

The Celebration Song by the Seashore Exodus 15:1-21

When the LORD moved upon His servants through the ages to gift us His Word, it was not like a factory assembly line. All the books of the Bible proceeded from the same source, yes, the Holy Spirit; all the books share the same chief subject, the character and work of God through Christ and Him crucified; the same aim, the glory of God; the same effect intended, to bring people from death to life and into spiritual life into conformity with His holiness. But the variation we find from those who penned scripture, spanning hundreds of years, concerns *how* they documented the content given them by God.

Most of it is narrative, a story. In fact, it's one larger story containing many stories going all in one direction, hundreds of tributaries feeding the one Amazon. Much of it is historical narrative—not circumventing peoples, places, animals, or events that shook the day or the mundane (which carries its own argument for scripture's inspiration). We're in the genre called *The Law* here in Exodus, which is a combination of covenantal instruction and theological history. The genre of prophecy has its own beauty and power, a fusion of forthtelling and foretelling. But this week, we find ourselves in a section which stretches beyond an orderly narrative. Tucked inside of this unfolding story by Moses, we encounter the inspired creativity of song and verse. We're privileged to situate our footing inside of longings fulfilled and praises exclaimed. Exodus 15 ushers us into the wardrobe of truth with joy freely expressed by a newly freed people. We journey from prose to poetry, crafted to glorify the God who continues to make Himself known.

In fact, in this poem of praise, we're moving from God proclaiming Himself "*I am the LORD*"—12 times, in fact, from chapters 6-12—to Israel now lauding the same in verse 3, ***The LORD is His name!*** What Yahweh has revealed about Himself will now spill over from an impassioned song which concludes with a spirited, tambourine jam session of reverential worship.¹

I. Praise for Yahweh's Power

I'm sure setting the scene of chapter 15 had its difficulties for future generations, including today's efforts. I can envision an Israelite boy having a conversation decades later with an old Hittite buddy named Hantili, "Han, you just had to be there, friend." What spiritual euphoria. The emotional transition from fears of dying via drowning, spear, or trampling to staring breathlessly, with utter astonishment, at a calmed seashore, attempting to take in what just happened. And to top it all, it was all accomplished apart from individual or collective Israelite power, ingenuity, or wisdom. It's why the song is frontloaded with what one commentator called an "irrepressible enthusiasm for God Himself."²

What is the typical response when something happens to someone, which turns out to be completely for their benefit, and, in no part or way was the result of anything in them or from them? Songs happen. Music is made. Praise pulsates, accumulates, and must escape the soul somehow, and often that somehow is something like Exodus 15. In fact, when God does what He does—reveals His glory to a people whose mouths were once "*an open grave*,"³ He is a LORD

¹ Ross Blackburn, *NSBT: The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 53.

² T. Desmond Alexander, *Exodus*, 297

³ Paul, quoting Psalm 5:9 in Romans 3, in the context of sweeping human sinfulness, expresses this death-state and how we use our tongues naturally.

who enlivens His people with “*praise...the fruit of lips that acknowledge His name.*”⁴ When divine glory is tasted, silence is not on the scale of options!

To the song...what did they sing of? Verse 1 tells us first who they sang to, ***I will sing to the LORD, for He is highly exalted; The horse and its rider He has hurled into the sea.*** Who sang? ***Moses and the sons of Israel.*** Now, we might be somewhat mesmerized in thinking about the sound of 600,000 men, with women and children, filling the air. I’m often captured by 160 of us singing to the God who has accomplished mercies on our behalf. So, to begin, let the vastness of the number of people belting out Yahweh’s praises capture your attention. Some of the most powerful memories in singing praise to this God are those I’ve shared with thousands of others simultaneously. And it wasn’t simply the number of worshipers alone that contributed to the gravitas of those moments, but it was also the content expressed with unity. The LORD was moving our hearts in the same direction. One million plus Israelites dumbfounded on those Red Sea dunes witnessed God visibly judging His enemies.

Here, we see a refrain of God’s exaltation and His enemies’ humiliation. He is ***highly exalted*** because He showed Himself superior to Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt, while they are brought low, ***hurled*** into the watery depths. In verse 3 Moses expressed a measure of God’s success with the descript moniker, ***The LORD is a warrior; The LORD is His name.*** He alone, facing the most powerful army known at the time, shows Himself a superior combatant. His exploits are unanswerable, worthy of being acknowledged and extolled in the highest heavens. But the arrayed and proud militant—best among the Egyptians? Verse 4, ***Pharaoh’s chariots and his army [Yahweh] has cast into the sea.*** Among them, ***the choicest of his officers.*** Verse 10 conveys the same with different imagery—***They sank like led in the mighty waters.***

Struck with the weight of God’s glory, He is the LORD who created this scene of destruction and deliverance. The Egyptians exalted themselves against Him, even after the disorienting weeks of one plague after another. They bowed up like an army of children carrying Nerf guns onto the beaches of Normandy. And we see this pride most clearly expressed in verse 9. Notice the hubris inside of the 5 statements concerning what the Egyptians believe will most assuredly take place. ***The enemy said, ‘I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; My desire shall be gratified against them; I will draw out my sword, my hand will destroy them.’*** This proud army was, in the end, verse 7, met with the overwhelming ***greatness of [Yahweh’s] excellence.*** The Egyptians received what they deserved in their lust for power, their devotion to false gods, and their mistreatment of God’s people.

Speaking of mistreatment, another vivid image makes it into Moses’ song at the end of verse 7, ***You send forth Your burning anger, and it consumes them as chaff.*** One scholar expressed that this word ***chaff*** is the same word for *stubble* back in chapter 5, which the Israelites, recall, were forced to gather in making makeshift bricks. They knew how flammable, weak, and unstable those stubbles were. In light of God’s inexhaustible strength, who among God’s enemies exists outside the categories of weakness and instability? None is the answer. Time doesn’t permit me to speak of the unconventional warfare of shouting to bring down a wall to defeat one’s enemies,⁵ or of Midianites turning on themselves due to the sound of trumpets and sight of torches.⁶ Nor of Elijah

⁴ Hebrews 13:15, “Through [Christ] then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.”

⁵ Joshua 6

⁶ Judges 7

and the prophets of Baal.⁷ Nor of the grand Assyrian army, 185,000, whom the angel of the LORD struck down in their sleep.⁸ Chaff. Stubble.

We should always keep in mind that our God is forever able to check His enemies at any time, any place, for every reason that is consistent with His glory and the good of His people. In a world that would just as well snuff out the voices of God's people given the opportunity, in a world hostile to God Himself, it would do us good to keep this truth close.⁹ But closer than this is the truth that the enemies of God's people are no longer defined by nation-states and neighboring superpowers. We are warring primarily against the fleshly tendencies within us, and the powers and principalities of spiritual forces in the world marked by pride, unbelief, hostility, etc. So, as we consider with Moses and Israel that God is a warrior, and because what God has revealed to us has progressed, we understand the apostle Paul's words to identify our enemies with greater clarity. We have armor to put on as we fight the devil's schemes and sin to put to death as we war with our own deceitful hearts.¹⁰ And when it's all said and done, we'll be preserved as "*more than conquerors through [Jesus] who loved us.*"¹¹ Not simply, but more than. Because the point is Him, not us. We join in this "irrepressible enthusiasm" of God's power revealed in His Son.

II. Praise for Yahweh's Purchase

Moses continued to reflect on God's kindness, *At the blast of Your nostrils*, he writes in verse 8, *the waters were piled up, The flowing waters stood up like a heap; The deeps were congealed in the heart of the sea.* Moses sets about to offer a kind of word-decor to the whole experience. This metaphor of God's nostrils prevailing, not competing chariots, or horses, or an army of His own, but His sovereign manipulation of earth's winds won out. He took no pains to part a sea, destroy an army, and save an unworthy people. More easily than we breath in and out, all of creation is at His command.¹² How many songs do we sing that help us to belt out this very truth?¹³ He moved the created order to convey His compassion for His people.

But let's back up to verse 2, *The LORD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation.* How had He become their salvation? Verse 13, *In Your lovingkindness You have led the people whom You have redeemed.* Yes, He loved Israel. But what was the premiere picture of this affection for them? Redemption, the twin brother of the word *purchase* from verse 16. With these two words, the Passover is in view with Moses' word choice. Recall that to *redeem* something or someone is to purchase, or to buy back. And when a thing or person is redeemed, its ownership changes hands.¹⁴ In this case, Egypt in some sense *owned* Israel for 430 years. Yet, by the mercy of God, His death angel passed over their firstborn because of the lamb's blood on their doorposts. A price was paid. Lamb blood was shed and Israeli children were spared. They could not and they would not and we cannot and we will not stop singing about this redemption price.

⁷ 1 Kings 18

⁸ All of these are initial sightings of God leading His people in 2 Cor. 2:14 "triumphal procession." They are victorious because God gave the victory. Because of Christ, we know and sing of victory in an even greater sense, 2 Cor. 15:57.

⁹ Romans 8:7

¹⁰ Ephesians 6:11, Colossians 3:5

¹¹ Romans 8:37

¹² Peter Enns, *NIV Application Commentary: Exodus*, 299.

¹³ One example of a hundred, *God Moves in a Mysterious Way* by William Cowper, "God moves in a mysterious way! His wonders to perform; He plants His footsteps in the sea and rides upon the storm." *Hymns of Grace*: 88.

¹⁴ Douglas Stuart, *NAC: Exodus*, 357.

In Colossians 1, Paul makes the very same connection. Colossians 1:13, “[God] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son...” There’s the ownership changing hands. We belonged to a foul kingdom with a sinister father. But God acted upon us. The very next sentence, “[God] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” We personally share the joyful sentiments of Exodus 15:2 in unison with each other do we not? ***This is my God, and I will praise Him!*** Redeemed how we love to proclaim it! Redeeming love has been my theme and shall be till I die! With His own blood He bought Her, and for Her life He died! With Him is plentiful redemption—Psalm 130, and at least 20 other Psalms expressing the truth that God purchased a people.¹⁵ For thousands of years His children have been singing it, with multiplied thousands yet to unfold.

III. Praise for Yahweh’s Presence

In one sense, verses 1-14 sing of the victory at hand. Israel had remarkably vivid visual aids helping them to express the conquering power of God. Beginning here in verse 14, however, we move from the victory at hand to the victory ahead. That is, that the route at the Red Sea was not an end in itself. It was simply the first stage in a process that will find its high-water mark of Israel eventually living under the nearness of Yahweh’s special presence. Something about a tent.¹⁶

But Moses and Israel aren’t simply retrospective about what just happened, and they aren’t paralyzed by the dead Egyptians lying on the shores either. Beginning in verse 14 they look forward, singing prophetically we might say. ***The peoples have heard, they tremble; Anguish has gripped the inhabitants of Philistia.*** ¹⁵ ***Then the chiefs of Edom were dismayed; The leaders of Moab, trembling grips them; All the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away.*** ¹⁶ ***Terror and dread fall upon them; By the greatness of Your arm they are motionless as stone.*** As Moses structured this communal song of praise, he was led to look ahead at the presence of foreign powers and all the baggage that came with them. He was familiar with these places. He grew up as a figurehead in Egypt, exposed to the royal concerns that these nations in Asia Minor might pose to Egypt.¹⁷ And he writes, familiar of the threats over the borders, that they are all shaking in their boots. The deliverance of Israel created a few sleepless nights in distant lands. God’s promise of place and conquest will not return void. He is now known among the nations, and His presence to judge has become a force to be reckoned with.

But His presence for Israel will be a mercy.¹⁸ Verse 17 & 18, ***You will bring them and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance, The place, O LORD, which You have made for Your dwelling, The sanctuary, O Lord, which Your hands have established.*** ¹⁸ ***The LORD shall reign forever and ever.*** It truly is what God has been doing in the world from day one. He’s making Himself known as the God of power—all things at His disposal and nothing too difficult for Him; the God of purchase—a people will be secured by a divinely verified, sacrifice; and the God of presence—a people brought into sweet fellowship with Him through that power and purchase. Again, it’s what the end of time will bring.¹⁹ Yet, these are first steps. God grants this foundational

¹⁵ Many of which we plan to consider this summer from the Psalms!

¹⁶ Alexander, 297.

¹⁷ Stuart, 357-358.

¹⁸ Psalm 73:28

¹⁹ Revelation 21:3, “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.”

layer of understanding His presence with His people—*the place made for His dwelling, the sanctuary*. A people exiled from their homeland sing of a new sense of place and belonging which will orbit around God’s precious and holy nearness. He will tabernacle among them soon in part, and later with a demonstrative fullness.²⁰

This song was apparently a family affair. Miriam is afforded honor and takes her place in leading Israel in worship, as she *took the timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dancing*. It can be reasonably understood here that by the Spirit, Moses authored the song and Miriam popularized it among all the women. And there’s no reason to believe that it was a one-hit wonder. Rising from homes for generations was the story-song of God’s deliverance through the Red Sea. To bring it all together, it’s one way we understand and experience the presence of God among us. Psalm 22:3, “*God dwells in the praises of His people.*”

Conclusion

This framework of power, purchase and presence is the glorious atmosphere inside which all believers live and move. It will be a central refrain of our songs a billion ages from now. In fact, when John was envisioning the magnificent sights of the new heavens and the new earth in Revelation, these themes of Exodus 15 make a surprising, yet unsurprising appearance. Listen to what John saw in Revelation 15:3, “*And [those who conquered the beast sang] the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, ‘Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty!’*” Folks, we’re not finished with this song! Exodus 15 will be on the playlist of heaven, belted out by those who conquered through the blood of Jesus our LORD!

You see, the thing that sets us apart from Temple Israel a couple of miles west of us is that when they this song on any given Saturday, they’re still attempting to clutch shadows. It’s only in Christ that the shadows are swept away.²¹ We now see that Yahweh who commanded the Red Sea is the Risen Christ who calmed the Sea of Galilee. Christ’s power—He routed the enemies that condemned us to the grave! Christ’s purchase—He bought us with His blood to bring us out of the grave! Christ’s presence—God did what was necessary in His Son to bring us into that place with nothing wedged in between. Full, free, uninhibited fellowship lies ahead, amen. But sweet and true fellowship is enjoyed in this life, to the praise of God’s grace. And if that is so, might the LORD receive our praises this very hour.

²⁰ John 1:14

²¹ Hebrews 8:13