

Day 24: Joy to the World

Dec. 21

*1 Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive its king;
let ev'ry heart prepare him room,
and heav'n and nature sing,
and heav'n and nature sing,
and heav'n, and heav'n and nature sing.*

*2 Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!
Let all their songs employ
while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.*

*3 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.*

*4 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.*

Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who live in it. Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy at the presence of the Lord, for he is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity. (Psalm 98:7-9)

Joy to the World is arguably the greatest hymn written by the one of the preeminent hymn writers of all time, Isaac Watts. And the music for it was composed (at least in part) by the equally esteemed George F. Handel. Watts, a man frequently besieged with physical maladies, nonetheless turned out more than 800 hymns over his long career, including *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross, I'll Praise My Maker While I've Breath*, and *O God Our Help in Ages Past*.

Combining together amazing lyrics and spectacular music, *Joy to the World* celebrates Christmas morning like nothing else can. The hymn is actually based on an Old Testament text, Psalm 98, but that too can be seen as a foreshadowing of the Messiah's coming down to earth for his people.

It is in the third verse that we understand why the news of his coming truly is so good. The earth has been subjected to sins, sorrows and thorns. But now, we declare, "He comes to

make his blessings flow far as the curse is found!” The curse spoken of here is the judgment of God in the Garden of Eden when our most distant ancestors ate the forbidden fruit, thus setting up all our calamities (Genesis 3). God cursed the ground so that it now brings forth thorns as well as food. He cursed our bodies so that now all succumb to death. All this because of sin. That dread curse is broken by his coming (and will be fully obliterated when he comes again). “Joy to the world” is our natural and exuberant response to his gracious action.

And when he comes again, he will rule the world “with truth and grace.” Truth does not mask over sin as if it were unimportant. Grace means that, despite how evil our actions and attitudes may be, God forgives those who are repentant. Likewise he “makes the nations prove the glories of his righteousness.” That is, humankind will one day prove out in their own experience that righteousness rather than sinful selfishness is truly beneficial and what we’ve craved all along. Likewise, we will all experience “the wonders of his love.” Yes, we will always stand amazed that he loves us at all and even more amazed at how much. Thus, “heaven and nature sing!”

Questions

1. How many Old Testament prophecies can you think of that foreshadow something in the Christmas story?
2. What part of the curse of sin do you experience most regularly?
3. When you think about the love of God for you personally, what comes to mind?

Prayer

Jesus, I understand, at least in part, how universal and how challenging is the curse that sin has brought into the world. Though it was initiated in the Garden so long ago, sin is a very real fact of my life. It is not Adam and Eve alone who are to blame for my fallen world. I am too. But you have graciously come to make a way of peace and reconciliation between heaven and earth. You are nullifying the effects of the curse, and I am grateful. How I look forward to that final day when I can sing without reservation, “Joy to the World, the Lord is come!” Amen.