

# Joy To The World

*Christmas 2000*

*With Study Questions*

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## **I. A Confrontation About Reality**

Let us examine this very popular Christmas carol or hymn. This hymn captures the Christian worldview in its most comprehensive scope, its most militant impulse, its most confident assurance. It is "triumphalism" -- biblical triumphalism. This hymn, and the gospel it proclaims, confronts us with our own fundamental convictions about the nature of reality and our hope for the future.

### **A Historic Reality**

"Joy to the world, the Lord is come!" is a declaration of historical reality. It is not wishful thinking, nor is it a warm feeling. So often Christmas is associated with a message of tolerance, giving, realized dreams, the pursuit of fantasies, etc. But in all this the true message is veiled or lost altogether. And the subsequent joy which accompanies the reality of His coming is replaced by consequences which are sad and, as we'll see in a moment, often disastrous.

One of my greatest enjoyments is the response of my 1 ½ year old and my 4 year old when I get home from work. My wife sees my car and tells them daddy's home. They come running into the front yard screaming with excitement. What a let down it would be for them if I weren't truly home. They might look to mommy who would explain, "Well the good thought of daddy is home." I don't think they'd buy it.

### **A Biblical Revelation**

"The Lord is come." As explained by the biblical revelation, God the Creator of the heavens and earth entered the space-time world of everyday reality in the Person of Jesus of Nazareth, the Lord's anointed King. We celebrate that glorious Incarnation of the Eternal Son during this Christmas season: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth...No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known" (John 1:14,18).

### **No Dreamy Concepts**

We are called upon, not to dreamy concepts but to a historical reality. There is not something for us to feel, but to admit—something long suppressed in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18). We are commanded to face the reality of the revealed, holy and righteous God. Speaking of Jesus, the Apostle John writes of "...**that which**

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the material in this paper is taken from an e-mail written by Roger Wagner, where he was comparing the songs and lives of Greg Bahnsen to John Lennon.

**was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life” (1 John 1:1).** Be suspicious of any religion, even a Christian religion, which depends upon, or relies upon the impulses of men over the word of God.

## **Imagine**

In, perhaps his most well-known song, John Lennon beautifully captures the most dominant atheistic view of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, Marxism. "Imagine...no religion...no possessions...no need for greed or hunger...a brotherhood of man..." Sounds like a beautiful vision. One which millions of men and women embraced with all their hearts. Lennon goes on to sing, "You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one." How true. Twentieth Century has had its share of dreamers -- Adolf Hitler, Pol Pot, Joseph Stalin, Idi Amin, Charlie Manson, and Mark David Chapman. So the real question is, who decides which dreamer's dream becomes reality?

## **A Disastrous Dream**

As Dr. Greg Bahnsen never tired of pointing out, without the God of the Bible, the worldview set forth in the Holy Scriptures, the redemptive work of Christ, and the life- and culture-transforming power of the Holy Spirit, there is no basis for establishing the transcendent validity of one worldview, one "dream" among many. The man with the .38 ended Lennon's dream by establishing his own. Millions of men, women, and children in this bloody century have become the mortar for building the dream-empires of man.

## **II. King of Kings**

### **Receiving a Benevolent King**

"Let earth receive her King." It has been said, that there have been many men who would be God, but only one God who would be man. Similarly, there are many kings, but there is only one King of kings. Men of the earth seem to have the choice to bow before human despots who may have the power to kill the body, but no power in eternity, or the King of kings who is loving, benevolent, and has the keys to both heaven and hell.

### **Room in Our Hearts**

"Let every heart prepare Him room." The truth of the Christian faith is built upon a foundation of objective reality, but that certainly does not justify an antiseptic and dispassionate approach to life. In fact it is quite the opposite. Peter tells us we are to sanctify Christ as Lord in our hearts (1 Peter 3:15). I am to love that which is good and right and true and wonderful. And I am to seek to love it with every faculty I

have. I subject my thinking, feeling, volition, etc. to the beauty of the veracity of Christ. In doing so I order my life to His glory, and to the joy of others and myself.

It is through these prepared hearts that the King's kingdom prevails—a heart that, by the grace of God, recognizes its own desperate wickedness and cries out for redemption. And redemption will always be forthcoming to those who cry out in sincerity. For Jesus died to rescue men from the consequences of their own wickedness. This redemption is always followed by a genuine desire to walk in the law and goodness of God.

### **III. The Heavens Declare**

“And heaven and nature sing.” The Psalmist records,

**“The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork” (Psalm 19:1).**

**“Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens; Praise Him in the heights! <sup>2</sup>Praise Him, all His angels; Praise Him, all His hosts! <sup>3</sup>Praise Him, sun and moon; Praise Him, all you stars of light! <sup>4</sup>Praise Him, you heavens of heavens, And you waters above the heavens! <sup>5</sup>Let them praise the name of the LORD, For He commanded and they were created” (Psalm 148:1-5).**

All inanimate, unfallen and heavenly things sing praises to His name. The only created thing that has difficulty singing praises are those created beings who were made in the image and likeness of God. The sun and the moon have no pride, nor do they seek to be as gods. Oh that men would join in the chorus of the stars in their praise of the Lord.

The fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains repeat the sounding joy of the Lord who has come and the Savior who reigns.

### **IV. The Savior Reigns**

#### **Given a Kingdom**

"Joy to the world, the Savior reigns!" Daniel records "One like unto a Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and a kingdom; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed" (Daniel 7:13-14). Only One has been given the authority to enact His dream of reality -- Jesus Christ the Righteous.

#### **The Superiority of Christ**

It is the Son, whom God appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe. The Son, the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful word. The Son, who provided purification for sins, and then sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. The Son, so much superior to the angels as the name He has inherited is superior to theirs: "You are my Son; today I have become your Father...I will be His Father, and He will be my Son...Let all God's angels worship Him" (cf. Hebrews 1:1-6). About the Son God says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy" (vv. 7-9). To the Son God spoke this promise, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet" (v. 10).

## **V. With Truth and Grace**

### **Questionable Candidates**

"He rules the world, with truth and grace." This reigning King is not self-serving. As we find ourselves surrounded by campaign promises we are always suspicious. Is the candidate sincere? Are his methods effective? Does he have the power to deliver? These questions are answered by the ruler who rules with truth and grace. For He doesn't merely rule with truth and grace, He is truth. He is beyond question and above reproach.

### **Proof Through Nations**

His methods are so effective and His power so exhaustive that the very nations (who themselves boast of, or desire sovereignty) are the proof of a King who rules with truth and grace. Tyrants and despots are brought low time after time. One must ask why and by whom? It is because the Lord has come, He reigns and rules with truth and grace. The glories of His righteousness and wonders of His love are readily apparent to all who have eyes to see.

This Christmas season, let us not allow the incarnation of Christ to be reduced to dreams and shallow sentiments. The Lord has come. He rules and reigns with truth and grace. Let every heart prepare Him room.

## Questions for Study

1. How does this hymn confront us with our own fundamental convictions about the nature of reality and our hope for the future?
2. Why is it important that the Lord has come relate to His actual physical coming in history?
3. What are the flaws in a Marxist, atheistic view of hopes and dreams? How can this be disastrous?
4. In what respect is Jesus King and how is He to be received?
5. What does it mean to make room in our hearts?
6. How does heaven and nature sing?
7. When was Jesus given a kingdom?
8. What is the nature of that kingdom?
9. How does He rule the world? Why can we find peace with that knowledge?
10. How do the nations prove His righteousness and love?