

Christmas 2017

Joy to the World

Joy to the world, the Lord has come!
Let earth receive her King
Let every heart prepare Him room
And Heaven and nature sing
And Heaven and nature sing
And Heaven, and Heaven, and nature sing

Joy to the World, the Savior reigns!
Let men their songs employ
While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat the sounding joy
Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy

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
Far as the curse is found
Far as, far as, the curse is found

He rules the world with truth and grace
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness
And wonders of His love
And wonders of His love
And wonders, wonders, of His love

Our Last carol for our Christmas season is "Joy to the World." It was written in 1719 by Isaac Watts who was a Bible preacher, scholar and academic. The song is not really about the birth of Jesus Christ, but about Christ's second coming and his rule in the millennial kingdom.¹

The times leading up to the writing of this hymn were troubling times for those who wanted to teach and believe the Bible rather than follow the often

¹ This is the thousand year reign of Christ before he returns the kingdom to God: Revelation 20; 1 Corinthians 15:24

unbiblical teachings of the Church of England. Isaac associated himself with Christians who were called non-conformists. And these Christians suffered terribly at the hands of the church and state. In fact Isaac's father was arrested many times. So our song writer lived during a time of uncertainty, a time of great pressure to conform, and a time of persecution for Christians who wanted to obey God rather than men.

I share all of this with you, because it would be wrong to think that Watts lived in a simpler, gentler time. Watts wrote "Joy to the World" not because his life was easy, but because he believed God's Word that a better world is coming when Jesus Christ returns as King over all. So let's read a section of the apostle Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost fifty days after Christ's resurrection. And he will speak about the return of Christ.

Repent therefore and be converted,
that your sins may be blotted out,
so that times of refreshing may come
from the presence of the Lord, ²⁰ and
that He may send Jesus Christ, who
was preached to you before, ²¹ whom
heaven must receive until the times of
restoration of all things, which God has
spoken by the mouth of all His holy
prophets since the world began.
(Acts 3:19-21)

When we place our faith in Jesus Christ there are times of refreshing in our lives. The world can load us with doubts and fears and heartache. But through Jesus Christ our hearts can be refreshed with love and joy and peace. In John 15:10 and 11 Jesus said that if we keep his commandments we will abide in his love and his joy will be in us. And at the second coming of Christ we will have the times of restoration of all things. When Jesus returns he will rule the world for a thousand years and the earth will be renewed and there will be peace and justice. Many of the Old Testament prophets saw this coming kingdom and we will look at a few references. Let's begin in Isaiah.

There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse,
And a Branch shall grow out of his roots.
²The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him,
The Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
The Spirit of counsel and might,
The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.

³ His delight *is* in the fear of the LORD,
And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes,
Nor decide by the hearing of His ears;
⁴ But with righteousness He shall judge the poor,
And decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,
And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked.
⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins,
And faithfulness the belt of His waist.

⁶ “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb,
The leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
The calf and the young lion and the fatling together;
And a little child shall lead them.
⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze;
Their young ones shall lie down together;
And the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
⁸ The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole,
And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den.
⁹ They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,
For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD
As the waters cover the sea.

¹⁰ “And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse,
Who shall stand as a banner to the people;
For the Gentiles shall seek Him,
And His resting place shall be glorious.
(Isaiah 11:1-10)

Jesse was King David's grandfather. And the Rod branch growing from this family tree is Jesus Christ . He will rule with the wisdom and righteousness of God and our world will be transformed. Can you imagine a world where justice always prevails and where there is righteousness and goodness? Can you picture a world where there is peace and joy and happiness? Can you imagine a world of health and safety and no more wars? It is coming! Here is another prophecy.

The wilderness and the wasteland shall be glad for them,
And the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose;
² It shall blossom abundantly and rejoice,
Even with joy and singing.
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
The excellence of Carmel and Sharon.

They shall see the glory of the LORD,
The excellency of our God.

³ Strengthen the weak hands,
And make firm the feeble knees.

⁴ Say to those *who are* fearful-hearted,
"Be strong, do not fear!
Behold, your God will come *with* vengeance,
With the recompense of God;
He will come and save you."

⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.

⁶ Then the lame shall leap like a deer,
And the tongue of the dumb sing.
For waters shall burst forth in the wilderness,
And streams in the desert.

⁷ The parched ground shall become a pool,
And the thirsty land springs of water;
In the habitation of jackals, where each lay,
There shall be grass with reeds and rushes.

⁸ A highway shall be there, and a road,
And it shall be called the Highway of Holiness.
The unclean shall not pass over it,
But it *shall be* for others.
Whoever walks the road, although a fool,
Shall not go astray.

⁹ No lion shall be there,
Nor shall *any* ravenous beast go up on it;
It shall not be found there.
But the redeemed shall walk *there*,

¹⁰ And the ransomed of the LORD shall return,
And come to Zion with singing,
With everlasting joy on their heads.
They shall obtain joy and gladness,
And sorrow and sighing shall flee away.
(Isaiah 35:1-10)

During the time of Christ's kingdom the world will be transformed to reflect all the beauty that God originally intended. Throughout world history there have been attempts by mankind to govern and rule rightly and to care for nature. But because even the best of us are fallen sinners we have failed to have dominion

over the earth as God intended. War, crime, greed and social injustice have plagued us since Adam's fall into sin.

God intended for Adam and his descendants to rule the world as the representatives of God. Sin ruined all of this. But because Jesus Christ fully obeyed God he now has the right to be the King of kings. And at his return he will subdue the enemies of God. We can see this prophesied in Psalm 2.

Why do the nations rage,
And the people plot a vain thing?
2 The kings of the earth set themselves,
And the rulers take counsel together,
Against the LORD and against His Anointed, *saying*,
3 "Let us break Their bonds in pieces
And cast away Their cords from us."

4 He who sits in the heavens shall laugh;
The Lord shall hold them in derision.
5 Then He shall speak to them in His wrath,
And distress them in His deep displeasure:
6 "Yet I have set My King
On My holy hill of Zion."

7 "I will declare the decree:
The LORD has said to Me,
'You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You.
8 Ask of Me, and I will give You
The nations *for* Your inheritance,
And the ends of the earth *for* Your possession.
9 You shall break them with a rod of iron;
You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.'"

10 Now therefore, be wise, O kings;
Be instructed, you judges of the earth.
11 Serve the LORD with fear,
And rejoice with trembling.
12 Kiss the Son, lest He be angry,
And you perish *in* the way,
When His wrath is kindled but a little.
Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.
(Psalm 2:1-12)

At the right time God will give the rule of the world to Christ despite opposition. And every knee will bow to Christ and confess him as Lord of all either willingly or by submission. One of the great Old Testament prophecies of the coronation of Jesus Christ as King of kings is in the book of Daniel. Here is Daniel's vision.

I was watching in the night visions,
And behold, One like the Son of Man,
Coming with the clouds of heaven!
He came to the Ancient of Days,
And they brought Him near before Him.
14 Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,
That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion,
Which shall not pass away,
And His kingdom *the one*
Which shall not be destroyed.
(Daniel 7:13, 14)

Scripture tells us that Jesus was anointed King at his baptism when the Spirit of God came upon him. He coronation was at his ascension when he was seated at the right hand of God. And he will be enthroned when he returns.

When Jesus returns believers who have died will be raised from the dead, and we will rule with him according to our faithfulness know. Revelation 5:9, 10 declares of Jesus Christ,

You are worthy to take the scroll,
And to open its seals;
For You were slain,
And have redeemed people to God by Your blood
Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation,
10 And have made them a kingdom and priests to our God;
And they shall reign on the earth.

This is what the New Testament is speaking about when in Romans 8:17 we are called "Joint-heirs with Christ." And it is what Colossians 3:4 means when it says that when Christ appears we shall "appear with him in glory." What we do now, how we live for God and Christ determines what we will do in the kingdom, how and where we will serve.

Now there is a sense in which for believers the kingdom has been inaugurated in our lives, though it has not yet fully come. As 2 Corinthians 5 says we are already new creations in Christ. The old has passed away and the new

has come. We are no longer bound. We are no longer bound to this world and its fate. In his letter to the Colossians the apostle Paul wrote,

giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. ¹³ He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. (Colossians 1:12-14)

There is a kingdom to come for sure. But the kingdom has come to us in a spiritual way. Christ is ruling in our hearts and lives. Whenever we experience the power of the Spirit in us, whenever we experience peace, love and joy we taste of the powers of the age to come.

But what about believers who have died? Are they in heaven now experiencing the kingdom? The answer is no. They are asleep in the grace until the return of Christ and we will all enter the kingdom together. The apostle Paul wrote,

But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. ²³ But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those *who are* Christ's at His coming. ²⁴ Then *comes* the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. ²⁵ For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. ²⁶ The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. (1 Corinthians 15:20-26)

When our Lord returns every believer who has died will be raised up to everlasting life. And believers who are alive will instantly be made mortal.

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. ⁵¹ Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

⁵³ For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. ⁵⁴ So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

⁵⁵ “O Death, where is your sting?
O Hades, where is your victory?”

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.
(1 Corinthians 15:50-58)

When Jesus returns and believers are made immortal we will rule with Christ for a thousand years. There will still be mortals on the earth. And with Christ and the believers ruling the world will see a time of peace and prosperity it never imagined. Sadly at the end of those thousand years Satan will be released to deceive the nations once more. But then God will finally destroy all evil and wickedness and there will be a new world of righteousness and joy in which we will live forever.

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. ² Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a

bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them *and be* their God. ⁴ And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

⁵ Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful."
(Revelation 21:1-5)

And so this Christmas as in many past, we sing in hope "Joy to the World." And what we are really singing about is the return of Jesus Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords. Joy to the world, for God sent Christ to save us from our sins! Joy to the world, because through Christ you can be transferred from the power of darkness to his kingdom! And joy to the world for Jesus Christ will judge all evil and restore our world to the paradise it was intended to be.