

Great Joy | 11/27/16 | Luke 2:8-14

Song: *Joy o the World*

Robert J. Morgan, *Then Sings My Soul, Book 2*, (Nelson 2004).

Until Isaac Watts (1674-1748) came along, most of the singing in British churches was from the Psalms of David. The church—especially the Church of Scotland—had labored over the Psalms with great effort and scholarship, translating them into poems with rhyme and rhythm suitable for singing. As a young man in Southampton, Isaac had become dissatisfied with the quality of singing, and he keenly felt the limitations of being able to only sing these Psalms. So he “invented” the English hymn.

He did not, however, neglect the Psalms. In 1719, he published a unique hymnal—one in which he had translated, interpreted, and paraphrased the Old Testament Psalms through the eyes of New Testament faith. He called it simply, *The Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament*. Taking various Psalms, he studied them from the perspective of Jesus and the New Testament, and then formed them into verses for singing.

“I have rather expressed myself as I may suppose David would have done if he lived in the days of Christianity,” Watts explained, “and by this means, perhaps, I have sometimes hit upon the true intent of the Spirit of God in those verses farther and clearer than David himself could ever discover.”

Watt’s archenemy, Thomas Bradbury, was greatly critical of Watts’ songs, which he called *whims* instead of *hymns*. He accused Watts of thinking he was King David. Watts replied in a letter, “You tell me that I rival it with David, whether he or I be the sweet psalmist of Israel. I abhor the thought; while yet, at the same time, I am fully persuaded that the Jewish psalm book was never designed to be the only Psalter for the Christian church.”

“Joy to the World!” is Isaac Watts’ interpretation of Psalm 98, which says: “Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth” (verse 4). As he read Psalm 98, Isaac pondered the real reason for shouting joyfully to the Lord—the Messiah has come to redeem us. The result, despite the now-forgotten criticisms of men like Bradbury, has been a timeless carol that has brightened our Christmases for nearly three hundred years.

Text: Luke 2:8-14

Joy = *chairō*

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There are three main groups of words in the NT which denote human joy and happiness and express its special character. In the case of *chairō* physical comfort and well-being are the basis of joy. Hence the use of the verb in the good wishes which people express on greeting one another and on parting. They refer to the benefits of health and happiness which, in fact, people wish for themselves. On the on the

hand, *euphraino* indicates the subjective feeling of joy, and *agalliaomni* the outward demonstration of joy and pride and the exultation experienced in public worship. 352

Classical Greek Literature: *chairō*, to be glad, rejoice, to take pleasure in... Also to be noted is the etymological connection with *charis* (grace) which has not always been clearly distinguished in meaning from *chara* (joy).

Old Testament: **God is the giver of all joy and of all blessings (1 Ki 8:66). He gives his gracious word (1 Ki 8:56) which** far outweighs all transitory blessings. This word comforts and strengthens in times of temptation and distress (Jer 15:16). It enables men to endure until such time as God turns mourning into joy (Ps 126:5). The fear of the Lord is thus a source of joy. Consequently *chairō* serves also to describe eschatological joy, rejoicing over ultimate salvation and peace (Joel 2:21, 23; Isa 66:10, 14; Zech 10:7). 357

New Testament: In the NT the verb and noun occur chiefly in the Gospels and Pauline Epistles (vb. 74 times; the noun 59 times)... It is no accident that the words appear particularly where there is express mention of the eschatological fulfillment in Christ, of being in him, and of hope in him. But it ought not to be overlooked that the whole NT message as the proclamation of God's saving work in Christ is a message of joy. 357

According to the Synoptic Gospels [Matthew, Mark & Luke], the coming of Jesus brings in a time of joy: "Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them?" (Matt 9:15 par. Mt, 2:19, Lk 5:34). The fact that he brings in the eschatological salvation distinguishes him mainly from John the Baptist and the OT prophets: the blind see and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the poor have the gospel preached to them (Matt 11:5, Lk 7:22). The effect of his work and preaching is to bring joy (Lk 19:6). Even when he became an offence and the way of those who tread in his footsteps leads to suffering and persecution, the joyful assurance of salvation should not be lost; "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven!" (Matt 5:12)... When the disciples met the risen Christ, they were seized not only with fear but also with great joy (Matt 28:8; cf. Mk 16:8; Lk 24:9). 358

Luke's Gospel has joy as one of its basic themes. Already in the birth narrative the note is clearly heard. Zechariah is promised joy and gladness; many will rejoice at the birth of John (Lk 1:14) because of what God is now about to do on behalf of his people (cf. 2:15)). When Elizabeth meets the mother of the Savior (cf. 2:11) the child leaps for joy in her womb (1:44). Jubilant praise of God, in the majestic language of the OT Psalms, is expressed in the Magnificat of Mary (*egalliasen*, "rejoiced", 1:47) and in the hymn of Zechariah (1:68 ff.). The basis and content of this great joy is the Christmas message that in Jesus God has visited and redeemed his people (1:68), that he has taken care of lost mankind, as he had promised to the fathers (1:55) and to the prophets (1:70), and that he has good will (*eudokia*, 2:14) towards men. 358

The Pauline Epistles testify to the paradox that Christian joy is to be found only in the midst of sadness, affliction and care. Indeed, this is precisely where it gives proof of its power. 359

NOTE: Fee, in *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul*, gives us a glimpse of what "joy" meant to 1st century common people.

What strikes one here [referring to 1 Thessalonians 6] is what he recalls for them as the evidence of their genuine conversion: their experience of joy, resulting from the Holy Spirit's invasion of their lives. The little phrase, "with the joy of the Holy Spirit," probably tells us much about both the paganism from which they had come and the life of the Spirit into which they had entered. ON the one hand, life as a pagan may have had its moments of happiness, as it does for them a life of heaviness and toil, arid in religion and empty in personal fulfillment—especially for the slaves and poor freedmen who would have made p the majority of the typical early Christian congregation (cf. 1 Cor 1:26). But in coming to Christ and thus receiving the Holy Spirit, they had been filled with such an untrammelled joy, which was such an experienced reality for them, that even in the midst of genuine hardships related to their having become believers, this is the one characteristic of their life in the Spirit that Paul recalls for them as evidence of their conversion. This suggests in the strongest possible way that for Paul joy is one of the certain hallmarks of genuine spirituality. 46-47