

Greetings Redeemer family,

If someone were to ask you, “what is the key thing that Christians believe?” how would you answer? If you were to introduce someone to the truths of Christianity, where would you start?

My guess is that most of us would start with something about sin, Christ's substitutionary death, and the hope of Heaven. Or maybe you'd take a chronological approach, starting with how God created the world, and that we find identity in the created order. A non-Christian would probably say that Christians are people who try to do the right things and live by the Ten Commandments.

There's one place most of us wouldn't start: Joy.

This, however, is precisely where the writers of the Westminster Shorter Catechism started. The Catechism was written in the 1640s to give Christians an accessible and comprehensive guide to the essential teachings of Christianity. And the first truth they wanted communicated was this: you were created to experience joy in the presence of God.

Q. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever

We begin our service this week with a very familiar hymn of joy to God. In our culture, “Joy to the World” is seen as a seasonal Christmas song, but this was not Isaac Watts' original intent for the text. Watts – the father of English hymnody – had taken up a project of re-working the Biblical psalms for congregational worship. Watts' driving question in this project was this: “how should a Christian sing the Psalms?” As he approached the ancient Psalms, he labored to show how their promises found fulfillment and new meaning in the revelation of Christ. For example, Psalm 98 speaks of the Lord making His salvation known to His people, and calls for a response of praise. Watts' recognized that salvation was made known fully in the person and work of Christ, and because He has come, we are filled with joy.

*Joy to the World, the Lord is come
Let earth receive her King!
Let every heart prepare Him room
And Heaven and nature sing!
And Heaven and nature sing!
And Heaven, and Heaven and nature sing!*

This theme of joy in Christ our King is a theme that carries throughout the service this week. Our second song is a narrative of Christ's work. The first verse looks at Christ as the Creator of all.

*You're the Word of God the Father from before the world began
Ev'ry star and ev'ry planet has been fashioned by Your hand
All creation holds together by the power of Your voice
Let the skies declare Your glory; let the land and seas rejoice!*

The second verse takes Christ's incarnation, as He came as a man to live a perfect life and die a substitutionary death for us.

*Yet You left the gaze of angels, came to seek and save the lost
And exchanged the joy of heaven for the anguish of a cross
With a prayer You fed the hungry; with a word You stilled the sea
Yet how silently You suffered that the guilty may go free*

The final verse speaks of Christ's resurrection. Jesus rose again from the grave, and now sits at the right hand of God. There, He constantly calls His people to Himself and makes our needs to the Father.

*With a shout You rose victorious, wresting victory from the grave
And ascended into heaven, leading captives in Your wake
Now You stand before the Father, interceding for Your own
From each tribe and tongue and nation You are leading sinners home*

During our offering this week, we will be singing one of my favorite texts. So often, when I think of joy in the Christian life, I think of some kind of perpetual, animated ecstasy. But the repeated refrain of this song says something very different – that the joy of Christ is something that we rest in. We don't have to work really hard to drum up excitement and energy to prove that we're experiencing the joy of the Lord. True joy is found in fellowship with the One who says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

*Jesus, I am resting, resting, in the joy of what Thou art;
I am finding out the greatness of Thy loving heart.
Thou hast bid me gaze upon Thee, and Thy beauty fills my soul,
For by Thy transforming power, Thou hast made me whole.*

*Jesus, I am resting, resting, in the joy of what Thou art;
I am finding out the greatness of Thy loving heart.*

*O, how great Thy loving kindness; vaster, broader than the sea!
O, how marvelous Thy goodness, lavished all on me!
Yes, I rest in Thee, Belovèd, know what wealth of grace is Thine,
Know Thy certainty of promise, and have made it mine.*

*Simply trusting Thee, Lord Jesus, I behold Thee as Thou art,
And Thy love, so pure, so changeless, satisfies my heart;
Satisfies its deepest longings; meets, supplies its every need,
Compasseth me round with blessings: Thine is love indeed!*

*Ever lift Thy face upon me as I work and wait for Thee;
Resting 'neath Thy smile, Lord Jesus, Earth's dark shadows flee.
Brightness of my Father's glory, Sunshine of my Father's face,
Keep me ever trusting, resting; fill me with Thy grace.*

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dX9-ruvMtrE>

Resting in the joy of Christ,
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