

GOOD CHRISTIAN FRIENDS REJOICE, 1JOHN5:11-13

Carols of Christmas #1

◆**Intro:** One of the most uplifting of ancient carols is “Good Christian Men Rejoice.” It’s author, or at least the earliest person associated with the song, Heinrich Suso, endured great hardship and even persecution by the church he loved. Born in 1295 in a German nobleman’s family, he was educated in the best school, and lived in luxury while the poverty and disease of the Dark Age was all around him. Instead of remaining there, he accepted the call to the priesthood and became a Dominican monk. Suso wanted to bring the gospel to the common people, but instead this progressive thinking got him tried for heresy. He was tried by the Pope in 1326 and exiled by the German king.

◆In Switzerland he continued to suffer persecution and even death threats. One night immersed in a dream Suso saw countless angels singing and dancing. He listened and eventually joined with them. When he awoke he not only remembered the dream vividly, but the song and it’s words as well. Feeling led by divine will, he picked up quill and ink and put them to paper.

◆His song embraces the joy of being a believer in Christ. Although not immediately accepted by the church, the song was enthusiastically received by the German people. Perhaps because of it’s simple capture of eternal truth. In celebration of Christ’s birth on earth, the song consistently points to the eternal result of opening the door to heaven.

◆Good Christian men, rejoice

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- ◆ With heart and soul and voice
- ◆ Now ye hear of endless bliss
- ◆ Jesus Christ was born for this
- ◆ He hath opened the heavens door
- ◆ And man is blessed forevermore

◆ In spite of the many explicit Christmas carols proclaiming Christian truth, many folks still don't catch on to why all the rejoicing about Jesus coming to the Earth. Lets consider why.

◆ **1. Misunderstanding #1: Everybody goes to heaven.**

◆ Why should we be rejoicing all that much? After all, just as all dogs go to heaven, don't all people go to heaven. Isn't it kinda God's job to give us eternal bliss after suffering here, what with two parties in congress and all? The view that all religions are the same and that all people automatically go to heaven because that's how it works is called universalism.

◆ A. But universalism is flatly illogical and unreasonable. All religions can't lead to the same place because they teach mutually exclusive things. Universalism is like saying "Feeding my dog beef is no different than feeding my dog grapes." Yes it is. Grapes will make him sick. Beef will not. *Opposite things cannot both be true whether or not it's "true for you"*. Islam teaches Jesus was not God. Christianity teaches Jesus is God. Islam teaches you can behave your way to heaven. Christianity teaches that if you trust your own goodness, you will end in hell.

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Truth has nothing to do with what you think or like. Truth is the way things really are.

◆**B.** Here's another problem with universalism; if you and I can believe opposite things and have them both be true then our beliefs are myth, or nonsense; they make no difference. If all religious beliefs must be accepted as valid (including satanism, UFO cults, atheism) this means that all religious beliefs are pointless. If our religious beliefs are pointless and make no difference, we cannot trust anything about any of our religious beliefs, including what we have just said; including our ideas about heaven, the afterlife, or how to get there.

◆In summary, if you believe all religions are the same, then you must also believe that no religion is actually true at all.

We might as well stop talking about them at all. Which also means then that there is no point in talking about heaven, or what happens when a human being dies, or why you think one thing is good and another bad. (Yet people just keep on talking about heaven.) If there is no good or bad, then there also is no joy or sadness. Some people accept all this, but my guess is that no one in the room is that ready to throw out all concepts of good, bad, joy or sadness.

People just keep on talking about these things too. So the "everybody's right" is irrational.

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◆2. Misunderstanding #2. Really good people go to heaven.

◆During an edition of the news program *60 Minutes* some years ago, Dan Rather interviewed Jack Welch, the outspoken former CEO of General Electric. At the end of the interview, Rather asked Welch, "What's the toughest question you have ever been asked?" Welch replied, "Do you think you'll go to heaven?" When asked how he had answered that question, Welch continued, "It's a long answer, but I said that if caring about people, if giving it your all, if being a great friend counts—despite the fact that I've been divorced a couple of times, and no one's proud of that. I haven't done everything right all the time. I think I got a shot. I'm in no hurry to get there and to find out any time soon."

Citation: CBS 60 Minutes Wednesday (4-30-05)

◆Welch's assumption is that there is a "good enough" that will get you into heaven. Welch is unsure of whether or not we can *know* if we were good enough, and therefore the prospect of heaven is not something he's eager to arrive at any time soon. Maybe your view is the same as Welch's. This view assumes that if there is a little more good than bad, the bad is outweighed and you're a winner! Fifty-one percent vote and you're elected! This is very popular because every world religion besides Christianity teaches that heaven is based on a merit system. Even some versions of Christians fall prey to the merit system belief.

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◆A. Some folks think that sins are all assigned a **degree of badness**. So some sins can send you straight to hell once you've done one. No getting out unless you specifically confess this type by name while still alive. So, some Christians practice habitual confession (and excellent practice by the way) in hopes of not failing to cover all the bases. This can lead to a very nervous religion. These folks also believe that other **sins are not so bad**, really. While these (say a white lie, or too long a glance at the girl in a bikini at the pool) will not commit you to hell, you may have to spend some time in a half-way house paying them off with good deeds. This too doesn't make the process of heading for heaven an inviting event. Folks that think this way believe that Jesus died for your sins to give you the option of earning a ticket in, like a Fortune 500 company, giving a college kid a break in the accounting office, as long as he can keep up with demands.

◆But don't we see? If all our god does for us is give us a chance to be good like him, how is that salvation?

That's like a lifeguard swimming next to a drowning person saying, "No, no, stroke like this, like I'm doing."

That's no rescue.

◆But you say, "Well, we're not really drowning. We're pretty good swimmers." But we are all drowning. Isaiah says "all our *righteous* acts (to say nothing of the dirty ones) are like

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filthy rags compared to God's holiness." Paul said "There is none that is righteous, not one. Everyone falls short of God's glory."

◆**B.** Other folks think two **contradicting** things at the same time! Researcher George Barna has found Americans willing to embrace beliefs that are logically contradictory. Among born again Christians - who believe that they will experience eternal existence in Heaven solely because they have confessed their sins to God and are depending upon Jesus Christ to spare them from eternal punishment or rejection 50% contend that a person can earn salvation based upon good works!

◆Many committed born again Christians believe that people have multiple options for gaining entry to Heaven. They are saying, in essence, "Personally, I am trusting Jesus Christ as my means of gaining God's permanent favor and a place in Heaven, but someone else could get to Heaven based upon living an exemplary life."

◆There is a simple problem with the theory that good people go to heaven: 1) there are no good people. 2) God's standard is not goodness, but perfection.

◆*Jesus answered. "No-one is good--except God alone."
Mark 10:18, NIV.*

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◆ *Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. (Matthew 5:48, NIV).*

◆ It's an impossible equation!

◆ you are saved...not by works, so that no-one can boast. (Ephesians 2:9, NIV).

◆ Therefore no-one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. (Romans 3:20, NIV).

◆ Lets put it this way: It's like...

◆ -you realize no matter how much you work at it, you will never be a pro skateboarder like Tony Hawk. It's just won't happen. You can't ollie over your back pack much less ride the handrail down the front steps of the bank. But the requirement for heaven is that every citizen be as good as Tony, X Games material.

◆ -you're 49 and it dawns on you that you will never be the next Jimmy Hendrix. But heavens entrance pass is being better than those in the music hall of fame,

◆ -you're 21 and though you like to write, you know in your gut that your stories aren't ever gonna sell like JK Rowling. But heaven only allows in best-sellers.

◆ Have you realized that...

◆ ...you will not be a millionaire before you die?

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◆...no one is going to "find" you and make you a model, you just don't have the hips, and besides, you actually weigh something?

◆...you're already past getting into the NBA?

◆*That is the emotion you must feel about earning your way to heaven. It won't be happening. Only people who have no sins under their belt get in.*

◆*Your eyes are **too pure** to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. (Hab 1:13)*

◆Ah but here is why Christian Friends Rejoice, not because they are Good Christian Friends, but because "Jesus Christ was born to save." All our goodness is given!

◆**Biblical Truth about heaven #1: Christmas Joy is a result of the Christmas gift: Jesus took my bullet and gave me his palace.**

◆*God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21, NIV).*

◆There are two things going on here. 1) Christ is taking our demerit, and 2) we are being given his merit. Through the Cross, Jesus "became sin for us" and provided our only way into heaven by allowing us to become clothed in his perfect merit. Christianity is the only religious system that views salvation as a gift. The Bible teaches that entrance into heaven is an undeserved gift made possible through faith in Jesus Christ.

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- ◆ I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:13, NIV).
- ◆ You never have to say, "I hope so." when someone asks you if your going to heaven. You never have to say, "I think I have a shot." You never have to say, "I don't know" -because you do.
 - ◆ And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. (1 John 5:11,12, NIV).
- ◆ Sin is not your barrier. Unbelief in Jesus as your Lord is. Your mother's religiosity is not your ticket in. Repentance of sin and acceptance of God's free gift is. You will not be in heaven because you were good, or because your wife in there, or because you feel positive about your contribution to society. I love this email story someone sent me as I was working on this:
 - I was testing the children in my Sunday school class to see if they understood the concept of getting to heaven. I asked them, "If I sold my house and my car, had a big garage sale and gave all my money to the church, Would that get me into Heaven?"
 - "NO!" the children answered.
 - "If I cleaned the church every day, mowed the yard, and kept everything neat and tidy, would that get me into Heaven?"

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-Again, the answer was, "NO!"

-By now I was starting to smile. Hey, this was fun! "Well, then, if I was kind to animals and gave candy to all the children, and loved my husband, would that get me into Heaven?" I asked them again.

-Again, they all answered, "NO!"

-I was just bursting with pride for them. "Well," I continued, "then how can I get into Heaven?"

-A five-year-old boy shouted out, "YOU GOTTA BE DEAD."

◆ Good friends, that is, you who are friends even though you are not really good on your own,

◆ Christian Friends, Rejoice,

◆ with heart and soul and voice!

◆ Now you need not fear the grave:

◆ Jesus Christ was born to save

◆ Calls you one and calls you all

◆ To gain His everlasting hall

◆ Christ was born for this.