



'Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music' (Psalm 98:4)

**M**any of us will have sung *Joy to the World* during Christmas. Based on Psalm 98, the widely sung words are by hymn-writer Isaac Watts, best known for *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*. Christmas is often a time when we experience joy in the Lord; a camp or retreat is often another. Yet any Christian knows that it isn't all about mountain-top experiences. 'Life after the houseparty high' was a well-chosen seminar title at one weekend away during my CU days!

The first weeks of January at medical school are rarely a mountain-top experience. Many have exams, and the 6.30am start to arrive in time for theatre is even less appealing when it is dark and cold outside. We know we *should* still be joyful – but we don't feel it.

The reason for praise of Psalm 98 is that 'all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God' (Psalm 98:3). The praise isn't temporary. Yet we find writing from times of trial in scripture.

Psalm 142 finds David in a time of great trial (almost certainly because Saul was persecuting him). David tells God that he is in desperate need, weaker than those who persecute him. Yet he affirms that God is his refuge, and will be good to him. He has not lost his foundation in the Lord.

Paul wrote to the Philippians from jail; knowing he was likely to die for his faith. Though ready 'to depart and be with Christ', he sees why God keeps him on earth a while longer. But the purpose of his remaining is startling. We might expect him to stay to help the Philippian church grow in number, or in personal holiness, or in the knowledge of God. Yet it is all about joy.

*'I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me.'* (Philippians 1:25-26, NIV 1984)

Paul expresses the same sentiment in 2 Corinthians 1:24, as well as twice more in Philippians (3:1, 4:4). And it isn't just Paul. Jesus also talks about joy (John 15:11, 17:13).

That joy is based on the everlasting promises of God. Being joyful in the Lord doesn't mean we will be 'happy' every day. We're not promised that. But it does mean that even at difficult times, we can be certain, secure, and contented in the promises of God. Making these central to our worship and prayer life will be key not only to our own joy in the Lord, but to sharing this joy with those around us.

Let's all pray that during 2014 we might know the joy of the Lord in all that we do, and that others will see this in us, bringing glory to God. ■