

Do You Hear What I Hear?

Go Tell It on the Mountain

Go, Tell it On the Mountain: We have absolutely no way of knowing just how long ago this song was created, because the song was commonly sung for many years before anyone wrote it down and published it. The song was nearly lost to history during the early 1900's. Slavery was a part of American history that many wanted forgotten, so very little from that era was played or published. Yet, there was a group of 10 singers from Fisk University in Tennessee who went on a fundraising tour in 1871 to save their school from bankruptcy. Over the 18-month tour, their concerts primarily consisted of "anthemized spirituals." In fact, this ensemble is credited for keeping the Negro spiritual alive as they performed them to black and white audiences alike. Other historically black colleges followed suit in the years that followed. The earliest known recording of *Go, Tell it On the Mountain* appeared in a publication in 1909 by John Wesley Work, Jr. There are many additional verses that have surfaced since, but this old spiritual, sung by enslaved Africans on the plantations in the south, is found in nearly every hymnal in the world and is sung by billions worldwide.

"Regardless of which version that is sung, 'Go, Tell It on the Mountain' has become a truly American contribution to the telling of the Christmas story that is now sung around the world." **C. Michael Hawn**

Two Biblical Themes in this Classic Christmas Carol

- I. **The Birth of Jesus Is a Blessing to Us** – *"While shepherds kept their watching, o'er silent flocks by night, behold, throughout the heavens there shone a holy light. The shepherds feared and trembled, when lo, above the earth, rang out the angel chorus that hailed our Savior's birth. Down in a lowly manger, the humble Christ was born, and God sent us salvation, that blessed Christmas morn."*

"And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." **Acts 4:12**

*"And Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'" **John 14:6***

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God." **John 3:16-18**

"He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God." **John 1:11-12**

- II. **The Birth of Jesus Is for the World** – *"Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills, and ev'rywhere; go, tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born."*

One of the things I love most about this Christmas carol is the focus on telling others about the birth of Jesus and his love for them. If we celebrate Jesus as ours and fail to share the good news of his birth, life, death, and resurrection with others...we have missed the point.

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." **Luke 19:10**

"For you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." **1 Peter 2:9**

"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." **Acts 1:8**

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes..." **Romans 1:16a**

A lot of people are hurting this Christmas season. Some may be struggling to celebrate the birth of Jesus because of pain or suffering that they have endured. It makes sense, but I try to think about the person who first sang *Go Tell It on The Mountain* and consider the fact that they were enslaved and forced to work against their will for someone who may have claimed to be a Christian themselves. They lived in awful conditions and had no freedom to do what they wanted or to go where they chose. Yet, even in such horrible conditions, they summoned the faith to write a song in celebration of the birth of Jesus. How amazing!

"I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!" **Psalms 34:1-3**

As we believe in Jesus, we are blessed. As we share Jesus, we are doubly blessed. As we do so amid suffering and pain, we fellowship with Christ like never before!

Sources & Further Reading Opportunities:

- *Tyndale Bible Dictionary* – Elwell & Comfort (2001)
- *Tony Evans Book of Illustrations* – Tony Evans (2009)
- *United Methodist Hymnal* – (1989)
- *Sermons and Songs of Christian Life* - Library of Congress (2022)
- *History of Hymns: 'Go, Tell it On the Mountain'* – C. Michael Hawn (2015)

