

## Joy to the World

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My family moved from suburbia (hippie-era Boulder, CO) to a beat up old farmhouse in West Kaysville, UT when I was 11. I was suddenly thrown into a strange new world of daily farm chores and interactions with animals both wonderful and terrible. I idolized my two grandfathers with whom I was able to spend a lot of time learning and being mentored. Setting aside all the positive, tremendous experiences, by the time I was 15 I had also seen much of the opposite side of the spectrum: blood, gore and death. And my two grandfathers had both died so I stayed for a year with my lonely, sorrowing grandmother.

I clearly recall the night, following some Sunday school or seminary lesson on the Great Plan of Happiness, struggling over the obvious disparity between what was being described and the world's prevalent—nay, predominant—suffering, sorrow and death. It was so much more than “Why do bad things happen to good people?” because the news was filled with bad things happening to ALL people. And the Sunday school punch line for the Great Plan of Happiness was described as what God required from His own son: the most brutal physical and emotional torture followed by the bloody and gory, malice-filled murder of that innocent Son. *This is the best a loving Father could do? And this is "happiness"?* *Why did it all have to be so bloody?*

When I reflect upon my boyhood conundrum, I can rephrase my question with a broader view: *objectively—is it better this way for everyone?* If the premise is that God gave me trials and suffering so I could reach out to Him for strength and support and therefore find peace and happiness, how is happiness still attainable if that link is broken so that I don't know about God and what He can do for me? Did God create the plan only for people like me with the Gospel? How does the great Plan of Happiness help the rest of the world's probationary occupants find happiness if they have no idea why they are subject to suffering and probation in the first place?

Even if our privation leads to our happiness because of our understanding of the Gospel, how is it that the ignorance, suffering or want within the remaining 99.8% of the world can lead to their happiness *without* the Gospel? This was *God's* plan?

*When saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee?*

There are approximately fifty times the membership of our church who are undernourished worldwide, suffering chronic hunger.

*When saw we thee thirsty, and gave thee drink?*

65 times our world church membership suffer from water shortages.

*When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in?*

300 times our church membership are displaced from their homes as refugees; most are Syrians.

*When saw we thee naked, and clothed thee?*

There are about the same number of reported (!) rape incidents or children being sexually abused in the world *annually* as there are total members of the church.

*Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?*

There are about the same number of new cases of cancer per year as there are total members of the church. ~8.8 million deaths per year are the seemingly inexorable result of cancer.

There are ~9 million total prisoners in the world, of whom an appalling number are imprisoned because of conscience incompatible with those who wield power.

How can this earth's inhabitants seriously make a moral choice to believe, follow and become like God when the most fundamental human needs are not being met: food, water, health, basic security? World illiteracy runs about 17%, and only two thirds of the world's populace have even heard the name of Jesus or know enough about Him to choose to believe Him or not. Few of us doubt this is a fallen world. But few of us know what that phrase really means. Did our God really intend life on earth to be this way, or is this the way the chosen "god of this world" has fashioned it?

*[B]ehold, the power of Satan was upon all the face of the earth... and [Enoch] heard a loud voice saying: Wo, wo be unto the inhabitants of the earth. And he beheld Satan; and [Satan] had a great chain in his hand, and it veiled the whole face of the earth with darkness; and he looked up and laughed, and his angels rejoiced. (Moses 7:24-26)*

By humanity's own choosing, Satan reigns with blood and horror on this earth and mockingly laughs at us. Our Father—and indeed the entire heaven of His uncountable creation portfolio—weeps over our misery.

As a young teenager, I sorrowed, worried and wrestled before the Lord as I sought to understand why this so-called Plan of Happiness had to be so bloody. It was late into the night in the depths of my desperate confusion that I was finally visited by the Comforter as by a mother wrapping me in her loving arms, to simply promise me in that uniquely soul-penetrating means of communication, *"It's okay. It's okay. Someday you'll understand."*

Those of us who have the gospel in our lives have great hope in Christ. We tend to forget that much of this fallen world lacks such hope. And it is not just because of what they do not have, but rather it is because of what humanity has altogether forsaken. The gospel of Jesus Christ, little by little, begins to restore hope among humanity.

We hear Satan menacing us in the temple,

*This is the great day of my power: I reign from the rivers to the ends of the earth. There is none who dares to molest or make afraid!*

How many times have we sat in the pre-endowment and wondered what that frightening phrase could possibly mean? There is a very good reason why this statement sounds at once both

ominous and baffling. It is because the “liar from the beginning” whom the Savior describes as “there is no truth in him” (Jn 8:44), *cannot even tell the truth when he is boasting to himself!*

Of course there is now *One* who dares to molest *and* make afraid!

But the glad tidings of great joy announced by herald angels that first Christmas day directly confront and will thwart Lucifer’s power by declaring just the opposite:

*Fear not!*

*For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord...  
Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.* (KJV Luke 2:11,14)

Back to my youth it was not much longer when I was privileged to receive a second, comforting witness of the Spirit. It was Christmas in the old Kaysville tabernacle, when Dianne Brian sang O Holy Night! That testimony buoyed me. But that song is not in our hymnal, so I offer the second-best alternative: that same sacrament service we sang Joy to the World, and I was so moved by the words and music as impressed upon me by the spirit, that I was glad others were so joyfully singing, because my own emotions, so pressed upon by the spirit prevented any sound from my own willful voice.

I testify that Jesus is the answer to all the wrong that is in the world. I testify that Jesus can heal broken things: broken hearts, broken spirits, broken relationships. I testify that Jesus can annul Lucifer’s influence if we will let Him.

Joy to the World!