

## Singing and Worship

Exodus 15:1-21

The most basic and fundamental response of the Christian to the work of God in salvation is to sing his praise. In that work of salvation, Jesus tells us that God is seeking worshipers. Worship is a broader concept than simply singing, incorporating a number of elements in a dialogue between God and his people, yet singing is such a necessary, essential aspect of that worship that without it, there really is no worship!

So we read in,

Ps. 95:1 “Oh come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! 2 Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!...6 Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!”

“Oh come, let us worship.” What that means is, “Oh come, let us sing.” Last week we studied the salvation which God accomplished for his people. Today we have a song to study, the Song of Moses.

Last week the text was,

14:30 “So the Lord saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians.”

Today it is,

v.1a “Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to the LORD...”

The redemption described in,

v.19

And this chapter show us,

## I. SINGING AS THE RESPONSE TO REDEMPTION.

I want two things to be abundantly obvious this afternoon, and the first is that this is a song of worship. Therefore, all our analytical study of the words and verses might have the danger to detract from the very purpose for those words! Don't forget that purpose. These are the words sung by those 600,000 men who, with their wives and children, had just witnessed the parting of the Red Sea. They had walked through on dry ground, and when Pharaoh's armies followed, the waters fell back upon them and drowned them all! So these words are filled with awe and an immediate sense of God's power and glory. Their hearts were probably still pounding! This was no cold, dry, dispassionate repetition of old, familiar words. This was a spontaneous outburst of exuberant praise.

Having said that, the other thing that I want to be obvious is how meaningful these words actually are. How deep in content they are, how rich in doctrine and theology. And I want that realization to be a striking contrast to what is found in too much of modern, contemporary worship music. Over the last generation there has been a lot of talk about the so-called worship wars of our day which focus upon the style of music--whether it is contemporary or traditional, or now blended. Yet the much deeper matter is this concern about content. The lyrics to modern music are too often far too subjective--that is they express, often with ongoing repetition, the thoughts and feelings of the singer. And whatever references there are to God are singular, undeveloped, shallow, and often sentimental or somewhat mystical.

The goal of singing, however, which is before us this afternoon, is to sing about the glories and attributes of God with a delighted satisfaction in his personal goodness, and to do it with both a deep reverence for the transcending glory of God and an

exuberance befitting a soul recently rescued and freed from the bondage of slavery.

So we should sing about,

**A. The salvation of God.**

The salvation which God accomplished! Look at, v.2 “The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation.”

What is the subject of that sentence? The LORD. Yahweh. God is. The LORD is my strength. The Lord is my song, my joy, my delight. And He is my salvation.

Moses is not singing about anything that he did! He is not glorifying any decision that he made, nor any strength or ability of his. After all, all that he did was stretch out his hand over the sea. And when it was time for the water to come back upon Pharaoh, all he did was stretch out his hand again! He goes on, v.2 “...He is my God, and I will praise him, my father’s God, and I will exalt him.”

My God, and my father’s God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The God of history, the God of Israel, the God who has done all these great and mighty deeds! And the God who is faithful to his own covenant promises, a faithfulness to which Moses refers when he speaks of God as “my father’s God.” He writes in,

Deut. 4:37 “And because he loved your fathers and chose their offspring after them and brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power, 38 driving out before you nations greater and mightier than yourselves, to bring you in, to give you their land for an inheritance, as it is this day, 39 know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.”

You see, God is not merely the God of my fathers, Moses sings. He is the God who loved my fathers and in that love made a promise to their descendants! He is a God who keeps those promises made through my fathers! This ought to be especially important for our covenant children, or any of you who had the privilege of being raised in a godly way by godly parents. Praise the God of your parents, who because he loved your parents extended that love to you!

v.2 “...He is my God, and I will praise him, my father’s God, and I will exalt him.”

And then,

v.3

He is a man of war! That’s his very identity, and that is how he accomplished your salvation. That is his name. He is not a pacifist. He is not weak nor mild. He is a conquering king who accomplished his salvation for the people whom he chose to love only by bring about a crushing defeat to his enemies.

Therefore a very important part of this song of salvation is the singing about,

**B. The judgment of God.**

A lot of verses are given to this, with great emphasis. This must be embarrassing to those who claim to believe the Bible but refuse to think of God in terms of judgment and death. Let alone sing about it! Just look at the words of this song.

v.4-10

Moses is singing to God’s praise, for his anger and wrath, his fury and the blast of his nostrils! God turns his enemies into stubble, and Moses sings about it! This subject comes up again in,

v.14-16

All the nations see this work of God, this judgment of God. All the nations are terrified by the power of God. And Moses sings about it all! Just as we will in heaven,

Rev. 19:1 “After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, 2 for his judgments are true and just for he has judged the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and has avenged on her the blood of his servants.” 3 Once more they cried out, “Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever.” 4 And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who was seated on the throne, saying, “Amen. Hallelujah!” 5 And from the throne came a voice saying, “Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great.” 6 Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.”

If you are familiar with the words to Handel’s Messiah, this is the text for the Hallelujah chorus, and it amazes me to see and hear non-Christians sing those words in our day in the celebration of Christmas. They are a song of death and judgment to unbelievers! “Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up forever and ever...Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.”

You have to ask, how often in the worship services of our day do we sing about the death and destruction of the wicked? How often do we consider that subject as ascribing glory and praise to God! We should, so much more. After all, Moses did! All in the broad context of,

## **II. SINGING AS THE PROCLAMATION OF THE GLORY OF GOD.**

That’s what all this is about. God’s glory!

v.6a

v.7

Look especially at that word “excellence.” Sometimes translated “majesty”. It is a word meaning exaltation, rising up to glory. Most often the word is used negatively to describe human pride, for it is always inappropriate as men to exalt ourselves. For the glory belongs to God, and thus we sing of “the greatness of his excellence.”

That majesty, that glory, is unique. It belongs to God alone.

### **A. The uniqueness of God’s majesty.**

v.11

That is such a marvelously reverent question, “Who is like you, O Lord?” It is obviously a rhetorical question, for the answer is “no one!” No one is like God. None of the false gods created in the minds of the people have any legitimate comparison to the one, true God. None of them have any of his glory!

None of them compare to God, who is “glorious in holiness.” Glorious means exalted, superior to all others. And only one can be superior--by definition all others are inferior. Superior in holiness! Infinitely superior. God is perfectly holy, perfect in his sacred holiness. He is entirely separate from any moral imperfection, and exalted as pure and right in every way possible.

And this is what we ought to be singing about! The fullness of the doctrinal, theological descriptions of the glories and attributes of God. And that ought to be what is important in our songs--not whether or not is an old favorite with a catchy tune. This is the measure of good hymns, those that develop throughout the hymn a description of the uniqueness of God’s majesty. Then show

forth,

**B. The extent of his power.**

v.11 "...fearful in praises, doing wonders."

In other words, to be feared and revered for his great praiseworthy deeds. Deeds of power--miraculous power, which is the meaning of the word "wonders." The description of that power continues in,

v.12 "You stretched out your right hand; the earth swallowed them."

It was Moses' hand that was stretched out, wasn't it? Moses was the man whom God used. But whose power was it? Whose right hand was it really?

Such is the extent of God's power. God is a spirit, who does not have a body like men. He has no right hand, as we would think of it, but that description is used of him to show forth this extent of his power. No one else compares. No one else even comes close.

And then, as is so often the case, joined with that power is,

**C. The goodness of God's love.**

Power and love belong together, for one without the other is really quite useless. Even dangerous. A god of power without love would be a constant threat to our security and well being. And a god of love without power is a helpless and worthless crutch. But our God is both.

v.13

Moses recognizes what God has done in delivering his people out of Egypt. He sees the power, the strength, but he also sings of God's steadfast love. His covenant love, his covenant

faithfulness. The idea is loyalty. It is his mercy. His lovingkindness, a word which perhaps best conveys the fullness of the idea of the Hebrew word chesed.

God does it all because of the depths of his covenantal love. A love that provides for his people all that they need, even bringing them to his "holy abode." A love that brings his people into his own home as his own family. And thus we ought to sing! With a broad interest in,

**D. The building of God's kingdom.**

Too many of our modern hymns and songs are inadequate in their perception of the glorious kingdom of God already installed on earth. So many of our thoughts have a narrow, provincial focus, thinking only of ourselves or our own little existence. But worship songs--they ought to lift our souls unto God in order to be able to show forth the full extension of his glorious kingdom on earth. That's what Moses sees.

v.16-18

Moses understands the greatness of the people of God--not that it is in them but in their identity as a nation. A holy nation. Ultimately, their enemies will be stilled as God builds his church, and God will plant them! God will establish his church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it! Those people whom God has purchased he builds up into what he calls the body of Christ. The kingdom of God on earth.

Look again at,

v.17

You see, it is all about the Lord. It is his mountain. It is the place he has made for his own home. It is the sanctuary he has established, for himself, that his name be exalted forever.

And the conclusion of all this is clear.

v.18

Whatever it is that we sing about in our worship, this ought to be at the center of our focus. “The Lord shall reign forever and ever.” And so our singing ought to follow the same general pattern as our praying, having prayed that the name of God be honored and glorified, Jesus tells his disciples to pray, “Thy kingdom come,” praying “that Satan’s kingdom may be destroyed, and that the kingdom of grace may be advanced, ourselves and others brought into it, and kept in it, and that the kingdom of glory may be hastened.”

Let us always evaluate what we sing by these standards, whether or not the content of those songs measures up to this great song of Moses. In that context, it is a good thing to know and love the psalms themselves which give you such good patterns for worship songs, written of course under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit. As you sin, think of the kingdom, the worldwide, universal kingdom that grows throughout this age until Jesus returns in triumph. Open your mind to the great truths of God, the great biblical expressions of the doctrine of God, particularly the perfect combination of his power and his love. Consider the greatness of your redemption accomplished by Christ, and,

Ps. 96:1 “Oh, sing to the LORD a new song! Sing to the LORD, all the earth. 2 Sing to the LORD, bless His name; Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day. 3 Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples.”

Having said all of that, let me be even more practical in applying these things to our own experiences in the body of Christ, the church, today. Particularly, our singing. So there is a

contrast, and a comparison, between,

### **III. SINGING THEN AND NOW.**

Singing then, in the Old Covenant, meant singing this song of Moses. But what about now? Now that Jesus has come, what about this song and others that came before Jesus? What are we to think of it? And should we sing it today, this song so filled with the shadows and types of the Old Covenant, and lacking what we would think to be so important,

#### **A. The name of Jesus.**

But actually, this song is about Jesus. From beginning to end. And not only should we sing it, we WILL be singing it in heaven. Just consider,

Rev.15:1 “Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete. 2 And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God. 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!”

The song of Moses and the song of the Lamb are joined together! The song of Moses, which I believe is the same song that we are studying this afternoon in Exodus 15, is defined by the heavenly host with reference to the lamb of God, whose name is Jesus.

Back in Revelation 5 we read about this occasion for worship, this new song of worship,

Rev. 5:6 “And between the throne and the four living

creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 7 And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. 8 And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, 10 and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.”

That’s Jesus! He is the object of our worship, the subject of our singing.

Rev. 5:11 “Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” 13 And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” 14 And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.”

That’s the song of the lamb, the song of Jesus, joined with the song of Moses. So we ought to sing this song today, with all its Old Testament context pointing us directly at the person and work of our Lord Jesus. We ought to sing from the other Old Testament songs, especially the book of Psalms included in the Bible for that purpose, as they all point us directly at the person

and work of our Lord Jesus.

We ought to sing of Pharaoh’s death, knowing he represents Satan himself. We should sing of the Lord’s triumph over his enemies in redeeming his people for that is exactly what he has done for us, in and through the person and work of Jesus Christ. So,

v.1-3

With one more thing to say about singing then and now. There is one difference, a difference made evident at the end of the chapter with the reference Miriam, the sister of Aaron.

v.20-21

Those verses show forth perhaps the most fundamental difference between Old and New Testament worship. Old Testament worship was mediated. There was always a mediator, a man, or in this case a woman, appointed by God to mediate between God and his people. They were typically called priests, and it was they who had the authority to gain entrance to the Lord’s presence, and it was they who had the responsibility to bring the people into God’s presence through the continual offering of their priestly sacrifices.

And now, all of that is done away with. All of the priestly regulations were temporary, imposed only until the time of Christ. And now they are abolished. So it is that we now have one high priest, whose once-for-all sacrifice accomplished everything that was needed for our salvation. And now, in the glorious fulfillment of the New Covenant, we are all priests! We are a kingdom of priests, offering our own sacrifices. This is often called,

## **B. The priesthood of all believers.**

And as a corollary to that, there is now only “one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.”

My point is this, that the aspects of the Old Testament worship that related to the function of priests now applies to all of us, so that the priestly choirs of Levites and singers in the Old Testament worship become the congregation of all the believers today. The exercise of singing in worship is a congregational activity, such that we are all priests, and we all ought to sing together with one voice, “singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

And with tambourines and dancing? That, too, seems very much relegated to the external formalities of the Old Covenant shadows. Something akin to the burning of incense. Now, in the fullness of the revelation of Christ, our worship is to be intelligent, not merely ceremonial. Worship is to be rational, appealing to the knowledge of the mind, not wordless!

We proclaim his excellencies, with our singing. In the words of the writer of Hebrews,

Heb. 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.”

Ps. 95:1 “Oh come, let us sing to the LORD! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. 2 Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving; Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms.”