

Dear and Blessed Friends:

It is now 11:00 PM on New Year's Eve in Enterprise, Alabama. I can hear fireworks sounding in the distance as I type this message to the dearest hearts I know in all the world. Of course, the booming of fireworks on this night is not something to arouse fear and trembling for me and my family, but I realize that the crackling of fireworks would be drowned out by the booming of artillery and bombs in other parts of the world where mother's put their children to bed not knowing if they will be granted the blessing of awakening the next day. How tragic for these poor people who face the rigors and threat of war every day and, yet, we are surrounded by peace and plenty.

The memory of the meaning of this Christmas Season endures through the New Year's celebration. It is still Christmas after all. The end of every episode of life evokes reflective thought on our part. An year in our lives is closing, and another year in the rest of our lives is dawning. What joys or pains may this year hold for each of us? Knowing that God is at the Helm of our lives enables us to face the future with courage and faith. But, still, misery and fear rule the hearts of many of our countrymen and a greater number of those abroad. The Eternal God, the great I AM, knows the insignificance of time. We measure our days by it, and the beautiful moments of our lives by it, but God transcends all time. He was I AM, yesterday. He is I AM today. And He will be I AM tomorrow. We may take comfort in that fact. And we may also gather comfort from the fact that our God is a kind and merciful God. When our loved ones and little ones pass into His Hands, they are in far better stead than we have the power to imagine. His Hands, though scared by iron nails, are strong and loving.

On Christmas Day of 1864, a great poet named Longfellow was reflecting on the personal losses to his close family over the past years, and of the tragic, internecine War that was raging in his beautiful America - the American Civil War. As he walked down the sidewalk, he heard the bells of Christmas chiming from the church steeples. It was then that Henry penned these words to a beautiful poem that later became a carol of Christmas:

"Christmas Bells"

(The original poem, complete with all seven stanzas)

**"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 to men!"**

**And thought how, as the day had come,
The belfries of all Christendom
Had rolled along
The unbroken song
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!"**

**Till, ringing, singing on its way,
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime
A chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!**

**Then from each black accursed mouth
The cannon thundered in the South,
And with the sound
The carols drowned
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!**

**It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent,
And made forlorn
The households born
Of peace on earth, good-will to 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!"**

With the world engulfed in regional wars, and many of our allies at our side on foreign fields, we must again thank God for His love and mercy toward us who have not deserved His beneficence. But we must also acknowledge that He is still on the throne and that He will never leave nor forsake His people - neither this year, nor any succeeding.

May the coming year bear the fruits of Godly hopes and a turning of the hearts of the Fathers to the sons, and the hearts of the sons to the Fathers. And may peace reign in our hearts regardless the continual roar of the battlefield. This is my prayer for my family, my friends, and my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. AMEN.

+Jerry L. Ogles, D.D.
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