

Joy to the World

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this morning, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read. Book of Psalms and Psalm 98.

Psalm 98, but if you keep handy in your hand your sheet that you were given at the door. Psalm 98, I want us to look at the whole psalm.

But if we just read again from the beginning. For the psalmist writes, O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things.

His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things. His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him.

I want to begin this morning by asking the question, why do we sing Christmas carols? Why do we sing Christmas carols? What is it about this time of year that so many people, so many people sing Christmas carols?

[1 : 17] And even people who wouldn't call themselves religious or other people who wouldn't claim that they're regular churchgoers. And yet at this time of year, they find themselves singing Christmas carols.

And they enjoy singing them. They enjoy singing Christmas carols. And you know, we should actually encourage people. We should encourage people to enjoy singing Christmas carols. Because I remember reading an article from 2015. It was an article written by a reformed pastor in America. Maybe I've mentioned him before.

I found the article again the other day, hence the reason we're looking at this Christmas carol this morning. The article was entitled, The Gospel According to Christmas Carols. The Gospel According to Christmas Carols.

And the article, this is what it said, It's that time of year again, where you're likely to hear songs about Jesus's birth. We call them Christmas carols, but they're really Christian hymns, celebrating the incarnation of our Lord and Savior.

[2 : 20] For a few weeks each December, these profound songs of worship become part of the holiday atmosphere. And our society's pervasive interest in them provides us with a unique opportunity to share the gospel.

It's the perfect time, he writes, to explain the meaning of these songs to those who don't know Christ and share the good news of the gospel.

And that's simply what I'd like us to do. And not only today, but over the next couple of weeks, both on the Lord's Day and midweek on Wednesday evenings, I'd like us to consider the gospel according to Christmas carols.

The gospel according to Christmas carols. And my hope is that we'll see that they all exalt Jesus and they all explain to us the good news of the gospel.

And so this morning we're considering, as you'll have it on your sheet, we're considering Isaac Watts' Christmas carol, Joy to the World. And I'd like us to think about it under two simple headings, rejoicing with praise and remembering the promise.

[3 : 28] Rejoicing with praise and remembering the promise. So first of all, rejoicing with praise. Rejoicing with praise. Psalm 98 tells us, Oh, sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things.

His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. And as you can see in your sheet, Isaac Watts' Christmas carol, it begins with the words, Joy to the World, the Lord is come.

Let earth receive her King. Let every heart prepare him room. And heaven and nature sing. Now these words, Joy to the World, they were first penned in 1719 by this popular preacher and hymn writer called Isaac Watts.

And he said to have written over 750 hymns, some of which are very familiar to us. He's written the hymn, When I survey the wondrous cross upon which the Prince of Glory died.

He also wrote the hymn, Our God, Our Help in Ages Past, Our Hope for Years to Come. But you know, the thing about Isaac Watts' hymns and his carols is that they're all Christ-centered.

[4 : 43] They're all gospel-focused because they're all biblical. They're all based upon the Bible. And that's certainly true about this Christmas carol, Joy to the World.

Because Joy to the World is based upon the words of the psalm, Psalm 98. Where Psalm 98, it calls us and commands us and even compels us to rejoice and celebrate in the promise of a coming Savior.

And for Isaac Watts, he simply wanted to remind us and reaffirm to us that when it comes to Christmas, Jesus is the reason for the season. Jesus is the reason to rejoice and be glad. Jesus is the reason to sing a new song to the Lord for wonders He hath done. Which is why Isaac Watts wrote in his opening verse, he wrote there, Joy to the World.

The Lord is come. Let earth receive her King. Let every heart prepare Him room. And heaven and nature sing. But you know, what's remarkable about Psalm 98, which is what the carol is based on, what's remarkable about Psalm 98 is that Psalm 98 was written after one of the darkest periods in Israel's history.

[6 : 02] The Israelites, if you know the context, the Israelites had just returned to Jerusalem. They had been in exile in Babylon for 70 years. They had been exiled into Babylon because the Lord brought punishment upon them for their repeated ignorance and their repeated idolatry.

So the Babylonian army in 586 BC, they invaded Jerusalem, they demolished the city, they destroyed the temple, and they detained the people. They took them all to Babylon.

But when the Israelites returned to Israel, when they returned to Jerusalem, they returned to rebuild the city and to restore the temple. But when they restored the temple, the glory cloud of the Lord didn't return.

Of course, the glory cloud, it symbolized the Lord's presence amongst His people. It had been that glory cloud that had been present amongst the Lord's people since the time of the Exodus.

You remember when we're looking at the Exodus, the Lord promised His people. He promised His people that His presence would be amongst His people as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

[7 : 17] And so when the Israelites returned after the 70-year period of exile, they returned and they rebuilt the city, they restored the temple, and when they restored the temple, they expected the glory cloud of the Lord to return to the temple.

But it didn't. There was no glory cloud. There was no pillar of the Lord's presence. There was no sign that the Lord was amongst His people.

There was no sign. Only silence. No sign. Only silence. And it was this silence that made the Israelites think that the Lord had now forgotten them.

We're still forsaken them. But what happened was that the Lord's silence made the people silent.

The Lord's silence made the people silent because the Israelites, they were so downcast and depressed and felt so detached from the Lord because the Lord wasn't amongst them anymore. They felt so downcast that they couldn't sing the songs of Zion anymore. They couldn't raise their voices in rejoicing. They were silent.

[8 : 30] They were absolutely silent as a people. And you know, when we're faced with dark and difficult providences in our lives, we can sometimes become silent.

We can sometimes stop speaking and stop singing to the Lord because we can convince ourselves that the Lord is silent and the Lord has stopped speaking to us.

So we've stopped speaking to the Lord. We can convince ourselves that in our dark and difficult providence, the Lord has forgotten us. Worse still, the Lord has forsaken us. But you know, my friend, it's during those dark and difficult providences that the Lord is calling us to cling to His promises.

It's during those dark and difficult providences that the Lord is calling us to cling to His promises. And that's what the psalmist does here. The psalmist clings to the promises of a coming Savior. He clings to the promises of a coming Savior. He clings to the first promise that was written in the book of Genesis. Genesis 3.15, the seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent.

[9 : 40] The psalmist clings to the promise of Emmanuel. The virgin shall conceive and bear a son. You shall call His name Emmanuel, which means God with us. The psalmist clings to the promise of a son.

Unto us a child is born. Unto us a son is given. The psalmist clings to the promise of a Savior. A Savior who will have a name above all names because His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

My friend, despite the difficulty and the darkness of the Lord's silence, the psalmist here in Psalm 98, he clings to the promises of a coming Savior.

But he not only clings, he sings. He not only clings, he sings. And he exhorts and he encourages everyone, everywhere, in every generation to cling to the promises of a Savior, but also to sing of the promises of this coming Savior.

That's why he says in verse 1, Oh, sing to the Lord a new song, for He has done marvelous things. His right hand and His holy arm have worked salvation for Him.

[10 : 56] Do you know, my friend, the psalmist, he calls us to sing. He calls us to cling to the promises, but also to sing this new song to the Lord in expectation and in anticipation of His arrival.

And you know, it was a new song. It was a new song because it prophesies and it proclaims and it points us forward to this new day and this new dawn in the history of this world.

It was a new song because it was promising a new beginning, that there was going to be new life and new hope through this coming Savior, where this Savior was going to make all things new.

It was a new song. And you know, it's for that reason the psalmist, he's rejoicing with praise. He's rejoicing with praise. He's clinging and he's singing.

And that's why Isaac Watts wrote in his Christmas carol, Joy to the world, the Lord has come. Let earth receive her King. Let every heart prepare Him room.

[12 : 09] And heaven and nature sing. And you know, I love Isaac Watts' evangelistic prayer there in verse 1. Let every heart prepare Him room.

And heaven and nature sing. I love his prayer because, you know, it should make us question, is there room in my heart for this King?

Is there room in my heart for this King? My friend, I want to ask you this morning, who sits on the throne of your heart?

Who sits on the throne of your heart? Who is Lord over your life? who's in control? Who is first and foremost in your kingdom?

Who is King? Or who is Queen? Are you the King or the Queen who sits on the throne of your heart, ruling and reigning over your life?

[13 : 19] Because many, like others before you, they would not have this man, this Jesus, this King to rule and reign in their life.

Instead, maybe, maybe I can say, well, you crowd all the other Christmas stuff in. But in doing so, you crowd the King out.

Who is King? Who is King? But the Gospel, it calls us and it commands us and it compels us to come to this Jesus, to come rejoicing with praise because of the salvation of the coming Savior.

That's what Isaac Watts is saying to us. He says, joy to the world. The Lord has come. Let earth receive her King. Let every heart, let every heart prepare Him room and heaven and nature sing.

Now, as we said, Isaac Watts, he wanted to remind and reaffirm to us that when it comes to Christmas, Jesus is the reason for the season. Jesus is the reason for the season.

[14 : 27] He's the reason to rejoice and be glad. But you know, what's remarkable about this invitation to come rejoicing with praise and to sing this new song of salvation, what's remarkable about it is that the invitation is extended.

the invitation is extended and expanded to the whole of creation. You look at verse 4. The psalmist says, make a joyful noise to the Lord all the earth.

Break forth into joyous song and sing praises. Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre, with the lyre of the sound of melody, with trumpets and the sound of the horn. Make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord.

Then he says, let the sea roar and all that fills it, the world and those who dwell in it. Let the rivers clap their hands. Let the hills sing for joy together.

The invitation to sing this new song of salvation and to come rejoicing with praise, the invitation is extended to the whole of creation.

[15 : 36] And that's because the Lord is Lord of the whole of creation. Jesus is King of Kings. He's Lord of Lords. He's the sovereign, superior, and supreme ruler who reigns and rules over every area and aspect of this creation.

And this is why Isaac Watts, that's why he writes in his second verse of the Christmas Carol, he says, joy to the world or joy to the earth. The Savior reigns.

Let men their songs employ while fields and floods, rocks, hills, hills, and plains repeat the sounding joy. My friend, we have good reason to come rejoicing with praise this morning.

The invitation has gone out for the whole of creation to rejoice with praise. And we're to rejoice with praise because Jesus is the reason for the season.

Jesus is the reason to rejoice and be glad. Jesus is the reason and he's the reason for revealing the promise of a coming Savior.

[16 : 45] That's what we see secondly, revealing the promise. So we're exhorted to be rejoicing with praise and then secondly, revealing the promise.

Revealing the promise. Look at verse 1 again of Psalm 98. The psalmist says, O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things.

His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. The Lord has made known his salvation. He has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations.

He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

As we said, Psalm 98, it issues this invitation to come before the Lord rejoicing with praise where everyone, everywhere, in every generation, this invitation is extended to them.

[17 : 43] They're exhorted and encouraged to cling to the promises of a coming Savior. But not only to cling, they're also to sing about the promises of this coming Savior.

But as you know, this invitation is issued and it's been extended to the whole of creation. And it's been extended to the whole of creation because the whole of creation is under the curse of sin and death.

The invitation has been extended to the whole of creation because this whole creation is under the curse of sin and death. Our Bible teaches us that when Adam sinned against God, and when Adam fell from that perfect estate wherein he was created, all mankind sinned in him, and the whole of creation fell with him in his first transgression. And today the whole of God's creation is groaning. That's what the Bible says. The Bible says that the whole of God's creation is groaning under the curse of sin and death. And as you know, my friend, we don't have to look far.

We don't have to look very far outside these four walls to be reminded of that solemn and sorrowful fact that the whole of creation is groaning. You know, there's not one of us here this morning not one of us who is unaware and unaffected by the fact that the world we live in is full of brokenness. It doesn't matter what face we put on or what face we present to the public.

[19 : 36] The reality is we are all broken people living broken lives in a broken world. We are broken people living broken lives in a broken world. And I've said it before, but I want to say it again. The church the church is not a museum of good people. It is a hospital for the broken. And I want everybody in this community to know that. This church is not a museum of good people. It is a hospital for the broken because we're all broken people living broken lives in a broken world. It doesn't matter who we are.

We all encounter and experience sins and sicknesses and struggles and stresses and strains and sufferings and separations and sorrows. And you know, it's always at this time of year that we're made more aware, aren't we? We're made more aware of the damage and the devastation that sin has brought upon us as the creation. And yet the psalmist here, he's exhorting and encouraging us to come. To come and cling and to come and sing. To sing these songs. We're to rejoice with praise, he says, because the Lord is revealing his promise. The promise of a coming Savior. A Savior whom we're told in the Bible who will bear our griefs and carry all our sorrows. A Savior who will bind up our broken hearts. And a Savior who will heal our wounds. A Savior who will call us to himself and say to us, come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden. And I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and lowly in heart. We're being exhorted and encouraged by this Savior who will call us and compel us to come to him with all our burdens and all our baggage and all our brokenness. So that in him we will find rest for our souls. He's the Savior, my friend, upon whom we can cast all our cares and all our concerns. Why? Because the

Bible tells us so clearly. He's the only one who really cares for us. Everyone else will let us down. And that might not be their fault. But he is the one who cares for us. Cares for us so deeply.

And we are to come to him with everything. Casting. That's what Peter says. Cast all your cares upon him. Because he cares for us. And he cares for us, as the psalmist says, because he has a right hand and a holy arm that will work salvation.

That's there at the end of verse 1. He says, O sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things. His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him.

[22 : 47] And that statement there, right hand and holy arm, it's an illustration of victory. Victory over sin and victory over death. Our Bible reminds us that our Savior came to defeat death and conquer the grave.

He came to deal with our sin. He came to deal with our struggles and all our sorrows. He came to defeat death and conquer the grave. And today, this is the amazing thing about Sundays. This is the best day of the week. This is the Lord's day. The first day of the week. The day of resurrection. Because it's on the day of resurrection that we should all be reminded that our Savior stands over death saying, O death, where is your sting?

And he stands over the grave, the grave of every Christian. He stands over them and says, O grave, where is your victory? And you know, with resounding praise, we can say with the Apostle Paul, thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We're to respond in praise. We're to sing and cling to these promises. Because we can say with Paul, thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

[24 : 02] And you know, again this morning, this is something Isaac Watts picks up on in his carol. The third verse of his Christmas carol, No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground.

He comes to make his blessings flow, far as the curse is found. My friend, we are to sing this new song. We're to cling to this new song because he is the one who has come to make all things new. He's come to make all things new. We're to come rejoicing with praise for revealing the promise of a coming Savior, a Savior who promised that he would abolish death and bring life and immortality to light.

through the gospel. And you know, that's what's been emphasized and explained to us there in verse 2 of Psalm 98. He says, The Lord has made known his salvation. He has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations.

So the psalmist is saying to us that we're to come before the Lord clinging to the promises, singing the promises. We're to come rejoicing with praise for the Lord has revealed his promise of a coming Savior.

[25 : 19] The Lord, he says there in verse 2, beginning of verse 2, The Lord has made known his salvation. Literally, he has revealed his salvation.

He has declared his salvation. He has heralded his salvation. He has proclaimed his salvation. And you know, whether the psalmist was aware of it or not, when he said that, he has made known his salvation.

The psalmist was making a prophecy there. He was proclaiming, pointing us forward to someone. He's pointing us, and I say it was someone, because the word salvation, the Lord has made known his salvation.

The word salvation is translated Jesus. It's not what the angel said to Joseph. Mary shall give birth to a son.

Call his name Jesus. Call him Savior. Call him salvation. For he shall save his people from their sins. Call him salvation, Psalm 98, verse 2, because the Lord has made known his salvation.

[26 : 33] Call his name Jesus. For he shall save his people from their sins. And you know, my friend, we are being encouraged and exhorted this morning to come clinging and singing the promises.

We're to come rejoicing with praise, for the Lord has revealed the promise of a coming Savior. The Lord has revealed his salvation. He has revealed his Jesus to us, because he shall save his people from their sin.

But there's more, because by revealing the promise of a coming Savior, by revealing the promise, the Lord was remembering the promise of the coming Savior.

That's in verse 3. He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

My friend, we're to come to the Lord rejoicing with praise, for revealing and remembering the promise of a coming Savior. A coming Savior whom we're told in verse 3, who would be known for his steadfast love and faithfulness.

[27 : 45] His steadfast love and faithfulness. And those words are very important, because the description of his steadfast love and faithfulness is also translated as grace and truth.

Grace and truth. And that's something Isaac Watts, again, he picks up on in his Christmas carol in the concluding verse. He says, He rules the world with truth and grace and makes the nations prove the glories of his righteousness and wonders of his love.

And what Isaac Watts picked up on was that in Psalm 98, the Lord is calling us, he's commanding us, he's compelling us to rejoice with praise because the Lord has revealed and remembered his promise of a coming Savior.

He has revealed and remembered his promise of a coming Savior. And this was so important, especially when the psalmist wrote Psalm 98.

Because as we said earlier, Psalm 98, it was written during one of the darkest periods in Israel's history. They had been 70 years in exile in Babylon. They had returned home, they had rebuilt the city, they had restored the temple, but when they restored the temple, the glory cloud of the Lord's presence didn't return.

[29 : 05] There was no glory cloud. There was no pillar of the Lord's presence. There was no sign of the Lord. There was only silence. No sign, only silence. They thought that the Lord had forgotten them.

They thought that the Lord had forsaken them. But the psalmist here, he points the people forward, he prophesies and he proclaims. He says to them, cling to the promise.

He says to them, sing of this promise. He encourages and he exhorts everyone, everywhere, in every generation, to cling and to sing about the promise of this coming Savior.

Why? Because of his steadfast love and faithfulness. the Lord has remembered his grace and his truth. The Lord has remembered his grace and his truth.

And you know, this is what I love about the Psalms and how the Bible just holds together. Do you know, when the temple was restored and the glory cloud never returned, the Lord told his people in the book, you can read it in the book of Haggai.

[30 : 13] We did this afternoon. It's only two chapters long. He told his people, he said, the glory of the latter temple would be greater than the glory of the former temple.

The glory of the latter temple would be greater than the glory of the former temple. And that promise in Haggai was fulfilled not in the form of a pillar of cloud.

The promise was fulfilled in the person of Christ. He is the fullness of the Godhead bodily. He is the temple of the living God as the Bible describes.

And John tells us the opening words of his gospel. John tells us that when Jesus, the eternal word of God, became flesh and dwelt among us, John says, we beheld.

What did we behold? His glory cloud. The glory cloud as of the only begotten of the Father. And how was it described?

[31 : 18] Full of grace and full of truth. Just as the psalmist said, full of grace. We beheld his glory. The glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

And you know, these things are written, says John. John wants you to know who this is all about.

These things are written so that you will believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have a life in his name.

You know, it's no wonder Isaac Watts said, joy to the world, the Lord has come. Let earth receive her King. Let every heart, let every heart prepare him room and heaven and nature sing.

My friend, Jesus is the reason for the season. Jesus is the reason we should come before the Lord clinging and singing. Jesus is the reason we should come rejoicing with praise because the Lord has revealed and the Lord has remembered his promise.

The promise of a coming Savior. the Lord, as verse 3 says, he has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel and all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation.

[32 : 46] This Jesus, the salvation of our God, all the ends of the earth have seen him. You have seen him this morning in his word.

So as Isaac Watts said, or as he prayed, let every heart prepare him room and heaven and nature sing.

My friend, is there room in your heart for this Jesus? Is there room in your heart for this Jesus? Let every heart prepare him room and heaven and nature sing.

Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks to thee for thy word.

Thy word that is so precious and how it all holds together that it speaks to us from Genesis to Revelation of this wonderful Savior and how we see Jesus on every page and he is there to be seen and there to be found.

[34 : 01] And Lord, we do plead all that we would all have a heart, a heart to receive the King, that thou in thy grace and in thy mercy, that thou wouldst so work in our hearts that Jesus would come in, that we would know him and love him and follow him as the King of kings that he is, as the Lord of lords, that we would be able to confess him, as our Savior.

Lord, bless us, we pray. Help us, we ask, to keep looking to Jesus, to know him and to love him and to follow him as the author and the finisher of our faith.

Cleanse us, then we pray, and go before us, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen.

Amen. Well, we're going to bring our service to a conclusion this morning by singing in that psalm, Psalm 98.

Psalm 98 in the Scottish Psalter, page 360. We're singing from the beginning down to the verse marked four. Psalm 98, page 360.

Psalm 98. Where you are called to cling and you are called to sing.

[35 : 21] So sing. Don't stand in church silent. Sing. We are here to worship God. So sing. That's what the psalmist says.

Oh, sing a new song to the Lord. For wonders he hath done, his right hand and his holy arm, him victory hath won. The Lord God his salvation hath cause to be known.

His justice in the heathen sight he openly hath shown. He mindful of his grace and truth to Israel's house hath been and the salvation of our God.

All ends of the earth have seen. Let all the earth unto the Lord send forth a joyful noise. Lift up your voice aloud to him. Sing praises and rejoice.

So these verses of Psalm 98 to God's praise. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. O sing a new song to the Lord, for wonders he hath done, his right hand and his holy arm in victory hath won.

[36 : 49] The Lord God his salvation hath caused it to be known.

His justice in the heathen sight he openly has shown.

He mindful through all of his grace and truth to Israel's house hath been.

And the salvation of our God all ends of the earth have seen.

Let all the earth come to the Lord, send forth a joyful noise.

[38 : 14] lift up your heart a love to him. Sing praises and rejoice.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forevermore. Amen.