

Introduction

Although arranged by John Baptiste Calkin in 1872, the song "I Heard on the Bells on Christmas Day" was actually based on the poem "Christmas Bells," written by American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. A series of events in Longfellow's life led him to pen the poem. In 1861, the Civil War broke out, causing hatred, racism and division throughout the country. That same year, his wife died tragically. Two years later, his son was severely wounded fighting in the Civil War. The following year, 1864, President Lincoln was reelected, the Civil War raged on, and Longfellow wrote the carol.

Discussion

1. **Read Jeremiah 29:4-13; 31:1-4.** Hope equals trust in the promise and character of God and not our circumstances. Think about a time when you were walking through a valley. Did you trust God and believe Him despite the circumstances? Was your trust able to grow in Him?
2. **Read Jeremiah 31:15-17 and Matthew 2:16-18.** There is hope because Jesus Christ is with us. God entered the mess, the hopelessness. He joins us – we are not alone. He knows us – He understands. Because He is God, He can do something about your circumstances. Share a time when you felt you were alone and without God. How did God heal and provide the answers to your hopelessness?
3. **Read Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Luke 22:14-20.** There is hope because your sins are forgiven. Our salvation doesn't depend on our behavior but on Christ's. You are no longer condemned or guilty. You are a new creature in Christ. Share the moment when you became a new creature in Him.

Think About It

This carol asks the question, "Is there hope in the midst of hopelessness?" The answer is "yes." There is hope because Jesus Christ is with us. There is hope because our sins are forgiven. When we focus on the size of our circumstances, we forget the size of our God. In the midst of hopelessness, don't just tell God how big your problems are; tell your problems how big your God is. Look beyond your circumstances to the faithfulness of God. Find your hope and help not in your works or circumstances but in the promises of God. Every promise of God comes to pass.

Do Something

1. We can be confident in the hope Jesus brings to us at Christmas and for eternity. As you are preparing for your upcoming holiday gatherings, be aware of those around you who may be experiencing hopelessness. How will you bring the message of hope to them? Pray God will provide you with opportunities to share the message of hope He brings.
2. During this holiday season, look for opportunities for God to provide a greater sense of hope and confidence in your life by focusing on the size and character of God and not the size of your problems.