without exception. Yet, joy sustained Him—the joy of loving concern for others. He enjoyed lunches prepared by the tender hands of His mother. He received kindly words from His father and mother. He was no weakling.

Thirdly, as a Man He walked alone. He was misunderstood. His own family was against Him. The rulers also did not recognize Him. They sought to thwart His plans. Those who aspire for a career

know that the greatest thing for an achiever is his life's work: success, accomplishments. One desires more than even money and that is the recognition of achievement and success.

However, for Christ His own nation turned against Him. Their was a seeming failure of His mission. "His own received Him not" (John 1:11). Yet joy sustained Him in ministry amidst the disappointments.

Fourth, where did the Father's path lead Christ? It was certainly a much more painful one than for us. This innocent Babe was destined to die a criminal's death. Yet, joy sustained Him. However, Christ harbored no resentment nor bitterness against His enemies. Marvelous! Let someone say something bitter and spiteful to us, and we brood over it for days. What sustained Christ was the joy of His work accomplished in ministering to hurting humanity. His joy is revealed in a strange passage you may not have noticed.

Psalm 22 is a transcript as if there were a stenographer present at Calvary who could take down more than any stenographer could take down. A stenographer can only take down the words that someone might speak audibly. But this stenographer took down the thoughts that Jesus had his prayer.

The first words were spoken audibly—people heard them, and no doubt someone went to Mary and said, "Mary, I'm sorry to tell you this, but I heard your son express the thought that God had forsaken Him."

Can you imagine how Mary thought, “that my son has come to this—that my son, that I thought was the Messiah has finally confessed that the whole thing was a monstrous fraud and he is nobody, that God has turned His back on Him.” No doubt that was a sword that was plunged through her heart.

Yes, the first verse was spoken audibly, “My God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me.” The Hebrew word here is a word that describes an animal that is caught in a trap and is crying in distress, “and from the words of my roaring?” He felt that God was far from Him. That is how we sinners feel.

Maybe you have felt that way? I know you have because you are human. If you are a son or daughter of Adam, you are bound to have felt that way. The papacy’s idea is to put Christ as far away from us as possible. This alienation from God, this feeling that He is far away from us, that He really doesn’t care about me—that’s how Jesus felt.

Now the lion that’s been circling Him has Him in his mouth: “Save Me from the lion’s mouth, and from the horns of the wild oxen!” (Psalm 22:21). It’s in this desperate moment in horrible darkness that He breaks through that blackest cloud. In the middle of verse 21 Jesus has finished the building of His atonement-bridge, by faith. He can’t see anything yet; He still feels forsaken; it’s still dark, but now He has chosen to believe—in total hopelessness. The King James Version suggests a clearer rendition: “Thou has heard Me while I was tossed on the horns of the wild buffalo.”

There was a missionary who was gored by a wild buffalo. He enjoyed hunting them, and once he wounded one. It slunk up behind him unknown and gored him to death. They are mean animals. Imagine yourself caught in a herd and they are just tossing you on their horns like a ball in the air. That is how Jesus described how He felt in His last extremity.

Then He shouted—so heaven and earth could hear Him, “You have answered Me”! By faith, He has triumphed. And so, the rest of Psalm 22 now shifts gear into a hymn of praise.

And here is where you and I come into the picture. I don’t have enough wisdom to know what happened. His loving heart has probably already ruptured, but in those last moments of consciousness as the shadows gather, He’s happy. The last trial is over—He has made it! “I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You. You who fear [reverence] the Lord [don’t get discouraged!], praise Him! All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, and fear Him [let your hearts tingle before Him], all you offspring of Israel,” because He is good, He is faithful.

Verse 24: “He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from Him; but when He cried to Him, He heard.” It’s as though Jesus is giving His testimony to the crowd: when I cried, “My God, why have You forsaken Me?—He heard Me!” And He answered me! Oh joy unspeakable, He will answer you too. Like you, tempted sinner, I was tempted to think He

had forsaken Me forever, but I have proven for all eternity that He is faithful! My “bridge” of the atonement over this dark chasm of sin-despair is built forever—trust your weight to it!

Verses 25-28: “My praise shall be of You in the great assembly!” He knows He is dying the equivalent of the second death; no hope of a resurrection lights up His heart. But what makes Him so supremely happy as He descends into the darkness of hell itself is His hard-won confidence, “You will live forever” while I die forever! That makes Me happy now!

The joy that overflows from the heart of Jesus makes Him want to hug the universe. The terrible struggle of eternity is over; the Father is Victor! And something special cheered the heart of Jesus: poor humble people such as you and I are kings and queens forever, our prayers will always be heard.

This is now the culminating moment to that introductory announcement He made to the congregation in Nazareth when He said, “The Lord . . . has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor, . . . to heal the brokenhearted” (Luke 4:18). If you are in either of those two fortunate categories, friend, Jesus’ last conscious moment is a prayerful remembrance of you! Yes, “let your heart live forever!”

“All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You. For the kingdom is the Lord’s, and He rules over the nations.” With what unbounded joy He proclaims from His cross that His Father forever rules the universe.

Verse 30: “A posterity [a generation] shall serve Him. It will be recounted of the Lord to the next generation.” You may wonder what this “generation” could mean. Maybe the KJV can suggest a key to help us understand: “A seed shall serve Him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation”—body of people who believe. When the Lord has a remnant who finally appreciate what happened on that cross, whose worldly Laodicean hearts have been solemnized and moved by what they have come to see, “it shall be accounted to Him for a generation.” Then He can come the second time!

Verse 31: “They will come and declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that he hath done this.” and there follows the one last word in the Hebrew. The only way to translate that word *asah* is, “It is finished!” And He bowed His head and died. Now there is the atonement. That’s the reconciliation. The bridge has been built. You can cross it by faith. None have ever appreciated to the full what it cost until the world and the universe see that final group who “follow the Lamb wherever He goes,” in whose mouth is “found no deceit” (Rev. 14:4, 5).

“The tidings of great joy” of Bethlehem sustained Christ to the end. WONDERFUL! He died triumphant. What will make Him happy? For you to share that true joy, that triumph! Share His joy. “Enter thou into the joy of Thy Lord.” Not the joy of Christmas frivolity, the joy of material possessions or of surfeiting or drunkenness, but real the joy of victory over sin and evil, the joy of finishing the work of God.

Have you thought of a Christmas gift for Christ? I don't mean a dollar on the tree, but "Master, eat." What did He reply? "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (John 4:34).

I asked a certain person this week what he would like most for Christmas—"joy of seeing a certain loved one turn to Christ." Jesus would like that too. The joy of seeing all turn to salvation.

ILLUSTRATION: During the dark days of the Civil War, the Pres suffered pain such as no other President before or since. Lincoln's nature was sensitive, tender. He extended kindness to others, fairness, sympathy, generosity. His soul was tortured by the passions, hatred, and agony of the war. He loved the South, as he loved the North. During the summer of 1864 Lincoln's fortunes were at their lowest ebb. The Nation was sick of war and bloodshed. The radical elements in North and South wanted peace at any price, but Lincoln knew if slavery was not extinguished, all would be in vain. The public tide turned against Lincoln. He had given his strength, his life for the nation which now abhorred him. The newspapers now called him a gorilla because of his appearance. His party was facing certain defeat. Even Lincoln expected defeat at the polls. Clouds of suspicion and resentment arose against the White House over the mismanagement of the government and the war. "Get him out!" Here was a brave, good man, misunderstood and unappreciated.

What would Lincoln want for Christmas in 1864? Victory. The lifting of the cloud from his administration?

There is cloud of suspicion against the government of God. The world has dark misapprehension about Him. Millions are persuaded that God has mismanaged the civil war of the universe. One third of the angels, and a vast majority of earth's inhabitants are at war with God, at enmity against Him. They would vote Him out of office if they had the power.

The heavenly sanctuary is something like the White House in America with the seat of God's government in the great controversy with Satan and sin. Until the sin problem is solved, until civil war caused by sin is ended, and the world and the universe reconciled, the great heart of God cannot find rest.

"Then shall the sanctuary be cleansed" (Daniel 8:14).

Christ wants to come again and bring an end to sin. But He cannot force His people. We talk about the nearness of the end with the "signs" all around us of this and that. But COL 63 says, "When character of Christ is perfectly reproduced in His people then He will come to claim them as His own." That's all that stands between us and the second advent. Christ wants to come. He will come anytime we really want Him to.