

The Original Joy To The World

INTRO: We are taking a break as Christmas grows ever nearer from our Search for Shepherds, to take a little time to tune our hearts in to this most wonderful time of the year. I thought the best way to do this would be to look back at the original “Joy to the World.”

I am not referring to a previous version of the song written by Issac Watts some 300 years ago. And while in the grander sense I am referring to the actual joy to the world: Jesus Christ, that is actually not what I have in mind with the title of the sermon. I am referring to the inspiration for Watts song. I am referring to a lesser known passage for the celebration of Christmas. I am referring to: Psalm 98.

TURN: to Psalm 98. I want to do a little dissecting of this Psalm, and then I want to apply it right where we live.

READ: Psalm 98

I. Verses 1-3

A. “Sing to the Lord a new song...”

1. Let’s stop there
2. Isn’t it funny that we say that we believe the Bible - cover to cover we trust God’s Word, and believe that it really is from Him
 - a) And yet, how long have frustrations, arguments, fights, people walking out of churches and even church splits occurred over singing a new song in church?
 - b) The Bible says it right here - “Sing to the Lord a new song”
 - (1) “Well Pastor, that doesn’t really mean that we are supposed to sing new songs. It’s really just talking about when you are inspired by God because of his amazing works, worship Him in a fresh way.”
 - (2) For a biblical “literalist” like me
 - (a) And by the way I don’t like that term “literalist” because it has come to mean that you take EVERYTHING in the Bible literally (or so says that people that like to attack our positions)
 - (b) I prefer the term “seriousist” - I know there is no such word, but I take the Bible seriously - yes literally in many cases, but when it can’t be taken literally, I still take it seriously rather than throwing things out I can’t understand
 - (3) Anyway, for a seriousist like myself, it says, “Sing to the Lord a new song”
 - (a) I think it means sing a new song

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- c) And I will be the first to admit, when I go to worship, I want to be familiar with what I am singing
 - (1) It brings me comfort
 - (2) I remember the first time one of the kids asked if we could sing “Overwhelmed”
 - (a) I remember kind of liking the song, but was so unfamiliar with it
 - (b) However, that song has grown on me, and is one of my favored songs - largely because it gets me thinking about the Person of God - who He is and what He is like
 - B. There is a reason why we sing a new song - He has done marvelous things
 - 1. And the rest of verses 1-3 talk about those marvelous things
 - 2. All of it centers around salvation
 - a) God worked out salvation for us
 - b) God made salvation known to us
 - (1) Think about it - if He only worked it out for us, but never told us about it, what good would that be?
 - c) He remembered His love for Israel
 - d) And all the ends of the earth have seen God’s salvation
 - C. Does this not seem to fit well with the Christmas story?
 - 1. Sing a new song because God has worked it out
 - 2. We had no hope on our own, so God made the way - God provided salvation for us, and announced it (via the angels, the shepherds, the story of the wise men)
- II. Verses 4-6
- A. Starting again in verse 4 - “Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music.”
 - 1. Now, as a church we are biblical “seriousists” - we take God’s Word seriously - Why don’t we shout for joy?
 - a) That’s an honest question - because I don’t do it - I’m not a terribly demonstrative worshiper
 - (1) And don’t give me, “He means shout in your heart for joy, Pastor”
 - (2) What exactly would that look like when you shout for joy in your heart?
 - b) To be honest, I think God knows how He created each of us
 - (1) Some are more demonstrative in how they worship God - they raise hands, that shout “hallelujah”, they display on the outside what is going on on the inside
 - (a) The thing about it is, that’s okay

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- (b) It's okay to be demonstrative, as long as it comes from your heart, and not your heritage; its okay to be demonstrative as long as it is demonstrative and not disruptive
- (2) And some people are wired more introspective in nature - they bow their heads in worship, they think deeply about the words of a song, they tear up as they realize afresh the grace and mercy of God
- 2. "Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music."
 - a) Does this not sound like we just stepped into a hollywood musical?
 - (1) People in musicals burst into song for sometimes the most random of reasons
 - (2) When that little girl from Frozen can run around the castle and bug everyone by singing, "Do you want to build a snowman" - random things
 - b) We are being asked to burst into jubilant song for the salvation that God has revealed
 - (1) We have the most awesome of reasons to turn life into a musical
- B. And that is what the rest of this section talks about
 - 1. Grab a harp, find something to beat on like a drum - but make glad and happy music because our salvation is here
 - 2. Shout it out to the Lord with all joy from our hearts
- III. Verses 7-9
 - A. Does this not sound like Issac Watts just ripped off the Psalmist here
 - B. Joy to the World
 - 1. "let heaven and nature sing"
 - 2. "While fields and floods, rocks hills and plains, repeat the sounding joy"
 - 3. Even the part about thorns infesting the ground and making his blessing flow "far as the curse is found" - is really found in Psalm 98 where it says "He comes to judge the earth - He will judge the world in righteousness"
 - a) It's talking about God setting things straight
 - b) And God judging the earth in righteousness is a cause for celebration
 - (1) Because God is not swayed by outside influences
 - (2) He judges in all righteousness and with perfect fairness
 - C. Psalm 98 was where Issac Watts, a huge believer in singing a new song to the Lord, took his inspiration to write the beloved Christmas carol, Joy to the World
- IV. We all know as we enter into this time of year that it can sometimes seem anything but joyous

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- A. Christmas time can be quite the stress maker
 - 1. Party planning, getting the “perfect gift”, big meals, distant cousins, aunts and uncles that remind you when you are together why there are distant
 - 2. Suicide actually rises during the holiday time period
 - 3. Christmas time can bring more frustration than joy...if you focus on the wrong things
 - a) A woman was at the mall shopping feeling the stress of the season
 - (1) She was tired of searching for the perfect present
 - (2) Stressed by credit card debt climbing
 - (3) Tired of fighting crowds and standing in lines
 - b) She had her arms full of bags when she tried to get on the elevator
 - (1) When the doors opened, it was full
 - (2) She muttered, “Great” - those in the elevator, feeling her pain, squeezed a little tighter to make a bit of room
 - (3) As the doors closed she said in disgust, “Whoever came up with this Christmas junk needs to be found and strung up and shot.”
 - (4) A few people nodded, others grunted in agreement
 - (5) Somewhere from the back of the elevator came a single voice, “Don’t worry! They already crucified Him”
- B. Christmas is not about us, it really is about joy in Christ
 - 1. So many people are searching for happiness, not realizing that something better exists out there
 - 2. The joy that comes from a relationship with our Creator
 - a) Happiness is fleeting
 - b) Joy is deep, and does not shift with the circumstances
- V. So let’s apply Issac Watts beloved song to our Christmas this year
 - A. The first verse teaches us that there is joy when the King is received
 - 1. “Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her king; let every heart prepare Him room, and heaven and nature sing.”
 - 2. You realize that not everyone was joyful when Jesus was born
 - a) Herod was not happy
 - b) He learned about it from the Magi
 - (1) He was paranoid - His title in Israel was “King of the Jews”
 - (2) He murdered three of his own sons, so what do you think he would do to a little baby that others were calling the king?
 - 3. And today, there are others that do not accept, much less with joy the birth of the Messiah and King
 - a) They have their freedom to worry about
 - b) He is a threat to their desires, their greed, their intellectual pride

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4. The Magi stand in contrast to Herod
 - a) These astronomers from the Orient arrived almost two years after Jesus birth
 - b) But they were filled with joy to find the new king
 - c) They brought gifts with them (and the three gifts are the reason people think there were three wisemen)
 - d) They were Gentiles, who may have had no idea of the Jewish history, but they came to worship the new king
5. So here is truth: when you receive Christ as King of your life, He brings spiritual joy that cannot be found anywhere else
 - a) Your body craves food or it becomes weak
 - b) So your inner spirit craves a relationship with Christ, and if it is not nurtured, the soul becomes weak, and restless
 - c) When we receive the King, there is joy
- B. The second verse shows us that there is joy when the Savior reigns
 1. "Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns..."
 2. There is a difference between receiving Christ and allowing Him to reign
 - a) Allowing Him to reign is a life long process called sanctification
 - b) And as long as you truly received Him, sanctification will happen in your life as Christ reveals more areas of life that need to be submitted to Him
 3. In the Bible, we see a number of Jesus fanboys, but when Jesus expected much of them, they would take off
 4. The same things goes today
 - a) There are lots of people that want the benefits of Christ in their life
 - b) But they do not want to let Christ reign over their life
 - (1) They are fans
 - (2) They are not followers
 5. The sad thing is, fans usually are not very joyful
 - a) Their indecisive nature zaps the joy out of life
 - b) Even they can see, as time goes on, that they are not fooling anyone, and they often give up, rather than committing to the relationship
 - (1) It's as if people want to date Jesus indefinitely
 - (2) They don't want to step up and commit because that would mean more demands on their life, and they are satisfied with the relationship the way it is
 - (3) But that type of relationship does not produce joy
 - (4) And Jesus will not stand for that type of relationship

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6. When Jesus reigns over your life, He brings joy into the relationship you didn't think possible before
 - a) Someone once said, "Joy is the byproduct of obedience"
- C. The third verse shows us that there is joy when the sinner repents
 1. "No more let sin and sorrow grow, nor thorns infest the ground, He comes to make His blessings known, far as the curse is found."
 - a) When I was little I never fully understood this verse
 - b) I have to say in some ways it is now my favorite verse in the song
 - c) I'll tell you why in a minute
 2. Ever notice that sin promises happiness - but delivers sorrow
 - a) Think no further than Adam and Eve
 - (1) Hey Eve, that fruit sure looks good!
 - (2) No! God says we will die.
 - (3) You won't really die. Com'on try it.
 - (4) Okay.
 - (5) BAM! Sin devastates the world!
 - b) And it is not just sin against each other, and a list of rights and wrongs that entered the world then
 - (1) Sin devastated everything!
 - (2) The people, their relationship, all of nature
 - (a) Romans 8:19-22
 - (b) And this is why I love this verse so much
 - (c) It says that He comes to make His blessings known, far as the curse is found
 - (d) The curse affected everything
 - (e) Including the animals, the earth itself, absolutely everything was affected by the curse of sin
 - (f) And nature is groaning for the day that the curse is lifted
 - (g) And one day, one day Jesus WILL complete the redemption of the earth and all who believe in Him, and all of this will be over! - If that don't get an "amen"
 3. When a sinner repents, there is joy
 - a) For that person - and when you are there to see that, when you have witnessed to someone and they say "yes" to Christ, you can see the joy in them
 - b) This baby that we celebrate changes everything
 4. A man by the name of Bret Harte wrote a story entitled "The Luck of Roaring Camp"
 - a) Roaring camp was supposed to be one of the meanest, toughest mining towns in the West

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- b) There were more murders and thefts there then anywhere around
 - c) It was a terrible town, inhabited almost exclusively by men, except for one woman - and you can guess how she made a living. Her name was Cherokee Sal
 - d) Cherokee became pregnant by, who really knows, and she died giving birth to her daughter
 - (1) The men took the baby, put her in a box with some old rags under her
 - (2) That didn't quite seem right so one man rode 80 miles to buy a rosewood cradle for the baby
 - (3) They put the baby in the cradle with the old rags under her - but that didn't seem right either, so another man rode up to Sacramento and bought some beautiful silk blankets with lace
 - (4) They then put the baby in her new cradle with her brand new blankets and all was well
 - e) Until one man noticed how dirty and disgusting the floors looked
 - (1) So these hardened men, tough as nails got down on their hands and knees and scrubbed the floor spotless
 - (2) So as you probably can guess, after the floors looked so good, these guys realized...the walls and ceiling needed to be cleaned.
 - (a) They even put curtains on the windows
 - (b) Things were looking a lot better
 - f) However, they realized that they had to give up some of their fighting, because babies sleep a lot, and babies don't sleep well in the middle of a brawl
 - g) The men, when they went to work in the mine, would take the baby and put her in her cradle by the entrance, with one man watching over her
 - (1) They noticed that it was kind of dirty and dingy there, so they planted flowers and a garden at the mine entrance
 - h) They often brought her shiny little stone from the mine, but when they put their hands near hers, they notice how dirty their hands were
 - (1) The next day the general store was sold out of soap and shaving gear
 - i) This baby changed everything in this little town!
5. Has the baby of Bethlehem changed everything in you?
- D. The final verse of Joy to the World shows us that there is joy when truth rules with grace
- 1. "He rules the world, with truth and grace"
 - a) Watts borrow this straight from John

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- b) Jesus was full of grace and truth
- 2. I used to wonder why those two things, grace and truth?
 - a) Why not grace and mercy?
 - b) Why not truth and righteousness?
 - c) Why grace and truth?
 - (1) Simple: they balance each other out
 - (2) Truth without grace is dogmatic tyranny
 - (a) It's harsh, its only concern is what's right
 - (b) It's very unpleasant
 - (3) Grace without truth is slushy, mushy sentimentality
 - (a) It's more concerned about how a person feels than directing them from harmful things
 - (b) It is a spineless form of love that is weak because it will not correct anyone or anything
 - d) Now, truth and grace - that's Christianity
 - (1) Truth to lovingly expose sin, to redirect away from harmful choices, to correct people and hold them accountable to the only measuring stick that matters - God's Word
 - (2) Grace to balance the truth with love - we don't just hit them with the truth and expect change, we lovingly, patiently work with people to help them see the truth, and move toward change

VI. CONCLUSION

- A. This Christmas there will be many things that will try to rob you of the joy of the season
- B. The reality that we focus on, that we spend much time preparing for, that we spend real effort to keep as the central focus of the season is the baby in the manger
 - 1. Not because he is a cute little baby, not because of the miracles surrounding his birth, not for the angels announcement, not for the shepherds visit, and not because this story is idyllic
 - 2. Jesus birth was just the beginning - He was born to die
 - a) To die for us
 - b) For our sins - in a most gruesome and horrific manner
 - c) Only to raise again to new life
- C. That is why, when we look back at a Psalm like Psalm 98 we begin to understand when he says
 - 1. "Sing to the Lord a new song for he has done MARVELOUS things"
 - 2. "The Lord has made His salvation known"
 - 3. "SHOUT for JOY to the Lord all the earth"
 - 4. "Burst into jubilant song"

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- D. But Jesus still is not done yet! - If this were an infomercial I would be telling you, "But wait! There's more!!!"
 - 1. We remember Jesus first coming as a baby because it was a promised arrival
 - a) Promised all the way from the first chapters of the Bible
 - b) Predicted by Isaiah some 700 years before Christ
 - 2. His first arrival reminds us of another predicted arrival - one that hasn't happened yet
 - a) The Bible tells us that Jesus will return
 - b) And when He does, the world will get set straight
 - c) Creation will stop it's groaning and be set free from the curse of sin and death
 - d) And we, we will live with Jesus for eternity
- E. If that don't get you shouting for joy to the Lord and bursting into jubilant song, nothing will
 - 1. In the words of the apostle John - "Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!"