

Sermon: The Song at the Sea Text: Exodus 15

Charles R. Biggs
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Reading from Scripture: Psalm 78

NKJ Exodus 15:1 Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to the LORD, and spoke, saying: "I will sing to the LORD, For He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!

2 The LORD *is* my strength and song, And He has become my salvation; He *is* my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will exalt Him.

3 The LORD *is* a man of war; The LORD *is* His name.

4 Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has cast into the sea; His chosen captains also are drowned in the Red Sea.

5 The depths have covered them; They sank to the bottom like a stone.

6 "Your right hand, O LORD, has become glorious in power; Your right hand, O LORD, has dashed the enemy in pieces.

7 And in the greatness of Your excellence You have overthrown those who rose against You; You sent forth Your wrath; It consumed them like stubble.

8 And with the blast of Your nostrils The waters were gathered together; The floods stood upright like a heap; The depths congealed in the heart of the sea.

9 The enemy said, 'I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; My desire shall be satisfied on them. I will draw my sword, My hand shall destroy them!'

10 You blew with Your wind, The sea covered them; They sank like lead in the mighty waters.

11 "Who *is* like You, O LORD, among the gods? Who *is* like You, glorious in holiness, Fearful in praises, doing wonders?

12 You stretched out Your right hand; The earth swallowed them.

13 You in Your mercy have led forth The people whom You have redeemed; You have guided *them* in Your strength To Your holy habitation.

14 "The people will hear *and* be afraid; Sorrow will take hold of the inhabitants of Philistia.

15 Then the chiefs of Edom will be dismayed; The mighty men of Moab, Trembling will take hold of them; All the inhabitants of Canaan will melt away.

16 Fear and dread will fall on them; By the greatness of Your arm They will be *as* still as a stone, Till Your people pass over, O LORD, Till the people pass over Whom You have purchased.

17 You will bring them in and plant them In the mountain of Your inheritance, *In* the place, O LORD, *which* You have made For Your own dwelling, The sanctuary, O LORD, *which* Your hands have established.

18 "The LORD shall reign forever and ever."

19 For the horses of Pharaoh went with his chariots and his horsemen into the sea, and the LORD brought back the waters of the sea upon them. But the children of Israel went on dry *land* in the midst of the sea.

20 Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.

21 And Miriam answered them: "Sing to the LORD, For He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!"

I. Introduction

Songs...they all make us happy. For one reason or another we sing them. We have all sung or "whistled while we work" so to speak. We sing many times when we are happy and oftentimes even when we are sad. We remember our favorite songs from the past and what do they do? They conjure up images of past occasions, past loves, past memories of which we are fond that enlighten our present and make us recount the varied steps that got us to our present place and age. There is a profound connection between songs and memories [*Repeat*].

Songs have importance in Scripture as well. Like a book of memories or a collection of photographs, God gave Israel songs to sing that recalled the past, and his works of salvation on their behalf. The Songs in Scripture are often called "redemptive songs". This is because they are God-centered (or *Theocentric*) and point back to the great acts that God performed in real history to redeem his people. Like a scrapbook full of memories, God provided the people of God with songs of redemption to remind them of the vivid memories of his constant love for them...particularly in the midst of struggles, temptations and uncertain times. The people of God have songs to reflect upon and look back with eagerness to remember the work that God has done on their behalf his love, care, concern, faithfulness, and ultimately the fact that no matter how distant in the past, God never changes he is the same yesterday, today and forever.

These songs, these memories, enlighten our present and help us on our journey in this life. This is exactly the purpose of the 'Song at the Sea' in the middle of the Book of Exodus. You might ask yourself, "Why did Moses pen a song in the midst of Israel's redemption from Egypt and prior to her coming to Sinai, and her taking the land promised because of God's covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?" You might wonder why a song is in the middle of the story of Israel's redemption, when God with a mighty hand redeemed them from bondage and slavery. But remember Moses' message to Pharaoh from God earlier in the Book of Exodus: "Let my people go so that they might worship me! Here is the beginning of Israel as a "redeemed-worshipping" community. So let us be reminded of the events that preceded this *Song at the Sea*.

a. Historical background to the Exodus and the Crossing of the Red Sea:

Do you remember the great event of the Exodus that precedes this song? Well, the Israelites were camped at Pi Hahiroth and Baal Zephon with the raging sea behind them and Pharaoh's army mightily pursuing them! This is the proverbial "rock and a hard place" that you've heard tell of! What were the Israelites to do? Were they to perish? Had God really remembered the covenant he made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as he said earlier in Ex. 2:24? Maybe now he had forgotten, maybe this was something that God has not foreseen? Was Israel truly God's firstborn son as he said in Ex. 4:24? Was this YHWH (Adonai) able to save...that is, was he truly the I AM of Ex. 3:14? In all the 10 plagues, God showed his mighty power, but is he able to deliver them from Pharaoh's strong army and chariots? Perhaps YHWH (Adonai) had the strength to get them "three days in the wilderness", to attack Egypt with plagues by his outstretched and mighty hand, but it was

as the Israelites said, only to have his children die in the wilderness? Was this the case? Was God able to deliver from the strong hand of Pharaoh? Yes!

God had brought the Israelites out of Egypt with a mighty and outstretched hand so that they might worship him in the desert. The trip was not over in spite of how it seemed to the Israelites at the time! God had Moses stretch out his hand and he parted the waters of the sea. In fact, all of the Israelites, men, women and children passed through the waters to safety. But the Egyptians, when they tried to pursue were destroyed by the waters! So that when the Israelites got their breath and stood at a pace in the distance, they looked back and saw the full redemption of the LORD.

On the other side of the Sea as soon as Moses reached a “safe” distance, he led the people of Israel in song. You would think he would be worried about the next day’s provision; or perhaps the directions of how he would proceed to the place of worship from there; or maybe he would have been concerned to understand God’s purposes in even allowing the Egyptians to hold God’s people in slavery for over 400 years! But no! Moses led the Israelites in worship for the simple reason of who God *is* in his revelation to them *and what he had done in love for his people*.

As a community of saints, many of the Israelites would have sung this song with great tears of joy and sadness, remembering this event when God made the impossible...possible, and thus the *reason* to worship him. The God who had indeed remembered the covenant he had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob delivered his people from the past bondage and slavery in Egypt so that his people might be free to serve him in the future [*Repeat*]! Here is a song that reflected on the attributes of the only God who could redeem his people. This song would be remembered for many generations to come and every time that it was sung, it would have reminded the Israelites of the One whom they serve and love and the One to whom they owe their utmost allegiance and obedience- -all of their worship!

Now notice the way the song is given to us in chapter 15 of Exodus; that is, notice the *form* of the song. Chapter 15, verses 1-12 is about the past redemption from Egypt, verses 13-18 are the present and future promises, or redemptive acts that God will perform on behalf of his people, and verses 19-21 are a repetition of the song with Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron. The immediate repetition of the song not only shows us that it was for men and women alike as the people of God, but more importantly, it teaches us that this song was to be continually sung or repeated. The acts of God were to be remembered and meditated upon continually! All of the people of God, men and women, even several generations removed from the Exodus would still sing this song – the great redemptive event on behalf of God’s people and of all the OT! The people of God were to be a worshipping community!

II. Exegesis of Moses’ Song at the Sea (Ex. 15:1-21)

a. Notice what is Moses singing about.

In the song here in Exodus 15, Moses is reflecting in a God-centered (or *Theocentric*) manner on the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Who has been revealed to him and now to Israel and even her enemy, the nation of Egypt. He who with a strong arm and mighty hand delivered them from under the pharaoh of Egypt, the most formidable and powerful man of his day; the pharaoh who ruled the mightiest nation

known to men at this time in history. God who delivered his people despite the power of the so-called mighty gods of Egypt. When God goes to battle, our Great and Divine Warrior, who can stand? We must appreciate the fact that God as Divine Warrior or a “man of war” always leads his people in victory regardless of the battle.

In chapter 15, verses 1-12, Moses sings of the attributes of God and he repeats the defeat of the Egyptian power. Moses leads the Israelites to begin their song with exaltation of God because of his holiness and power. Look at v. 1: “I will sing to the LORD, for He is ‘highly exalted’ or he ‘has triumphed gloriously’, as some translations have it. Then in the latter part v. 1 we see the first mention of his great strength: “The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea.” Then in v.2, Moses sings that not only is the Lord his strength and the content of his singing, but in his redemptive work, he has become his salvation. In addition, Moses sings in v. 2b that God is the covenantal God, the God of his father who keeps his promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Then the first part of the song ends with another exaltation. The song begins and ends the first refrain with an exaltation of the mighty God in Israel.

In v. 3, we want to appreciate the LORD’s attribute as Divine Warrior or “man of war”, and his name is the LORD. *Who God is* is communicated in his holy name and what he has done is revealed in the LORD as a Warrior on behalf of his people. Moses records here the magnificent and awe-inspiring attribute of God as a Divine Warrior who wars against the enemies of his people to bring great salvation! The God who has revealed himself to Moses and Israel by name, the name of “I AM” back in Ex. 3:14, is praised for the revelation of his being and power!

Now you should appreciate a pattern in the song. That is: between God’s attributes or revelation of himself - and his acts. Remember, God and his acts...*Who God is...What God has done...is what Moses is communicating in this sacred song. What is the act which Israel was to remember? Again, vv. 4-5: “Pharaoh’s chariots and his army he has hurled into the sea. The best of Pharaoh’s officers are drowned in the Red Sea. The deep waters have covered them; they sank to the depth like a stone.”* God as Divine Warrior has destroyed his enemies and the enemies of his people! Just because he is the LORD - - that is His Name - -and there is no other!

Notice in vv. 6-10, there is the remembrance of the great war or conflict between the strong and powerful arm of the Lord and the strong arm or power of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Moses sings in v. 6 that your “right hand” was both “majestic in power” and that it “shattered the enemy. Nothing can withstand the power of the Lord’s outstretched hand...nothing, including the most powerful nation on the face of the earth! In v. 7, Moses describes God’s dealings with Pharaoh and the great Egyptian army. He sings, “In the greatness of your majesty, you threw down [*overthrown; beat down- sroh*][T] those who opposed you...you unleashed [*sent forth- xL;v;T*] your burning anger or wrath...it consumed them.” God is truly Divine Warrior, notice the devastating language: God *threw down*, or *beat down*, then he *sent forth*, or better *unleashed* his wrath against Pharaoh and his powerful army. You can feel in the verbs here, God’s power pulverizing and devastating his enemies!

Verse 8 says that “by the blast of your nostrils” the waters piled up [^yP,a; x;Wrb.W]...they stood firm like a wall and congealed in the heart of the sea. The *wind or breath of God’s nostrils* and the *congealing* of the sea or the waters should remind us of the creation account of Genesis 1. Remember: How God’s Spirit hovered or brooded over the face of the deep, bringing order from chaos? Remember how God divided or separated the waters to make the heavens and the seas? This time, God has used the waters to destroy, to bring death rather than life as in the creation. Remember, for the Egyptians, water was the source of all of their life; ironically, the LORD makes the source of their life, the place of their death. The God of the Exodus, is the God who is worthy to be worshipped as the God of all creation. Not only does he save his people from slavery and bondage in Egypt, not only does he bring them through the Red Sea with his almighty, supernatural powers, but all of creation is ruled by this Majestic King- -there is nothing outside His rule and authority including the mighty power of the sea!

Now you must understand that to an Israelite (or for that matter any of the people’s who lived in the ANE), the sea was a place of chaos. The sea was the embodiment of chaos where Leviathan lived and lurked in order to destroy (or other frightening sea creatures). Understand this: the sea was no place for an Israelite, they were terribly frightened of the sea. To have walked through even when God made a path through the sea would have taken a great amount of faith. For Israel, the sea was a place of chaos and we must remember that it is in this chaos of the Egyptian’s death in water, that God is establishing his people. From chaos to order, God is bringing the flood of his wrath down upon his enemies so that he might save those who have found favor in his eyes as Noah before them. God divides the waters here as he did in the creation account in order to bring his people from chaos in Egypt to rest and order in the promised land. What a beautiful picture and what a reason to sing along with Moses this great song!

In verse 9-12, Moses sings now of Egypt’s boasting in their power and particularly in their so-called mighty gods. In v. 9, Moses sings of the enemy boasting and God’s response: The enemy was determined with all their heart to pursue Israel and submit them back to a yoke of slavery...they were determined in spite of the dreadful plagues God had sent upon them earlier in the story...they were determined, because God had hardened Pharaoh’s heart so that his power might be displayed over him.

What we want to appreciate about the Exodus from Egypt is this: In one way, God was drawing Pharaoh out on the battlefield, out in the open, out to the middle of a clearing in history, so that all the nations around them would know that YHWH, I AM is God, the only God who rules all of creation (despite the so-called gods of Egypt). He alone has power, and he alone is worthy to be praised! Again, in v.9 Moses speaks of God’s attributes and then his actions. What did God do in response to Egypt’s pride and boasting? He led them out in the midst of the waters of the Red Sea, the flood waters of chaos, in order that he might destroy them when he blew with his breath [*ruach*], as v. 10 tells us. After God was finished with the Egyptians, their memory in this song was not only humiliation from a few chariot wheels stuck in the mud, but was the memory of a foolish and sinful people trying to outwit the majestic God of creation in a game of “cat and mouse.”

How will Israel remember the mighty power of Egypt? Look at the end of v. 10: “...the sea covered them. They sank like lead in the mighty waters.” Remember from this: The enemies of God don’t float

for anyone interested, they sink like lead. The Egyptians sank like lead- - lead that was as hard and heavy as their hearts toward the God of Israel! What Moses began with exaltation of God, again ends in exaltation in v. 11: “Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you- - majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?”

As the Egyptians were sinking down to the bottom of the sea, as their mouths were filling with the raging waters, perhaps they called out to Ra or their god of the waters, Prince Nu for deliverance and salvation! But if they had heard the words of Moses from the beginning in his dialogues with Pharaoh and his magicians, and if they had truly seen and understood the works which God performed on behalf of Israel, then perhaps they would have understood the song of Moses when he sings: “Who among the gods is like you, O LORD?” But alas, their hearts were hard- - and they could not see nor understand the acts of God. The Egyptians trusted in dead idols- - not the only Living God!

In verses 13-18, the focus moves from the past act of deliverance to the present and future hopes of Israel! As the God of creation has delivered them in the Red Sea, so he will be faithful to them as v. 13 says: “In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling.” Here we see the connection we made at the beginning between a song and a memory, or how a song can conjure up true hope in the present. What would drive the Israelite on by faith was knowing God’s unfailing love and the strength he would use to guide them. Exodus 15 forms a bridge of hope between God’s great act of deliverance from Egypt and the beginning of their journey in the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land [Repeat]. This song was to be their strength as they passed through every test in the wilderness, as they received the Law on Sinai, and as they entered Canaan surrounded by many nations stronger than them!

From the perspective of this song, nothing could separate Israel from the love of God, nothing could ever threaten Israel because of the Lord’s strength and protection on their behalf. This song must have brought great hope to enlighten the circumstances of the people of God in whatever situation they would find themselves.

From verses 14-16, we see the nations that will tremble at the power of Israel’s God: Philistia, Edom, Moab, and Canaan will be terrified with the news of YHWH’s redemption of Israel. Nothing shall stand in their way...nothing, no nation shall keep God from fulfilling his covenantal promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Remember that these were the nations that inhabited Canaan, the Promised Land of which the Israelites were to inherit! Moses wrote this prior to the Israelite’s wilderness testings and their entering the Promised Land. It was a song that should have been in their hearts so that fear of greater peoples might not consume them. No matter how “big” the people seemed in comparison to themselves, no matter how powerful the nations seemed, the Israelites were to: “Fear not, stand still and see the redemption of the LORD.” Their focus was to be on the God who had already delivered them with a strong arm- - and could do it again!

In the final part of Moses’ song, in verse 17 (the last refrain if you will), Moses sets the tone of the future. Because of the covenant and God’s enduring love and faithfulness, he will bring and plant Israel

on the mountain of their inheritance. The place Moses' describes as: "...the place, O LORD, you made for your dwelling [word in Heb.], the sanctuary, O LORD, your hands established [word in Heb.]" Then Moses ends with one great exaltation of praise: "The LORD will reign forever and ever!" What he has done for Israel in leading them out of Egypt is just the beginning of his acts on their behalf. He has revealed himself in all his majesty, love and power, and He will continue to be faithful to his promises!

b. What is Moses' focus in the song?

The focus of the *Song at the Sea* is to teach Israel, particularly future generations who did not live during the Exodus, that their God is truly THE All-Powerful and Majestic God of all Creation! He is the faithful and loving God who keeps his promises and therefore they should never fear, because he will always be with them, to deliver them from all their enemies. The past deliverance was always to enlighten Israel's present circumstances and to encourage loving obedience to the God who truly delivers them! These events are designed to teach God's people, then and now, to look beyond the events themselves, because the song is about the victory of God [Pause]!

In addition to the Song at the Sea, there are other "songs of redemption" in Scripture! These songs are means by which God is praised for his saving acts as a worshipping community!

III. Other "Songs of Redemption" in Scripture

Many of the Psalms for instance are *songs of redemption*. These psalms praise God not in the abstract but for some concrete act of deliverance, whether on a personal or a national level. Particularly Psalms 40 and 78.

In your own study, you may consider Numbers 21: *Song of Provision*; Deut. 32: *Song of Moses*; 1 Samuel 2:1ff *Hannah's Song*; 2 Samuel 22: *David's Song of Victory*; Luke 1:46-55: *Mary's Song*. Notice the connection in all these songs between who God is in his character and what he has done in his acts to redeem his people!

But songs of redemption are not just something found in the OT, or for the people of God in the past! We today as a people of God have our own "songs" as a worshipping community living in the Last Days! God never changes!

IV. Our "Song of Redemption" in Christ

a. The death, resurrection and ascension of Christ

The good news of our redemption or deliverance is that Jesus, the true Israelite overcame as Divine Warrior all of his and our enemies. He died for us, was raised and now has dominion over all of the earth - all of the nations! Our message as the people of God is to all the nations which should repent and tremble in fright at the power of our God in Christ, who will come again on the clouds as Rev. 19 teaches, to judge the world! Christ's dominion is forever and God has redeemed us with a strong arm out of the Kingdom of Darkness and he has transferred us into the Kingdom of the Son he loves! As Israel was released from the dominion of Pharaoh, so the Apostle Paul teaches in Romans 6 that sin is no longer our master. "Sin shall not have dominion over you," he teaches us!

Because of the work of Christ on our behalf, we also sing redemptive songs concerning *who* God is and *what he has done* for us in Christ. Notice those who have been redeemed by the great act of God in Christ in the Book of Revelation. Particularly Revelation 5.

In Revelation 5:12, the creatures and the elders are joined by countless angels:

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!"

The song sung by the oppressed Israelites in the OT is now universal, for Christ has come, and through him all creation is brought back to God. The song ends, as does the Song at the Sea, with the announcement that God will reign forever and ever. Church: this is our new song in Christ!

One more passage in Revelation to consider is Revelation 15:3-4:

3 They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: "Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints!

4 Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, For Your judgments have been manifested."

V. Conclusion

Let us sing a "new song" to our LORD for the great things he has done in Christ. Col. 3:17ff teaches us: "Let the word of Christ dwell in us richly as we sing *psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs*, making melody in our hearts. Our past is noble, our present secure, our future is certain "in Christ" and so we sing with the Psalmist: "His steadfast love endures forever". Church: Let us say together today: "Christ shall reign forever and ever"- - this is our new song!

Hymn of Praise: *Christ Shall Have Dominion*- Hymn 439

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