

JOY TO THE WORLD, Ps.98

Carols of Christmas #2

◆**Intro:** An old farmer went to the city one weekend and attended the big city church. He came home and his wife asked him how it was.

◆"Well," said the farmer, "It was good. They did something different, however. They sang praise choruses instead of hymns."

◆"Praise choruses," said his wife, "What are those?"

◆"Oh, they're okay. They're sort of like hymns, only different," said the farmer.

◆"Well, what's the difference?" asked the wife.

◆The farmer said, "Well, it's like this. If I was to say to you, 'Martha, the cows are in the corn,' well that would be a hymn. If on the other hand I was to say to you, 'Martha, Martha, Martha, Oh Martha, MARTHA, MARTHA, the cows, the big cows, the brown cows, the black cows, the white cows, the black and white cows, the COWS, COWS, COWS, are in the corn, are in the corn, are in the corn, are in the corn,' well, that would be a praise chorus."

◆Differences of opinion on music have always been with us. Even back in the 1719 when Isaac Watts first published the text of "Joy to the World". Surprisingly it was not written for Christmas. In 1719 it was not very popular to write new songs either. The majority of Christians at the time believed that one should sing the songs in the Bible and not add to them and so they sang only the Psalms. It's a bit ironic, because at least six biblical Psalms say that we ought sing a "new song" to the Lord! It's a direct injunction! Well to bridge the gap, Watts, known today for over 800 hymn, decided to publish a hymnal called *The Psalms of*

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David Imitated. In this hymnal, Watts rewrites many of the psalms using a Christological lens. Joy to the World is one such Psalm, Psalm 98 to be specific. There are of course a number of reasons it has wound up to be a Christmas Carol and we'll look at those today as we study the text of the song in Psalm 98.

◆ **1. One reason I can be joyful is that God is the God who comes.** In the myths of other religions it is rare that the gods pursue people. It's the other way around; people are always trying to get the attention of the gods. But when it comes to the True God, the creator of heaven and earth, it's different; he comes looking for us even when we don't want to be found. And so it was from Genesis on. Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden and hid from God. God came looking. God came and chose Noah, Abraham, Moses. God showed up to rescue Israel from Egyptian slavery, etc. all the way to the Messiah who God promised all the way back in the Garden with Adam and Eve. God came near in Jesus. And Jesus said before he ascended back to heaven that he was coming again to restore all things.

◆ This is one truth that Joy to the World accents and it comes from Ps98. *"Joy to the world, the Lord is come. Let earth receive her king! Let every heart prepare him room and heaven and nature sing!"*

◆ **A.** Psalm 98, when giving the reason for shouting for joy, reminds us that 1) God has already come to the earth, and 2)

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that he is coming again. This is the source of Joy he encourages us to yell about.

◆1) The opening stanza of the psalm, (v1-3) looks back to the demonstrations of God's salvation in history.

◆*"His right hand, and holy arm"* are descriptions used of God's deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt and also of God's bringing Israel home from exile in Babylon a thousand years later.

◆His *"love and faithfulness"* are the characteristics of God revealed to Israel after the Exodus. If you know the history– God showed up at Sinai and spoke with Moses! He gave them the 10 Commandments. The mountain shook. And God said, "I am the Lord full of love and faithfulness". The NT picks up on these traits in speaking of Christ...

◆*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." John 1:1,14, NIV. (the greek counterparts to "hesed and emet")*

◆*So, God showed up.*

◆2) Secondly, verse 9, the last stanza of Psalm 98 looks forward to the fact that God is not done coming! There is a someday still coming. There will come a day when God

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shows up in person again to set things to right! We call this the promise of restoration. Isaac Watt's rightly interprets this verse to be referring to Jesus Christ. Did not the angels tell the shepherds that they brought good news of great joy? And the NT sees Jesus as the final "Judge" of the Earth.

◆ *"For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead." Acts 17:31, NIV.*

◆ *"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life. I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man." John 5:24-27, NIV.*

◆ Don't go away. We'll be right back to apply this in a moment...

◆ **B.** This is all in Psalm 98. And this, of course, is one of the reasons the song/psalm fits so well with Advent. Advent is a celebration of the First and the Second Comings of Christ! We still look forward the appearing of our Messiah

◆ 1). In Advent we remember the **first** coming/Christmas when Jesus was born miraculously by the power of God and

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no human male, in the body of Mary a normal human female. And lets not forget the **reason he came**.

◆Some say it was to be a good example, so we can see how to behave and earn life.

◆Some say it was to be an inspiration for us to be all we can be.

◆Others say Jesus came as a payoff to the devil who owned the world and mankind and was demanding a ransom.

◆None of these theories of atonement is true. As Psalm 98 points out, God is King, all the earth sings before him. He is the owner, the Devil is an underling. God is the Judge too. We know from the New Testament that God has sentenced sinful man to death, but then also sent his own Son to die in man's place so mankind could live. If you want a fancy word for it, it's substitutionary atonement. So Christians celebrate the first Advent/coming of Christ. But Advent is more than remembering that Jesus came...

◆2). Advent is also our looking forward to Jesus coming again. Jesus is still coming! Salvation, while it has been established is still on the way! At the **second** coming/ Christmas when Jesus returns he will finish the kingdom he set up when he came the first time. He will come not to pay for sins again, but to establish the effects of the salvation he earned for us.

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◆“(1) *But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and (2) he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.*” Hebrews 9:26-28, NIV.

◆What we look forward to is the establishing of Jesus kingdom in the earth, the end of wars, the cessation of family feuds, the inability to sin any longer, the overflow of goodness among men and women, the presence of harmony, generosity, and compassion, peace and universal contentment. All your little quirks will be gone, and all my annoying habits ended. No crime, no deceit, no media except maybe to marvel and applaud acts of human kindness and mysteries of beauty in God’s creation. This is still coming, though Christ has begun it through he birth, death, and resurrection!

◆*So in the hymn we sing “No more let sin and sorrow grow, nor thorns infest the ground (the curse God put on the earth at Adam’s sin.) He comes to make his blessings known far as the curse is found.” Though that phrase is not in PS.98 and kept this hymn out of some hymnals, it is rightly the after affect of Jesus coming that began already in the Garden. We look forward to a return to Eden in which God and man walk together eternally!*

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◆**2.** At this point you might just be wondering, **“What should I do in light of this truth that God has already come to show his salvation to man, and is coming again** to rid the world of all that does not fit with it? Surely there are things about ME that can not exist in this coming Kingdom!”

◆*“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you--even Jesus. He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.” Acts 3:19-21, NIV.*

◆**A.** Repent. It makes sense doesn't it? I mean if you're going to go before a Judge and face the music like Ps.98 says you will, remorse is pretty important. It's that simple. To repent is to recognize that like Adam and like Eve, you have walked away from God in many ways and you need a messiah, a savior to purchase your way into that beautiful future. Jesus is that savior. You can't come home without him. (pray right now...)

Once you've gotten right with God, what's next? Well according to the Psalm...

◆**B.** Shout for Joy. God is worthy of obvious praise. Therefore I need to praise him openly. We might notice again that the middle stanza of Ps.98 enjoins us to shout for joy, to *burst* into jubilation! What does jubilation look like, I wonder? I'm guessing it's kinda

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hard to miss. When do we yell with happiness? At a touch down? At some amazing demonstration on America's Got Talent? Maybe. I've seen people shout at times like these. It usually involves throwing arms up in the air, widening the eyes and opening the mouth. But certainly not in church, right? Certainly not to the Lord. There once was a lady in church with a little toddler that was looking over her shoulder cooing and smiling at all the people behind her. They smiled back. When mom finally noticed she pulled the child down and said, "Stop that smiling. You're in church!" But the song says to shout for joy "to the Lord", and shout for joy "before the Lord"! Can I get an Amen?

◆**C.** I hope sometime in this Christmas season you take the opportunity, maybe even every opportunity, to open your mouth and openly praise God in his world, among the people he made. Jesus had strong words about this.

◆*"Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven." Matthew 10:32, 33, NIV.*

◆Do not let the evil one cause you to worry with embarrassment if you mention God. It ought to be as natural as acknowledging the Cubs, or the Colts, and certainly nothing like mentioning the White Socks... just kidding. Lets say you're in the dentist chair and the assistant mentions that she's been married 25 years tomorrow. That's like, forever right? So you say, "Wow that's

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terrific. How did you manage since that doesn't happen so often anymore?" And she says, "Oh luck I guess, and we let each other off the hook a lot." How could you point to Jesus? Any ideas? You say, "Oh, well for me it's the grace of Jesus that I haven't killed my husband by now." (Maybe not exactly) How about, "Jesus is the one whose helped me stay married."?

◆It's significantly easier this time of year with "Christmas" stuff everywhere. "Hey what do you think of the Christ part of Christmas?" That ought to open a conversation. "What do you love about the Christmas season?" And after you agree that lighted neighborhoods and generosity are pleasing you can go on to mention your hopeful heart because of what Jesus came to do! You see? This too could be "shout for joy".

◆**Conclusion:** When I was a young boy my family was talking about heaven and my sister said that she was looking forward to meeting Ruth and Grace. Mom asked who she was talking about. Lisa, my sister, said something to the extent that she didn't know for sure but that they must be important because the song says "He rules the world with Ruth and Grace!" You know, she might be right. The Bible says that we, God's children, will rule over angels when he comes to establish his kingdom. But you say, what about the judgement? How can I shout for joy at having my sins judged by the ruler of all things? Why all the joy at Christmas that God came? Well because the first time he came,

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he paid the price of your sentence for you! All you need do is receive him as your king. The second time he comes will be to gather you into that great Kingdom! Joy to the World, the Lord is come!