

Joy to the World (Psa. 98:1-6)

1. The Story behind the Song: 3 Unrelated Characters

Isaac Watts (1674-1748) was the son of a cobbler convicted as a criminal for radical teaching against the morally lax Church of England. Isaac was a brilliant student and gifted poet who contemporized the Psalms and was criticized for it. Yet, his stubborn passion was to put back *biblical faith* into 'churchianity'. In **1719**, he composed a set in which was our four-stanza carol based on Psalm 98:4 '*Shout for joy to the Lord all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music*'!

Lowell Mason, a banker and choir director, in **1836** compiled a song book that became popular in Boston. Later, he drew from two songs in Handel's *Messiah* to compose an *upbeat* melody he entitled - "Antioch" - after the city from where Paul started his missionary trips! To this, Mason put Watt's verse, making our Christmas Carol. It was only in **1911** with her *Victor Records* single, **Elise Stevenson** a famous singer put it on the charts' top 5 hits to popularize it across America!

2. A Sermon from this Song: 3 Truths that produce Joy

1. Receive your King *and with heaven and earth sing*:

Surprise #1: This hymn contains no reference to Jesus' birth in the Gospels. It was inspired by an OT Psalm highlighting YHWH's righteousness as he comes to judge the earth! (98:2,9) Judgment has two parts - punishment and vindication, the latter produces true joy. All imputed with the Lord's *righteousness* have prepared hearts that have received Jesus' *kingdom* and rightful *reign*. This is the only basis for the new song of *redemption* that is indeed cause for great *rejoicing*!

2. Repeat the sounding joy *and your new song employ*:

Surprise #2: The "joy" sung about has no relation to our circumstances! Watts was censured for his work. Elizabeth Singer a fan, proposed to him then broke his heart, not liking a 5-ft guy with small eyes, hooked nose and bad cheek bones! Isaac' joy of *salvation* was in being "accepted in the Beloved". "Merry" in Germanic, means short-lived; but lasting *joy* (NT x132) has Jesus as its object-subject. It is the Lord's strength, amidst trials, that this world can't give nor take away!

3. Reach the nations and show *how Christ's blessings flow*:

Surprise #3: This all-season *heretical* tune is now *missional* to "let nations be glad". Many called Watts a heretic, yet he didn't give up proclaiming biblical *truth* with musical *grace* of the Lord's salvation revealed in Christ, God's righteousness. Jesus' 1st Advent was to save; His 2nd Coming will be to judge the world in righteousness! Only "the redeemed" can sing of this "new song" and take His *name* to all *nations*. *The Unreached* need not remain in sin, sorrow or under the curse since Jesu' the Joy of all the earth makes God's heavenly blessing to flow also on them!

The way this story and song came together shows us the need to: 1) **radicalize**, 2) **contemporize** and 3) **popularize** biblical truth through media. Our Lord endured the cross for the joy that was set before Him. He has given us His joy to "Go and tell" the world... *the wonders of His love*!