

October 18, 2020

Surprise: Celebration!

Exodus 15

1

God had done a miracle. He had promised the Israelites deliverance. That seemed impossible. But God had done it. He had parted the Red Sea. The Israelites had passed through. The Egyptian army had been decimated. The people of Israel were free.

How do the Israelites respond? On reaching the far side of the Red Sea, Moses and the Israelites sing a song of celebration (15:1-18). Then Miriam, Moses' and Aaron's sister, takes a timbral/toph/frame drum and leads all the women as they play timbrals and dance (15:20). And Miriam sings a song praising God, too (15:21).

Reading: Exodus 15:1-21 (Roman family)

2

There are times in our lives when ordinary prose is simply not good enough to express our emotions. And so people turn to poetry and song to express their emotions. And sometimes the joy that fills our hearts even leads us to express our deepest emotions with our whole beings – we dance.

This week we'll "shake things up" a bit. We'll spend some time praising God, just as the Israelites did, in poetry and song (and maybe the occasional timbral 😊).

Songs of praise:

All Creatures of Our God and King – Rob, Mark, Gord
God of Wonders (Chris)
Pied Beauty by Gerard Manley Hopkins (Ruth)

Kids Moment – Praise and Worship

3

Christianity has been described as the "singing-est" of all religions. No other religion has anywhere near the musical tradition that Christianity has. In part, this is rooted in the Old Testament. The psalms, for instance, are all the lyrics to songs. But in the New Testament there is the encouragement to "*be filled with the Holy Spirit, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, and making music to the Lord in your hearts*" (Ephesians 5:18-19). In the Book of Revelation, with all its strange and imagery, singing is the response to God's great salvation (Revelation 5:8-13, 14:2-3, 15:3-4).

In part, the song the Israelites sing is a celebration of what the Lord has saved them **FROM** – slavery in Egypt. More immediately – slaughter by the Egyptian army. "*I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously; he has hurled both horse and rider into the sea.*"

The Lord is my strength and my song; he has given me victory. This is my God, and I will praise him – my father's God, and I will exalt him!"

One of the great themes in Christian poetry and music, as well, has been what we are saved **from**. Like the Israelites enslaved in Egypt, we were enslaved. In our case, it was not slavery in some foreign country. Our slavery was to the power of sin that repeatedly trips us up. We try to be good, godly people. But then we stumble and fall. Paul writes, *"I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate ... I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway"* (Romans 7:15-18). Sound familiar?

"For everyone has sinned," writes Paul, *"we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood"* (Romans 3:23-25). We are free at last. Free at last!

A case study is John Newton, a notorious slave trader in the 1700's. In his early sailing days, he gained notoriety as being one of the most profane men his shipmates had ever met. In a culture where sailors habitually swore, Newton was disciplined several times for not only using the worst words the captain had ever heard, but creating new ones "to exceed the limits of verbal debauchery." In March 1748, while at sea in the North Atlantic, a violent storm came upon Newton's ship. It was so rough it swept overboard a crew member who was standing where Newton had been moments before. The ship was about to sink. In desperation, Newton began praying for God's mercy. The storm began to die down.

The haunting memory of his prayer, "Lord have mercy upon us!" uttered during a moment of desperation in the storm did not leave him. Not only had he neglected his faith but directly opposed it, mocking others who showed theirs, denouncing God as a myth. He came to believe that God had sent him a profound message and was becoming real to him.

He continued in the slave trade for several more years – as a sailor, first mate, captain, and investor – until the Holy Spirit convinced Him it was wrong.

He became an Anglican priest, and an outspoken abolitionist, publishing pamphlets and actively speaking against the slave trade. In his later life, he wrote, *"I am not the man I ought to be, I am not the man I wish to be, and I'm not the man I hope to be, but by the grace of God I am not the man I used to be."* Almost 30 years after his miraculous deliverance from the storm which had begun his spiritual journey, he wrote "Amazing Grace" – his musical response to God's grace in his life:

Amazing Grace (the 50 nation version again?)

Psalm 100 (Racheal)

My Lighthouse ([My Lighthouse](#) (Chris))?

4

The other theme in the Israelites' song of praise to God is what they are saved **TO** – *"With your unfailing love you lead the people you have redeemed. In your might, you guide them to your sacred home ... You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain – the place, O Lord, reserved for your own dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, that your hands have established"* (Exodus 15:13, 17).

Jesus invites us to know that we are called **TO** a whole new identity as sons and daughters of God (John 1:11-13).

Toward the end of his life, John Newton wrote, *"Although my memory's fading, I remember two things very clearly: I am a great sinner and Christ is a great Savior."*

We have a wonderful Saviour who saves us TO eternal life. On the one hand, eternal life is the reality that we will be with Jesus forever, one day, some day. On the other hand, eternal life is the reality that we are filled with His Holy Spirit, right here, right now. He is with us each and every moment of every day, giving us hope, joy, peace, and love. We are *"a chosen people. We are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession"* (1 Peter 2:9). One of the things priests do is pray – we pray to God FOR other people and ourselves, and we pray God's will will be done here on earth as it is in heaven ...

Prayer – combined offering and pastoral

5

"We are a chosen people ..." Peter goes on to say, *"As a result, we can show others the goodness of God, for he called us out of the darkness into his wonderful light"* (1 Peter 2:9). We have good news of deliverance, of salvation, for people around us. For John Newton, this meant being in the forefront of the anti-slavery movement. He chose to risk his reputation and livelihood to do what is right and good – a dramatic U-turn for a former slave-trader. For us, this means being called **TO** actively sharing the good news of Jesus and being the good news of Jesus in practical ways ... It also means being called **TO** worshipping God ...

Be Thou My Vision [Be Thou My Vision](#) (Carlos)
Mighty to Save (Hillsong)

6

The song in Exodus 15 ends with these words: *"The Lord will reign forever and ever!"*

In the Book of Revelation 5:8-13, John has a vision of a spotless Lamb who was slain but is now raised to life again – this, of course, represents Jesus. He writes this:

*"The four living beings and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp, and they held gold bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of God's people. And **they sang** a new song with these words:*

"You are worthy to take the scroll and break its seals and open it.

*For you were slaughtered, and your blood has ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation.
And you have caused them to become a Kingdom of priests for our God.
And they will reign on the earth."*

*Then I looked again, and I heard the voices of thousands and millions of angels around the
throne and of the living beings and the elders. And **they sang** in a mighty chorus:*

*"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain—to receive power and riches
and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and blessing."*

*And then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea.
They sang:*

*"Blessing and honour and glory and power belong to the one sitting on the throne
and to the Lamb forever and ever."*

This is Amazing Grace? (Jodi & Matt)

Benediction: Let's praise Jesus, the One who has saved us FROM the power of sin and death; the One who has saved us TO eternal life – in God's Spirit now, and with God, forever.

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