

Repeat the Sounding Joy

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[0 : 00] All right, well, this year I've noticed something that I believe is a very serious problem, something that I've seen among friends, among relatives, among neighbors, something that I've even seen in my own heart.

And this is the same problem year after year after year, and I just noticed that this past year it's been a very significant issue. 2017 has been a year in which you and I have been lacking in joy. We've been lacking in joy, in genuine joy. And I'm not talking about just occasional giddiness and happiness and moments of excitement and smiling faces.

I'm talking genuine joy at the very core of who you are, a genuine joy, that sort of foundation, something that can never be taken away from you, no matter how miserable your circumstances, no matter how much sorrow you're experiencing and feeling.

Real, true, lasting joy. And 2017 has been a year in which I've witnessed many people, people I love, succumb to anxiety, to despair, whether in their relationships, in their careers, in their vision for a better country.

[1 : 20] And all of this has been a problem for a long time. And one way this problem became evident, it actually became evident to me last year during that long and slow and torturous American election.

Now, just, you know, we Canadians were complaining about our election, then I think we had our eyes opened a little bit to see how bad things really could be. And I noticed a number of people sharing online their favorite third-party candidate for president.

The third-party candidate for president was Giant Meteor 2016. The campaign slogan, just end it already. Bring it to an end. Now, this candidate, the Giant Meteor, was not a natural-born citizen of the United States, therefore not technically eligible for the presidency.

That didn't stop its supporters from promising an end to student loans, an end to mortgage debt, an end to all credit card debt, and an end to a tax burden within five minutes of their candidate's arrival on the national scene.

Now, I don't venture, I try not to wade into politics too much, and try not to venture into politics too much, but I'll take the risk of saying this, I'm glad this candidate didn't win. Now, as humorous as it is, what's lying behind this is sad.

[2 : 40] As funny as I personally found it, there is a sadness to this. There's a cynical despair that's driven many people into the welcoming arms of a giant meteor from outer space.

And that hopeless cynicism, this lack of joy, it isn't right. This isn't what we were made to be. Believe it or not, there is something that these people get right, because they understand something that maybe many of us are in denial about. They understand that the immensity of the problems we're facing in our relationships, in our world, that justice can only come to us through a world-shaking event, through the powerful arrival of someone outside of our broken and corrupted world.

And that's something that the ancient poets from the nation of Israel, they understood this as well. And one of them wrote a song about the world-shaking arrival of someone who would bring justice to our world.

And this song that he wrote, it's now found in our Bibles as Psalm 98. And here are the words of this psalm. Psalm 98, a psalm.

[4 : 03] Oh, 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.

The Lord has made known his salvation. He has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations. He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel.

All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. 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.

Let the sea roar and all that fills it, the world and those who dwell in it. Let the rivers clap their hands. Let the hills sing for joy together before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth.

[5 : 09] He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with equity. This is the word of the Lord. Now in the first three verses of this psalm, we learn how the Lord, how the God of Israel, the creator of all of this world, plans to save that world that he created.

Here's how he plans to save the entire world. Verse one, the poet, he stirs us up to sing to the Lord a new song. Why a new song?

Because the Lord is about to do something new. He is about to take action. And the action that he is going to take, it will make the world marvel.

His right hand and his holy arm, these were the powerful, in the ancient world, the powerful force of the King, his right hand and his arm. They are about to move with world-shaking action.

World-shaking action. And the Lord began this world-shaking action. He began this marvelous effort to save us on that very first Christmas long ago.

[6 : 19] That's when God sent his only son into our world. He sent his son to be born of a virgin woman named Mary, as Carl read about earlier in our service.

After receiving this good news, Mary responded with a song, a song that's recorded in Luke chapter one. And she sings to the Lord a new song. And she says, he has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered the proud and the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate. And the Lord will not only move with world-shaking action, we see from this, we also see that he will show the whole world that he is righteous.

And by that I mean this, that the Lord can always be counted on to do what is right. That the Lord will always act to restore us to a right relationship with him and right relationships with one another. Don't you know, aren't there people in your lives where you're like, our relationship is not right. It is not what it should be. And maybe if you're honest, you know that that's what your relationship with God is like too.

[7 : 37] It is not what it should be. But the Lord is acting to change that. And this is what he shows us.

Not just world-shaking action, but a worldwide revelation. A worldwide revelation of who he is and what he has come to do.

The Lord has made known his salvation. He has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations. And that's what we read in Psalm 98 verse 2. The Lord is showing us how he is going to save this world.

He's going to bring justice to us. And it's just like Mary wrote in her song. He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and exalted those of humble estate.

He has filled the hungry with good things and the rich he has sent away empty. He's going to set everything right, everything the way it should be. But if God has come to set everything right, that does raise the question, where does that leave you and me?

[8 : 43] Because this is good news for those who are suffering. This is good news for those who are in the right, who are behaving rightly before God. But this is bad news for the rest of us.

Which means this is ultimately, in the end, this is bad news for everybody on earth. Are we going to be found in the right before him? Who can stand before a God who is absolutely, perfectly good and right and holy?

Are we the ones who are going to be brought down and punished? We haven't always done what's right in God's sight. Not a one of us has loved him with all of our heart.

Not a one of us has loved our neighbor as ourselves, like God has called us to do. We haven't done this at all. And so for God to save our world and to do more than wipe out all life on the earth like a giant meteor would do, God has to do something more than just bring justice.

God must also make us just. He has to do more than bring righteousness to the world. He has to make us righteous. And so it is that an angel promised that Mary's son would do exactly these things.

[10:08] In Matthew chapter one, the angel says, she will bear a son and you shall call his name Jesus. For he will save his people from their sins.

Jesus, the son of God, will save his people from their sins. He will save them from their thoughts, from their words, from their actions that are crooked and corrupted.

Thoughts and words and actions that oppose God and his plan to save our world. And so everyone who believes in Jesus will be included in the people of God.

Everyone who believes in him will find peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased. And that's why the poet writes in Psalm 98 verse 3, He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel.

And not only that, but not just for Israel, but all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. And as far as this psalmist, this poet is concerned, there is only one right way to respond to this good news.

[11:20] Verse four, make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth, break forth into joyous song and sing praises. Now, if some of us start singing, calling it a joyful noise, that might be a bit generous at best.

But the quality of our voice isn't what's important. In fact, the poet says, you know, pile on every instrument you can find. Stringed instruments like the lyre, loud brass like the trumpet and the horn. And that is not enough even. Because just wait till you read verses seven and eight. Let the sea roar and all that fills it, the world and those who dwell in it.

Let the rivers clap their hands. Let the hills sing for joy together before the Lord. This chorus of praise is something that is echoed by the whole universe.

The Christmas hymn, Joy to the World, it's based on this psalm. And in the second verse, it calls us to join together with this massive anthem of joy that someday all of creation is going to sing.

[12:24] Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns. Let men their songs employ while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains repeat the sounding joy.

Now, why, why again do we all respond with joy? Deep-rooted joy to the very core of your being. Why do we all respond with joy to the Lord?

Verse nine reminds us. He comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with equity.

The Lord Jesus, he didn't come, he didn't only come to save sinners. He's coming again to judge the world and to set everything right the way that God promised. So Christmas, we think of Christmas as something that we look back to the past and so much of the trappings of Christmas are about nostalgia and looking backwards.

And there's a big part of this that is true. It is a celebration of that first mighty blow against Satan's power, against the injustice of this world. But Christmas isn't just looking back in time, it is looking forward in time.

[13:33] It is our anticipation that Jesus is going to come again to rule the world with truth and grace and make the nations prove the glories of his righteousness and wonders of his love.

And if Christmas is anything less than this to you, you've been settling for something less than true joy. You've been settling for something less than a deep foundation of hope and joy and desire that you were meant to build your life on.

So please, I beg you, turn away. Turn from your sin, turn from your old way of life, believe in Jesus Christ, repeat the sounding joy that God meant for you to have as you look forward to our coming King.

Let me pray. Let me pray.