

# Mary's Boy Child

## *Favorite Christmas Carols*

My first memories of this Christmas Carol, "Mary's Boy Child", were of Harry Belafonte singing it, probably in the late 1960s. For those of you that have never heard of Harry Belafonte or the 1960's you might have to try the Boney M version which was a bit later. It's one line from this carol that has always stood out for me. **"Man shall live forevermore, because of Christmas Day"**. That line has always been a problem for me, because this song implies that everyone will live forevermore because of Christmas day. I wish that were so, but it's not what the Bible teaches. What the Bible teaches is that not everyone will live forevermore because of Christmas Day. You see, what this Carol is talking about is eternal life.

### **1. Death Is The Last Taboo Subject.**

About 6 years ago I had a brief conversation with a car dealer. We were chatting at a function and he asked me what had what had brought me to that particular city. I explained to him that my brother in law was dying of cancer, and that I had come up to see him and my sister so we could have some time together. He then started to share with me about a friend of his who had died recently through cancer. In our conversation I made the remark that death is one of the last taboo subjects in our society. It seems we can talk pretty freely about any subject except death. He agreed, then he quickly changed the subject! It was Woody Allen who once said, "I'm not afraid to die, I just don't want to be there when it happens."

A discussion group was once asked this question. "If you found out that you only had two weeks to live, what would you do?" After a few moments of silence one person said, "I would quit my job, sell my possessions and travel." Another said, "I would call all of my family and friends and plan a going away party." A third said, "I would invite my mother in law to come and live with me." A bit puzzled by the third man's answer the leader asked if he would explain. He said, "I would invite my mother in law to come and live with me because it would be the longest two weeks of my life!"

### **2. When We Die, Will We Live Again?**

Beyond all the jokes about death, there is an underlying question that almost every person in every civilisation on earth has. Here it is. "When I die, will I live again?" Notice it's not "if I die", for the death rate statistics have never come down. They are still the highest in the world, at 100%. You wouldn't think that people believed that by the way they live. They live as if they were going to live forever. None of us are eager to die. But it does make all the difference to that way you die if you really believe there is eternal life for you beyond the grave. The most common question people have at funeral services is "Will I see this person again?" Perhaps that's why we love this Carol so much. It brings us reassurance. "Man shall live forevermore, because of Christmas day." Sounds good, but is it true?

### **3. What Jesus Said About Living Again.**

Most of what we understand about living on after we die comes from Jesus. Here are some quotes from Jesus. All of these are from the Gospel of John. This is what he said about eternal life.

**"...that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:15 & 16 NIV)**

**"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life." (John 5:24 NIV)**

**"You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me." (John 5:39 NIV)**

**"I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand." (John 10:28 NIV)**

The best indications we have about eternal life come from Jesus. All through the centuries, those who have believed what Jesus said have found that belief in a life after this takes away the fear of death. The early followers of Jesus certainly believed this, because the book of Hebrews in the New Testament makes reference to the teaching of Jesus on this subject. It says that Jesus **"freed those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death."** (Hebrews 2:15) So at first glance, it seems that the Carol is right. "Man shall live forevermore because of Christmas day". But is that what Jesus said?

#### **4. Jesus Is The Only Way.**

Jesus made it very clear that the only way we are going to live forevermore, is through him. He was absolutely exclusive in his claims that he was the only way that we can have a relationship with God. Listen to what he said. **"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"** (John 14:6 NIV) He didn't say "I am a way or a truth or a means to get to the Father". He said I am **the** way. On numerous occasions he said the same sort of thing. In John 8:24 we read that Jesus said **"I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins."** (John 8:24) Is that offensive to you? Those words of Jesus are very offensive to people who live in an age of tolerance, where all beliefs are treated as truth. But there is nothing new in that. If you read the whole of John's Gospel Chapter 8 you will see that what Jesus said was so offensive to the religious people who were listening to him, that they picked up rocks and were going to stone him to death. They were incensed that he was saying he was the only way to God. Everyone listening to Jesus, those who followed him and those who hated him, were in no doubt about what he was claiming. He was saying that only those who followed him would have eternal life. And if you are not sure if the disciples believed this, in Acts 4:12 we have a record of Peter is speaking to the religious leaders in Jerusalem. He tells them **"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."** (Acts 4:12)

It's pretty hard to mistake the point being made. Without faith in the person of Jesus Christ there is no other way to be saved from sin and to have eternal life in heaven with God. Jesus is the only way. Jesus made these "all or nothing" statements. There is only one way to God. It's not through good works. It's not through other religions. It's through Jesus. Christians are not trying to be arrogant and presumptuous. They are not claiming to be smarter or superior to anyone else when they make these statements. They are just stating what the Bible clearly teaches. It's what Jesus said. "Man shall live forevermore because of Christmas day?" Not according to Jesus. I need to explain a bit more.

#### **5. Why Do We Need A Saviour?**

The Bible clearly teaches that every human is a sinner and alienated from God. Because we are sinners we are excluded from heaven. Heaven is holy and God is holy. It would only take one sinner to enter heaven for the whole place to be contaminated. He cannot tolerate sin. There is no way he could tolerate sinful people for an instant in heaven, let alone for eternity. That's why we need a Saviour. We need someone who can rescue us from our sinfulness. We need someone who can free us from our sins. Someone, who can wash us clean. That's where Jesus fits in. Christmas is the celebration of the coming of Jesus as our Saviour. He came to die on a Cross to take the penalty and punishment for our sin. He took all of your sin and mine upon himself so that we could be clean and enter heaven to be with a holy God. Those who believe this and trust in him are given the gift of eternal life. Eternal life is a very expensive gift. But like any gift, it can be refused.

## **6. The Offer Of A New Heart.**

Just take a moment to think about the one person you love more than anyone else in the world. Imagine that that the one you love is on life support in the hospital, suffering terrible injuries. The doctor takes you aside and tells you that there has been massive brain damage, and there is no point in continuing life support. He asks if you would be willing to sign a consent form so that the organs of your loved one can be donated to help someone else live. You take a walk in the hospital to think about it. As you are wandering around the hospital in a daze, something happens that is not supposed to happen. Through a series of events you find out there is a person in the same hospital, who will die very soon if they don't have a heart transplant. The heart of your loved one is their only hope. Without it they will die.

So, with a heavy heart, you sign the consent form. Through the death of the one you love, someone else can be given the chance of life. The life support is turned off from your loved one, and the heart removed. But then, to your amazement, you find that the dying person with the diseased heart refuses the transplant.

You are so dumbfounded you rush into the room of the patient and demand to know why. The person with the diseased heart says to you "There are a lot of ways to deal with heart disease. I've decided from now on I'm going to take aspirin every day. I'm going to become a vegetarian and stop eating fatty foods. And I'm going to exercise. I'll run five kilometres a day. And I was reading an article about some new treatment in Mexico. I'm going to Mexico to have that." Your mouth drops open in amazement. "Are you crazy? None of that stuff will work! None of those things is going to save your life. You are signing your own death certificate. The only hope you have is the transplanted heart of the one I love more than anyone else in the world".

## **7. Eternal Life Is For You – If You Will Accept It.**

God's plan to save us for all eternity is absolutely brilliant. It was completely sacrificial, but it's the only thing that works. There is nothing wrong with God's plan. But there is something wrong with us when we won't accept it. We fiddle around with our own plans, thinking that they will be the means for us to have eternal life. We have all these schemes to try and save ourselves, because we are too proud to admit that we need a Saviour.

And because of our own stubborn stupidity, we die in our sins, and miss out on the eternal life that Jesus offers. "Man will live forevermore, because of Christmas Day?" Not necessarily. It's certainly true for those who put their trust in Jesus as Saviour. But for those who refuse his offer of a heart transplant that will save their life, they miss out on a life with Christ that begins today and goes on for all eternity.

When Jesus was talking about eternal life, and he talked about it a lot, he said this; **"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." (John 3:36 NIV)** He also said **"For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:40 NIV)**

Perhaps you are a person here today, or a person listening to this message on the internet, who doesn't have the certainty in your heart that you have eternal life. You know, that if today your heart were to stop beating, and you stood face to face with God and he asked you "Why should I let you into my heaven?" you wouldn't know what to answer. If you don't have that deep sense of certainty about eternal life, there are people here today who would love to talk to you, pray with you, and explain to you how you can live the rest of your life in this world and the next in relationship with Jesus Christ. This really is a matter of eternal life or death. If God is speaking to you, do something about it now.

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