

The Song of Deliverance

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Preacher: Rev. Dr. Neil Mancor

[0 : 00] I'm sorry that I'm in shadow today, but the light above is broken, so I will hopefully be able to see the words on my page.

We're looking at this passage in Exodus chapter 15, if you'd like to keep your Bibles open there. I think it is quite an appropriate passage for us to have on this Remembrance Sunday, this wonderful song of praise and jubilation at a mighty victory won.

In my family, all of my uncles and aunts and my father, they all served variously in the armed forces of Canada and the United Kingdom, the Navy, the Air Force, the Army. One of my aunts was a quack.

Does anyone remember quacks? Canadian Women Army Corps served over there. And she was in London on VE Day, that first VE Day 62 years ago, and loved to tell of being in that great crush of people going down the mall towards the palace to be with the King and Queen.

The jubilation was just so immense. Our Remembrance Day is more reflective now, time to give thanks for the freedom that is ours, and to remember the sacrifice that so many have made for us.

[1 : 13] Old enmities have faded away and new ones have arisen. But many will still recall the wonderful jubilation and joy and excitement at the end of that terrible war with the capitulation.

And it is that mood of this song, this jubilation and joy, which Moses sang on that VE Day. Not victory in Europe Day, but victory over Egypt Day.

A great victory by any measure, having overseen the destruction of the Egyptian economy and wiped their gods off the map. Now an entire army has been thrown into the sea and drowned of choicest officers, horses, and chariots.

And so now we close this chapter in the story of Exodus and move on to the next major scene, the taking of God's land, God's people taking His land.

But before we do that here, we pause to celebrate this victory. But more than that, to figure out what kind of victory it really was. Whose victory was it?

[2 : 20] What does it really mean? And you'll notice in our passage that Moses looks back, and then he looks forward, and lastly he looks beyond. Firstly, he looks back, and we start with praise.

I will sing unto the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously. The horse and rider He has thrown into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my song, and He has become my salvation.

This is my God, and I will praise Him. And he goes on, the Lord is a man of war. The Lord is His name. And who is it that we're celebrating here?

The generals, the cavalry marching in? No, we start with praise of Almighty God, because this is the Lord's triumph. And Moses rightly sees that it is an act of great salvation.

The people of God were hemmed in with nowhere to go, and they needed to be saved. The focus here is upon the events of the Red Sea. We start with jubilation at what God has done.

[3 : 24] He has triumphed over Egypt, and He has provided salvation. Of course, it might be an odd verse for us, that one that refers to the Lord being a man of war, for us in the 21st century here in Canada.

And yet it tells us, that even though in this victory, God's victory was assured, that the victory over sin and death, to which this points, is a battle that needed to be won.

And of course, when God won that victory, He sacrificed the one thing He loved the most, the costliest thing He had, His only Son.

Oh, it was a battle that needed to be won. But back to our passage, we notice who does not get the praise here. There is no mention of the role of Moses, or Aaron, or the people of Israel. No, this was God's work, and God's work alone.

And what a mighty work it was. Pharaoh's chariots and armies, God cast into the sea. The best officers are sunk in the Red Sea. And what was the agency that accomplished all this?
[4 : 33] Who was it who blew, and the sea covered them up? Verse 6 tells us, Thy right hand, O Lord, glorious in power.

Thy right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy. Well, this is far more than just a battle between nations. This is far more than some kind of natural disaster.

No, it was the right hand of God intervening in the situation. Bringing salvation. Bringing victory. We've heard a great deal about the right hand or the arm of God in Exodus.

Many references to it. This one, for example, in Exodus 6, God says, Say therefore to the people of Israel, I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.

God's outstretched arm reaching into the situation, saving. When God touches the situation with judgment, who can stand? Who can bear it on that day?

[5 : 39] And as they look back at what God has done by the strength of His arm, we see some very important things they needed to know and we needed to know. This was an act of salvation and judgment.

It was a judgment of evil. It was an act that was accomplished by God alone. And it was far more than any military victory over Egypt. It was a victory of the living God over the forces of darkness. He has become my salvation, saying the people of Israel. It is one mighty act with very different consequences. For Israel, the parting of the Red Sea becomes the central moment of deliverance, of redemption, of salvation in their history.

And for us as Christians, it points us to God's great deliverance when He offered His Son to die on the cross that we might be saved. But for Egypt, that same act was the judgment of the Lord against them.

And amazingly, in chapter 14, the result of both sides is the same. The Lord is recognized.

Amazingly, as the waters close in over them, the Egyptians cry out, let us flee from before Israel, for the Lord fights for them against the Egyptians.

[7 : 01] See, they recognize the Lord. One terrible act which saved and which condemned. But in either case, God was recognized as the Lord.

God alone accomplished this. You know, when Israel looked back and saw the Egyptian dead washed up in the seashore, the seashore, they said, Israel saw the great work which the Lord did against the Egyptians.

And the people believed in the Lord. In either case, the Lord is recognized because He alone accomplished it all by the strength of His arm.

Thy right hand, O Lord, glorious in power. His right hand. And that means that God is strong to save. That means that there is no power like His.

And when He reaches out to judge, no one can endure it. And when He reaches out to save, we are secure. And it means that the God who executed judgment and salvation at the Red Sea is the same God who executes judgment and salvation in the cross of Jesus Christ to save.

[8 : 18] He is the Lord. And He has accomplished the victory over sin and death on the cross of Jesus by His right hand.

By His glorious power. Is Moses celebrated here? Are the people of Israel celebrated here? No, it is the strong arm of the Lord.

It is His right hand. It is His majesty. It is His glory. He is the one who accomplished this. What could Israel have done to save themselves from Egypt?

There was nothing they could do. They are hemmed in and they are hopeless. And what, brothers and sisters, can any of us do to save ourselves from sin? There is nothing that we can do.

We come before the cross of Jesus hemmed in by sin with nothing we can offer. There is nothing we can do. We throw ourselves down in the shadow of the cross under its judgment and there receive mercy because He has won salvation for us by the strength of His right hand.

[9 : 27] You see what that means? You take these two great acts of redemption in which God won salvation by His right hand. It means that the God who has revealed Himself in the Bible from first to last is a God of grace who requires nothing of us save obedience and who wins our salvation for us by the strength of His arm.

And, brothers and sisters, the Bible tells us that this contest was much more than just a conflict between Israel and Egypt. This was a struggle between the Lord God and evil. It was a great defeat, a terrible defeat, which points to the final defeat of Satan.

This was a set-piece battle which directs us to God's great and final defeat of sin and death on the cross where Christ offered Himself the pure, sacrificial Lamb.

And this song of Moses is sung in Revelation 15 at the sea of glass mingled with fire by those who had conquered the beast. It says that they sing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb saying, Great and wonderful are Thy deeds, O Lord God, the Almighty.

Great and wonderful are Thy deeds, Lord God. And when Jesus died on the cross and rose again from the dead, then was the head of Satan crushed, and then was his power ended completely.

[10:54] No, this contest was about much more than Egypt. It was about the forces of darkness. And behind the power of Egypt lay the beast who seeks to destroy. And God's victory points us to the final victory on the cross over sin and death, which even as we speak now is being celebrated in heaven over and over again, which is our joy and our hope.

And we all, every human being, every one of us, stand under the judgment of the cross. We come under its judgment, but there we can receive mercy and salvation.

See, that's the great shock of the Egyptian soldiers as the judgment of God literally washes over them is to recognize too late the Lord.

They had an opportunity after opportunity to repent and turn, but they didn't take it. And now, too late, they are washed away in judgment.

Let us be those who look back with thanksgiving and repentance at what God has done, that which He has won, a great victory on the cross over sin and death.

[12:08] And you see, it is all accomplished by the strength of His arm. It is all accomplished by grace. It's all grace. And this reflecting back leads to what must have been a startling realization that in fact there really is no one else.

Verse 11 and 12, Who is like Thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like Thee, majestic and holiness, terrible and glorious deeds, doing wonders? Thou didst stretch out Thy right hand.

The earth swallowed them. All the gods of Egypt seem so powerful. And yet, God stretches out His right hand and they're revealed for the nothing that they were.

He has accomplished it. They never were really there. There only is the one Lord. We need to remember that in the world in which we live, there is no power like the Lord's.

There is no one like Him. It's by the strength of His arm that we are preserved, that we are saved. So they look back, but then they look forward.

[13:16] And faith is about that also. Faith is looking back at what God has done and the promises He's made. But faith is also looking forward. Looking forward to what the Lord will do and will complete.

And faith and looking forward is not a vague hope for the future that all will be well. It is not everything is going to be okay so we don't have to worry. It is the faith that God, having given His word, will complete what He has said He will complete and will do what He has said He will do.

Now in Exodus chapter 3, way back at the beginning of this series, God promised both to rescue Israel from slavery and to settle them back in the land. So clearly the first part has now been accomplished and we end that part of the story.

Now our attention turns to the next phase in the God and Israel project, the taking of the land.

Before they set out on what is going to be an epic journey, we are given a God's eye view of what that is going to look like.

And we need to remember this in the 40 years that lie ahead. What is the God's eye view of what this is going to look like? Because it's a scary prospect for having just seen off the Egyptians, that's one great power, they're now going to have to tangle with a whole host of tribes and nations that are inhabiting the land.

[14:36] So it's a scary prospect. But a new note is struck. Verse 13, which talks about love. Thou hast led in thy steadfast love the people whom thou hast redeemed.

Thou hast guided them to thy holy abode. It's a wonderful piece about that verse. But you see that love that is the key, God's steadfast love.

He has led his people in his steadfast love. Another way of translating this is his covenant love, his covenant loyalty, his loyalty to the promises he made to his people.

See, that looks back to the promises he made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and looks forward to the land which they're going to take. And his covenant promises continue to be worked out even today until Christ comes again.

And for God to be a God of love means so much more than an emotion, so much more than just a wide-open acceptance. It means that God is faithful to his people and faithful to his promises that his right hand will deliver them.

[15 : 47] And it is in the light of that covenant love, that steadfast love, that the rest is true. Look at verse 14. The peoples have heard and they tremble. And we go through this list of nations, all of whom inhabit the land.

And their response to the arrival of the people of God is they are dismayed and they tremble. Pangs of fear afflict them. They melt away. Terror and dread fall upon them.

Why? Because of the greatness of thy arm. They are as still as stone till the people pass by whom thou hast purchased.

By the strength of God's arm, that same arm which brought them out of Egypt, that same arm which stretched out to judge the Egyptians and save the Israelites, that same power will now be with them and go ahead of them and will settle them on the land.

God is going to accomplish this. So we should set out now on our journey with great confidence and faith, looking back at what he has done, looking forward to what he will do.

[16 : 51] But we all know that things do not quite work out as simply as this song suggests. Their journey turns into an epic 40 year long excursion around the desert. And the taking of the land is not as simple as this.

But none of that means that God was unfaithful to his covenant promises. None of that means that God was less than steadfast in his love. None of that meant that God's arm had weakened.

The problem for the people of God was their sin. Yes, they were saved from Egypt, but they were not saved yet from sin. And they grumble and they doubt, they turn on Moses, they give in to fear, they fall into terrible sin.

And the result is that the covenant promises of God will be delayed until that entire generation dies. Except for a few people, everyone of that generation, including Moses, perished in the desert.

But none of that meant that God wasn't faithful to his promises. The covenant promises of God endured and he saw them through. From God's perspective, from the perspective of God's steadfast covenant love, nothing ever changed.

[18 : 09] And he kept his word. And you know, brothers and sisters, as God's people, we are a people on a journey. And often our lives go in uncertain directions.

And uncertainty can come in our health or our life, our families. Sometimes we do not know the direction we might be going in or the outcome. But when we look back and see what God has won by the strength of his arm, we look back and see that God has won salvation by the strength of his arm.

Is that not enough to help us look forward and put trust in the God of steadfast love who cares for his people and to allow him to lead.

Ever since I've been at St. John's, which is five and a half years now, we have been on a journey. And that journey has sometimes felt more like a roller coaster than a journey into the promised land. But we've been on it. As we look forward, wondering what God is going to do in his church, we need to look back and see what God has done and see what God has promised.

We look back to the cross of Christ and see that the God of grace has won salvation by the strength of his arm. And we can turn to the promises God has made to us in his word that Jesus has made that he will be with us and never leave us.

[19 : 32] That he will fill us with his spirit. And we can turn to the life of our congregation and see the awesome faithfulness of God to us in the past.

And so as we journey, we know that he is with us. The journey of faith, the journey of confidence in God is not a vague journey, a hope that things will just be okay in the end.

It's not, well, don't worry about it, dear, it'll be fine. No, we put our trust in the God of steadfast love. We put our trust in the God who has triumphed by the strength of his arm.

And so we can trust in the final outcome. Israel grumbled, doubted, gave into fear and sin. It is for us to obey and to be faithful.

We look back and God is rescued by the strength of his arm. We look forward and we know that God will sustain us by the strength of his arm and will accomplish what his word has said will accomplish.

[20 : 38] And so as I close, Moses looks beyond. Verse 17, Thou wilt bring them in and plant them on thy own mountain, the place, O Lord, which thou hast made for thy abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, which thy hands have established.

See, that's where it's all heading. It's heading to peace. It's heading to an eternity spent in the presence of the living God. God's people arrived on God's mountain in his presence.

The sanctuary which he has made. Perhaps Moses was only dimly aware that he was looking beyond and prophesying of a day when Christ would come again and be with his people.

A day when those who have chosen Christ will be with him in his presence forever in the sanctuary which his hands have established. There it is again. His hands have established it.

It is his doing. It's all his doing. And it is all freely given. Because in the end it's all grace.

[21 : 49] Executed by the by his hand. It's all grace. And it is ours to obey. It is ours to receive.

And it is ours to enjoy with him. Amen. Amen.