

**Philippians 4:4-7**

**Psalm 98**

**November 13, 2022**

*Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC*

## **JOY TO THE WORLD**

***Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.***

On October 11, Buckingham Palace released the following announcement:

### **THE CORONATION OF HIS MAJESTY THE KING**

Buckingham Palace is pleased to announce that the Coronation of His Majesty the King will take place on Saturday 6th May, 2023. The Coronation Ceremony will take place at Westminster Abbey, London, and will be conducted by the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Ceremony will see His Majesty King Charles III crowned alongside the Queen Consort. The Coronation will reflect the monarch's role today and look towards the future, while being rooted in longstanding traditions and pageantry. Further details will be announced in due course.<sup>1</sup>

An article about what to expect in King Charles III's coronation says, "The actual coronation ceremony is a solemn religious affair that has 'remained essentially the same over a thousand years,' according to Buckingham Palace. The Archbishop of Canterbury, the senior bishop of the Church of England, has been tasked with holding the service at nearly every coronation since the Norman Conquest in 1066. During the ceremony, Charles is expected to take the coronation oath before being anointed, blessed and consecrated by the archbishop."<sup>2</sup>

The coronation ceremony has six basic stages: the recognition; the oath; the anointing; the investiture which includes the crowning, the enthronement, and the homage. At the beginning of the ceremony, King Charles will stand in the central place of Westminster Abbey. He will turn and present himself to the people at each of the four directions of the compass — east, south, west, and north. Then the Archbishop of Canterbury will proclaim Charles "the undoubted King" and ask the congregation and choir to pay homage to the King by shouting, "God Save King Charles!" The order of service encourages the congregation and choir to praise the King with "willingness and joy." Following the recognition, King Charles will take the formal Coronation Oath which was established in 1688. While the exact wording and form have changed over the years, in essence the King will promise "to reign according to law, exercise justice with mercy and maintain the Church of England." When Charles's mother took the oath in June 1953, the Archbishop asked her, "Will you to your power cause Law and Justice, in Mercy, to be executed in all your judgments?" Upon taking the oath, King Charles will go to the altar and declare, "The things which I have here before promised, I will perform, and keep. So help me God."<sup>3</sup>

There are some interesting similarities between the Coronation Ceremony of King Charles III and Psalm 98, with praise and adoration of God as King, the mention of all the earth and the world and those who live in it, the recitation of the marvelous things God has done, and the promise that God the King will judge and rule the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.

Psalm 98 is one of a group of six psalms known as the “Enthronement Psalms.” These psalms were probably used in worship at festivals when God’s people celebrated God’s kingship. They declared and affirmed YHWH as King, not just *their* King, but King of the entire world, indeed the whole cosmos! At a particular moment during the festival worship, the people of God would shout their praise and God’s enthronement would be formally declared. Although they believed, just as we do, that God’s kingship is eternal, nevertheless they would celebrate God as King and the Lord’s enthronement anew on a regular basis. . . because it’s important always to remember what God has done for God’s people in the past. After all, that communal memory of the past is the foundation of our hope for the future and our encouragement and motivation for the present.

And so, as the people of God gathered for their festival worship, they would remember the great things God had done for them, especially how he freed them from slavery under Pharaoh, led them through the wilderness, made a covenant with them to be their God, and delivered them into the Promised Land. The people would also remember God’s deliverance of them from years in exile in Babylon, in order to return to Jerusalem. These mighty acts — along with countless every-day acts of mercy and kindness — were the reason God’s people were encouraged, “O sing to the Lord a new song . . . Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises . . . Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody. With trumpets and the sound of the horn, make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord.” In other words, “Joy to the World!”

On November 1, a friend here in town posted this picture on his Facebook page



He also included this commentary: “Me. Downtown Wallace. This morning.” He received many comments, ranging from “Never too early for Christmas music” to “You are such a grinch but I agree.”

I don't consider myself to be a Scrooge or a Grinch, but I have to agree with his sentiments. One of the challenges of the upcoming Advent season is choosing which hymns to sing in worship on the four Sundays leading up to Christmas — Advent hymns or Christmas carols? I finally compromised and try to strike a balance between the two. [Of course, you have to know that, there's a part of me that thinks it would be good to wait until Christmas Eve to decorate our Christmas tree, but that never happened in our house!]

So, it's kind of ironic that we are singing "Joy to the World," the most published Christmas carol in the United States, during worship on November 13. [Don't worry — we'll probably sing it again on a Sunday nearer Christmas Day.] But, guess what? We're not singing "Joy to the World" today because it's a Christmas carol or because I figured "if you can't beat 'em, might as well join 'em" in singing Christmas music in November. No, we're singing "Joy to the World" this morning because Isaac Watts, the hymn's author, based his poem on Psalm 98. Remember the words of the enthronement psalm and listen to their echoes in the hymn: "Joy to the world, the Lord is come. Let earth receive her King. Let all their songs employ, while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains repeat the sounding joy. He rules the world with truth and grace and makes the nations prove the glories of his righteousness and wonders of his love."

Isaac Watts was an 18th century Congregational minister and hymn writer. In fact, he is known as the "Godfather of English Hymnody." You probably know some of his other hymns: When I Survey the Wondrous Cross; Our God, Our Help in Ages Past; and Jesus Shall Reign Where'er the Sun. Watts bucked the tradition of the Church of England, where only the psalms as written were sung. He wrote more "popular" hymns and also used instruments. His philosophy was that Christians should read the psalms through Christian eyes and beliefs. And you can hear that philosophy and theology in our closing hymn today, "Joy to the World."

Although "Joy to the World" is so beloved as a Christmas carol, it should more accurately be considered an Advent hymn. Isaac Watts wrote about Christ's promised second coming. In fact, Watts gave his poem the title "The Messiah's coming and kingdom." Whereas God's people in the Old Testament sang Psalm 98 in praise of YHWH, God as King, Christians sing "Joy to the World" in praise of the Lord, King, and Savior Jesus Christ, with the hope and assurance of his promised return.

But, of course, our reason for singing "a new song to the Lord" (even if it's a 300-year-old popular Christmas carol) is the same reason God's people sang Psalm 98 during worship at the Enthronement Festival — to make a joyful noise to the Lord, to sing praises to God, to welcome our Savior, to proclaim to the whole world, "God is our King and King of the whole universe," and to remember all of God's marvelous and mighty acts for us.

The story of God's people in the Old Testament is part of our story, so we remember, "We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand." (Deuteronomy 6:21) We remember how, in the wilderness, "The Lord went in front of [us] in a pillar of cloud by day, to lead [us] along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give [us] light." (Exodus 13:21) We also remember how the

angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, “She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:21) We remember how an angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds and gave them the good news of great joy, “to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.” (Luke 2:10) We remember how Jesus took bread, broke it, gave it to his disciples, and said, “Take, this is my body,” and a cup and said, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.” (Mark 12:22-23) We remember how “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” (John 3:16) We remember that “God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8) And we remember, just as Jesus told us to remember, that he is with us always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:20)

In a sense, Psalm 98 and “Joy to the World” are a repeat and affirmation of last week’s message about God always doing something new. Adopting Isaac Watts’s outlook, in Christ we have a new perspective on what God has done, is doing, and will always keep doing as God creates anew and offers us a hope for the future that will not only sustain us in the present, but encourage us and empower us to live faithfully day in and day out in the present. That’s reason enough to sing “Joy to the World” throughout the year — during Advent, at Christmas, after Easter, during what is called “Ordinary Time” in the church calendar — because when we remember what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, our hearts can prepare room for our King, our songs can proclaim “The Savior reigns,” and we can live today in God’s truth and grace, the glories of God’s righteousness, and, most of all, in the wonders of God’s love. We can look toward the future, while being rooted in longstanding traditions and memories of God’s marvelous deeds.

“Joy to the world, the Lord is come . . . let heaven and nature sing.”

***Let us pray: O God of past, present, and future, we praise you for the marvelous things you have done, you are doing, and you have promised. Fill us with your joy and empower us with your Holy Spirit, that we may be renewed to sing a new song of joy in a world which longs for your justice and peace. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, in whom we become a new creation. Amen.***

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>[www.royal.uk/coronation-his-majesty-king](http://www.royal.uk/coronation-his-majesty-king)

<sup>2</sup>Carlie Porterfield, “Charles III Announces May Coronation Date — Here’s What To Expect,” October 11, 2022 at [www.forbes.com](http://www.forbes.com).

<sup>3</sup>“King Charles III coronation ceremony: What will happen stage by stage, and what date is it?” October 11, 2022 at [www.itv.com](http://www.itv.com).