

## Living Christmas All Year Through

⊕ **Wrapped up in love (vv.12-14)**

⊕ **Refereed by peace (vv.15-17)**

In the name of Jesus, our newborn, eternal Lord and Savior, dear saints of God:

To hear some pundits talk these days, you'd think that all the past Presidents of these United States were ungodly men whose wives didn't like God either. Perhaps they've never heard of Rutherford B. Hayes. I didn't know he was wounded four times and had four horses shot out from under him in the Civil War. He was barely elected by only one electoral vote as the nation was reeling from Reconstruction and the scandals of hero President Ulysses S. Grant. But Hayes and his wife Lucy were devout Methodists. She said that through her husband she took an oath to uphold the Constitution, but not such precedents as alcohol in the White House. State dinners with no alcohol? A White House with family devotions? They sang music and held worship services for the staff on Sunday Evenings!

Some of their music was written by Philip Bliss. Remember "It Is Well With My Soul"? Only a few weeks before Rutherford B. Hayes was elected, Bliss and his family joined Christmas travelers to see his mother in Pennsylvania. On the way back to Chicago, December 29, 1876, they ran into a blinding snowstorm. Crossing a wooden trestle, the train broke through and plunged 75 feet into the icy river. Over a hundred people died in the fire, including Philip Bliss and his family. He was only 38. In his luggage on another train friends found his last hymn: "I will sing of my Redeemer And his wondrous love to me. On the cruel cross he suffered From the curse to set me free."<sup>1</sup>

To the White House or to God's house in heaven, who knows where this year will lead? But with God's Word before us and His melodies in our soul, we'll be **Living Christmas All Year Through...**

⊕ **Wrapped up in love (vv.12-14)**

For the Lord's Apostle Paul the years A.D. 61-63, were spent in chains, under house arrest in Rome. Through this blessing God gave us four "Captivity Letters": Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon. Remarkable, isn't it, that some of Paul's most joyful words come from the toughest times? Isn't it true that human hopes and dreams for earthly things will always disappoint? But God, never!

After thanking God for the faith He planted in their hearts at Colosse, Paul praises the supremacy of Christ. You see, Jesus wasn't always a baby. He "***grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.***" (Luke 2:52) As the God-Man, Jesus lived a perfect life in our place, died an innocent death, and rose to glorious life and rule from God's right hand in heaven. He set us free from human traditions and regulations. Christ fulfilled God's law for us so completely, that we are no longer "***under law, but under grace.***" (Romans 6:14) **In love** we relive our Baptism every day by putting to death sexual immorality, lust, greed and evil desires. Daily we strip off the filthy garments of our own righteousness with anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language. We put on the new self to be holy like God.

God made Christmas presents of us to Christ, all **Wrapped up in love**. He wants us to keep the wrapping on, to keep **Living Christmas All Year Through**. "***Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves....***" Did you ever get overlooked when kids were choosing up teams? Terrible feeling, isn't it? But when someone called you over, felt great! God has called us over in Christ to be on His team. He wants us to wear His uniform. There it is in Christ that time He landed on the shore of Galilee so tired, but still had **compassion** on the people. "***Clothe yourself with***

<sup>1</sup> Morgan, Robert J. *On This Day*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1997. Available at [www.Laridian.com](http://www.Laridian.com).

*compassion*,” that wells up from deep inside. Put on *“kindness”* that doesn’t just pity, but goes to work and helps. Don’t look at this next one; just put it on. If you look at it, it disappears. This is the most elusive of Christian virtues. As soon as you think you have it, you’ve lost it. So *“put on humility.”* And pity the poor Christian who thinks it’s his duty to humble others. You can’t think that way when you *“put on gentleness.”* We can be meek and gentle because we belong to Christ. He tears off our defensive pride and lets us live in His gentle grace and kind forgiveness. Seeing how patient He has been with us in all our sins helps us *“put on patience”* which has a long fuse and cuts people some slack.

Would God have to say this part if there were nothing to bear? But since God says, *“Bear with each other...,”* shouldn’t we hold onto one another instead of letting hurt feelings get in the way? Even at church, yes, especially here, *“Forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another.”* When we pray, *“Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us,”* we ought also remember the Lord’s warning, *“If you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”* (Matthew 6:15 NIV84) *“Forgive as the Lord forgave you.”* Remember the New Covenant: *“Their sins and iniquities I will remember no more.”* (Hebrews 10:17) “But, Pastor, what if the memories keep coming back?” Dear Christian, use each memory as another opportunity to pray that God will have mercy on that sinner as He has had mercy on you. Memories are God’s opportunities for grace to abound.

A memory of my one year in college football recalls teammates whose fathers also attended the former Northwestern College, Watertown, WI. As boys they dreamed of wearing that uniform. Think of a hockey game; take off everyone’s jersey and they’re all on the same team. The jersey distinguishes the team. We have a jersey for Jesus to wear with pride all year. He says, *“Over all these virtues put love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”* This *agape-“love”* sacrifices self, as Jesus sacrificed Himself to save us all. He wants us **Living Christmas All Year Through – Wrapped up in love**, and...

#### ⊕ Refereed by peace (vv.15-17)

*“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,”* more literally is, *“...referee in your hearts.”* Once I woke up with a referee leaning over me. The gym was quiet while he kept asking, “Are you okay?” Finally I answered, “I’m okay, but my teeth aren’t.” I had been playing point guard in one of those wild high school basketball games. At some point I started swearing under my breath and just didn’t care. If I had been letting Christ’s peace referee my heart, I’d not have had to talk to the referee after my flawed flight to the floor face first. My professor would not have heard one of my front teeth hit the stage ten feet away. I would not have needed this lifelong reminder to keep it cool and let Christ rule. Strange thing about God’s discipline: It always hurts, but it always works when received in repentant hearts. The Psalmist said, *“Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I guard your word.”* (Psalm 119:67 TPA)

*“Let the peace of Christ referee your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.”* Funny thing about thankfulness: If you’re busy thanking God for your fellow Christians, you don’t have time for petty grievances and hurt feelings. I’m glad when some tiny body part of mine heals. We have work to do for each other. You can’t do this sitting at home or working for the boss. You can worship God on a lake, but not like this: *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly,”* not just a little bit every once in a while, but *“richly, as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom....”* We need fellowship time for that. After church could you stay a while, help others and maybe even receive some good Christian counsel yourself? On a lake far, far away how can you *“sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God”*? True, Rev. H. in the mountains of China belted out, “How Great Thou Art,” but he did that in worship with his fellow Christians too. And his students can’t stay in their desks when they sing praises to Christ the King.

You want a Happy New Year? Try this: *“Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”* Let your words and actions focus on the reputation of our Savior Jesus as Lord of your life. Wherever this year may go, God will guide and bless, even like Philip Bliss – from grace to glory. “I will sing of my Redeemer ...” Amen.

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