



Point of View

Dear Marketplace Friend,

Can you hear it? Like you, I've been surrounded with Christmas music since Thanksgiving. My Button #1 radio station in Southern California - **KFSH, "The Fish"** - has been playing "only Christmas music" since November 22nd. For the last month, I've heard from Bing Crosby more than I've heard from my family.

Right now - it's Sunday night, the 23rd as I write - I have my Christmas '07 favorite tune playing. In fact, I'll bet I've played it close to 100x since the last turkey hit the table. *Bet you couldn't guess...*

One of the reasons I embrace Christmas tightly is because - for about four weeks - most of the people around us act like they agree with us. During July, you can be marginalized if you go public with your thoughts about Jesus, but during December, even lost people will agree...

The song in the background proves my point. James Taylor recorded 20 albums before he put his first Christmas album on the shelves in 2004. His playlist includes some pretty bland mall music - *Santa Claus is Coming to Town, Jingle Bells, Deck the Halls*, that kind of ACLU-friendly stuff - but he sandwiches those utterly useless holiday hoots with some numbers that pack a biblical punch...

Few modern Christmas CDs include the hymn made from the poem written by Christina G. Rossetti in England, nearly 150 years ago. Read what James is singing to me, as I write:

*In the bleak midwinter, icy wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
Snow on snow had fallen, snow on snow, on snow,
In the bleak midwinter, long and long ago.*

*Angels and archangels, they have gathered there,
Cherubim and seraphim rising in the air;
Oh, but only Mary, in her maiden bliss,
Worshipped the beloved with a mother's kiss.*

*Heaven cannot hold Him, nor can earth sustain;
Heaven and earth shall fall away when He comes to reign.*

*What then can I give Him, empty as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a Wise Man, I would know my part;
What then can I give Him? I must give my heart.*

I've preached the Christmas story to thousands of people assembled at churches

over the last 25 years, but I've never captured the essence of the message as well as Christina wrote it, and James sings it. It's so great... that it's tragic.

Tragic? Sadly, millions of people this week are immersed in the facts of the Advent, and the music makes it memorable, but they've never acted on that last verse from Taylor. With the gaggle of gifts that will trade hands in the next few hours, the gift that would top 'em all is the gift of your heart, given to the One who was - and, remains - the gift from the Heavenly Father. He was sent to resolve our emptiness with the fullness that can only come with the promised presence of the grown-up Christ Child, who awaits His Second Advent, when *"heaven and earth shall fall away, when He comes to reign..."*

Merry Christmas, dear friend. Don't let the music tell His story only; make it your story as well...

Bob Shank



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