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Exodus 15:1–18

Singing at the Sea: Joining Israel's Song of Salvation and Hope

Introduction and Context

As we come to Exodus 15, I want us to think about the role which music plays in our lives. I basically soundtrack my entire life – whether I'm working, exercising (which does not happen very much), driving, I'm always listening to music. Whenever, Emma and I play or work together, there is always a lot of music and dancing. She really loves to listen to movie soundtracks, so our go-to albums are the soundtracks for Frozen, The Lion King, and Beauty and the Beast. I believe that music and song are not just something that we enjoy; I believe that music and song are hard-wired into who we are as humans. Consider the field of music therapy that developed as a profession in the 20th century. It has been discovered that music can be used things like motor skill problems in children, emotional trauma in war veterans, and many other ailments. Apparently, music has always been an important part of the human experience. In the Hohle Fels cave in Germany, some of the oldest human artifacts in existence have been discovered – believed to derive from the earliest human migrations into Europe. Among the artifacts are flutes – some carved out of mammoth tusks and one made from the bone of a griffon vulture (which you should see on the screen up here). This is interesting in light of the Bible, because in the first genealogy in Genesis chapter 4, mention is made of the origins of music (Gen 4:20). So, it seems that humans are and have always been designed for music.

So, it's no accident that there are a lot of songs in the Bible. Tonight we come to one of the most ancient of these biblical songs.

The song of Exodus 15 goes by many names:

Some people refer to the song of Exodus 15 as the Song of Moses. This makes sense because v. 1 says that Moses and all Israel sang this song to the LORD. However, I don't like to call this the Song of Moses because there is another song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32 that is also called "the Song of Moses."

Others call it the Song of Miriam. This is because of v. 21 where the first line of the song is repeated by Moses's sister Miriam. It's not entirely sure what is going on here, but it seems most likely to me that verse 21 indicates that the song was sung in a kind of antiphonal pattern. By this I mean that apparently Moses along with the men would sing a section of the song, and then the women would respond with a repeated refrain.

Finally, the song in Exodus 15 may be called either the Song of the Sea or the Song at the Sea. This is the terminology that I prefer, as it reminds us of the context of the Song – this is a celebratory song of praise after God has defeated Egypt and rescued Israel through the miracle at the sea.

Now, songs in the Bible are presented in basically one of two ways: First, there are places in the Bible which collect songs and put them all together – the book of Psalms is the best example of

this. Second, songs can be presented within the context of a narrative or a story. In other words, you are reading through a story and then all of the sudden you come to a song that is part of the story. We call these “inset songs.” This is a form of literary production which continues even until works of literature and art today. Consider how a Broadway musical works. There is a storyline (or a narrative), and there is plenty of dialogue. But, what are the most memorable parts of the production? Where is the main message of the musical presented? These are of course the songs. There is a reason we call them musicals.

Now, I have never been to Broadway. However, I do remember one of my first Valentine’s Day dates with Sara. I believe this was in February 2006 (I had my driver’s license for less than a year). I took Sara to a local theatre company’s production of *The Sound of Music*. Now, I remember the gist of the plot, but I do not remember any of the dialogue. But, I do remember the songs. I remember both their melodies and specific lines: “the hills are alive with the sound of music,” “Doe, a deer, a female deer,” “I am 16, going on 17.” And this was well over a decade ago for me.

So, if you think about the book of Exodus like a landscape, it’s important to see that we are not dealing with a flat plain. No, Exodus, like the rest of the Bible, has a rich topography. There are valleys and bogs and plains and mountain peaks. And, as we come to this song in Exodus 15, we have come to a great mountain peak. This song represents the culmination of the exodus – God’s rescue of his people from Exodus. And here, we have God’s rescued people singing a song of praise to the God who has saved them.

Now, this brings up one other point that sets the stage for our entry into the Song. Why do we have this song in the Bible? In the story, Moses and Israel are singing this song to the LORD. However, the song is not written in the Bible for them to know what to sing. I also do not think that the song is written down just for history’s sake – this isn’t just so that we know what happened. This song is written for the reader of the book of Exodus. That is, the purpose of this song is to call you, the reader of the book, to join in with Israel in praising the God of the Exodus. So as we walk through the Song together, I want us to be guided by two questions: 1. Why can we sing? 2. What should we sing?

We will look at the Song in two parts. First, we will focus on the portrait of God we are given in the first 12 verses of the song. Second, we will look at the goal of the entire exodus in vv. 13–18.

1. Singing about the God of the Exodus (vv. 1–12)

The main idea of the first 12 verses of the song comes in v. 3: “The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is his name!” What an interesting image of who God is! The LORD, the God of the exodus, is a warrior God. And we see in the song that this is a sword that cuts in two directions. God’s role as a warrior is like a coin with two sides. It means something different to the groups of people in the song: God’s people and Egypt.

What does it mean for God’s people, Israel, that the LORD is a warrior? Verse 2 provides the best statement:

“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 fact that the LORD is a warrior means salvation for Israel. He has defeated Egypt and Israel is now free. They have been delivered! This is why they burst into song on the eastern shore of the sea! **The point is that the God of the exodus is a warrior who delivers his people.**

This is powerfully captured in that narrative of the miracle at the sea in chapter 14, verses 13–14. The context of this verse is that the Israelites have suddenly found themselves trapped between the sea and the pursuing Egyptian army. And now they are despairing of life itself. They even sarcastically question Moses, "Is it because there weren't enough graves in Egypt that you've led into the wilderness to die?" Hear Moses's response:

13 Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. 14 *The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still.*"

This verse is extremely important not only because it describes the LORD as a warrior who delivers his people but also because it shows our proper response to the deliverance which God brings. What does the passage say? "The LORD will fight for you; *you need only to be still.*"

The people trapped at the sea are not supposed to deliver themselves. They can literally do nothing to effect their salvation at this dire moment. What are they supposed to do? They are told to be still and rest in the deliverance which the LORD will work for them. So, as we consider what it means for the LORD to be a warrior who delivers his people, it's important for us to see that implicit in this truth is a command for us to rest in the salvation that he has worked and will work for us.

I brought with me tonight my very first Hebrew Bible. I brought it because I will never forget how I got this Hebrew Bible. I got this during my sophomore year of college in my first semester of studying Hebrew. This is now 9 ½ years ago. My Hebrew class had about 8 people in it. 6 of us were regular college students, but two members of the class were middle-aged women who were in the class strictly because they wanted to learn Hebrew. They were not seeking a degree. Their names were Barbara and Sharon. Now, at the beginning of class I had a problem. We were supposed to have a Hebrew Bible at class with us each meeting. However, the campus bookstore was still waiting on the order of Hebrew Bibles to come in (I had some credit at the bookstore, so I was insistent on waiting for the bookstore's copies to come in). One week at the beginning of class, Sharon looked across the table and told me that she had another copy of the Hebrew Bible and wanted to give me the copy she had at class that day. So, Sharon handed me this Hebrew Bible that I am now holding. After she handed me the Bible, I said to her, "How much do I need to pay you?" Her response is something that I will never forget. She very calmly asked me, "What do you say when someone gives you a gift?"

Church, you and I both know that trying to pay for a gift only insults the giver. The answer to Sharon's question, of course, is "thank you." The Bible is telling a great story not of how great men and women rise up and save themselves. Instead, the Bible is telling a great story about a needy and helpless people who are slaves to sin and wickedness and suffering. And the Bible is telling a great story about a mighty warrior of a God who has come to deliver his people, who has suffered for their sins on the cross and who rose again three days later, laying death in its

grave. He now offers freedom and salvation to you, and this great deliverer is not seeking repayment. He is seeking a people who receive his salvation as a gift. **Because the LORD is a warrior who delivers his people, let us trust in him.**

Is this call for two questions. First, have you ever placed your trust in Jesus for your salvation from sin, death, and hell? If not, I urge you. Delay not! If you wait until you're better, you will never come at all. What better time to rest in Christ than now? Second, for those who have trusted in Christ, are you still resting in Jesus? Resting in the work of Christ is not the ABC's that we learn at the beginning of our Christian walk and quickly advance beyond. God's grace and kindness to us in Christ is the A-Z. Resting in the salvation Jesus has won is the fuel that keeps the fire of our soul ablaze for the LORD – we never get over it. As we read this celebration of salvation in Exodus 15, let it cause you to meditate on the marvels of God's work of salvation in your life. When is the last time you considered the miracle of salvation that God has worked in your life? Take some time this weekend, to be alone with God and remember and thank him.

I realize that all of us walk through many trials and seasons of suffering, whether with finances, parenting, health, family stress, marriage, etc. Bring to mind the things in your life right now that fill you with anxiety or heartbreak. Consider this, if Christ is worthy of your trust with your eternal salvation, how much more ought we to rest in him in the temporary anxieties of this life?

Earlier this week, Chris Coughlin reminded me of the words of Psalm 46. Psalm 46 is an amazing song. It begins with the comforting words: God is our refuge and strength, a helper who is always found in times of trouble. However, after this the psalmist paints a scene of chaos and danger: the sea is raging, the mountains are shaking and falling into the sea. Yet, the psalm tells us that we need not fear. Because the LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold. Then, hear the closing words of the song:

- 10 He says, "Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth."
11 The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

So, as you consider the anxieties and the threatening chaos of your life, consider also the mighty warrior God who is with you. Be still, and know that he is God.

So, in the Song at the Sea we encounter the God of the exodus as a warrior who delivers his people. Because of this, we can rest in him. On the other hand, what does the refrain "The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is his name!" mean for the Egyptians? Clearly, it means their defeat and destruction. Hear the words of the song which follow the celebration of the LORD as a warrior:

- 4 Pharaoh's chariots and his army
he has hurled into the sea.
The best of Pharaoh's officers
are drowned in the Red Sea.
5 The deep waters have covered them;
they sank to the depths like a stone.

6 Your right hand, LORD,
was majestic in power.
Your right hand, LORD,
shattered the enemy.

So, as we encounter the God of the exodus, we encounter **the LORD as a warrior who destroys his enemies**. This is a hard truth, and there is much to say about this. However, I want to briefly give three observations about God's destruction of his enemies in the book of Exodus. First, God's judgment on the Egyptians is just. It is no accident that a story that began with the Egyptians throwing Hebrew baby boys into the Nile ends with the LORD throwing the Egyptian officers into the sea. In the same way, all people are under God's wrath and judgment not because God is unreasonably grumpy but because all people have rebelled against God and have committed grievous sins against both God and their neighbors. For God to refuse to punish such rebellion would be unjust, and a world governed by an unjust God would be a terrifying world to live in. Second, God's judgment on the Egyptians is necessary. Without destroying the Egyptians, the Hebrews remain slaves. Without judgment, there can be no salvation. This is all the more remarkable in light of what Jesus has done for us. You see, the Bible teaches us that God's judgment for our rebellion against God has been executed on Jesus at the cross. We are delivered because he was destroyed. He descended into the sea of death in our place. You see, Jesus's suffering and death in our place was absolutely necessary. In the words of Paul, because of Jesus's death in our place, God can be both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. What this means is that because of Christ's death God can be the just judge of the universe and also forgive us and welcome us as his children. Third, God's judgment in Exodus is impartial. To this point in Exodus, all of God's judgment has been directed at Egyptians. However, when Israel comes to Sinai and makes idols to worship, several thousand Israelites are slain by the divine warrior. And this is certainly not the only time that God judges the Israelites en route to the promised land. So, we see that God the warrior is not Israel's pet lion whom they can send out against their enemies according to their pleasure. No, the LORD will not be domesticated, he will not be tamed. He has no owner; he answers to no one. So, let us not mock God and presume upon his grace while in secret we seek to live as our king. **Because the LORD is a warrior who destroys his enemies, let us tremble before him.** Note the response of Israel after seeing the LORD destroy the Egyptians in the sea:

30 That day the LORD saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. 31 And 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.

You have probably noticed a paradox within what we've discussed. We are called to trust in the LORD and rest in him, but we are also supposed to tremble before the LORD, or fear him. This is a really big topic, but it's imperative tonight that you understand that both fear and trust are part of biblical, saving faith. If we fall off of either side of the horse, then we are not relating to God rightly. It is difficult to explain exactly how these work together, but I do think that the combination of fear and trust is best displayed in the way a child looks at the best of fathers. This is difficult because none of us have or are perfect parents, and I am sure that in a room this large several of you have fathers whose character does not resemble that of God at all. That makes it difficult, but I still think that the analogy is valuable (perhaps why God has chosen "father" as one of the titles by which he reveals himself to us). It is right for a child to trust the best of fathers. His father wants only what is best for his children and would never seek his

children's harm. Therefore, trust is fitting. However, the child should also fear his father, not in the way that he is afraid of the boogey-man or a monster, but he should respect his father and recognize that a good father is a father who disciplines his children. So, it is right and necessary that we should both fear God and trust him because he is neither abusive nor a push-over. The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is his name. And he fights for his people. Is this your idea of who God is?

The depiction of God as a warrior, delivering his people and destroying his enemies, builds to a crescendo in v. 11:

11 Who among the gods
 is like you, LORD?
Who is like you—
 majestic in holiness,
awesome in glory,
 working wonders?

The answer, of course, is that there is no one like the LORD!

2. Singing about the Goal of the Exodus (vv. 13–18)

Verse 13 is a hinge verse. It signals a significant shift not only within the Song at the Sea but also within the book of Exodus. At this point attention shifts from the past to the future. God has defeated Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt and has liberated his people from slavery. Now, these Israelites will never see the Egyptians again. Vv. 13ff., then, seem to answer the question, "Where is this relationship going?" So, if the first part of the song sings who God has shown himself to be in the exodus, then in the second part Israel sings about God's end game for the exodus – what his goal is. Verse 13 introduces the main theme:

In your unfailing love you will lead
 the people you have redeemed.
In your strength you will guide them
 to your holy dwelling.

So, God is leading his people to his "holy dwelling." Next, vv. 14–16 describes God leading Israel to the promised land past foreign nations – Edom, Moab, Philistia, and the Canaanites. Just as the first part of the Song described the Egyptians as having sunk into the sea like a stone, so now it is said that the enemies of Israel *will* be still like a stone as God leads his people to his goal. Then, v. 17 returns to what it means that God is leading his people to "his holy dwelling." Let's read v. 17 again:

You will bring them in and plant them
 on the mountain of your inheritance—
the place, LORD, you made for your dwelling,
 the sanctuary, Lord, your hands established.

So, Israel's destination here is described with three expressions: the mountain of the LORD's inheritance, the place the LORD has made for his dwelling, and the sanctuary the LORD has made with his own hands.

What we're expecting here is something that says that God is leading Israel to the promised land. But, notice that the language here goes well beyond the language of the promised land. Promised land terminology is well known – the land the LORD swore to give to Abraham and his descendants, a land flowing with milk and honey, etc. The language here is, dare we say, more intimate. This is the language of the temple – God's dwelling place. God is bringing his people to his temple. **The LORD redeems his people so that he might dwell with them.**

And then, we have the crowning line of the song in v. 18: The LORD will reign forever and ever! So, what is the goal of the exodus? The goal is God's people living in his presence, and him reigning forever as their king!

Now, to catch the full import of this idea we need to recall where we are in the Bible. Exodus is not a standalone book. It is Act 2 of a 5-Act play that we call the Pentateuch or the Torah. That is, Genesis–Deuteronomy form one book with 5 parts. So, here Exodus 15 is not only looking forward to God bringing Israel into the promised land, it is also looking back to the early chapters of the book of Genesis. The first two chapters of Genesis give us an idyllic portrait of God's original creation. However, in Genesis chapter 3, the first humans rebel against God's rule in their lives and the entire creation ruptures. As a result, they are driven out of the Garden of Eden and, therefore, tragically they are driven away from God's presence. The rest of the Bible is the story of God's seeking to redeem humanity and restore us to his presence.

Those of you who have moved cities know how flexible of an idea "home" is. You especially see this when you go back to a place where you had lived and suddenly find that that place is no longer home. I feel this most acutely when I go back to Louisiana to visit family. You see, my parents no longer live in the town where I grew up, and it is always an odd feeling to drive past my old childhood home and realize that that is not my home anymore. So, what is home? Well, home is where the people that you love are. For me, home is wherever Sara and Emma are. In the same way, our true and ultimate home is where God is. That is what we were wired for. And that is the goal of redemption.

Now, as I mentioned earlier, there is a lot of temple language in this part of the passage, and, because of this, the song is associated with the building of Solomon's temple. However, there are a lot of reasons that I am confident that the Song looks beyond the temple that was built in Jerusalem. One quick reason is that the temple in Exodus 15 is a temple which God has made with his own hands. Yet, Solomon is clear in 1 Kings 8 that his hands made the temple in Jerusalem. Now, there are a lot of things to say about this, but I want us to focus on how, on this side of Christ's first coming, we experience God's presence.

Looking Back – In becoming a man, Jesus is "God with us." And we see in John 2 that he speaks about "the temple of his body." As Jonathan taught us this past Christmas, this is what it means that Jesus is Immanuel.

Present – For believers, according to 1 Corinthians 6 our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. God dwells with us now in his Spirit. According to 1 Corinthians 3:16, there is also a sense in which we as the people of God, the church, are God's temple, where his Spirit dwells. And the

book of Hebrews tells us that because of Jesus's sacrifice we are able to boldly approach God's throne – we are able to enter into the holy in holies in prayer.

Future – Yet we still do not experience God's presence in the full way in which it was intended, so like Israel on the shore of the sea, we still look forward to the complete fulfillment of the vision of the Song at the Sea when Christ returns and all things are made new. Hear the words of Revelation 21:

¹ 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. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

So, as we think about God restoring us to his presence, I want us to contemplate two things.

First, understand that the gospel is ultimately about reconciliation between you and God. So, if you're here tonight or listening online and want to know why you should accept Christianity and believe in Jesus. I think that reason #1 is that the good news of Jesus offers you the chance to have peace with God and to know him and to dwell with him.

Second, for those of us who already have faith in Jesus, do you actually desire God's presence in your life? I was recently struck by the language of the psalms, especially when the psalmist is expressing deep sorrow:

Ps 42:1–2

As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for you, my God.

² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
When can I go and meet with God?

As I read these words in the psalms, I was struck by how different the position of my heart is towards the LORD. When God feels distant to me, I do not usually respond by saying that my soul pants for God like a deer pants for water. Rather, I usually find myself feeling rather indifferent. Do you? I pray that what we see in the Song at the Sea will awaken your heart to run hard after God's presence in your life. May it awaken you to seek God in the Scriptures, to speak with him in prayer, to have communion with him, to long for the day when the dwelling of God is again with man. **Because, the LORD redeems his people to dwell with him, let us long to be with God.**

Conclusion

In light of what we have seen in the Song at the Sea, I want us to revisit the two questions I introduced at the beginning of the message. So, we have seen in the Song a portrait of the LORD as a mighty warrior God who delivers his people and destroys his enemies, and we have

the goal toward which the exodus is heading – God’s people dwelling in his presence under his kingship. So then, why can we sing? And what shall we sing?

Jeremiah 23 is a very important passage about the coming of the Messiah, God’s promised king, and the salvation which he will bring. We know now that Jesus is this promised King. Hear the words of Jeremiah:

5 “The days are coming,” declares the LORD,
“when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch,
a King who will reign wisely
and do what is just and right in the land.

6 In his days Judah will be saved
and Israel will live in safety.
This is the name by which he will be called:
The LORD Our Righteous Savior.”

7 “So then, the days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when people will no longer say, ‘As surely as the LORD lives, who brought the Israelites up out of Egypt...’”

Notice what the passage is saying (I have left some complicated details out). When the Messiah comes, he will work a salvation so great that God’s people will forget the exodus and praise God for this greater work of salvation which he has accomplished through the son of David. In other words, the salvation which Jesus will bring about will be even greater than the exodus.

So, why can we sing? We can sing because we have come to know the God of the Song at the Sea in Jesus of Nazareth. He is our mighty warrior who has delivered us from sin and death and will conquer every foe that stands against him. He is our God who deserves our highest praise – he is our God who has come to dwell with us and to bring us to himself. He is our king, who will reign forever and ever.

And what should we sing? We should sing the Song at the Sea and exult in the God of the exodus, the mighty warrior, and hope in the goal of exodus, living in God’s presence and under his rule.

Is this the song that your life sings? This is the song that God is inviting you to join tonight.