

SUMMER 1 - Great Creator, Great Redemption

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[0 : 00] Well, friends, great to see you here tonight. For me, this is one of those times of the year that I really enjoy because we get to spend a bit of concentrated time on one book of the Bible in a relatively short period of time.

It puts a bit of pressure on in terms of preparation, but I think it's good because we get some concentrated looking at one particular book. And for those of you who have visited after Belgrave Heights, a special welcome for you.

It's great to see you here as well. With us. Let's pray and let's ask God to help us with the scriptures here tonight. Let's pray. Gracious God, we thank you for your redemption of your people way back in the book of Exodus and a pattern that it set for your future redemption.

We thank you for the reminders of your character and of your ways in your world. We pray tonight you'd help us understand these things. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, Brian Keenan went to Beirut in 1985 for a change of scene from his local town, Belfast, and he became headline news when he was captured by Shiite militiamen for four and a half years.

[1 : 15] He was held captive and he was shut off from any news, any contact with anyone other than his jailers. These are some of his thoughts on his time in that prison.

The world that has forgotten me has no meaning for me. I am thrust suddenly into agonizing torrents of tears. I am weeping, not knowing from where the tears come or for what reason. I am weeping and weeping is all that I am. How long have I wept for? I drift into exhaustion and into melancholic sobs.

For many days now I've tried to scream but nothing will come out of me. No sound, no noise, nothing. I am full of nothing.

My prayers rebound on me as if all those words that I sent up are poured back down on me like an avalanche tumbling over me. I am bereft even of God.

[2 : 20] Now while some of us have probably never experienced such loneliness and helplessness as this man experienced at this time, every one of us will I think have at some time in our lives felt helpless and without hope.

Helplessness, hopelessness, even those very words just strike fear into our hearts, don't they? For there is nothing so terrifying as being without help and without hope and without any ability to rescue yourself.

And that is how Israel in many ways felt in Egypt. They too had felt and sensed God's absence.

They too had cried out to God and God had heard, God had seen, God had remembered, God knew, God came down and God rescued them and brought them up out of the land of Egypt.

Now friends, today we're going to begin our summer Bible studies in the second half of the book of Exodus. That is from chapters 19 through to 40. And I begin here because we have covered much of the first half of Exodus at 8 and 10 o'clock in our Sunday morning services here at Holy Trinity. So that was a year or two ago. So I thought we'd pick up where we left off. And for those of you who missed those, I think they're probably available on the internet somewhere. But I thought we would pick up there.

[3 : 38] And I need also to confess there's an ulterior motive, which Heather has already told you. That is, I'm working on a commentary and you are my guinea pigs. So I hope you can endure that.

I don't think it'll be a terribly hard task to do, but you are a test audience. That means that I'm actually, I'd be quite interested to hear your feedback, interested to have questions.

So we're going to have a question time afterwards. But the focus of our study tonight is going to be on chapter 15, verses 1 to 21. And I need to tell you that my heart is into the study of biblical theology, trying to see what this means in the larger context of the whole Bible.

And so we're going to spend a bit of time looking at Exodus 15, and then we're going to see how it fits into the Bible as a whole. Now, I want you to remember where Genesis ended up. Think about it in your brain.

Just think about how Exodus starts, how it progresses, how it goes on. Remember chapter 12 all the way through to chapter 50. It's focused largely on the story of how Abraham gains descendants. [4 : 44] But you might remember that those descendants end up in Egypt, out of the land of promise. At the end of Genesis, they are faring well in Egypt.

However, when we open page 1 of Exodus, we find that the situation is very, very different. They are being persecuted by a Pharaoh who knew nothing of Joseph.

And because of the harshness of that persecution, they cry out to God to remember his promise to Abraham. And they do that at the end of chapter 2. You might like to open at Exodus chapter 2 and look at it with me.

Verses 23 to 25. So Exodus 2. These are the words that Israel, this is what Israel did.

During that long period, the king of Egypt died. And the Israelites groaned in their slavery. And they cried out. And their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God.

[5 : 44] And God heard their groaning. And he remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. And God looked on the Israelites and was concerned for them. God's first move in answering the call has already happened during chapter 2.

He has raised up Moses or at least begun that process. Through Moses, he will rescue his people. He'll bring them up out of Egypt. And that happens in chapters 5 through to 18.

And the climactic event of the Passover, where the firstborn of Egypt all die, but God passes over the firstborn of Israel, is at the center of this.

And he then brings them through the sea. And that brings us to Exodus 15. So let's have a look at Exodus 15. Exodus 15 occurs immediately after the rescue out of Egypt.

Let me just tell you a bit about Exodus 15. There are only a few places in Scripture where what happens here happens. That is, in the immediately preceding story, you have had a narrative description of what has gone on.

[6 : 50] What happens in chapter 15 is you get a poetic and largely theological reflection on those same events. Now, think in your brains, does that happen anywhere else?

Well, it does. You might remember that it happens with Barak and Deborah in the book of Judges. And it does happen one or two other places throughout Scripture. Hannah and her theological reflection in her song is an example at the beginning of 1 and 2 Samuel.

But that's what we've got here. We've got a story that is then followed by a theological reflection in chapter 15. It tells the story via poetry and song and significant theological reflection.

This poem is probably the oldest piece of continuous poetry in the Hebrew Bible. It is an ancient poem or song. Scholars agree it's one of the most important, most radical, most important poems in the Old Testament.

And this ancient piece of poetry, ancient song, is known as the Song of the Sea. It is an outburst of praise to God.

[7 : 56] A spontaneous outpouring of emotion by a group of people who had experienced the most significant of events in Israel's history. Now, we're very restricted in time today, as I said.

So we're not going to delve into it too deeply. But I want to draw out one significant theme from it. My own view is that the theme we are going to look at is both one of the strongest theological themes in the book of Exodus and in the Bible as a whole.

But a most neglected one, particularly by Bible-believing Christians. So it's a theme mentioned on page one of the Bible. It is mentioned on the last few pages of the Bible.

And it undergirds much that is between. So let's get started. Let's have a quick look at our passage. Now, I want to talk a little bit about tenses here in chapter 15.

Now, tenses are somewhat difficult in Hebrew. However, the NIV version of the Bible, I think, has captured some of the tenses that are present or can be inferred.

[8 : 57] Look at verses 4 to 10. These verses are cast in the past tense. God did this. God did that. Now, look at verse 1. This verse is cast in the present tense.

God is majestic in holiness, awesome in glory. Now, look at verses 13 to 21. These verses are cast in the future tense.

God will lead his people and the nations will hear of what he has done. In other words, this poem is carefully crafted. So it conveys some sense of what God has done, who God is, and what God will be toward his people.

It is about the past actions for his people, his present actions for his people, his future actions for his people. So not only is it a poem about God, it's a poem about God's incredible plans for his people. Now, let's have a look at the content. First, we're told at the beginning and the end who sang it. In verse 1, we're told that Moses and the Israelites sang.

[10:02] The term probably means all the people of Israel. Verse 20, we're told that Miriam and the women sang. Now, we don't know exactly what that meant. It could mean all Israel sang, then the women sang.

It could mean they sort of had some responsive way of singing. But what we do know was that this was a great event with all of Israel bursting into song within this great outburst of music and voice. And verses 1 and 2 tells us the reason for this. It is a song of praise because God has triumphed. It is a song of delight in his great victory.

It is a victory that has exalted God and brought God glory and brought his people salvation. Now, look at verse 3. The Lord is a warrior.

The Lord is his name. There is no mistaking the language. It is in our world, in relation to God, probably considered, you know, very not politically correct language.

[11:07] But it is the language that the Bible uses itself. This is battle imagery of the ancient world. And this is a battle song. Yahweh, the Lord, is pictured as a warrior king who fights Israel's battles and defeats her enemies on their behalf and on behalf of his glory.

He holds out his hand in battle and his hand is glorious in power. It shatters his enemies. The pinnacle of the palm is reached in verse 11.

The Israelites are clear. No one can be compared to such a God. He is above every other so-called God. He alone is majestic in holiness. Alone is awesome in glory.

Alone works great wonders. Who among you, O among the gods, is like you, Yahweh? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?

Who is like you? Then in the last section of the poem, God is presented as leading his people. Verses 13 to 18. Now, look at the language.

[12:14] It is strikingly different from the language we heard at the first half of the poem. No longer is God this warrior king. Instead, he is a shepherd king who leads his people to safety.

The journey to the promised land that is about to take place is presented as a victory march. The passage of God's people will be like going through the waters. Terrified nations will stand on either side and will make ready for Israel, a path for Israel to pass through.

As God rescued them from Egypt, he will easily bring them through into the promised land just as he led them through the water. And he will be with them in the land just as he was with them as he passed through the waters.

And he will plant them in the land. And he will be with them. And he will reign over them forever and ever in that land. They will live in his presence.

And having done this, I want you to think about where Exodus started. So think back in your brains. You see, in Exodus 1, God is remembered as creator.

[13:24] His creative purposes are focused on his people Israel, you might remember. The language of Genesis 1 is used in Exodus 1. And Pharaoh, they are increasing and multiplying as humans were meant to.

And Pharaoh, we find in chapter 1, does not like this. Pharaoh sets out to stop Israel increasing and multiplying. Pharaoh is therefore an anti-creation force in the world.

He's trying to stop God's creative purposes which flow through his people. He is an anti-God agent. Now, that in mind, I want to show you some creation illusions within this poem.

Look at verses 5 and 8. See in verse 5, the word deep waters occurs there. And then notice verse 8, there's another phrase, surging waters.

They, both those terms, are one word in Hebrew. And the same word. They are the word for the deep. The very word that was used in Genesis 1-2 to describe the watery deep that existed before God gave form to the world.

[14:30] And it's over those waters that God does something, isn't it, in Genesis 1. It's over those waters that God speaks his word. And there is light and life and form and order.

So in one sense, those waters were the enemy of God's order. Over which he had to speak and give order. But in Genesis 1, God simply speaks.

They are conquered. Order is imposed on the world. I wonder if you can see what the author is doing by echoing these words here in Exodus. Pharaoh wanted to reverse God's order on the world.

He had broken God's creation order. He had stopped things happening as God the Creator wanted. Or at least attempted. But God acted.

And he divided the waters again, just as he did in creation. In fact, think about the plagues for a moment. What are the plagues? Abraham wanted to stop God's creative purposes.

[15:32] So what does God do? He says, you want a world without my order imposed upon it? Let me show you what it looks like. And everything is turned upside down in the created order.

You see, here, in the passing through the waters, he had divided the waters just as he did at creation. He defeated the forces of disorder.

He brought his people through the waters to a place where they might do what God intended for them. In other words, God did a creation again. But there are other allusions to Genesis in this chapter.

Have a look. Just think about it for a moment. What is the goal and purpose of God's creative work in Genesis 1? Think of Genesis 1. What is God's goal for it?

Where does it end up? It ends up in day seven, doesn't it? What is day seven about? Day seven is about rest. God works for six days and then he rests.

[16:34] He puts Adam and Eve in the garden. And although he tells them to work the garden, it's clear that he wants them to rest in his presence. The goal of God's creative work is that humans find rest in the presence of God like they did in the Garden of Eden.

And that is where all of creation is heading. That's why in the last pages of Scripture, that's where you find yourself. But that is not how it had been for Israel in Egypt.

They had not been resting in the presence of a good and generous king who was God. On the contrary, they had been under the cruel bondage and working of a fierce king, Pharaoh.

With that in mind, look at how the poem ends. Verses 17, 18. God will bring his people to a place like Eden. He will bring them in.

He'll plant them on the mountain of his inheritance. He will bring them to the place where he himself dwells, just as he did in Eden. He will grant them sanctuary and rest.

[17:35] And he will be in the midst of them. And he will reign over them forever and ever. Okay, there are some of the hints of creation in this passage.

Let me tell you that there are far more. But let's ask ourselves why they are here. Why is the writer so concerned with creation? Why is God telling us about these hints here in this psalm?

Well, let me explain it this way. The Old Testament makes clear that the Exodus is the great act of rescue and salvation in Old Testament history.

It is the great act of redemption, of redeeming his people. In the Exodus, that's what he's doing. Redeeming his people. Now, I want you to notice how he redeems them.

How does he redeem them? He redeems them by creating again. Let's put it another way. We can define redemption as the reestablishing of God's created order at a specific time or place.

[18:40] End place. Let me say it again. We can define redemption as the reestablishment of God's created order at a specific time and a specific place.

It is turning things back to how they were meant to be. In other words, when God redeems, he's simply bringing a broken creation back into alignment with his purposes at one historical moment in the world.

Redemption is about returning things to the norm. About making them new again. Bringing them back to the way God intended. Setting them right. Reestablishing God's created order at a specific time and place.

Now, if I'm right about this, then you'd expect to see this sort of thing in the rest of the Bible, wouldn't you? You'd expect to see this reflected elsewhere. And you do. Because in the book of Isaiah, God talks about bringing people back from exile in Babylon and redeeming them from Babylon.

And when he does, what language does he use? He says he talks about a new exodus and a new creation. He will make things new again. And if I'm right, then you'd expect it's not just restricted to

Old Testament, but you'd find it in the New Testament as well, wouldn't you?

[19 : 53] Let's check out three places. A couple of them we've already read. Turn to 2 Corinthians 4 again. Paul is talking about his ministry here. And he's saying that his ministry is to bring people to know Jesus.

So turn to 2 Corinthians 4. He talks about the opposition to that ministry from Satan, from the evil one. Look at what he says in verses 3 to 6.

And if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. For the God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of God. Sorry, the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God who said, now listen to the language here. For God who said, let light shine out of darkness, made his light to shine in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

[21 : 04] Can you see what he's saying? He's saying that Satan, who is the God of this world, has set himself up against God, like Pharaoh did. He has opposed God's purposes, which is to bring people into relationship with him.

He has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the truth about Jesus. How does God change this? How does he wage war on the evil one?

He changes it by doing a creation again. He changes, he speaks his word just as he did over the deep chaotic waters on the first day of creation.

And he says, let light shine out of darkness. And the words that he speaks are the words of the gospel about Jesus Christ.

It is this word about Jesus that brings light where there was darkness, brings life where there was death, brings order where there was chaos, redeems people by doing a creation within them again.

[22 : 11] Take a look at 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 17 and look at what Paul says. If you are Christian, God has done this in you.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a, they are, the new creation, the new creation has come. The old has gone.

The new is here. Becoming a Christian is about returning to the way God intended you to be. It's about returning to how things were meant to be.

And that happens when the word of Christ is spoken into receptive hearts. Now turn with me to the book of Revelation. Revelation 21.

Just while you do that, let me remind you of the context. There has been this incredible battle between God and the forces of evil. Notice the context of battle again. There in Genesis 1.

[23 : 14] There in Exodus. There with people becoming Christians. There at the end. A battle. Between God and the forces of evil. God has triumphed over his enemies.

And the enemies of the people of God. Now let's read what the writer of Revelation, John, has to say about the results of this triumph. And I saw an angel.

Coming down out of heaven, he says. Verse 1. Having the key to the abyss. And holding in his hand a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent who is the devil or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.

And he threw him into the abyss. And locked and sealed it over him. And kept him from deceiving the nations anymore until a thousand years were ended. And after that he must be set free for a short time.

And I saw the thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus. And because of the word of God.

[24 : 14] You know, I've read the wrong passage. Look at 21, haven't I? That is the first problem with just putting it into your computer.

Let's have a look at 21. Sorry, folks. I was waiting for the punchline and it wasn't coming. And now I've got to rely on my poor eyesight.

So let's read chapter 21. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. And there was no longer any sea.

And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. Prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard the loud voice of her husband.

Sorry. And I heard the loud voice from the throne saying. Look, God's dwelling place is now among the people. And he will dwell with them and they will be his people. And God himself will be with them and be their God.

[25 : 13] And he will wipe every tear from their eyes. And there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain. For the old things, the old order of things has passed away.

And he who was seated on the throne said. I am making everything new. And then he said, write this down. For these words are trustworthy and true.

That's a grand passage, isn't it? But I want you to notice a few things about it. Did you notice that there will no longer be any sea? Why?

It's a way of saying that those forces, those, for Israelite people, the sea was a place of disorder and chaos. There will be no more forces of disorder.

They will be done away with. What I want you to notice is the larger pictures. You see, the larger picture tells us about God's purposes in his world. His purposes are to return the world to the way he intended it.

[26 : 14] And it's to return it to a place where humans live with God and with each other in peace and harmony. How is God going to accomplish this great goal? Well, he'll need to do a creation again.

He will need to act. He'll need to replace chaos with order, death with life, darkness with light. In the Old Testament, he did this by overturning Pharaoh and setting himself among his people.

In the New Testament, he does it by sending his son into the world to die. And it's through the death of his son that Satan is defeated. And that relationship with God becomes possible.

It is through the death of his son that things are set right. And that's why these last pages of the Bible, as we go on, have the lamb in the midst of the garden city.

The lamb, pictured back in Revelation 5, as dying but rising, is in the midst of that garden city and the means by which all things will be made new.

[27 : 13] Jesus is God's means for setting the creation back to the way it was. Or, in fact, to a better state than it was. For it now has the lamb there, the one who redeems.

Let's try and draw this together. What is the point of all of this? Why is it so important to understand that redemption is about creation? Is it simply an academic theological point?

Does it have practical relevance? Well, I want to say tonight that this doctrine of redemption through creation or recreation is one of the most practical and comforting doctrines of the Bible.

Let me explain. You see, the Bible says that my deepest desire is to be independent from God. That is, I am sinful, like Adam and like Eve.

My personal experience tells me that this is right. I find it very hard to do what God wants. In fact, I find myself helpless to do what God wants. Even if I wanted to, I know that I couldn't.

[28 : 21] I cannot make myself pleasing to God. I cannot please Him. I cannot stop being sinful. And that is the painful reality of living as a human being in a fallen world.

And that is where the doctrine I have been talking about comes into play. Do you remember Exodus 15? Let me ask you, were there any humans present in the overthrowing of Pharaoh?

Well, they were onlookers. No, God did it all Himself. He restored things the way He intended. He did not need any help. He waged war on disorder like a mighty warrior and won.

And what about Genesis? Were there any humans present on the first day of creation? Did God need humans to make the world? No, He didn't.

God made things the way He intended and He didn't need any help. He waged war on disorder and chaos like a mighty warrior and won. He created and it was.

[29 : 25] He set things in order and it was ordered. Everything in its right place. He spoke His word. Things were put into place. Can you see now why this doctrine is so important?

It is so important because it tells us that God can make us right with Him. He can make us right by doing an act of creation. By speaking His word about Jesus into the disorder of our lives.

By bringing light where there is darkness. And light where there is death. By creating new worlds within us that we could not create ourselves.

We cannot make ourselves pleasing to God. We cannot make ourselves what God intended us to be. But the great news of the gospel is that God can. And as we trust in Jesus, God will.

He will make us new creations. The old will pass away. The new will come. And as we trust in Jesus. He will bring a broken creation back into alignment with His purposes.

[30 : 35] He will make all things new. Friends, for me in my own personal life. This is an incredibly great truth. Because it means that I have hope.

Because God can create in me a new man. Shaped in the likeness of Christ. It will be an ongoing process.

It will go on all the days of my life. To be completed at the coming of the Lord Jesus. When I will be like Him. Because I will see Him as He is. But without that hope.

I would be nothing. The God who said, Let light shine out of darkness. Has shone into our hearts. To give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God.

In the face of Jesus Christ. The God who can make that back in creation. Can remake me. What a comfort and encouragement.

[31 : 37] It is a wonderful truth, isn't it? God is a creator. He can make things new. He can make us new. He can make us holy. He can make us what we are not by nature. He can do it because He's a creator.

Now you can see, can't you, why the Israelites get so carried away on the other side of the sea. They get so carried away because God was for them.

Because God was a great warrior who fought for them. Because God was a great king who gave them rest over their enemies. Because God was their saviour. Because God was their God and they were His people.

And He alone was God. So we can get carried away with the Israelites on the edge of the sea there. And say, who among the gods is like you, O Lord?

Who is like you? Majestic in holiness. Awesome in glory. Working wonders. Particularly, friends, that wonder of transformation in Christ and sanctification in Him.

[32 : 41] And that work more importantly than that even. That work on the cross. But let's not just stop there. You see, the rest of the book of Exodus flows from this great event, doesn't it?

And it tells you that responding to God who creates and redeems involves living with Him. And involves living before Him appropriately.

It involves being in covenant with Him. It involves hearing His word. Living by that word. Not breaking fellowship with Him by disobeying His word. Loving Him. Loving each other.

It involves transformation. Friends, the book of Exodus is about God the Creator redeeming His people. And He redeems them from something. And He redeems them for something.

Redeems them from slavery. Redeems them to fellowship with Him. And that fellowship requires obedience and changed lives.

[33 : 43] The same is true for us who are redeemed from the slavery to sin. We are redeemed to relationship with God through Christ. Christ fellowship with Him and His Son. And that fellowship requires us to enter into a new slavery to Him.

And a new obedience to Him. That was true in Exodus. And it is true for the Christian. And just to show you. Let's have a look at Romans chapter 6.

Romans 6 verses 1 to 13. And having learnt once, I'm now going to just make sure we've got the right verses there. And I have. So, what shall we say then?

Romans 1. Romans 6 verse 1. What shall we say then? Shall we go on sinning that grace may increase? By no means. We are those who have died to sin.

How can we live in it any longer? Can you see what he's saying? We have died. How can we go on? Don't you know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus have been baptised into His death?

[34 : 50] We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead, through the glory of the Father, we might live a new life.

For if we have been united with Him in a death like His, we will certainly also be united with Him in a resurrection like His. For we know that the old self was crucified with Him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, and that we should no longer be slaves to sin.

Because anyone who's died has been set free from sin. Do you notice the allusion there? Just a little allusion to Exodus and slavery. Now, if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him.

And we, for we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again. Death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all. But the life he lives, he lives to God.

You see, there's been a change. There is a new life to be lived. In the same way, count yourself dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

[35 : 58] Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so that you might obey its evil desires. Do not offer any of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourself to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and offer every part of yourself to Him as an instrument of righteousness.

You see, redemption involves a life before the Redeemer, and a life of obedience to that Redeemer. And that will happen by the same way by which you were redeemed.

That is, God will work in you. But it requires your participation as well. It requires you to offer yourself as one who has been brought from death to life, and to offer every part of yourself as an instrument of the righteousness for which you were brought.

Let us pray. Father, thank you for this word from the book of Exodus. Thank you that we can see its fulfillment in our own redemption as well.

We thank you for this in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, I think Elspeth's going to come and pray some more for us, and with us.