

Small Group Questions

Psalm 98; Luke 1:67-79

Sermon Title: Joy to the World?

Series Title: The Carols of Christmas #3

Week of 17 December 2017

Theme/Concept

"Joy to the World" is a different sort of Christmas carol in that it is Isaac Watts' Christological interpretation/paraphrase of Psalm 98 describing what we look forward to in Christ's second coming. But Jesus' work begins even now, as he makes "his blessing flow far as the curse is found." In a day when the shortcomings of human leaders and systems are clearly seen, the Lord teaches us and empowers us to live differently. We can be joy-bringers who reverse the effects of the curse brought on by human self-centeredness.

APPLICATION: Jesus begins to "reverse the curse," bringing true joy into every situation.

CHARGE: Be part of Jesus' work in reversing the curse and bringing joy wherever you are.

Opening Question

After making each individual feel welcome to the small group, a question or series of questions like the following can give everyone an opportunity to participate, start thinking about a concept from the passage and gradually share more openly the deep work that God is doing in our lives.

01. Looking at the lyrics below, what lines or parts bring you joy? What else do you see in this song?

Joy to the World

Verse 1

Joy to the world! The Lord is 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.

Verse 2

Joy to the earth! The Saviour 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.

Verse 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.

Verse 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.

Scripture Reference 1: Psalm 98 (NIV84)

Background/Context:

This psalm follows the same pattern as Psalm 96. The psalmist invites us to declare God's power to save and make His righteousness known to all people. He calls all people to express their joy with singing and instruments. The energy level rises as the psalmist calls us to listen to the seas and mountains as they announce God's greatness by their power and majesty. Finally, the psalmist calls us not only to praise God for what He has done, but for what He has promised to do: judge the world according to His righteousness and without favoritism.

¹Sing to the LORD a new song,
for he has done marvelous things;
his right hand and his holy arm
have worked salvation for him.

²The LORD has made his salvation known
and revealed his righteousness to the nations.

³He has remembered his love
and his faithfulness to Israel;
all the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation of our God.

⁴Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth,
burst into jubilant song with music;

⁵make music to the LORD with the harp,
with the harp and the sound of singing,
⁶with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn—
shout for joy before the LORD, the King.

⁷Let the sea resound, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it.

⁸Let the rivers clap their hands,
let the mountains sing together for joy;

⁹let them sing before the LORD,
for he comes to judge the earth.

He will judge the world in righteousness
and the peoples with equity.

Understanding the Scripture 1

A question like one of the following may help your group understand the content of the passage. Answering all of these questions exactly as written isn't necessary or recommended. Allow time for the application and Mission Statement questions.

U1. Verses 1-3: What marvelous things does the psalmist list here that God had done? How did God accomplish these things and to what end?

U2. Verses 4-6: What purpose does the psalmist feel music serves and before whom is it performed?

U3. Verses 7-9a: Although the psalmist is clearly using metaphors here, why would rivers and mountains rejoice? (Hint: See Romans 8:19-22) What does it look like when a river or mountain rejoices?

U4. Verse 9b: What does it mean to judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity?

Scripture Reference 2: Luke 1:67-79 (NIV84)

Background/Context

This passage is known as Zechariah's Song. Months earlier, Zechariah had been struck speechless by an angel while serving in the temple because he doubted the angel's message that His elderly wife, Elizabeth, would bear a son. Now, Elizabeth has given birth to a boy and Zechariah writes down that the boy should be named John as he had been instructed to do so by the angel—much to the surprise of his neighbors and relatives. Upon naming the boy, Zechariah immediately regains his ability to speak and praises God.

⁶⁷His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

⁶⁸"Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,
because he has come to his people and redeemed them.

⁶⁹He has raised up a horn of salvation for us
in the house of his servant David

⁷⁰(as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),

⁷¹salvation from our enemies
and from the hand of all who hate us—

⁷²to show mercy to our ancestors
and to remember his holy covenant,

⁷³the oath he swore to our father Abraham:

⁷⁴to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,

and to enable us to serve him without fear
⁷⁵in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

⁷⁶And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;

for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,

⁷⁷to give his people the knowledge of salvation
through the forgiveness of their sins,

⁷⁸because of the tender mercy of our God,
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven

⁷⁹to shine on those living in darkness

and in the shadow of death,

to guide our feet into the path of peace."

Understanding the Scripture 2

U5. Verse 67: What enabled Zechariah to prophesy and who enabled him? Why was it necessary to enable him to prophesy?

U6. Verse 68: What two things is Zechariah praising the Lord for? What do you think he—and anyone who heard Zechariah—was expecting to see and happen?

U7. Verses 69-75: How many verbs can you find in these verses and to what does each verb refer?

U8. Verses 76-77: To whom is Zechariah speaking and what does he tell us about that person?

U9. Verses 78-79: Who is Zechariah talking about in these verses, what will that person do, and why? How does Zechariah refer to this person here?

Applying the Scripture

Small groups are a primary way of *building a community fully alive in Christ*. A small group facilitator can use questions like the following, adapted to the context of the particular small group, to help the group move beyond understanding the passage to allowing *Jesus Christ to fully change our lives* by the passage.

A1. What kind of song or feelings are you singing to the Lord? What new song could you sing about the “marvelous things” He has done for you? What joyful words would you include in the lyrics?

A2. In what ways do you take the beauty of His creation for granted?

A3. In what tangible ways has God shown you that He remembers His love and faithfulness to you?

A4. What message is the Holy Spirit prompting you to declare? Who needs to hear your message?

Missional Strategy: Invite, Connect, Grow, and Serve

Use questions like the following, adapted to the context of your particular small group, to work toward the milestone for the year. **Milestone:** By this time next year each of us will have taken at least one step to become more like Jesus in our upward connection (connect), inner strength (grow) and outward focus (serve).

M1. To whom can you bring joy by telling your story about your Rescuer?

M2. Do you ever find yourself looking forward to God’s judgment and His act of restoring order to this world?

M3. How often do you stop to remember God’s promises when faced with difficulties? How joyful are you about those promises?

M4. Who do you know that is living in darkness and needs God’s light to shine through you so they can see?

Closing Prayer

If your small group prays together, some of the following concepts might be helpful to invite the Holy Spirit to help each member of the group grow in areas that may have come up during the group’s discussion.

Pray:

- That the group members would find joy in God’s blessings, discipline, and even in the difficulties they may be facing as they rely on His strength and wisdom.
- That the group members would be joyfully anticipating the celebration of Christ’s birth during this busy season.
- That the Holy Spirit would inspire those members who are struggling spiritually to sing a new song about the Lord.
- That all members would find joy in all aspects of God’s creation, especially His people.