

PSALM 98

- <sup>1</sup> 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.
- <sup>2</sup> The LORD has made his salvation known  
and revealed his righteousness to the nations.
- <sup>3</sup> He has remembered his love  
and his faithfulness to Israel;  
all the ends of the earth have seen  
the salvation of our God.
- <sup>4</sup> Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth,  
burst into jubilant song with music;
- <sup>5</sup> make music to the LORD with the harp,  
with the harp and the sound of singing,
- <sup>6</sup> with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn—  
shout for joy before the LORD, the King.
- <sup>7</sup> Let the sea resound, and everything in it,  
the world, and all who live in it.
- <sup>8</sup> Let the rivers clap their hands,  
let the mountains sing together for joy;
- <sup>9</sup> let them sing before the LORD,  
for he comes to judge the earth.  
He will judge the world in righteousness  
and the peoples with equity.

JOHN 1:1-17

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all humankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me." Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

I AM SURE YOU HAVE HEARD THE SAYING “GOD WORKS IN MYSTERIOUS WAYS,” WHICH WAS INSPIRED BY SOME OF THE ACTIONS AND CHOICES THE LORD HAS MADE AND CONTINUES TO MAKE.

PERHAPS THE STRANGEST AND MOST MYSTERIOUS OF ALL IS THE INCARNATION AND BIRTH OF JESUS- “GOD WITH US.”

AFTER ALL, IT DEFIES HUMAN LOGIC FOR THE CREATOR OF ALL TO BECOME NOT JUST ONE OF HIS CREATURES, BUT THE ONE WHO IS THE MOST FLAWED OF ALL.

HUMAN BEINGS ARE FLAWED BY SIN, MANY WOULD SAY IRREVOCABLY STAINED AND FLAWED- FOR NO MATTER HOW HARD WE TRY, WE CONTINUALLY FALL SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD.

SO WHY THEN, WOULD GOD’S GLORY COME TO EARTH WRAPPED IN A PACKAGE OF HUMAN FLESH AND BONE?

NO MATTER HOW HARD THEOLOGIANS, SCHOLARS, OR ANYONE ELSE TRIES TO EXPLAIN IT, NO PERSON CAN FULLY UNDERSTAND IT-SO IN THAT SENSE IT IS A MYSTERY.

BUT SOMETIMES MYSTERIES ARE NOT MEANT TO BE SOLVED, BUT INSTEAD ACCEPTED AND CELEBRATED.

A GOOD EXAMPLE OF THIS IS THE TRUE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS- AS THE CELEBRATION OF THE INCARNATION AND BIRTH OF JESUS, GOD’S SON, OUR SAVIOR.

JESUS, AS IT SAYS IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN, IS THE LIGHT OF GOD WHO SHINES IN THE DARKNESS AND DISPELS IT.

LISTEN AGAIN TO WHAT IS PROCLAIMED ABOUT JESUS IN JOHN 1:3-5:

“ALL THINGS CAME INTO BEING THROUGH HIM, AND WITHOUT HIM NOT ONE THING CAME INTO BEING.

WHAT HAS COME INTO BEING IN HIM WAS LIFE, AND THE LIFE WAS THE LIGHT OF ALL PEOPLE. THE LIGHT SHINED IN THE DARKNESS, AND THE DARKNESS DID NOT OVERCOME IT.”

ODDLY ENOUGH, IN THE KING JAMES VERSION OF SCRIPTURE VERSE 5 IS TRANSLATED: “AND THE LIGHT SHINETH IN DARKNESS; AND THE DARKNESS COMPREHENDED IT NOT.”

HERE WE FIND A REFLECTION OF THE MYSTERIOUS WAYS OF GOD- THAT OVERCOME DARKNESS BY DOING SOMETHING DARKNESS AND EVIL FIND INEXPLICABLE.

BUT WHILE THE DARKNESS AND EVIL, AND ALL THAT HIDE WITHIN, MAY REJECT WHAT THEY CANNOT UNDERSTAND, THOSE WHO DESIRE THE LIGHT AND LIFE OF CHRIST ARE CALLED TO RECEIVE IT.

THE GOSPEL TEACHES THAT JESUS IS GOD’S GIFT OF LOVE. A GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING TO US, AND THROUGH US, TO OTHERS.

YES, WE ARE TO RECEIVE THE GIFT OF GOD’S SON JESUS AS OUR SAVIOR, EVEN IF WE ARE NOT ABLE TO GRASP THE DEPTHS OF GOD’S LOVE FOR US AND OTHERS.

ONE WAY TO RESPOND TO GOD’S GIFT OF LIFE AND NEW LIFE IN CHRIST IS -TO REJOICE IN THIS WONDERFUL AND LARGELY UNEXPLAINABLE- GIFT OF LOVE.

MUSIC AND SINGING IS ONE OF THE WAYS WE EXPRESS OUR JOY FOR THE GOOD THINGS GOD HAS DONE.

THE CHRISTMAS CAROL THAT WONDERFULLY DOES THIS IN ITS OPENING LINE IS, OF COURSE, “JOY TO THE WORLD.”

HOWEVER, THIS HYMN ITSELF IS ACTUALLY ANOTHER OF EXAMPLE OF THE MYSTERIOUS WORKINGS OF THE LORD OUR GOD.

ISAAC WATTS, WHO IS THE AUTHOR OF THE SONG, DID NOT INTEND TO WRITE A CHRISTMAS CAROL.

INSTEAD, IN 1719, HE PUBLISHED A BOOK OF POEMS BASED ON HIS CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION OF THE PSALMS.

WHAT WE NOW CALL “JOY TO THE WORLD” WAS A PORTION OF HIS POEM INSPIRED BY PSALM 98.

HIS DESIRE WITH THE POEM WAS TO ADDRESS THE LACK OF JOY HE OBSERVED IN CHRISTIAN WORSHIP.

IT IS EXPLAINED THAT THE POEM'S ORIGINAL INTENTION WAS ALSO TO CELEBRATE JESUS' ROLE AS KING OF KINGS- IN BOTH THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD.

THE THEME OF THE POEM WAS THE WORLD REJOICING IN CHRIST'S RETURN TO EARTH IN FINAL VICTORY.

GOD, HOWEVER IT SEEMS, HAD OTHER PLANS FOR THAT PARTICULAR POEM, WHICH STAYED LARGELY HIDDEN FOR ABOUT A CENTURY.

THEN, A BOSTON MUSIC TEACHER NAMED LOWELL MASON DISCOVERED THE POEM, AND WITH SOME ADAPTATIONS, SET THE SECOND HALF OF WATT'S WORK TO MUSIC.

MASON RELEASED HIS SONG AROUND CHRISTMAS, WHICH HELPED IT TO BECOME A FAVORITE CAROL FOR THE CELEBRATION CHRIST'S BIRTH.

THE POEM BECOMING A CHRISTMAS CAROL RATHER THAN ANOTHER TYPE OF CHRISTIAN SONG IS A SIGNIFICANT FORCE IN SPREADING ITS MESSAGE.

AFTER ALL, IN THE U.S.A.-AND IN MANY OTHER NATIONS, EVEN PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT CHRISTIAN OFTEN KNOW THE TUNES AND EVEN SOME OF THE WORDS OF MANY CAROLS.

THEY KNOW THEM BECAUSE THEY ENCOUNTER THEM OVER AND OVER AGAIN IN SOCIETY-WHICH IS PERHAPS ONE POSITIVE ASPECT OF THE COMMERCIALIZATION OF CHRISTMAS.

OR TO PUT THAT THOUGHT IN MORE BIBLICAL TERMS, THE SPREADING OF RELIGIOUS CHRISTMAS CAROLS TO PEOPLE OF ALL FAITHS, OR NO FAITH, IS ONE GOOD THING GOD BRINGS OUT CHRISTMAS BEING COMMERCIALIZED.

HEARING AND SOMETIMES SINGING RELIGIOUS CAROLS MAY PLANT SEEDS OF FAITH IN SOME, AND MAY HELP OTHERS SEEK BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR MESSAGE.

TURNING BACK TO "JOY TO THE WORLD," IN ITS LYRICS WE MAY FIND SOME CLUES TO THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST'S INCARNATION AND BIRTH.

THE WORDS OFFER A WINDOW INTO WHY JESUS BECAME ONE OF US, AND WHAT THAT MEANS FOR ALL LIFE ON EARTH.

THE FIRST VERSE, "JOY TO THE WORLD THE LORD HAS COME," CALLS FOR EARTH TO RECEIVE HER KING, AND EVERY HEART PREPARE ROOM FOR JESUS.

THIS IS AN INVITATION TO ALLOW JESUS TO REIGN IN THE WORLD, THROUGH TRANSFORMING OUR LIVES BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, SENT TO HIS FOLLOWERS.

IT REVEALS THE TRUTH THAT UNLESS CHRIST IS BORN IN OUR HEARTS CHRISTMAS DOES NOT REALLY MATTER- AT LEAST NOT THE REAL MEANING OF CHRISTMAS.

THE SECOND VERSE REMINDS US THAT THE GIFT OF JOY IS MEANT TO BE SHARED NOT HIDDEN.

"LET US OUR SONGS EMPLOY," CALLS FOR US TO SING IN JOY, SO THAT ALL OF NATURE MAY SING AS WELL.

THE REIGN OF JESUS IN OUR LIVES MEANS WE ALLOW HIS LIGHT AND LOVE TO SHINE THROUGH OUR WORDS AND DEEDS, AND TO INFLUENCE OUR ATTITUDE.

THE THIRD VERSE OF THE SONG- "NO MORE LET SIN AND SORROWS GROW" - CALLS US TO REJECT SIN AND ACCEPT CHRIST. FOR JESUS IS THE ONE WHO HAS REVOKED THE CURSE OF SIN AND DEATH IN THE WORLD.

HIS DEATH AND RESURRECTION-WHICH WAS OF COURSE PRECEDED BY HIS BIRTH, OPENS THE WAY FOR FORGIVENESS AND NEW LIFE.

THE FINAL VERSE OF THE HYMN "HE RULES THE WORLD WITH TRUTH AND GRACE," DRAWS OUR ATTENTION BACK TO JOHN 1:17, WHICH SAYS: "GRACE AND TRUTH CAME THROUGH JESUS CHRIST.

TRUTH, WE SHOULD REMEMBER IS NOT ONLY THE OPPOSITE OF FALSEHOOD, IT IS REALITY, RATHER THAN ILLUSION.

THE CALL FOR THE NATIONS, MEANING ALL PEOPLE IN THE WORLD, ACKNOWLEDGING THE GLORY OF GOD IN JESUS HIS SON, SUMMARIZES WHY HE WAS BORN.

IT REMINDS US WHEN HE RETURNS TO EARTH- THE BIBLE SAYS: "EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW AND TONGUE CONFESS JESUS CHRIST IS LORD...."

SO, IN THIS BELOVED CHRISTMAS CAROL WE ARE REMINDED ABOUT THE REASON WE CELEBRATE THE BIRTH OF JESUS.

WE DO SO BECAUSE GOD SENT HIM INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE US, AND THUS SHINE THE LIGHT OF GOD'S LOVE UPON US.

THE WORDS OF SCRIPTURE, THE LYRICS OF THE SONG, AND THE TESTIMONY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, JOIN TO REVEAL TO US THE POWER AND PRESENCE OF GOD'S LOVE FOR US IN JESUS.

AND WHILE IT IS TRUE, WE STILL CANNOT FULLY GRASP THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S LOVE AND CHOICES-WE ARE HOPEFULLY INSPIRED TO GREATER TRUST IN THE LORD.

WE ARE CALLED TO SEEK, SO WE MAY FIND, JOY IN GOD'S LOVE FOR US AND FOR THE WORLD.

WE ARE ALSO CALLED TO BE FAITHFUL TO OUR SAVIOR WHO IS THE REASON FOR REJOICING, AND SHARE OUR FAITH IN HIM WITH OTHERS.

LET US THEREFORE IN THE WORDS OF CHARLES DICKENS PROCLAIM: "I WILL KEEP CHRISTMAS IN MY HEART AND TRY TO KEEP IT ALL YEAR."

AND HOW WE DO SO IS- TO KEEP JESUS IN OUR HEARTS, AND ALLOW HIS LOVE AND TRUTH AND GRACE, BY THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, TO LIVE AND GROW WITHIN US.

THEN- WE WILL BE EMPOWERED TO BE INSTRUMENTS OF THE LORD'S LOVE AND MERCY TO OTHERS, MEETING NOT ONLY THEIR SPIRITUAL, BUT ALSO PHYSICAL NEEDS.

AND IN DOING SO, WE WILL HELP OPEN THE WAY FOR JOY TO FLOW INTO THE WORLD THROUGH US.

JOY IN THE LORD, AFTER ALL, IS MEANT LIKE BABY JESUS. IT IS MEANT TO GROW AND FLOURISH, AND CHANGE THE LIVES OF THOSE WHO RECEIVE THE LORD, AND HIS GIFT OF JOY.

THIS IS THE HOPE AND THE PROMISE OF CHRISTMAS-THE REASON WE MAY CELEBRATE CHRIST'S COMING INTO THE WORLD, AND INTO OUR OWN LIVES.

TODAY, OF ALL DAYS, LET US REMEMBER THAT THE PURPOSE OF CHRISTMAS WILL NEVER END WHEN WE MAKE ROOM FOR JESUS IN OUR HEARTS.

LET US THEREFORE THANK THE LORD, AND SEEK CHRIST'S TRUTH AND GRACE, LOVE AND PEACE, AND JOY IN THE MIDST OF ALL OF LIFE'S BLESSINGS AND CHALLENGES.

LET US PRAY:

GLORIOUS AND BLESSED GOD, WHO BRINGS JOY TO OUR WORLD, WHO MAKES YOURSELF KNOWN TO US IN JESUS, WHO IS OUR LIGHT, AND IN WHOM THERE IS NO DARKNESS AT ALL; WE PRAISE YOU!

WE REJOICE IN YOUR FAITHFULNESS AND STEADFAST LOVE. YOUR SPIRIT ABIDES WITHIN US, CAUSING US TO SING A NEW THE SONG OF YOUR LOVE AND MERCY.

BLESSED JESUS, ON THIS CHRISTMAS DAY WE HAVE COME TO WORSHIP AND PRAISE YOU. WE THANK YOU FOR MAKING YOUR HOME HERE AMONG US AND CASTING OUT OUR SIN.

MAY PEOPLE OF EVERY TRIBE, RACE, AND NATION MAKE ROOM IN THEIR HEARTS FOR YOU.

RETURN TO US LORD JESUS WE PRAY, SO ALL OF HEAVEN AND NATURE CAN BE HEALED, AND ALL SING THE GLORY OF GOD-- FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY: PSALM 98 AND JOHN 1:1-17

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