

Exodus 15:1-21

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[0:00] Exodus 15 verses 1 to 21. Do you know the song you only sing when you're winning?! You sing to the football ground, doesn't it, at the opposing team.

You only sing when you're winning. Sing when you're winning. You only sing when you're winning. You know that you taunt the fans, don't you? It's a kind of victory song. They've been ahead, and they have been taunting you.

Your team equalized, and the opposition stopped singing. And so you sing at them. You only sing when you're winning. And that is true. That is true in life.

We sing when we're winning. And we sing when we're winning at sports. We sing when we're winning in life in general. When there's something to celebrate, when there's something to celebrate, one of the innate human responses is to break out in song.

And that's where you've got Exodus chapter 15. You've got an example of singing when you're winning. Or, more accurately, singing having won. Or even more accurately, singing because God has won.

[1:09] God has been victorious in this case. God has soundly defeated Pharaoh and the Egyptians on behalf of his people.

But what is interesting is that Exodus 15 tells you nothing new. Exodus 15 covers exactly the same ground as Exodus 14.

The chapter doesn't advance the story at all. It's the same material. But the chapter asks you and I to stop at the edge of the Red Sea with the Israelites and listen.

To listen as they stand and sing of the victory of God and what he achieved for them. So, that is what we're going to do. We're going to stop and listen to these words and think particularly about this experience of salvation.

They were in slavery and yet they've been redeemed. And how that produces a song of praise and how our experience and how if we have experienced salvation how that should produce a response of praise as well.

[2:16] Three things we're going to see. We're going to see the reason for the song the focus of the song and then the reissue of the song or the re-release of the song. The reason for the song the focus of the song and then the re-release.

So, earlier this year you might remember if you're a regular we looked at the different elements of a worship service. Why we do what we do on a Sunday morning.

And every Sunday we spent a sermon kind of looking at the different aspects of our service. And we spent one looking at singing and why it's important. So, I mentioned back then that the Bible contains 400 references to singing.

That's how many times the Bible talks about it. And 50 of those times it's a command to sing. There are references. 50 references. Direct commands to sing and to sing out.

So, whether you sing like whether you sing like a nightingale whether you sing like a like a penguin whatever it is whichever album you choose God commands you to sing.

[3:20] It's a great thing, isn't it? Whether you've got a great voice whether you've got an awful voice God says it doesn't matter sing. Sing out. God commands you to sing praises to him. And in addition to that when music is combined to words particularly gospel words it stirs us in a way that reading those words doesn't normally achieve.

I don't have all the reasons for why that is the case but one of the reasons is surely if we're just sitting and listening or reading text it's not the kind of full body action is it?

That engages us though many of us don't like the kind of full bodied action we sing like this don't we? But Tim there's something about singing that engages our bodies in a way that reading

doesn't.

Singing that seems to have a privileged channel to our hearts so we remember songs don't we? Singing has an impact on our gut we hear certain tunes and there's a taste in our lives in our mouths there are memories to certain songs to our imaginations and when you throw in the fact that music and songs can powerfully bring forth memories and associations and places you realise that songs get to us in a way that other forms of discourse don't.

So God throughout the Bible commands his people he says sing for goodness sake sing but here in Exodus 15 he doesn't do that nobody needs to be commanded to sing it has spontaneously specifically in response to what's happened in the chapter 4 in Exodus chapter 14 so as I've said 14 and 15 cover exactly the same event but just different ways Judges 4 and 5 same thing same event but they cover it from different angles so chapter 14 that we looked at last week it's a prose account isn't it?

[5 : 17] Chapter 15 it's poetic the purpose of chapter 14 is narration the purpose of chapter 15 is celebration chapter 14 tells the old old story chapter 15 sings the old old story but no one is being told to sing verse 1 then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the Lord it's a little word at the start of that sentence isn't it?

but it's a very significant word the word then this is after what God has done in chapter 14 it's in response to all that God has done Moses and the Israelites sinned to the Lord their experience of what God has done in their lives salvation produces a response of praise that is most suitably expressed in praise so when the Israelites get to the other side of the Red Sea when they realise we've been rescued and that God has saved us and God has overthrown the Egyptians they can't help but sin because you only sin when you're winning to praise God so the reason for the song is this spontaneous desire to praise the God of their salvation C.S. Lewis has got a really helpful paragraph in his book Reflections on the Psalms which is a wonderful mixture of amazing writing and some not great theology but it is a brilliant book in some ways listen to what he says he says the most obvious fact about praise whether of God or anything strangely escaped me I thought of it in terms of compliment or approval or the giving of honour I never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise the world rings with praise lovers praising their mistresses readers their favourite poet walkers praising the countryside players praising their favourite game I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment it is the appointed consummation in other words praise is natural now do you see what Lewis is saying here we don't just praise someone or something as an add on to something else we've been doing our praise is an overflow of our enjoyment or someone or something and here I think is the key insight our longing to praise we delight to praise what we enjoy because it doesn't just express the enjoyment it completes it that until we've actually praised the person or the thing that we've enjoyed something something just feels incomplete it feels unfinished it's like a scale isn't it the piano scales you want to finish it

I never scale twice in a certain you want to complete it don't you and having completed scale you want to finish off the notes and Lewis is saying that praise finishes the scale of enjoyment and brings with it a whole another level of satisfaction he says that is true in every area of life but it is definitely true when it comes to our love for and our enjoyment with God we sing praise to God not only to thank him but our delight in him isn't yet complete until we've done so I think that most of us here this morning can say I understand completely what he's talking about but in terms of where singing actually takes us at times to another level so Exodus 15 beautifully flashes this out for us and it comes right on the heels of Exodus 14 God didn't need to include Exodus 15 at all if anything actually it interrupts the flow of the story but it is here because it is a great example of how you and I experience what it is to be a Christian it produces it evokes this response of praise that is most suitably expressed in song so that is the reason for the song secondly let's look at the focus of the song so where is the focus of the song there's no question is there he's on God God is front and centre in this song and God is the one who is magnified and glorified from beginning to end and that is a characteristic of all the songs in the Bible there are many of them they make God big so one other obvious example is in the New Testament it is Mary's song after she's doing that she is going to be the mother of Jesus it's what we call the magnificat that is the Latin term to make large to make big it's drawn from the opening line of the song it says my soul magnifies the Lord my soul makes large the Lord and so in that sense so many of the songs in the Bible they are magnificats so Exodus 15 is a magnificent example of that because it is making large to the Lord look at it these

verses it comes to verse 1

[10:37] I will sing to the Lord for he has triumphed gloriously verse 2 the Lord is my strength and my song and he has become my salvation verse 11 who is like you among the gods who is like you majestic in holiness awesome in glorious deeds doing wonders verse 18 the Lord will reign forever and ever there's progression in the song it lifts and lifts and lifts and lifts Moses and the Israelites magnify the Lord I think it's really important that we clarify what do we mean by magnify there are two ways you can magnify you can magnify like a microscope or you can magnify like a telescope do you know what a microscope is kids do you know what a microscope is you do to your Rebecca so you get a tiny little bug you get a tiny little insect and you put it under the microscope and it makes something that is really small look really big that's what a microscope does okay so you can put a little spider under the microscope and it can end up looking like a monster you look through it and it makes something very small and it's made to look big but a microscope is different to a telescope do you know what a telescope is you do know what a telescope is what do you do in a telescope what do you do in a telescope what do you think Marius what do you do in a telescope he's hiding under the seat let's see what does a telescope do what do you look at in a telescope that's right isn't it and you look at things that are far away but you know those planets that you look at they are absolutely massive they are huge so they look like a pinprint galaxy to us like a tiny little star in the sky but when you look through a telescope you see them for what they are you see how enormous they are you see them for what they are and you see for us to magnify God we are to be like the telescope not the microscope the microscope takes something tiny and makes it large the telescope shows us what is vast which we often think is small and so for us to magnify God is to be like the telescope and it means that we claim

God's glory and we live in such a way that we want to make God look more like the greatness and the beauty and the infinite worth that he really is in the night skies God can sometimes appear like a pinprick like a prick of light in a heaven of darkness and when we see him for what he is we see that he is vast and great and the song of the sea reminds you and I of who God is and what he has done and our job and our role and our calling as a church is to make God look like he really is in all his beauty and majesty and power so what does Moses specifically magnify about God in the song and the answer is an awful lot isn't it the song is something like a prism and it separates out the attributes characteristics of God so that we can praise him for these different things so as you go through these songs

Moses sings of his eternal nature that God is forever and ever and ever he is outside of time speaks of his strength speaks of his justice of his wrath of his love of his sovereignty of his constant presence with his people but I think what strikes the reader as we go through the song is that none of these attributes none of these characteristics are given to us in the abstract they're not just out there that Moses magnifies the Lord for these characteristics as he focuses and as he sings of what God has actually done to demonstrate who he is let me read you this writer Doug O'Donnell writes when you study the songs that appear in the Bible they magnify God for who he is because of what he's done they magnify God for who he is because of what he's done it is always in light of what he's done and Doug O'Donnell is in this brilliant book where he points out that is a pretty significant area of weakness in many of the hymns and songs that we sing today he writes even songs that do praise God that we sing so often do so in the abstract that is too many of them don't actually buckle down and express the specific reasons why we're praising God we don't actually rehearse God's great acts we just say oh Lord you are very great you are awesome or we celebrate you but we don't actually say why we don't think it's a huge disservice to anyone who might come to our services and they don't know our God and they hear us celebrating God but why do you celebrate God the song of the sea is one great example where the Bible says that actually the songs we should sing should celebrate God and tell us what he's done our hymns that we sing should rehearse God's great acts particularly our great salvation through the greater exodus of Jesus in his death and resurrection and even those songs we might sing which we would call scriptural songs today do you know what they do?

so actually our hymn book praise is terribly guilty of this in the blue book they kind of edit the songs and so the bits that we kind of find a little bit unpalatable or that our kind of century doesn't really like they kind of slip that out and so we think we're singing the song but actually we're only singing the good bits it's like compilation album of now that's what I call the songs and actually the songs in the Bible give us a great example of how we are to sing that we should rehearse God's great acts

so the songs of the Bible give us a great benchmark how we should measure our songs in the Bible our songs should not only say how great God is but what he has done so let's look just for a minute at how this song magnifies who God is let me give you an example so at the beginning of the song Moses illustrates God's strength can you see that verses 1 I will sing to the Lord for he is trying to fight gloriously the horse and his rider he is thrown into the sea the Lord is my strength and my song and he's become my salvation this is my

[17 : 39] God and I will praise him my father's God and I will exalt him the Lord is a man of war the Lord is his name Pharaoh's chariots and his host he cast into the sea and his chosen officers were sunk in the Red Sea Moses just doesn't say Lord you are so strong strong strong he says no let me tell you about God's strength God's strength is that he could hurl the greatest army in the world at that time into the sea without breaking a sweat and he says let me sing of God's strength even over nature let me verse 8 at the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up the floods stood in a pile the deeps congealed in the heart of the sea the enemy said I will pursue I will overtake I will divide this fall my desire shall have its fill of them I will draw my sword my hands will destroy them you blew your wind the sea covered them and they sank like lead in the mighty waters it is an unbelievable portrayal isn't it of how absolutely effortless it was for God to destroy

Pharaoh and the Egyptians we had great fun in Sunday school this morning talking about this but God blew his nose God blasted through his nostrils he breathed out through his mouth to blow the Egyptians back after the Israelites had crossed it's an amazing image isn't it such was the power and the strength of the living God Moses then highlights God's wrath doesn't he verse 6 and 7 your right hand glorious in power your right hand the Lord shatters the enemy in the greatness of your majesty you overthrow your adversaries you send out your fury it consumes them like stubble the Bible is not slow to mention that God has enemies now you might not like that but what we read here is and what we read throughout the Bible is his enemy is described as anybody who opposes him and as anybody who chooses not to go God's way but to go his or her own way in life not to submit to

God not to seek God for his grace and favour and mercy God the New Testament tells us that every single one of us at some point by nature we were enemies of God Paul writes while we were still enemies of God God sent his son the Lord Jesus to die for us but what we see here in this chapter is how foolish it is and disastrous and dangerous it is to remain God's enemy because God shatters his enemies doesn't he God unleashes his burning anger on those who oppose him and this gets us I think to the big problem with this song because here we've got this great song of celebration this song of praise but as you read it it's a little bit heavy on judgement isn't it isn't it a little bit heavy on judgement couldn't this great song of celebration just celebrate how the Israelites were rescued through the sea and God brought them out of

Egypt why does he have to focus on all the stuff that he did to the Egyptians why well that is actually the focus of the song what he did and how he judged and how he was angry with the Egyptians is actually more the focus of the song than what the Israelites have experienced so why does Moses focus so much on why God pabbled Pharaoh and the Egyptians and I think our struggle with this reflects how the sounds and hymns we sing are written so they will not offend anyone so people don't like singing about wrath and anger do they and judgment so actually songwriters choose to leave out the songs and not just modern ones 18th section ones too why is it important for Moses to sing about God's wrath and anger isn't this just some kind of big temper tantrum that God has to get it out of his system but hold that question for a little bit first of all to make things a little bit trickier we discover that not only does this song praise God for his wrath but also for his love look at verse 13 do you see that you have led in your steadfast love the people you have redeemed by leading them and guiding them to their future homes so now we have a song where God is magnified as the

God of wrath and anger and he is magnified as the God of unstinting unrelenting faithful love and we don't know what to do about that don't we how on earth do you hold those two things together and we do not like the combination of wrath anger and love and we don't see how that can fit how can God be both of those things so we decide well let's choose love over the wrath so people say to me well actually I believe in a God of love that's the God I like to believe in and they think that settles it no one has to worry about anything anymore because God is a God of love well it's just not that simple as it and life is not that simple it's complicated and this is one of the areas where I think thinking about our God as Trinity is so so helpful God is one God in three persons Father Son and

Holy Spirit and in Christianity there is no contradiction when we talk about God's love and wrath it's not as if sometimes

[23 : 13] God is angry in the morning but by the afternoon he is love it's not like that it's as if he has different moods where he can only feel one and not the other and vice versa but rather the Bible tells us that for all eternity God the Father was loving God the Son before the world existed and never once never once was God angry not once and the reason he wasn't angry is the simple fact that there was nothing to be angry about until Adam and Eve sinned and rebelled in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3 and from Genesis 3 God's anger was a new thing it was and is how God who is love responds to evil God is angry at evil and wrong because he loves the prophet

Isaiah speaks of God's wrath and anger it's a brilliant verse as a strange work is an alien task to God God is not naturally angry isn't that wonderful evil provokes God's anger and that makes complete sense at least to me that as a father if I did nothing but twiddle my thumbs and yawned when my children were suffering it would prove that I don't love them at all wouldn't it it's precisely because I love my children that I hate the thought of anything evil happening to them and if that is true of a sinful messing up all the time human father like me then how much more is it true of a father of lights in whom there is no darkness at all a God who loves and cares deeply and that means because God loves and cares deeply it means that he cannot and he will not be indifferent to evil and wrong

God cares deeply for his people Israel suffering in Egypt such that it meant that he could not be indifferent to evil so the evil of Pharaoh provokes his anger and his burning anger upon them there's one theologian called Miroslav Wolff I don't agree with everything he says but he speaks of ethnic warfare when it was happening around him and it took him to appreciate that kind of ethnic cleansing to appreciate the goodness of God's wrath I think what he writes is particularly relevant in the light of the terrorist attacks last week it's a long crotch but it's worth listening to he says I used to think that wrath was unworthy of God isn't God love surely divine love is beyond wrath shouldn't divine love be beyond wrath God is love and God loves every person and every future that is exactly why God is wrathful against some of them he says my last resistance to the idea of God's wrath was a casualty to the war in the former Yugoslavia the region from which I came according to some estimates 200,000 people were killed and 3 million displaced my villages and cities were destroyed my people showered day in and day out some of them brutalised beyond imagination and I could not imagine God not being angry or think of Rwanda in the last decades of the past century where 800,000 people were hacked to death in 100 days how did God react to the carnage by doting on the perpetrators in a grandfatherly fashion by refusing to condemn the blood bath instead of affirming the perpetrator's basic goodness wasn't God fiercely angry with them though I used to complain about the indecency of the idea of God's wrath I came to think that I would have to rebel against a God who wasn't wrathful at the sight of the world's evil God isn't wrathful in spite of being loved

God is wrathful because he is love you see that is what is happening in Exodus God's anger arises out of his love God's anger is holy it is set apart from the temper tantrums that you and I might experience it is how God reacts to evil and wrong and that explains an awful lot in other categories the father loves the son Jesus and therefore he hates sin which is ultimately a rejection of the son that's what sin is God loves his children and so he hates them being oppressed God loves his world and so he hates all evil in it and in his love he promises to defeat all evil and it is with that knowledge that God was able to and does defeat all evil and Moses and Israel they sing here with joy at

[28 : 22] God's judgments they sing with joy at the God of judgment and that is why we shouldn't be ashamed or embarrassed to speak of God as the God of wrath and anger because it shows that God cares it speaks that God is a God of justice and God isn't going to ignore the atrocities of this world or the pain in your life this is how the living God reacts through evil so we thought about the reasons of the song and the focus of the song lastly and briefly the reissue of the song the re-release the song of Moses gets the second lease of life in the Bible for the benefit of a later audience actually more than just an audience it gets re-released with an invitation to join the choir and that comes in Revelation chapter 15 right at the end of the Bible where John the apostle his great vision of heaven this is what I think they're doing in heaven now it's not just the future it is the saints who are in heaven now in

Revelation chapter 15 and verses 1 to 4 he says this he says they sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the son of the lamb saying great and amazing are your deeds O Lord God almighty just and true are your ways O king of the nations who will not fear you O Lord and glorify your name for you alone are holy and all nations will come and worship you for your righteousness acts have been revealed the apostle John has got this unbelievable vision of heaven and he sees all those who have trusted in Jesus and all those who have been victorious over sin and evil and the devil and they are singing and while they're singing can you see that in Exodus 15 verse 3 they're singing the song of Moses and of the lamb because the reissue of this song becomes a remake of the song and the remake of the song is now we sing of God's great and marvellous deeds his justice and his true ways his righteous acts have been revealed and we think of a rescue and a deliverance to which the first

Exodus pointed which is much greater than that and it's been achieved by the one who in Revelation 15 is called the lamb Lord Jesus here's God's dilemma if I can put it like this people throw an accusation don't they act God and they say God if you care so much about evil why don't you just wipe it out why don't you just destroy the devil here and now why don't you destroy evil here and now and he could couldn't he that's all the problem but if he did that based on our own natural standing every single one of us would have to be destroyed at that moment Solzhenitsyn said this if only it were that simply if only there were evil people somewhere committing insidiously evil deeds and it were necessary to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them but the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being and who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart but the great news of the

Bible is that there was one who was willing to destroy a piece of his own heart to destroy his own self and he was of course the spotless Lamb of God that he was the one who had no line dividing good and evil because there was no evil in him the Bible says he was without sin and without blemish and that is the greatest and most marvellous of all God's deeds recorded in the Bible the work of the cross Jesus came as the sacrificial Lamb to bear the punishment for all the punishment and evil that people like me would commit but astoundingly Jesus is the one who is the Lamb he is the one who is hurled into the sea of God's wrath as Pharaoh and the Egyptians were he is the one who is covered over by death so that you and I would not have to be that Jesus bore the burning anger of God's judgment unleashed upon him so that you and

I could be spared and all of that means that God's commitment to defeat evil is not something that should bring fear to you because our evil has been dealt with and our sin has been dealt with if we trust in the Lamb who died in our place our evil has been paid for and so rather than fearing his commitment to defeat evil for those who actually love God we take joy in his judgments because we know that however hard life is one day good will overcome evil and injustice and wrong doing once and for all and God will do it through the person of his son the Lord Jesus so in the middle of Exodus 15 there's these great lines aren't there who is like you oh Lord among the gods who is like you majestic in holiness awesome in glorious deeds doing wonders and the answer of course standing at the edge of the red sea was there's no one there's no one comes close no one's got a prayer compared to you at all and the answer is the same today there's no one like him there's no one that you should put your trust in other than him there is no one who will rescue you from your sin and the one who is majestic in holiness awesome in wonder and work in wonders and when you experience that that experience of salvation and of rescue evokes raises up demands a response of praise that is modelled here most sigibly as we sing to him who is like you oh

[34 : 28] Lord among the gods who is like you majestic in holiness awesome in glorious deeds and doing wonders those