

Joy to the World | Psalm 98

from the series, Sing We Now of Christmas

In 1719 Isaac Watts wrote “Joy to the World,” which was his rendering of Psalm 98. He saw this psalm as a celebration of Jesus’s role as Savior, King and Judge of both his church and the whole world. It was never intended to be a Christmas carol. What explains why this non-Christmas carol has become such a popular Christmas favorite? Only one answer suffices: Because the world is looking for joy and they like singing about it.

Joy in the Christian Life

- Joy is a Christian concept. Only the Christian knows true joy, as it is based on spiritual realities. Joy is that which comes from the inside, not that which is based on external affairs. (Psalm 30:5)
- Joy is a consequence. Joy comes from: spiritual unity (Phil. 2:4); Christian fellowship (2 Tim. 1:4); spiritual maturity (1 Peter 1:8); discipleship (3 John 4); assurance of salvation (Jude 24).
- Joy may also be considered a command. We are to “Count it all joy when we meet trials” (James 1:2). But further, be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18) who brings joy as his fruit. Paul writes, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace...” (Gal. 5:22)
- Joy is a commodity. It is part of the Christian experience. To be a Christian is to know the joy of Christ and to live a life of abundant joy. No one can steal genuine joy. Jesus said to his disciples, “These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.” (John 15:11)

MAIN IDEA: True joy is found in God alone.

Psalm 98 gives us reasons for great joy. Such is likely why “Joy to the World” has become the most popular of Christmas songs. People like singing about joy, even if they don’t have it. Something about singing for joy gives us a sense of joy itself. As you hear folks singing “Joy to the World” this Christmas, may God give you the opportunity to teach others about the joy of Christ.

Three reasons to sing for joy at Christmas:

1. God as Savior is redeeming a people for his own possession. (v. 1-3)

His salvation is great. (v. 1) His salvation is global. (v. 2) His salvation is gracious. (v. 3) This is the gospel—God is on mission to save people who do not want it in their natural state. Is it our desire that God will reveal his righteousness in the sight of the nations (v.2)?

2. God as King is wanting your song before your service. (v. 4-6)

The one true God wants the deepest part of you—and that is found in your worship, not merely in your service.

3. God as Judge is coming again to set the earth right. (v. 7-9)

In verses 7-9, the focus changes. It is no longer Israel, or even the world, but nature itself. Inanimate objects are personified and shown worshipping the Lord. God will recover the natural order and set creation right again. The world, marred by sin, is not what it was created to be, but it will one day be renewed by the one who made it.

God wants his people to sing. Old songs and new. God wants his people to sing and sing to him. Old songs remind us of old truths and old paths. Yet new songs stir our hearts afresh. A new song can be about an old story. “New song” occurs elsewhere in the Psalms: (33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 144:9; 149:1). Sing therefore, sing to the Lord.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between joy and happiness? Why is joy dependent on a spiritual reality?

2. Why is it important to see the Lord as savior and king and judge?

3. How can we think missionally about the world and their desire for true joy?



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