

Exodus 15:1-21

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. It's great to have you here today as we find ourselves now in those dog days of summer.

For me and my family, we're freshly returned from two weekends away on vacation and am ready to go for the fall.

And looking forward to the return of the team in Africa. They're in Nairobi, the 15 of our congregation. And they are planting Holy Trinity Church Mathare and our own daughters part of that team.

And we look forward to their return. Pray for them. They'll be leaving tomorrow and home here again on Tuesday. And then next Sunday we'll hear a report on all that God has done.

And I actually saw a video clip of a birthday cake for Holy Trinity Mathare. And somebody from the congregation actually putting a piece of cake in Pastor Jackson and Pastor Dennis' mouth.

[1 : 06] And I will assure them when they get home, we will not be feeding them like that upon their return. Well, Exodus 15.

Amos Oz. I'm not sure if you're familiar with the name. He is my favorite modern day Jewish author. And his memoir on his early years entitled Tales of Love and Darkness, I have read on multiple occasions.

It didn't surprise me to see then that in his published collection of short stories titled Scenes from Village Life, that one should be called singing.

For to be embedded in Jewish life is to be by nature enfolded in song.

[2 : 13] It's not merely true of the Jewish people, but of them it is true. Just this week, I was on my screened-in porch in my sixth flat.

And the evening hours were coming. And the folks across the hall from me, Jewish families setting up for dinner in the backyard.

The grill was smoking. Their mother was there also from the neighborhood.

Two adult sons, grandchildren. And as they sat down to eat as the sun was setting, this Jewish family suddenly began to sing.

And I had the privilege, really, of just being around the Chicago brick corner, hidden on my porch, listening to a family raise their voices in song, singing to God.

[3 : 25] To be embedded in Jewish life is to be enfolded in song. Our text today gives us one of Israel's earliest songs.

In fact, I think it must be the first song, chronologically, that you come across in the Holy Scriptures. It's actually called, by Jewish antiquity, the Song of the Sea.

Some reading constituencies know of it as the Song of Moses, for indeed he is mentioned early on in verse 1.

Or the Song of Miriam, for we see her singing it in verse 21. The book of Revelation, in fact, calling it the Song of Moses in Revelation 15.

But for those raised in Jewish homes, you are reading today and have heard read the Song of the Sea. I'm not talking about that little movie that came out a year ago in animation form.

[4 : 32] The late rabbi and professor of Bible at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Umberto Casuto, helped me see the possibilities of this song in ways that it might be structured.

In fact, it might actually be composed of three distinct verses. You know how it is when you enter into a singing church today.

There will be verse 1 that will carry it all the way down, and then perhaps 2 and 3 and 4. And as I looked at Exodus 15 this week, I was asking myself, What is the meter?

Where is the rhythm I could hear in the tambourine, but how is it composed? I'd encourage you to take a look at it.

Casuto insightfully draws our eye to verse 6 and 11 and 16.

[5 : 33] For in those verses you will hear a refrain repeated, which may indicate the structural conclusion of a particular verse.

If that's the case, then the opening verse of this song, raising as it does at verse 1, would conclude at verse 6, musically with this repetition of thought, Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power, Your right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy.

End of verse 1. And then, back to the beginning in verse 7. The melody, of course, we know, I will sing unto the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously, the horse and rider thrown into the sea.

But 7 commences something different, closing then with this verse 11, Who is like You, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like You?

Majestic in holiness. You can almost see a lyricist finishing out the verse with the repetition now of Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power, Your right hand.

[6 : 55] And then 11, Who is like You, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like You? Majestic in holiness. And this week, as I continue to try to hear the song, verse 3 could be the concluding third verse with the repetition again of another phrase, Tear and dread fall upon them because of the greatness of Your arm.

They are still as stone. Here it is. Till Your people, O Lord, pass by. Till Your people pass by whom You have purchased.

Verse 16. In the African-American church, to be embedded in the African-American life is to likewise be enfolded in song.

And this almost antiphonal refrain, you can almost feel it here. Your right hand, O Lord. Your right hand.

Who is like You, O Lord? Who is like You? Till Your people pass by. Till Your people pass by.

[8 : 12] That may be the structural element of the song. And it finishes in verse 17 and 18 with this magnificent conclusion that moves the singer's gaze from all that the Lord had done to that which He will do.

He will bring them in. Plant them. God will give them a place upon which He will reign forever. The narration at the end, verses 19 to 21, is beautifully put.

You almost now hear this reflective refrain in the lips of Miriam and the women.

I almost myself can envision Miriam standing there, tambourine in hand. Remember, this is Moses' older sister.

singing almost quietly from her lips. He's triumphed gloriously. The horse and rider thrown into the sea as she gazes upon her younger brother Moses and remembers the early days of her adolescence when her own mother placed him as an infant on the waters and watched God deliver him, raise him, use him, and now through him to see the almighty deliverance of God's people right through the waters.

[10 : 11] And just as the princess picked him up in infancy, she now stands on the far side of salvation's waters and all of the enemies that have been present for 400 plus years.

Gone. The calming of the sea. It would take some time, but then suddenly there it is. Like glass on an early July morning that a slalom skier hopes to be the first one to cut through.

She sings. For she has seen the salvation of the Lord. Now, if you're beginning to feel the tonal quality of this song, then that's a good thing.

In fact, if these threefold movements of the song are present, it's interesting to me that there is a metaphor right on the cusp of that repetition of his right hand.

Who's like you to your people. Notice, in verse 5, they went down into the depths like a stone.

[11 : 46] Or, in verse 10, the metaphor, they sank like lead in the mighty waters.

Or again, in verse 16, right before the repetition of the final phrase, they are still as stone. This is the tonal quality of the song.

This threefold, magnificent repetition of the work of God where the enemies of God are now descended like stone upon the water.

Gone. Or like lead. Or again, like stone. If they were in Africa, I've been in the neighborhood that we planted the church in this weekend.

And I can see in my mind the people singing with the emphasis of each verse. This first verse, your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power.

[12:54] A congregation with right arm raised. All through verse 1. Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power.

Followed by the second verse where one hand gives way to two hands. Open. Who is like you, O Lord? Who is like you?

And then, literally, they would be dancing through the aisles with both hands now moving down till your people pass by. Till your people pass by.

that begins for me in some imaginative sense, but more than imagination, some linguistic connections within the text demonstrate how this song really moves.

The right hand of the Lord giving way to who is like Him, giving way to till your people pass by. Well, what are we to make of the song by way of observation?

[14:00] Come back to that first verse. By way of content, the first complete verse, verses 1-6, is the theme that God is victorious in triumph.

I mean, there it is. I will sing to the Lord for He has triumphed gloriously. It's the glorious triumph of God.

He is victorious in triumph. You'll see the word again in verse 6, your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power shattering the enemy.

And the image of God being one who is victorious in triumph is right there placed in verse 3 as a man of war.

That's the content of this verse. It is a verse which would have been rising with the theme in one sense of the aggressiveness of God.

[15:08] Israel's God is aggressive. He's not a passive God. He's not laying down and watching. He hasn't disappeared. He's actually been active all the way through.

Now this is surprising for some. That God, when spoken of in human terms, some kind of anthropomorphism in play, would be spoken of as a man of war.

We think of God as always bringing peace, but we neglect to realize that peace is wrought through war.

No less true vertically between our relationship with God and the heavens as it is horizontally between peoples of the earth and all their hostilities.

Now, Exodus, from the beginning, has been showing God to be aggressive. His aggressiveness has been a unique feature of the book. He was aggressive toward Moses.

[16:13] Moses said, I'm not sure I'm the one. You might find a better man. I've been away from church 40 years. In fact, Moses finally says, get someone else.

I'm not going back. And God is angry with Moses. God is the initiating one with Israel.

He basically says, I have seen their plea. I have heard their cry. And I who dwell in the heavens am coming down to deliver them.

He's moving. He's a God on the move with all aggression and salvation. He's been that way with Pharaoh. In all of his stubbornness, God has just allowed the stubbornness to build, to multiply, to pile up upon itself, so that his own judgments would be so definitive in nature that the nations would know there is a God.

And so when you and I are reading Exodus, we come upon this little phrase, the Lord is a man of war, and we're picturing God somehow in the verbiage of a warrior.

[17:34] The sensibilities of modern day life shy away from it. God must deliver! But the careful reader of Exodus, the careful observer of the world and the way it works, will be keen to remember that if God is not strong enough to save you from your enemies, then He's not your God at all.

God must deliver, and if He is to save, He must judge.

In the second verse, 7 to 11, it seems to me that by way of emphasis, you move from singing about His victory, triumphant victory, to a take on that theme, but it shifts you to consider His majestic holiness.

Look at verse 7, in the greatness of your majesty. There's majestic, there's something majestic about God as He overthrows His adversaries.

And you'll see it again at the close of that refrain in verse 11, who is like you among the gods, who is like you majestic in holiness.

[19 : 01] The majesty of God, the grandeur of God, the holiness of God is holding all that takes place between 7 and 11. And if you want to know what God's majesty looks like, His splendor looks like, His weight, His glory, it looks like one who can put down anything that would stand in His way.

He can stand waters up in a heap. He can take an individual who says, I will pursue, I will take, I will divide, and He can do them down in a day.

He can blow wind from His nostrils and remove a people from the face of the earth. majestic in holiness.

Now the word holy and majesty and glory has a sense of weight to it. The glory of an object is its weight, but it's also its eminence, its outshining, so the glory of the sun is that which emanates from it.

And when you consider the God of the scriptures, you're considering one who has all weight, all gravity, all rightness, all holiness, and a willingness to let it emanate from His very being through all His created order.

[20 : 35] Now when you begin to think of it that way, this is the kind of God we need. Even though we're not used to thinking in these terms, love requires justice, lest unloving behavior be allowed to go unabated.

A mother will demonstrate her love for her children by protecting her young, albeit even going to war with those who mean to harm them.

Now if you're not a follower of Jesus today, and I know we have many who are exploring, even in this series, week by week, the teachings of the Bible and trying to relate them to the Christian message and wondering, is this a God I should actually hold on to and believe?

All I would say from this song is consider the reasonableness of the Christian message regarding a final judgment that will be meted out against humanity by the one God who has installed his own king over all mankind.

Is that not exactly what is needed in the world? A righteous, true, holy, arbiter who can separate and divide the callousness of human heart, the division of my own soul, the selfish from the pure?

[22 : 07] Is there not one, even one, who is majestic in holiness? Yes, according to the Scriptures, the story that's beginning in Exodus arrives in ironic fashion to the person of Jesus who demonstrates the manifold glories of God.

Here, we see the manifold glory of God coming in that He destroys all enemies. But look at the irony of the way in which God is capable of working and the way in which He ultimately works in Jesus. Here, you have the strong hand of God that finds its ultimate mark in world by way of love and justice in the outstretched arms of Christ.

Here, you have enemies of God being buried at sea. There, you will have God taking on the form of punishment before God and being buried in the ground.

the manifold wisdom of God is so far above all that we could ever say. And this song begins to help us understand that we need a God in the world, that we need a deliverer from unrighteous people, and that God is capable of doing that, and that He does it ultimately, finally, fully, I believe, in His Son in the most ironic of ways.

[23 : 51] Indeed, look at this little phrase here, that it's the Song of Moses, and turn briefly to the very last chapter in the Bible, Revelation 15.

This is another image in apocalyptic literature, rather than in historical narrative, where we encounter a final scene where God makes all things new.

John writes, and I saw what appeared to be a sea of glass mingled with fire and also those who had conquered the beast in its image and the number of its name standing beside the sea of glass with harps of God in their hands and they sing 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 just and true are your ways O King of the nations who will not fear O Lord and glorify your name for you alone are holy all nations will come and worship you for your righteous acts have been revealed.

That's the way the scriptures end not with Israel on the far side of the Red Sea tambourine in hand singing for he is triumphed gloriously the horse and rider thrown into the sea it ends with all the redeemed host in humanity standing beside what now is a sea of glass and looking at Jesus and saying it is finished it is done all the wrongs which needed to be put right have finally come to fruition here is one worthy of following here is one I can pledge my life to here is one I can give my love to here is one I can raise my voice to here is one worthy of song they sing and just as that will

happen on the final day so too you and I are reading a song where where where we see in in a small form that seed already in play

Christians see the work of salvation as the birthplace for song think of it now I love the blues blues the Chicago blues takes our our sufferings our experiences and and sings of them lest they be given the power of overwhelming me so you sing the blues not as one who is defeated you sing the blues as your way through country music which we could do with a bit less of sorry for those of you who are in love with country most of my children in fact they it sings of the the the the full manifestation of our human relational experience

[27 : 29] I mean occasionally they bring in God but they only do it in a NASCAR kind of way there is no content like you have in this song of the greatness and glory of God now but Christian music in whatever genre you will find it whether it be classical or put to jazz whether it be hip-hop or rap whether it be folk or even country whether it be contemporary God forbid but whether it be any of those things it is constantly giving you the content of a God who is victorious over all things whom no one is like and who shelters his own people as they can pass by which is why for Christians salvation is the birthplace of song always has been always has been always will be that's why it says in Colossians 3 you know once you begin to understand the salvation you go forth singing songs and hymns and spiritual songs making melody in your heart to God that ought to be exactly what everyone is doing if God has done something for you in Christ the thing that begins to well up whether you're high church

Anglo-Catholic Anglican Episcopalian or low church Pentecostal four square out of Amy Semple McPherson's work in L.A.

Tabernacle you are arriving from salvation to song you may stand like this and capture the fullness of its weight without movement or you may take tambourine in hand and begin to walk the aisles as we do here occasionally but I encourage you to stay within a couple rows of your seat lest you lose it when we talked about our values at Holy Trinity this is I'm going to take it back 15-16 years we said this quote this is the congregation saying we take great joy in exalting Jesus name by singing songs of praise directed to him further we acknowledge the supremacy of Christ in all we say and do every hour of the day so we give ourselves to a life of worship and witness with joy reverence and a sense of awe for all that God has done for us in Christ those are the words of Exodus 15 joy reverence sense of awe not just reverence not just awe joy reverence and awe that is the hallmark of congregational singing if you look at our constitution the book of church order says it this way just listen to this it's worth hearing praising God through the medium of music is a duty and a privilege the singing of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs and the use of musical instruments should have an important part in corporate worship in singing the praises of God we are to sing in the spirit of worship with understanding in our hearts it is recommended that hymns be sung along with the psalms and spiritual songs of the church but that caution be observed in the selection of hymns and spiritual songs that they be true to the word they should have the note of praise or be in accord with the spirit of the sermon the leadership in song is left to the judgment of the session who should give careful thought to the character of those asked to lead in this part of worship and the singing of a choir should not be allowed to displace congregational singing see when the people gather we don't have any performers here what I love about our leadership is they are assisting the congregational moment of praise through song they are prepared better than you are so that you might follow with them to the heights of the throne of God and to be able to sing freely and fully with all your heart and some of you make a joyful noise and other of you make a noise joyfully but either way either way a hallmark of Holy

Trinity Hyde Park is the singing of song always has been always will be why because salvation first response is singing that's what we've seen in Exodus we've come to a high water mark here no pun intended the book opened in slavery it moved to the declaration of sonship it came then through salvation and the consequence of slavery to sonship to salvation is singing it's right here the whole narrative stops it stopped so that we might sing now what does this mean then mean then for us I want you to just take a couple things I want to begin to kind of settle into allowing this room in your life if you if you're not a follower of

Jesus Christ but you love song I'd like to take this opportunity to redirect your heart to the medium of music in a way where your soul will be satisfied and nurtured in ways that you haven't found it yet whether you're coming with me to the Green Mill or the Jazz Showcase or you're sitting out on the front lawn at Pritzker or you're off to Kingston Mines wherever you go to connect I'm telling you that

Jesus and songs given to him will satisfy your soul in ways that nothing else can nothing else will I've seen this happen I've seen this in my own family many of you know on my mother's side that my grandparents were converted into four square Pentecostalism in LA 1929 that would scare some of you to think that I connected to grandparents to go back that far

[34 : 32] I've been at family reunions I know what it's like to gather around with my great uncle Hubert I can see it I have vivid internal evocative memories of song as a consequence of salvation of the elder statesman in the family my grandfather on the piano and his brother-in-law my great uncle Hubert on his accordion winding that thing in and out with full gusto of my aunts in like full long Pentecostal like dress like you not going to see their toenails kind of clothing flowing through the room of cousins on recorders of these strumming things whatever they're called auto harps moving the swell of it all and

I'm sitting there as a young boy with my basketball on my knee and when I entered the room wondering when can we go out to play and my dad who was a coach saying just sit for a while son this is your family there'll be time for play in a bit and I remember being overwhelmed with the repetition of the rhythm the rising of the song the praises of his people the ball finally at my side my voice loosened my lips singing thanking God that he would have the grace and the urgency of commitment to come and do something for me I've been there I have been on the far side of the Red Sea

I have heard the tambourine I have lifted my voice and I long for those seasons to continue throughout my life indeed they will continue into eternity well if you're overwhelmed today you just might need verse 3 till your people pass by Lord do something hold it long enough that you can secure shelter for me my faith my family hold it back bring me in plant me down place me in your presence

I need your work to continue till we pass by your right hand oh God victorious in triumph who is like you oh God majestic in holiness oh God the one who shelters his people and leads them into pastures of peace one can imagine in the Jewish community rising early daily and going to the service of prayers and songs this song this song is part of the daily rhythm of the sounds you hear at dawn just as

I heard this week the songs rising at the setting of the sun and for all that this promises for me to find its fulfillment in Jesus for me is worthy of daily hourly internal heartfelt worship and praise when I was young and I close with this I had time to spend a summer in California there was a preacher out there by the name of Chuck Smith they didn't even have a building this is the birthplace of kind of what becomes contemporary Christian music you know pre Larry

[40 : 01] Norman for those of you who know your stuff Maranatha music where they sell their tapes out of a portable shed next to the place of meeting you would have to arrive in those early days in the Jesus people movement in Southern California an hour to an hour and a half early to get close enough to be under the tent outdoors which sat about a thousand people and if you didn't get in an hour and an hour and a half early well there was certainly plenty of space beyond but oh did the people come and they would sing for about 40 minutes and then Chuck Smith would get on the lectern and he would preach for longer than I do and from beginning to end the heart of the people was pulsing with a desire to elevate their understanding and praise of God one can imagine

I can imagine days like that yet again yet again yet again our heavenly father you are worthy of our our voices you're worthy of our praise you're worthy of our dance our tambourine the instrument that would have life the meter the rhythm the melody the collective nature of it all you are worthy of our song because you are the

God of our salvation we praise you in Jesus name amen to you to the God to you to you to!
to you to to!