

### **Series Slide**

Isaac Watts was born in Southampton, England in 1674.

From an early age, he loved to make rhymes.

Once he was asked why he had his eyes open during a prayer.

To which he replied:

- ***A little mouse for want of stairs  
ran up a rope to say its prayers.***

His Dad then went to spank him...and little Isaac cried out.

- ***O father, father pity take***
- ***And I will no more verses make***

I gotta tell you...I love this kid.

Obviously- he's got a mind to rhyme.

He also watched his Dad growing up as a non-conformist in England. A non-conformist was a protestant Xian that refused to conform to the rules and edicts of the government established church- the Church of England.

In fact his father- was imprisoned twice for being a non-conformist.

Anytime you got a poet- that loves Jesus- and has been raised as a non-conformist- well- you gotta a revolutionary on your hands.

And that's exactly what Isaac Watts did for worship music in the church. Revolutionized it.

Up to that point- all you could sing in church were the Psalms from the Old Testament. But Isaac Watts changed that. So I've written a little tribute rhyme this morning.

**Watts the deal!  
He got bars of steel  
The kid likes to rhyme.  
its not like a crime  
To take the lines  
Of David the King**

**And then to sing  
Some things  
That mean  
The same-  
But make em about the name  
Of the one came to take our pain**

**Drowned in the tide of a crimson flood  
This ain't Alabama- its about the blood**

**Of the one who was able- to save us  
Born in a stable- the gift that he gave us  
Was better than Wisemen  
Death took a hand to face like a Heisman**

**Aesops got fables  
But this is the Truth  
He turned over tables  
The empty tomb- proof**

**Now everyone  
Who'll kiss the son  
And Welcome the King  
Like an early Spring**

**For every Tribe, Tongue, and Nation  
We'll all join in the song of the New Creation.**

That's my tribute to Isaac Watts. Both in describing what he did, and then doing what he did.

Isaac didn't want to get rid of the Psalms- he wanted to read them- and then breathe the New Testament- particularly Jesus- back into them.

He wanted to take the words and themes of the Psalms- and then make them sing-able with rhyme- and make them about Jesus.

And that is exactly what one of the most popular Christmas Carols of all time is. A couple of Psalms- made to rhyme- with Jesus breathed into it.

In fact- Isaac Watts didn't even write this hymn for Christmas. The song isn't about Jesus birth...his first coming.

Its about the advent of his 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. When he comes to set the world to rights, to put everything back together- from human hearts to war torn countries- even down to the very physical matter that makes up trees, and rocks, and rivers and streams.

Do you know what song it is?

**Title Slide- "Boy to the World: Why Trees Root for Human Healing Then Teach Us What to Sing"- Psalm 96, 98, Romans 8**

Joy to the World.

Its based on Psalm 96 & 98 - and whole bunch of Jesus from the NT oozing into all the cracks.

So here's what we're gonna do today.

I'm gonna hit a few lines from the passages that I think best informed Isaac Watts intentions in this song. And then we're gonna follow the Biblical storyline of Trees- yes, including Christmas Trees. And in the end- I think you'll get a beautiful picture of Jesus-

...and that's what Christmas is really about, Charlie Brown.

**Psalm 96:10-13**

**10 Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns.  
The world is firmly established; it cannot be shaken.  
He judges the peoples fairly."  
11 Let the heavens be glad and the earth rejoice;  
let the sea and all that fills it resound.  
12 Let the fields and everything in them celebrate.  
Then all the trees of the forest will shout for joy  
13 before the Lord, for he is coming —  
for he is coming to judge the earth.  
He will judge the world with righteousness  
and the peoples with his faithfulness.**

**Psalm 98**

**Sing a new song to the Lord,  
for he has performed wonders;  
his right hand and holy arm  
have won him victory.  
2 The Lord has made his victory known;**

he has revealed his righteousness  
in the sight of the nations.

3 He has remembered his love  
and faithfulness to the house of Israel;  
all the ends of the earth  
have seen our God's victory.

4 Let the whole earth shout to the Lord;  
be jubilant, shout for joy, and sing.

Sing to the Lord with the lyre,  
with the lyre and melodious song.

6 With trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn  
shout triumphantly  
in the presence of the Lord, our King.

7 Let the sea and all that fills it,  
the world and those who live in it, resound.

8 Let the rivers clap their hands;  
let the mountains shout together for joy

9 before the Lord,  
for he is coming to judge the earth.  
He will judge the world righteously  
and the peoples fairly.

#### **Romans 8:18-25**

18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation eagerly waits with anticipation for God's sons to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility — not willingly, but because of him who subjected it — in the hope 21 that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage to decay into the glorious freedom of God's children. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now. 23 Not only that, but we ourselves who have the Spirit as the firstfruits — we also groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. 24 Now in this hope we were saved, but hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he sees? 25 Now if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with patience.

**Transition:** Two strange truths I want to point out today and I've made them into overtly cheesy rhymes in the spirit of Isaac Watts.

## **1) Trees sing for the King that brings Covenant Love for Human Beings.**

- In Isaac Watts' unintentional Christmas carol *Joy to the World*, there's a whole lot of lines about nature and Royalty.
- **Let Earth receive her King;**
- **heaven and nature sing**
- **The Savior reigns**
- **fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains**  
**Repeat the sounding joy,**
- **thorns infest the ground**
- **He Rules the world with truth and grace**
- Most of that comes out of Psalm 96 & 98, which you heard just has a lot of those phrases.
- The big idea is that all of creation, the rocks, the trees, the fields, the streams- that they rejoice in YHWH being their creator and King.

### **• Psalm 96:12-13**

- Look at this line about the trees singing (or shouting as the CSB translates it)
- Look what they are shouting about.
- The ALL CAPS LORD is coming to rightly judge the earth and human beings with faithfulness.
- Anytime in your translation of the OT you see the all caps word LORD- it is a reference to the Covenant Name of God- YHWH.
- Without going into too much detail here, whenever the Covenant Name of God is used- it highlights his personal nature. His promise keeping and his patient love- particularly in the Old Testament- to Israel.
- In Psalm 96 & 98- and in the song "Joy to the World" the picture we get is the trees, the fields, the rocks, the streams all joyously singing and shouting because YHWH is their creator and king and he loves human beings so much- that he

makes and keeps his promise to preserve and keep them- and save them from destruction.

- **Psalm 98:3-4**

- Here, it is even more explicit.
- Because YHWH remembered his Faithful, promise-keeping HESED -Covenant Love to Israel- All of creation- the whole earth is jubilant- shouting- singing.
- The question is "Why?"
- Well, to show you that, we're going to follow both Scripture and Isaac Watts here- and we're going to anthropomorphize nature.
- That just means we're going to give human characteristics to trees, rocks, fields, and such.
- It's a literary tool that the authors of Scripture use to communicate God's relationship with his creation- and creation's relationship with human beings.
- Paul the apostle picks up this theme in the New Testament in Romans. First- w

- **Romans 8:18-20**

- **18 For God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth, 19 since what can be known about God is evident among them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, that is, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what he has made.**

- **Romans 1:25**

- **They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served what has been created instead of the Creator, who is praised forever. Amen.**

- While that's not exactly trees singing- it does set us up for what we read in Romans 8.
- Through what God has created- all human beings have displayed before them a truth- That God is outside of us. That he is powerful enough to create the world- and That he cares

enough about us to make a world in which we can live and flourish.

- But humans suppressed that truth. Instead of letting creation tell us about the glory of God so we would do what we were created to do- worship him- we turned creation into an object of worship.
- This has been true for thousands and thousands of years. Though the trees have been pointing us to a good creator- instead- we've worshipped the trees- in some cultures- literally- but the trees are just a stand in for the way we put a greater weight on the things God created- the things we can see and touch- than we actually put on God. We worship stuff- instead of God.
- All the pointers that God wove into his creation- that direct us to him- we exchanged- for iPhones or sex. But the human creativity it takes to make an iPhone is supposed to signal to us- to sing a little song to us about the glory of God. That human beings made in his image can figure out how to take the raw materials of creation- in metals and electricity and somehow make it into this texting/video machine that sometimes can be used to make a phone call. That's supposed to point us to God's reality. We bear God's image- We picture God in our relationship to creation.
- You are supposed to stand at the edge of the Grand Canyon and say- "I'm small". There is a God who looks at this and is much bigger than this. I need that God in my life.
- Instead- we fall into the grand canyon trying to take a selfie to show our importance to our "so called friends".
- And the creation is going- ummmm, cmon guys. You aren't doing this right. You are using us to make this whole life about yourself.
- And God- the God of faithful love to his people- the God that made humans and trees- his heart is breaking as you are breaking yourselves.
- Its like the trees are rooting for us to get a clue. To wake up. To stop suppressing the truth. To see that God made the

trees FOR us- in love- so that we would recognize his presence with us and desire for us to know him.

- And because of the foolishness of human beings- the entire creation is under a curse. Its all broken. Every field, flood, rock, hill, and plain is not what it could be. Like the truth that has been suppressed by human beings- all of creation has been muted in a kind of way. Not as beautiful and glorious as it should be. IT has been cursed- just like humanity- for humans suppression of the truth.

• **Romans 8:19-20**

- Then Paul says later- in one of the greatest chapters of the whole Bible- Its like all of creation- the trees themselves are rooting for God's Hesed- Covenant Love to break through and save human beings.
- To wake them up and make those who are slaves to sin- to this broken way of worshipping themselves instead of the God who so deeply loves them- to free them from bondage and turn them into sons and daughters they were created to be.
- Because creation knows- that once the curse is removed by loved from human beings- then all of creation gets to fully be what it was created to be. No more suppressed truth. No more stuffed down and distorted glory.
- That might seem weird in a song about Xmas- but remember this.
  - first- this song wasn't intended to be about Christmas anyway.
- But...second- if it's a song about Jesus- it's a song about Christmas.
- And third- You can't separate Jesus from the story of what God is doing in, through, and to the natural world.

**Back to 1)**

- God the King will rule his creation in love again.
- And Human Beings will receive that love and everything will be in harmony and peace.



- This is why the Trees sing and get excited about the Covenant Love of God our King. Its there only ticket to freedom.

**Transition:** Alright- time for one last Isaac Watts'-type Rhyme. This one is going to help us follow the biblical storyline- and let the Trees teach us to sing about God's Covenant Love. And let it be known- that I have only 2 points today- yet still, I have tree points.

**2) When you see that you're hollow, there are 5 trees to follow. Let them lead to the love you need.**

- Because God created us to know and love him and each other- when we have suppressed the truth of his presence and love with our creation worship- we notice something profoundly missing from our lives. LOVE.
- There is a hollow spot in us- that strangely- we try to fill with created things.
- My wife, that I love, wanted to make a Christmas memory yesterday- so all 5 of us piled into our car and went to Opry Mills mall to do some Christmas shopping.
- We made some memories- along with about 500,000 other memory makers.
- While it would be lovely to think that every person there was thinking about how the Christ child was born into the world to save us from our sin and unite us to God for eternity...and all of the shopping was an expression of self-sacrifice to display God's gift-giving nature to those whom they all deeply loved...
- I get the feeling- there were probably more than a few of us there- doing something besides that.
- Shopping to fill a void.
- Some shopped because of the rush of getting something new (especially on sale) can temporarily make us feel like we aren't hollow- like we are deficient of some one saying "I see you. The Real you. And I love you."
- Some were shopping for gifts to give- but maybe just hoping to that someone would receive that gift and finally really love them.

- There are a thousand ways we try to fill the hollow spot inside of us- that is only filled by the Love of our Creator God. And it just keeps breaking us more. Because everything that seems to address the problem keeps letting us down.
- New products we buy- get old and boring.
- They lose their shine.
- And even the "I Love You's" of people- can get old and boring- and those people let us down.
- That's the Hollow I'm talking about.
- So now, I'm going to show you 5 "trees" or at least plants- in the Bible- that you can remember to remind you of the Wondrous love of God that Isaac Watts wrote about in the last stanza of Joy to the World.
- **And it came to us- when God sent his boy to the world.**
- Alright, first stop on the Tree Tour
- **Gen 2:8-9**
- When God created the earth- he created humans to enjoy 3 things.
- Fellowship with him. They were to know and love God as he knew and loved them.
- Fellowship with each other. God said "Its not good for humans to be alone. I'm going to make them dependent on each other's love in order to take care of the creation I've put under them."
- And they were to enjoy the creation. God made every tree and seed bearing plant for them to both look at and see his beauty...and to eat and experience nourishment and deliciousness. Think about it. God goes EXTRA on creation. He could have made tasteless nutrition pellets- or he could have made human beings natural producers.
- Instead he created a world- that was dependent on each other.
- Think about the food web and the life cycles you learn in science class. That is a part of creation's dependence.

- **Gen 2:16-17**

- Then in the middle of this garden- he puts this Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil- and he tells them "Eat of any tree, just not that one."
- Ok- this isn't a sermon on this text, so I'm not gonna spend the time needed to explain everything about the WHY of this tree, but to get the big picture...God has given humanity a will. A will to either obey- and trust him- or disobey and go their own way.
- This is absolutely crucial for Love.
- For Love to be love- it must be chosen. Not forced.
- So as many questions as we could ask about the "Why" of this tree- I think at its root- is the opportunity for humanity to freely, of their own will, love God- the way he loves them.
- That's the first tree. On to the second one- which is not so much a tree- as it is a distortion of a tree.

#### • **Gen 3:17-19**

- The second tree on the tour is thorns.
- The man and the woman eventually distrusted God. They listened to a serpent- that represents, once again, elevating God's creation over the creator- and they decided God didn't love them. Instead, that he was tricking them. That the key to their flourishing was actually eating from the tree to become like God.
- The result. A curse.
- Now creation would work against humanity.
- Instead of working for it- to bring life- It would fight back. The ground would grow thorns and be hard to till and plant things.
- And eventually- in death- the ground would swallow them up
- The thorns are the second tree- and they represent a curse.

#### • **Gen 3:15**

- But- even in the middle of all this curse- God promises a seed. A baby. A son will be born to the woman- that will rise up and crush the head of the lying serpent. A boy will come to the world to bring joy to the world.

- Again- God's wondrous love breaking through- as far as the curse is found- as Isaac Watts puts it in his Christmas Carol.

Ok, third tree now. Is a Christmas tree- The evergreen. O Tannenbaum.

- In the words of Linus- "Its not such a bad tree, really, Charlie Brown. Maybe It just needs a little love."

- **Isaiah 55:12-13**
- **12 You will indeed go out with joy**
- **and be peacefully guided;**
- **the mountains and the hills will break into singing before you,**
- **and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.**
- **13 Instead of the thornbush, a cypress will come up,**
- **and instead of the brier, a myrtle will come up;**
- **this will stand as a monument for the Lord,**
- **an everlasting sign that will not be destroyed.**
- Doesn't that Sound like Joy to the World?
- Because of God's wondrous HESED faithful love- he turns cursed thorns into evergreens. That what the cypress is. A myrtle is a desert plant that can live in the harshest condtions.
- This is a part of Isaiah's prophecy that God is going to save his people. Yes- the same Isaiah that is often quoted about the Christ child. Born of a virgin- Immanuel. Wonderful, Counselor, Prince of peace. That Isaiah.
- There's lots of origin stories about the tradition of Xmas trees- but here's the one that matters.
- Evergreens remind us of the undying Covenant love of God- that even survives the curse of winter...or the drought of sin and death.
- Evergreens are a sign of joy.
- A snake crushing boy will born to a virgin. He will be the evergreen tree in the middle of the drought- and he will bring life and joy back to his dying people.

On to tree #4

- **Matt 27:29 & 42**

- The fourth tree is the Cross of Jesus.
- And notice- the thorns are back.
- Look at the strangeness of this scene.
- Jesus, the King of Creation. God in the flesh. The savior born in a manger, now grown and instead of reigning with joy. He is dying.
- The symbol of creation's curse on his brow.
- The mocking of humanity as he hangs on a wooden cross.
- Humans, who are supposed to exercise their authority over creation to bring flourishing- now crucify the King of Creation on a dead trees that have crafted into an execution device.
- Its humanity's God-given creativity used against the God that loves him.
- Yet, strangely, in that very moment is the deepest display of God's HESED- Covenant love.
- As the King that we are supposed to receive in love...is rejected. He is, like the thorns on his brow suggest, taking our curse on him.
- The perfect son of God is dying- to lead us to resurrection.
- God himself is making an exchange.
- Life for death. Love for hate.
- Its not unlike your Christmas tree. In order to bring the wonder and joy of Christmas into your home- you go out and choose a tree to be cut down...and cut off. In front of your eyes, Like Jesus over the course of his ministry- you watch the tree die. And then you cast it out.
- Such is the story of Jesus on the cross. Cut off- Cut down...to bring life and joy.
- Except your Christmas Tree doesn't resurrect.
- Jesus did.
- And remember where he first made his appearance?
- In a garden outside his tomb. Mistaken as the gardener- the Vine Dresser- the caretaker of the trees.

- **John 15:1-4**

- And for those who recognize Jesus as the one who takes away sins curse- we attach to him, like branches to a vine.

- And he flows into us the Holy Spirit- His resurrection power and presence work through us to be Evergreens to the world. Producing the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and self control. So that, to our neighbors- we represent the Trees in the original garden. We represent life and the HESED love of God to others.
- Those attached to Jesus by faith become evergreen- we become the Cypress and the Myrtle- because even in suffering- even in the drought and the worst conditions- sometimes even BECAUSE of the drought- our lives stand out as a beautiful non-anxious presence...and source of unconditional sacrificial love.
- **And that's all pointing to the final tree.**

- **Revelation 22:1-5**

- **Then he showed me the river of the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb**
- **2 down the middle of the city's main street. The tree of life was on each side of the river, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree are for healing the nations, 3 and there will no longer be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will worship him. 4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5 Night will be no more; people will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, because the Lord God will give them light, and they will reign forever and ever.**

- **Rev 22:1-2**

- Now- the Tree of Life is back. The one that God put in the garden. Now, there is no more tree of knowledge of Good and Evil.
- And the King- the sacrificial lamb of God. The boy to the world, is sitting on a throne- reigning. The earth has finally received her king.
- And There are 2 trees of life next to a river in the Holy City...and you get a new fruit to make jam with every month.
- Its why Clark's boss got him a jelly of the month club subscription for Xmas instead of money for a pool.

- Its biblical!
- And the nations- that means all humanity- are healed. No more darkness. No death or pain or mourning. Only humans reigning with God over redeemed creation forever and ever.

That's the 5<sup>th</sup> tree. The Tree of Life- forever.

That is the wonders of God's love through the trees.

- And what is our response to this love. This never stopping everlasting curse breaking joy to the world through God's love to the world?
- Well, that's what Romans 8 is about.
- Isn't there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?
- To that, the apostle Paul in the spirit of Linus says "Sure Charlie Brown, I can tell you what Christmas is all about!"
- "Lights please"

- **Romans 8:31-39**

- **What, then, are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He did not even spare his own Son but gave him up for us all. How will he not also with him grant us everything? 33 Who can bring an accusation against God's elect? God is the one who justifies. 34 Who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is the one who died, but even more, has been raised; he also is at the right hand of God and intercedes for us. 35 Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Can affliction or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? 36 As it is written:**

- **Because of you**
- **we are being put to death all day long;**
- **we are counted as sheep to be slaughtered.**

- **37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. --**