**HE KNOWS IF YOU’VE BEEN BAD OR GOOD**

In 1934 Haven Gillespie wrote the lyrics to *Santa Claus Is Comin To Town* and it became an overnight sensation. I remember listening to a 45 RPM vinyl recording played on my parent’s Motorola Turntable by *The Four Seasons,* with Frankie Valli’s unique high pitch voice cranking out the lyrics:

You better watch out, You better not cry, You better not pout, I'm telling you why
Santa Claus is coming to town.

He's making a list, He's checking it twice, He's gonna find out, who's naughty or nice
Santa Claus is coming to town.

He sees you when you're sleeping, He knows when you're awake, He knows if you've been bad or good, So be good for goodness sake.

I was 10 years old in 1962 when that particular recording hit the Billboard charts. It not only had a catchy tune, it also had short four-word lines that easily rhymed, making it easy for a kid to memorize and sing along. At that young age, before I had gone through puberty, I could easily hit the high notes with Frankie Valli (our pet dachshund Rudy crooned it with me to make a great duo – but we never reached Casey Kasem’s American Top 40 charts).

I certainly didn’t want to get on Santa’s “Naughty List” to get switches and charcoal briquettes instead of a Radio Flyer scooter, Daisy BB gun and RCA transistor radio on Christmas morning. I just had to stay off that “List” but it was soooo hard to be “nice” when I had a little brother as my roommate and three sisters in rooms right next to mine! I really tried to be good but they were forever getting me into trouble. Each Christmas morning it was an anxious moment for me after a sleepless night wondering if I had made the “Nice” or the “Naughty” List. Would it be a scooter or charcoal? Each Christmas Eve as I was tucked into bed I would think back over the year and wonder what was recorded on Santa’s List. Somehow, it always amazed me when I got a stocking full of sweets, not switches. Grace! It just had to be Grace!

Well, you know where this is going, right? I’m sure I had heard that song when I was younger, but at 10 years of age I was now old enough to start understanding the words. And believe it or not, that had an impact on me. It made me start thinking about God in a different way. In 1964 in our Bible classes at church we studied the old Bennie Lee Fudge workbooks. One class we were studying 2 Corinthians and we came to this text:

*“Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”*
(2 Corinthians 5:9-10).

There it was. Clear as day. God has a “Nice” and “Naughty” List. Only this time it’s for real. And eternity. There will be no making it up next year. And the stakes are not between sweets and switches, or briquettes and BB guns, but heaven and hell. This time it led to not one worry-filled night on December 24th, but many anxious nights, not of Santa’s List, but God’s. So as I read that text to fill in the blanks of my workbook, it went like this in my old King James Bible:

“**9**Wherefore we labour, that, whether ***present*** or ***absent***, we may be accepted of him. **10**For we must all appear before the ***judgment*** ***seat*** of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be ***good*** or ***bad***.”

God has a “Good List” and a “Bad List.” And God is omniscient and omnipresent. I know that, not because of some song or legend, but because the Bible says so. It’s right there in black and white. For instance, He not only knows when a sparrow dies and falls to the ground, or the number of hairs I have on my head (Matt. 10:29-30), but He knows the very thoughts and intents of my heart and that “*all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account*” (Heb. 4:12-13). Isaiah reminds us God knows every detail of history – past, present and future (Isa. 46:9-10). John makes it clear that “*God is greater than our heart and knows all things*” (I Jn. 3:20).

When the thought of God’s omniscience hit me it brought fear into me like I had never known before. Yes, before when I got caught by my parents for some “minor” infraction (Ron, you deserved every licking, and Dee, you know I barely touched you), I was punished for “being a bad boy.” But now it was different. Much different. Now I was old enough to know it was sin against God. This was no longer getting my hand caught in the cookie jar, but my hand and heart caught in rebellion to Jesus Christ! Now it was going to take more than mom demanding I tell my little brother or big sister “I’m sorry” and then “kiss and make up.” Now it was going to take a “*godly sorrow*” that “*produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted*” (2 Cor. 7:9-10).

On April 26, 1964 at the Sunday evening worship services, the preacher delivered an old-fashioned hell-fire-and-brimstone sermon that shook me from my flat-top haircut down to my penny-loafer shoe bottoms. I was shaking all over. When the preacher was finally to the “Let us stand and sing” part, I was catapulted to the front row to do as he said, “give me your hand and God your heart.” That night I eagerly made the good confession of Jesus as the resurrected Son of God (Rom. 10:10) and was “*baptized in the name of Jesus Christ* *for the remission of your sins*” (Acts 2:38).

After many restless, terrifying nights of thinking God was watching me and knew whether I had “been bad or good” (and I knew I had been bad), I slept like a baby on April 26th, 1964. The terror was gone, the crisis was over. I slept like the 3000 on Pentecost evening; like the Ethiopian riding home rejoicing; like the suicidal jailer from Philippi; like the terrified Paul that night in Damascus. I had joined the ranks of the “*Lost but Found*” fellowship of sheep (Lk. 15) and could now “*lie down in green pastures*” and “*fear no evil, for You are with me*” (Psa. 23). I was now a Christian!

Haven Gillespie’s holiday lyrics about Santa Claus had a sobering effect on a young boy 56 years ago. They opened my thoughts of the omniscience of God. That led my thoughts to the obedience to Christ. What’s your conversion story?

Until tomorrow… “*HE* knows if you’ve been bad or good, so be good for God’s sake.”

I love you. Rick