



'Tis the Season to be ...

BY DAVID B. CRABTREE

The toy store parking lot is packed, and cars prowl like lions on the Serengeti waiting for any sudden movement in the occupied spaces. There is no charity here. This is serious business. This is Christmas.

A silver mist BMW with a tree strapped to the roof is parked sideways, taking up two parking spots. Sap drips onto the hood, ruining the paint the driver tried

to protect by taking two spots in the first place: poetic justice.

Inside, the checkout lines go on forever. Parents hold tight to the latest “must have” toys as the line creeps along. “Price check on 3!” calls the cashier. Thirty people groan in unison and gauge their chances at the other registers.

Anyone surviving the mayhem and the agonizing wait slogs back

to their car having found a gift, but often at the expense of any residual Christmas spirit.

The old Welsh Carol says, “’Tis the season to be jolly.” If it were only so! The season that drowns out the sacred is anything but jolly. Christmas, for many, is something to get through. It’s a hunt, a race, a competition for best gift or best party. The pressure can make people mean, stressed, cranky, rude, irrational, weepy,

depressed or bitter — and that’s before the credit card statement arrives!

We need to slow down. We need to go back to Matthew and Luke, read the story afresh and rescue Christmas. We need to rediscover ’tis so much more than “the season to be jolly.”

'Tis the season to be thankful.

Nothing we do because of the season can compare to what God did because of love. God came down and clothed himself in flesh so we could be clothed in righteousness. Christmas reminds us that we could not save ourselves, so God sent the Ultimate Gift in the person of Jesus and He did so with great joy. Humble gratitude is our only reasonable response.

'Tis the season to be thoughtful.

Count your blessings. Think of others. Be deliberate in scheduling through the holidays so you can give your loved ones the best of you, not what’s left of you.

Don’t let pride make you a pauper. Give within your means. And don’t just give it, say it. Words well spoken last longer than gadgets or garments.

Be helpful, kind, warm and gracious. God came to us with purpose. Let’s make the celebration of that wonderful event meaningful.

'Tis the season to be hopeful.

Who can gaze upon a baby and not feel hope stirring in their hearts? The Bible says that in Christ there is no darkness. We see the bright hope of eternity in the Bethlehem manger.

Step back and take the long view of life. You may be going through a dark place, but it’s just a passage, not a destination.

Give somebody another chance. Dare to dream again. Look beyond your circumstances and rest in God’s sure and certain promises.

'Tis the season to be joyful.

Scrooge doesn’t play a part in the real Christmas story. We all need to approach the season with a joyful mind-set.

Our attitudes are not chosen for us, we choose them every day. We have the ability to set our minds on right things, like setting the dial on a radio. Paul gives us an excellent station guide in Philippians 4:8.

Don’t let your attitudes be influenced by the secular crush of the season. Dial into joy and spread it all around.

'Tis the season to be still.

Everything should stop on Christmas as it did that starry night in the Bethlehem stable. For a few moments, the heavy demands on a carpenter named Joseph fell away as he looked down at the miracle Baby in Mary’s arms. Shepherds stepped out of their tedious nightly routine to bow and worship Deity. Angels set aside their normal refrain to sing a new song of peace and goodwill. There has always been something about Christmas that causes us to stop, if only for a few hours.

Have seasons past left you harried, hurried, worried and broke? Leave the rat race to the rats and have yourself a thankful, thoughtful, hopeful, joyful and quiet Christmas. Choose wisely *how* you celebrate, lest *what* you celebrate be lost in the shuffle. **tpe**

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