

God our Mighty Saviour

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[0 : 00] Okay, I'm going to begin today by asking you to talk to the person next to you and to answer the following question which is on the screen. Can you think of a piece of music or song that was composed for a momentous occasion?

So there you go. 30 seconds. Go for it. I want to hear some good answers in a while. Okay. Does anyone want to offer some suggestions? Just raise your hands. National Anthem, yeah. So, what's, I forgot your name again. Callum, is it? Happy Birthday. Yeah, okay, that's good. I didn't think about that one, but yeah, okay. 1812 Overture. 1812 Overture, yep. Okay. Why in celebration of? I meant the people defeating Napoleon.

The people, Russians, yeah. Yeah. Okay. Andrew? I hear you. The opening of the Suez Canal. Ah. See, that's someone only who lived in Egypt would know.

[1 : 08] Yeah. 1956, was it? 1812 Overture. I thought the Suez Canal was open in 19... I thought the Suez Canal was open in 19... So it was national. Okay. David?

Yeah, I thought putting Anthem up there to say... I knew someone was going to do that. It's quite a bit. It's a bit. Okay, good, good, good. All right, there are more, I'm sure. But the one that comes to my mind is an anthem written by Handel for the coronation of King George II in 1727.

And used ever since at the coronation of every British monarch. Does anyone know that? Zadok the priest, yes. Which some of you may be old enough to remember firsthand.

Not the 1727 one. But the 1953 coronation of Queen Elizabeth. So as a closet monarchist, I just can't resist but play this snippet.

There you go. Set it up. Set it up. Set it up.

[2 : 23] Attabish the priesthood and king. All right, there. The five year old man.

communicating. All right, there. Some hundred chance. And all the people return Return Return Does that bring back memories for you, Eric?

Sorry, just joking. Couldn't resist, sorry, Eric. Now, some of you soccer buffs may also know that in 1992 this was rearranged and is now also the anthem of the UEFA Champions League.

In case you thought, this sounds familiar, it doesn't remind me of Zadok the Priest. It's a powerful piece of music, isn't it? And that's the beauty of music as well as its danger, isn't it? Used correctly, it has the power to capture the imagination and to inspire those who hear or sing it.

And today in Exodus 15, we have such a song. Last week we saw Pharaoh's final defeat and the drowning of his army. And the Israelites sing it after that scene, the Egyptians, swallowed up in the Red Sea.

[3 : 58] And so this song, if you look closely at it, I think can be split up into three parts. But first, before we get into that, we read that in verse 1, the song is actually sung to the Lord.

I will sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted. Both horse and driver, he has hurled into the sea. They sing to praise the Lord for his salvation.

And then the song elaborates on this salvation over three stanzas, each ending with a couplet, as we shall see. So in the first stanza, verse 2 to 6.1, this is what we read.

The Lord is my strength and my defense. He has become my salvation. He is my God and I will praise him. My Father's God and I will exalt him. The Lord is a warrior.

The Lord is his name. Pharaoh's chariots and his army he has hurled into the sea. The best of Pharaoh's officers are drowned in the sea. The deep waters have covered them.

[4 : 57] They sank to the depths like a stone. And here's the couplet. Your right hand Lord was majestic in power. Your right hand Lord shattered the enemy.

God's right hand denotes his rule and authority and with it he crushes the Egyptian army. But notice how Israel now owns this covenant relationship.

Finally, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is their God. My Father's God is now my Lord too, they say.

He has become my strength, my defense, my salvation. For God, he has always been their God. But now at this turning point, the Israelites finally put their trust in him. It's just as it was written in the last verse of chapter 14, which if you look down, it says, When the Israelites saw the mighty hand of the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.

[6 : 04] So now they express this trust in word and song. But then the song moves on to the next stanza to explain why.

Why does God save them from the Egyptians? Why does he destroy them? Well, in verses 7 to 11, it's because God opposes the proud. He resists those who think too highly of themselves.

And so we read, In the greatness of your majesty, you threw down those who opposed you. You unleashed your burning anger. It consumed them like stubble. By the blast of your nostrils, the waters piled up.

The surging waters stood up like a wall. The deep waters congealed in the heart of the sea. The enemy boasted, I will pursue. I will overtake them.

I will divide the spoils. I will gorge myself on them. I will draw my sword and my hand will destroy them. There's lots of eyes, aren't there?

[7 : 07] But then, you blew with your breath and the sea covered them. They sank like lead in the mighty waters. And here's a couplet. Who among the gods is like you, Lord?

Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? You can see the contrast, can't you, between God's power and the Egyptians blustering.

All God does is blast his nostrils, verse 8, and the wall of water rises. Then he sort of exhales, verse 10, and the enemy is routed.

By contrast, the enemies fight with all their might, but sink like lead, verse 10, or like stone, verse 5. It's rather like that little boy in prep at school who thinks he can take on that grown-up year 12 student.

He challenges him to a fight. He's all gung-ho, you know, with his Bruce Lee moves. But the year 12 only has to hold him at arm's length.

[8 : 16] And that little boy is like punching air. Well, it's the same here. No human king or army, no matter how mighty, is any match for the Lord. And yet, God is very restrained in his use of power, isn't he?

He reserves it only for the proud, like Pharaoh, those who refuse to submit to his authority, those who think they are more powerful than God. Now, it's easy for us to identify the proud, isn't it?

We can spot them a mile away, strutting like a peacock. Many years ago, we saw the arrogance of Muhammad Ali who said famously, I'm not the greatest, I'm the double greatest.

Not only do I knock them out, I pick the round. I'm the boldest, the prettiest, the most superior, most scientific, most skillfulest fighter in the ring today.

And then he also said, it's hard to be humble when you're as great as I am. Or what about Dave, the international supermodel on Australian Survivor? Some of you are watching that show.

[9 : 24] He boasted that unlike the others in the contender tribe, he was a champion tribe, he's like cream that always rises to the top. Of course, we know what happens next.

He became whipped cream. He was voted out because he was too cocky. But often, what? You want me to turn up?

That was three or four episodes ago. Oh, sorry Emma. But anyway, back to more serious things.

Pride can be more subtle, can't it? Often. The jealous person, for instance, is proud because he thinks he's better than the rest, even though he's not recognized for it. Or the ungrateful person is proud because she thinks she's entitled to people's help instead of being thankful when others are kind.

But really, the ultimate in pride comes when we think we're better than God, when we have no need for Him or refuse to submit to Him. Remember back in chapter 5 what Pharaoh said?

[10 : 38] Who is the Lord that I have to obey Him? Who is He that He can tell me what to do with my life? Who is He that He can tell me who I can or can't marry?

Who is He that I should or shouldn't, He should tell me what I should or shouldn't do with my time and money? What do I really owe Him anyway? That's the mindset of a proud person, isn't it?

Never mind, of course, that whatever favorable circumstances they have encountered is only possible because of God. Even their brains and their talents have come from God. You see, you don't have to raise your fist against God like Pharaoh to oppose Him. No, you can oppose God just by ignoring His voice, just by hardening your hearts against His will. So the question is, are we guilty of this? Well, if we are, then thankfully, God is patient with us. [11:51] He hasn't dealt with us like Pharaoh, but He's giving us time to repent, to humble ourselves. So as Peter said in our New Testament reading, God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand that He may lift you up in due time. Friends, just like the laws of nature, God's way is always to oppose the proud but favor the humble. That's just who He is. That's His character. And so the only way for us to find His favor is to humble ourselves. His mighty hand, which we've just been reading, will bring down the proud. But that very same hand will lift up the humble. Maybe not immediately, but in due time, Peter says. which is what He did with Israel. As we see in the final stanza from verses 12 to 18, God now stretches out His right hand and leads them from slavery to His dwelling place, His holy dwelling place.

[13:02] Verse 12, You stretched out your right hand and the earth swallows your enemies. In your unfailing love, you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength, you will guide them to your holy dwelling.

The nations will hear and tremble. Anguish will grip the people of Philistia. The chiefs of Edom will be terrified. The leaders of Moab will be seized with trembling.

The people of Canaan will melt away. Terror and dread will fall on them. By the power of your arm, they will be as still as a stone. And here's the couplet.

Until your people pass by, Lord, until the people you bought or redeemed pass by. In this final stanza, we hear the promise of God leading His people to the promised land.

So yes, there will still be threats to encounter like the Philistines, the Edomites, the Moabites and Canaanites. But just as God's mighty hand rescued them from Egypt, He now guides them with His hand to His holy dwelling.

[14:08] Verse 13, After all, He's already redeemed them, bought them with the Passover lamb. And He has done it because of His unfailing love for them. And so as God's presence leads them, and we saw last week how it's a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, the nations will tremble before them.

They will be frozen like stone, petrified, in other words. And God will bring them and plant them.

Verse 17, what a beautiful phrase, isn't it?

To be planted by the Lord. Permanence, security, flourishing. Where? On the mountain of His inheritance.

In the sanctuary, His hands, there you go again, have established. God Himself will dwell with them. But remember, verse 18, He dwells with them as the Lord, the ruler.

The Lord reigns forever and ever. So there will be peace and security, but God's people need to relate rightly with Him in humble worship, in faithful service.

[15:24] And when we get back to Exodus next year, that's what we will see more of when God meets His people at Mount Sinai. Now this mountain of inheritance, we know to be Jerusalem or Mount Zion.

And for us as Christians, we're actually in many ways in the very same position as the Israelites were. Over the last weeks, we've seen how we too have been rescued.

God rescued them in the Passover, but we've seen how we are now rescued by Jesus, our Lamb, the Lamb of God. Just this week, I googled Song of Moses as I was preparing my sermon, and I actually found that there have been choirs that have put this song to music.

Unfortunately, we've lost the original music for this. We've only got the words. But some people have actually tried to put music back not to the English version, but to the actual original Hebrew. And so I clicked on one of them and started to listen. Now, my Biblical Hebrew is pretty poor, but I did manage to pick up one word which kept occurring. It was the word Yeshua, which is Hebrew for Joshua.

[16:43] And of course, you guessed it, for Jesus. Jesus' name means God saves or He saves. And the verse that these singers were repeating is verse 2.

He has become my salvation, my Yeshua. It's amazing, isn't it? Long before they even knew that Jesus was going to come, they were already singing this song and saying, He has become my Yeshua, my Jesus.

They were naming Him even though they didn't know who He was. And of course, we now know that that's exactly what Jesus did. He has become our salvation. We are rescued from sin and death by His blood.

But even though we've been ushered into God's presence spiritually, that is, we gather around His heavenly throne by the Spirit, we're like the Israelites, aren't we?

in that we're not there physically yet. We're still making our way there in life. That's why if you read Peter's first letter again in chapter 2 and verse 11, he calls us foreigners and exiles, or in other versions, aliens and pilgrims.

[17 : 57] Because just like the Israelites, the rescue, the cross is behind us in time, our victory is secured, but our final dwelling, the holy dwelling of God, Mount Zion, our heavenly Zion, is still before us.

And like them, along the way, we will face threats to our faith. At times, trials and temptations may get so difficult that they may threaten to overwhelm us.

It may be life-threatening illness. It may be persecution and trying to live out our faith at work. It may even be seeing people abandoning their faith or the church and some of them leaders that we respect.

And in those times, we may start to think, you know, will we make it? Is God still with us? In those times, it's probably natural to fear and be discouraged.

And in that fear, you know, sometimes we panic, don't we? And then we simply grab on to anything which may not be of God, which may not be what He promised, just thinking, oh, if we just do that, we can save ourselves from danger, from hardship, from whatever.

[19 : 15] But you see, the people learned this song at the start of their journey so that they could be strengthened in their faith as they made that journey in time. when they needed it, they could sing this song again to remind themselves of who God is, how His mighty hand has already saved them, redeemed them, and how God will be leading them and guiding them to His sanctuary.

And that's the same for us as well. That's the same promise. That's why in that reading, in chapter 5, verse 7, Peter goes on to say, cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.

Yes, keep trusting in the Lord because He cares for you. His love for you is unending. He will bring you, because He has redeemed you, to His mountain of inheritance.

He will bring us as a church because He's redeemed us to that mountain of inheritance. We can be sure of that. We just need to keep trusting and reminding ourselves of what God has already done and what He promises to do in His Word.

Now, the chapter then ends with a few more verses. And at first, it looks like we're sort of going back in time, going back to the end of chapter 14. So, verse 19 says, when Pharaoh's horses, chariots and horsemen went into the sea, the Lord brought the waters of the sea back over them, but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground.

[20 : 49] It's the same in verse 29 and 30 of the previous chapter. And, what's happening here is that this is actually being used like a literary device. And we've seen this being done before in chapter 6.

And it indicates that the events here in verse 20 are actually resumptive of what happened at the end of chapter 14. That is, I think, verse 1 and verse 20 are happening together.

That is, when the Egyptians were defeated and the Israelites reached dry ground, Miriam the prophet, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand and all the women followed her with the timbrels and dancing.

And Miriam sang to them this song, Sing to the Lord for He is highly exalted. Both horse and driver He has hurled into the sea. And that's exactly the same first two lines just with a bit of modification as was in chapter 15 and verse 1.

It's almost as if Miriam is leading saying to them, Sing to the Lord for He is highly exalted. And then the people start and sang with her this song, I will sing to the Lord for He is highly exalted.

[21 : 56] And because it's in the first person and because Miriam is named as the prophet in verse 20, I think it implies that actually Miriam wrote the song.

She, like her brother Moses and Aaron, is God's spokesperson because the words of the song give us God's view of the events of Exodus.

This is God's interpretation of what's been happening over the last 14 chapters. Now here's another little heartwarming and even spine-tingling detail.

Now this is the first time we hear Miriam's name, but it's not the first time we hear her speak in Exodus, is it? Can anyone guess when we've actually heard her before?

Anyone? Sammy? Correct. In chapter 2, she was the one that placed Moses in the Nile and ran after Pharaoh's daughter when she found him.

[23 : 03] This was Miriam. She's played her part, hasn't she, in God's salvation. She was there at the start and now, 80 years later, as a young, sprightly 90-year-old, she's leading Israel in a song and dance as God's prophet.

She's a lowly and humble person. She doesn't have the same authority as her brothers, but God chooses her to be his prophet. She has witnessed it from start to end.

All the years of groaning and crying out and waiting, each and every plague, the Passover, the parting of the Red Sea, she's seen it all and now she writes this song so that she can be an encouragement for Israel.

The words of the songs can be an encouragement for Israel so that they will keep their eyes fixed on their mighty Savior and remember his promises to bring them to their inheritance.

And in the same way, I think singing can do the same for us as well. Not to sing any old song, but songs that remind us of God's salvation, of his promises to us to help us keep trusting in him, especially in times of trial.

[24 : 19] Now, of course, we can do that reading God's word too and we should and we need to do that. We can do that praying as well and we should. But when we set God's word to music, it sort of injects God's truth directly into our souls, doesn't it?

There's a way of lifting our spirits at the moment, helping us to rightly express our feelings. As Andrew said one time when he was leading the band leaders meeting, it helps us not only to know God's truth but to feel God's truth as well.

And so here I want to just pause and thank all of you who serve as musicians and singers because you do an important ministry. And if you're so gifted, please write biblically rich songs for us to sing. But for the rest of us, I want to close by just asking you to ponder this question. How often do you sing to the Lord because He's highly exalted?

I know we sing when we come to church on Sunday but throughout the week, how much of your life is filled with songs to the Lord because He's highly exalted? Now I know for some of you, you probably don't want to do it too publicly, maybe just in the shower by yourself.

[25 : 43] But Ephesians 5 urges us, and I've got it on the slide, sing and make music to the Lord from your heart, giving thanks to God in everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So friends, whether it's just in our hearts or at the top of our voice in our shower, I think it's good to cultivate this habit, isn't it? To train ourselves to be, the singing is not the point, it's the joy that comes from singing, training ourselves to be joyful at all times, especially in the tough times because that's when we truly need it to keep trusting in the Lord.

When the outlook is bleak, that's when we need to remember what God's done for us that He's still leading us despite the circumstances. And then for some of us, you know, we sometimes feel like if we've not done that all week, we feel guilty and then we think, oh, you know, I better not come to church.

But actually, my word to you is this, no, come. I know it's an extra effort, but that's exactly what you need to come and be reminded in song and in other ways through prayer, through the word, but be reminded of God's mighty hand of salvation in your life, which He's done in Christ, and to renew your hope of glory.

That hope that's there even when things are not going well. So yes, the church is more than just singing. We come to hear God's word, to pray, to fellowship, but we also gather so that we can sing to the Lord.

[27 : 24] Why? Because He is highly exalted. He has saved us in Christ and He's promised to take us to eternal glory.

And so, with a nod to the old VB ad, which some of you might be too young to remember, let's sing to the Lord whenever we can. Let's do it while we're jumping.

Let's do it while we're pumping. Let's do it while we're pressing a suit. Let's do it while we're lifting.
Let's do it while we're shifting. Let's do it any or how.
Matter of fact, let's do it now. So let's rise and sing Savior of the world.