

Series: Exiles	Reference: Psalm 98	Title: Worship in Hope!	Date: 12.18.22
<p style="text-align: center;">Website Writeup:</p> <p>We've been talking about the Exiles returning to Jerusalem to relearn how to worship God during the time of Nehemiah. The exiles had come back to a world that seemed quite foreign. What they needed was a reminder of how to celebrate God's work and all the new ways He was showing faithfulness to provide them hope. We will find our way back to worship and trusting God's presence when we learn to open our eyes to the marvelous ways God has brought us victory, both now and in the future!</p>			

Color Changes in text indicate slide changes

Carols are songs specifically associated with Christmas. Isaac Watt's famous work *Joy To the World*, one of our most popular carols, was actually not intended to be so at all! Born in 1674, Watts penned a massive collection of over 750 still sung by Christians worldwide. Watts obsessively sought to put his Christian affections & convictions on paper so others could join him in worship.

But his work wasn't always well received since he was introducing in his time contemporary "praise & worship." The song selection in most Protestant churches was limited almost exclusively to the Psalms. John Calvin, during the Reformation, had translated the Psalms into common French so they could be sung corporately. English-speaking churches followed suit. Watts began introducing extra-biblical poetry into his songs. To some, this was anathema; to others, a breath of fresh air.

His goal was to wed emotional subjectivity with doctrinal objectivity. Songs such as *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross* | *Alas! And Did My Savior Bleed* | *I Sing the Mighty Power of God* | and *O God, Our Help in Ages Past* were a blend of personal reflection & emotional reaction couched in rich theological conviction. His songs put the old wine of faith into the new wineskins of English rhyme & poetry giving new life to church worship.

Like Calvin did for people in his day, Watts also published a work in 1719 which was a translation or rewriting of the Psalms for congregational singing. It had the lengthy title of, *The Psalms of David: Imitated in the Language of the New Testament & Applied to the Christian State & Worship*. Which simply means, Watts read the Old Testament in light of the New & wrote his Psalm-book to explicitly point to the person & work of Christ. In that collection, we find his rewriting of Psalm 98 titled, *Joy to the World*.

The opening line of *Joy to the World* is sometimes sung incorrectly as, "Joy to the world! The Lord **HAS** come." But He wrote, "The Lord **IS** come." Watts wasn't describing the past event of Jesus' birth, he was looking forward to the return of Jesus. The main point of Psalm 98, which Watts understood, wasn't about the first coming of Jesus, rather His Second Coming! Which is precisely what the song's about. It speaks of Jesus' final coming to earth when "the Savior reigns" and when "He rules the world with truth & grace." Watts longed for that glorious final day when the "nations (will) prove the glories of His righteousness & wonders of His love."

Even though Watts may not have ever envisioned his song being sung at Christmas, it's a wonderful tribute to his work. Indeed, the first advent of Jesus stands as a historical guarantee that His Second is coming. Indeed, the birth of Jesus & the return of Jesus are "good news of great joy that will be for all the people."¹

We've been talking about the Exiles returning to Jerusalem to relearn how to worship God during the time of Nehemiah. The exiles had come back to a world quite foreign. They needed a reminder of how to celebrate God's work & all the new ways He was showing faithfulness to provide them hope. We'll find our way back to worship & trusting God's presence when we learn to open our eyes to the marvelous ways God has brought us victory, both now & in the future! And we should acknowledge standing on this side of history we have much more for which to be grateful!

Watts knew Psalm 98 speaks to God's faithfulness & the hope we have in the promises of God & in Christ. Close your eyes and let these words wash over your soul as I read God's Word from Psalm 98...

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. 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.

Victory's key in this passage. The psalmist speaks to the power of victory God has provided for the returning exiles. Initially, salvation related to Israel, but also in a future sense, salvation will apply to the nations as well as seen in vv1-3. The language is both present & future, reiterating God's overwhelming plan throughout the Scriptures of not only saving Israel in the moment, but in the culmination of time when all nations will stand before His throne. Harkening ahead to when He reveals His righteousness to the nations; to when the ends of the earth have seen His salvation. Kingdom language - the kingdom has come, but not yet fully come. If you listen well you can hear, God's moving history towards a glorious end when justice & equity will reign with His righteousness known everywhere. So, this could very well be one of the songs we sing when Christ returns in glory!

Having this Psalm read over you, allowing it to seep in, reading & rereading it, the picture becomes clear of a victorious God! Creator & sustainer of the universe & all that's within it. Leading to that final culmination of evils defeat. That what He set out to accomplish & promised in the Garden of Eden with the promise of a coming Messiah

¹ <https://www.forestbaptistchurch.org/the-story-behind-the-carol-joy-to-the-world/>

who would crush Satan, would happen. Or, what He promised Abraham in Genesis 12 that He would bless him to be a blessing to all nations, would come about. Or, the unconditional covenant through which God promises David that the Messiah would come from his lineage & establish an everlasting kingdom, would occur. Like the abrahamic covenant, the davidic covenant was unconditional because God doesn't place any conditions of obedience upon fulfillment of His promises - it's not up to us.

For instance if we look at the abrahamic covenant...in ancient times if a king conquered another, they'd 'cut' a covenant in what was called a Suzerain Vassal Treaty. They'd sacrifice animals, cut them in half & lay them opposite each other, making a bloody aisle. Then the two parties would walk down the middle reciting their covenant to each other. They were saying, "If I break our covenant, may I end up dead like these animals." Two parties cutting a covenant for future relationship, if either party broke the promise the terms were nullified. Abraham would've been familiar with this ceremony, so in Genesis 15 God used it to communicate His Gospel of Grace by making a covenant promise to Abraham & his offspring into the future. God had him bring a bunch of animals, cut them in two & arrange the halves opposite each other. But it says in v12, "As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick & dreadful darkness came over him" Then in v17 it says...*When the sun had set & darkness had fallen, a smoking fire-pot with a blazing torch appeared & passed between the pieces. 18On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram & said, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates."*

God cut a covenant with Abraham, but when it came time to walk the aisle, Abraham was in a deep sleep. God, *by himself*, represented by the smoking fire-pot & a burning torch, walked the aisle cutting the covenant as one party with Abraham. What God was saying is, *'I make this covenant with you as one party. The whole covenant is therefore based on my Word, my Promise, by Grace & not your ability to hold up your end of the bargain.'* Not based on two party's behavior. God's saying, *'If I fail at this, I'm placing all my deity on the line, you do nothing but receive & believe this promise.'* That was the gospel of grace revealed from the very beginning!

So, the surety of the promises of salvation made, rest solely on God's faithfulness & doesn't depend at all on Abraham, David or Israel's obedience. God remembers His love & faithfulness to Israel & to us in the same way. It's all contingent on His character, faithfulness & righteousness, and not on us at all. Thinking about how often Israel went astray, matched with our own fickleness of heart, we realize - restoration, reconciliation, victory, any good & salvation are of God's doing, not ours.

Derek Kidner comments, "This salvation/victory is wholly supernatural, a single-handed exploit of the Lord. The supernatural aspect is expressed in the term *marvelous things*, which is more than a superlative, a standard term for the miraculous interventions of God, such as those at the exodus (106:7), to save his people."²

² Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 16 [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975], 384, Logos

Andrew Menkis reminds us of the Old Testament prophecies of Christ like Is. 9:6-7 which foretell of the coming salvation in the Messiah & a fulfillment of the Davidic & Abrahamic Covenants...*For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government & peace there will be no end, on the throne of David & over his kingdom, to establish it & to uphold it with justice & righteousness from this time forth & forevermore.*

Verses often quoted during Christmas due to the Angel Gabriel's announcement to Mary in Luke 1:32-33 that she'll become pregnant & give birth to a child who *"will be great & will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."*

Isaiah's prophecies about the Servant are some of the most well-known Messianic predictions of the Old Testament because of how clearly they point to the person & work of Jesus Christ. The quintessential example of this is Isaiah 52:13-53:12. In these verses Isaiah writes a song in which a picture emerges of a Servant who's summed up as, "sage, priest, sacrifice, servant, sufferer, conqueror & intercessor; the channel of God's grace to sinners. In Him the holiness & mercy of God are perfectly reconciled." Christ is the fulfillment of the promises & prophecies in these verses, the one who reconciles the holiness & mercy of God on the cross. *He was "wounded for our transgressions... crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed"* (Is. 53:5). The apostle Peter described what Christ accomplished on the cross in words which echo Isaiah's prophecy, *"He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin & live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed"* (1 Pet. 2:24).

The final portrait of the Messiah begins with a promise in Isaiah 56:1, *"Thus says the LORD: 'Keep justice, and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed."* This follows on the heels of the portrait of the Messiah as Servant which comes in the middle of the book & in the middle of time. Life goes on after the Servant comes to suffer & bear the sins of many. God's people are called to live just & holy lives until the Messiah returns as the Anointed Conqueror. Salvation & deliverance will come with the arrival of the Anointed Conqueror. *The meaning of the word Messiah is "the anointed one," a fact which is highlighted throughout the final prophecies of Isaiah. Isaiah 61:1-2 says, "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn."*

Jesus read these prophetic words in the synagogue of his hometown Nazareth. After finishing he rolled up the scroll, handed it back, and sat down. With all eyes on him

Jesus said, *“today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”* (Luke 4:21). His mic drop moment. Then it says Jesus went on teaching with “gracious words” (Luke 4:22). He claimed to be the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy, the Anointed One.

But notice, this prophecy also tells us, as the promised Messiah, Jesus had “the double task of salvation & vengeance.” He’s not merely the Anointed One, He’s the Conqueror who’ll bring blessing & justice to the world when He comes at the end of time to judge the wicked & the righteous & to make all things new.

Meditating on the Messianic portraits found in Isaiah & the words of Psalms 98 we become people who live life with eyes set on God in history; current troubles have less hold with a birds-eye view of God’s loving action through time. The New Testament makes it clear, Jesus is the promised King, Servant & Conqueror. *Christ is the savior & as His followers we’re exhorted to, “run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God”* (Heb. 12:1-2). The Christian life lived with eyes set on Christ.

Though the Messianic portraits found in Isaiah are each unique, they only depict one person: the God-man Jesus Christ. Unlike Israel in the OT, the church looks back, to the life, death & resurrection of the Servant, and forward to the return of the Davidic King as the Anointed Conqueror. Our great hope as believers isn’t only that Christ died for sin, but that He’ll return to make all things new. As we celebrate His incarnation & await the Conquering King, we live in the age of the Servant. We must endure through the trials & temptations which come with life in a fallen world. Like Christ we must be humble, suffering servants trusting in the overall plan of God in history as revealed in Christ. Apprentice isn’t above master - the cross comes before the crown. But, as Isaiah foretold, the Master is returning. In the meantime, we live by faith. No matter how bleak things may be, one day we will see our Savior face to face & wear the crown of life!³

Salvation’s such a necessary term because the exiles have been restored as individuals & collectively as the people of God. God’s victory is of utmost importance because this affords personal confidence that God’s with them. God’s final plan of vindication is of utmost importance because it’s His righteousness which is vindication, it saves & nothing else, as it always has been - a righteousness which rights all wrongs in the end!

The celebration of both humanity & creation is key to recognizing the power of seeing God as the final authority & worthy of praise as we see in vv4-6. The psalmist calls for a joyful noise to be made in honor of God, the idea of loud, definite proclamation of God’s wonderful ways. The call to worship is more than just an invitation to the believer from week to week to enjoin themselves to God.

In some ways, the way people shout out to the Lord in celebration may be something which spurs others to hear as well (98:4). However, the key here is how the earth

³ <https://modernreformation.org/resource-library/web-exclusive-articles/the-mod-messianic-prophecies-in-the-book-of-isaiah/>

responds to God with jubilant song. All of creation is pictured as participating in one grand chorus of worship. This is critical to understand how all creation is both subject to God & called upon by Him to celebrate. The images of creation worshipping references the undeniable adoration that all creation should bring to God.

For many, when they come back to God in worship, they have to learn again what it means to fully submit to His authority. Standing in awe of God & His wonder is to come ready to worship. As the exiles returned from long seasons of feeling estranged, it was critical for them to learn how to worship again. The idea that all of creation was able to celebrate God was a good way to remind them God's still on the throne.

The psalmist wants the exiles to find a way to sing to God. People are called to sing "a new song" in v1, shout for joy to the Lord in v4, use instruments to make a joyful noise in vv5-6, and even let creation show them how it's done in vv7-8. What a powerful reminder to sing to God with all our being. A connection could be made between Jesus's call to worship God in spirit & truth in John 4:21-24 and the call here to worship God with all creation for all His marvelous works (98:1).

While the exiles were learning to worship God for the way He'd provided & shown Himself to be faithful, they were waiting for His arrival to judge the world & the people with equity in v9. The significance though is the feeling of confidence in the pending judgment in which they have. Instead of being fearful & uncertain of the pending judgment, the exiles feel a sense of hopefulness. Like us awaiting the return of Christ, there's hopefulness in that promise. We have nothing to fear under the righteousness of Christ!

Autur Weiser rightfully comments, "We're told only at the conclusion of the psalm that it's intended for the God who's appeared to judge the world. That God's judgment is awaited with joy & not with fear shows how greatly this hope is sustained by the faithful's devotion to God & by trust in God's will to save. The yearning for God & the absolute certitude of God's gracious will prove themselves to be too strong to be overshadowed by fear. This advent faith prepared the ground within the scope of the Old Testament piety for the fulfillment of salvation through Christ."⁴

We live on this side of the Messiahs coming still awaiting the fulfillment of His kingdom! We could say we have more reason to worship, but God's promises have always been trustworthy. He's always been moving history towards a time where His righteousness & justice reign fully. Let's return to worship with a full heart. Let's believe the promises of God with confidence, not allowing the trials & tribulations to define us. Let's believe & choose to worship as Israel did in returning from exile! We'll not do this perfectly, but remember salvation is by God for His glory, not contingent upon our perfect obedience.

⁴ Autur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1998], 639, Logos