

42-02-11b-I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day
 Advent, Christmas, suffering, grief, tragedy, war, hope, peace
 Luke 2:14

Advent is humanity's highest hope that Good will triumph in the end.

INTRODUCTION: (HOM.idea. That's the theme of this carol (title).

–Longfellow wrote “*Christmas Bells*” just after his son came home from the Civil War paralytically wounded. He was still in deep grief from 2 years earlier, when his beloved wife of 18 years died after her dress caught fire. He got hand and facial burns trying to put it out. He quit writing after this loss. Listen to the Online synopsis of *I Heard the Bells* (2022): “*Known as America’s Poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow leads an idyllic life...until the day his world is shattered by tragedy. With a nation divided by Civil War and his family torn apart, Henry puts down his pen, silenced by grief. But it’s the sound of Christmas morning that reignites the poet’s lost voice as he discovers the resounding hope of rekindled faith.*” Amid family sorrows and war’s tragedy, an epiphany of hope rang from Christmas bells into his heart and into his pen. It was the same hope resounding from an angelic choir at the 1st Advent in Luke 2:14, “*Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, good will toward men.*” 10 years before he died, Longfellow’s poem was set to the tune we know today:

I heard the bells on Christmas Day	And with the sound \ The carols drowned
Their old, familiar carols play,	Of peace on earth, good-will to men! \ \
and wild and sweet \ The words repeat	It was as if an earthquake rent
Of peace on earth, good-will to men! \ \	The hearth-stones of a continent,
And thought how, as the day had come,	And made forlorn \ The households born
The belfries of all Christendom	Of peace on earth, good-will to men! \ \
Had rolled along \ The unbroken song	And in despair I bowed my head;
Of peace on earth, good-will to men! \ \	“There is no peace on earth,” I said;
Till ringing, singing on its way,	“For hate is strong, \ And mocks the song
The world revolved from night to day,	Of peace on earth, good-will to men!” \ \
A voice, a chime, \ A chant sublime	Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
Of peace on earth, good-will to men! \ \	“God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
Then from each black, accursed mouth	The Wrong shall fail, \ The Right prevail,
The cannon thundered in the South,	With peace on earth, good-will to men.”]

–Oft quoted poems express emotion and remain contemporary. His has both despair and hope, and [In our world, 25,000 people starve to death daily; at least 20 wars are going on right now; 27 million have become refugees.] Today’s statistics support Longfellow’s poetic complaint: 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!” Yet we only feel such painful despair, because...

I. God Has Made Humans with Hearts that Can Hurt

- A. We all know this: hearts get wounded, and the scars hurt for years.
- B. What’s the alternative? [The Wizard of Oz told the Tin Man, “As for you, my galvanized friend, you want a heart. You don’t know how lucky you are not

to have one. Hearts will never be practical till they can be made unbreakable.”
 “But I still want one.”] (*And why so? Hearts make us fully human!*)

- C. *Our hearts hurt, because we image the God Whose heart can hurt.*
 (That 1st Advent let God *feel our hurts through a human heart.*)

TRANS: God answered the *prayer* “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” by sending *heaven to earth* at the 1st Advent. *Earth was hurting: hearts were hurting!* God came to be *with us* in that pain! Jesus brought down *heavenly* “peace on earth, good-will to men,” **establishing humanity’s age-old, longed-for hope that Good will triumph in the end.** *But...*

II. God Does Allow our Hurting Hearts to Question Him

- A. *God isn’t upset if we question, doubt or even disagree with Him:*
1. *He’s patient when we complain— Hab 1:2-3.* O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you “Violence!” and you will not save? Why do you make me see iniquity, and why do you idly look at wrong? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise.
 2. *He made sure that doubts expressed by believers got recorded and put in the Bible!— Psa 10:1.* Why, O LORD, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? – **Psa 44:23** Awake! Why are you sleeping, O Lord? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever!
- B. *Job’s hurting heart questioned God, yet he was blessed for openly and directly maintaining communication with God (which Job’s 3 accusers didn’t do!). [Charles Williams: “The Lord demands that his people shall demand an explanation from him. Whether they understand it or like it when they get it is another matter, but demand it they must and shall. Humility has never consisted in not asking questions; it does not make men less themselves or less intelligent, but more intelligent and more themselves.”]*

TRANS: In times of *tragedy, grief and suffering*, people *despairingly* ask, “*Why, God? How could You let this happen to me, to my loved ones, to my nation, to my world?*” Longfellow’s poem asks: “*Why do heavenly bells ring out a promised ‘peace on earth, goodwill toward men,’ when war has drowned out the message?*” But his *last stanza* gives *the answer:* 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.”

III. God Wants Hurting Hearts to Trust Him for Life’s Outcome

- A. *God will end all war, all hunger, all suffering, at exactly the best*

- time possible— Rev 21:1.* Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. (*In this fallen, world of sin, God does a balancing act, taking into account every person, each prayer, all actions and all resultant interactions of actions— making sure that the best of all possible outcomes, comes to pass.*)
- B. *God will heal all hurting hearts who put their trust in Him— Rev 21:4.* He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. [**Sundar Singh**, the *mystically motivated Christian evangelist of India*, had a *vision of the afterlife*, and saw a *man who died as a child* and grew up in heaven. He was *welcoming his aged mother* who had died: “*All around were matchless and exceedingly beautiful mountains, springs and landscapes, and in the gardens was abundance of all kinds of sweet fruits and beautiful flowers. Everything the heart could desire was there. Then he said to his mother, “In the World, which is the dim reflection of this real world, our dear ones are grieving over us, but, tell me, is this death, or the real life for which every heart yearns?” The mother said, “Son. this is the true life. If I had known in the world the whole truth about heaven, I would never have grieved over your death....”]*

CONCLUSION:

–*At the 1st Advent, angels sang out, “on earth peace, good will toward men.”* Christ’s Incarnation began the *fulfillment of that promise.* *At just the right time—the best time—God will say, “Curtains!”* to earthly history, and **Christ’s 2nd Advent will finally bring that promise to completion:** “The Wrong shall fail, \ The Right prevail, \ With peace on earth, good-will to men.”
 –[**Gandhi** said, “*A man with a grain of faith in God never loses hope, because he ever believes in the ultimate triumph of Truth.*”] **Why is Advent humanity’s highest hope that Good will triumph in the end? Because Advent brought us Jesus, the King of Kings and humanity’s promised Savior, and the 2nd Advent will bring Him back.**