

Sunday 12th July 2015 AM When worship is not enough - Exodus 15

Title: When worship is not enough - Exodus 15

Purpose: To understand how a people can go from the heights to the depths in the space of one chapter and only 3 days.

To see what it is that TRULY SUSTAINS, to see what's at the heart of TRUE WORSHIP.

INTRODUCTION

Unfinished books from my study

I pulled out these 6 books from my study this morning - Q. WHAT do these all have in common?

I can tell you it is not that they are all Christian books - it is not that they are all new (some are old), it is not that they are all on the same subject or that I even agree with all the authors. Q. WHAT do they all have in common?

ANSWER - well the bookmarks are the clue - they are all books I have started but have failed to see through.

We all have this problem - DIY projects that began but have not seen an ending; learning a language and then getting stuck; taking up a new sport; losing weight.

It is that common experience of **RUNNING OUT OF STEAM** of ***not* having what it takes TO PROPERLY SUSTAIN US.**

This morning we are coming to Exodus 15 and a story where great worship begins but somehow, within the short space of 3 days has completely RUN OUT OF STEAM!

1] SINGING - What worship! (Exodus 15v1-21)

The background

To get the background for this great song that the Israelites sang we really only need to read the 3 verses prior to chapter 15.

(And it is worth noticing that for BOTH the song and the chorus part that Miriam and the women sing - they are BOTH preceded by a statement of the CONTEXT - which really just serves to remind us that WORTHY WORSHIP is not something merely spontaneous that has no necessary connection to anything):

(Exodus 14 verses 29-31) "But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. That day the Lord saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. And when the Israelites saw the great power the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant."

Well, If ever there was a time to **sing** and **laugh** and **dance** - that moment had arrived.

I cannot imagine that Moses would have had to sit down with a committee of the Israelite elders and decide what to do - I think there are clearly times when you just instinctively know.

A song worth doing justice to

Now as this:

- is the **very first song** to turn up in the pages of Scripture
- and **since it is not brief** (weighing in at around 20 verses)
- and also because this song is **comes back into vogue at the end of the Bible and is sung again**:

Revelation 15 verses 1-4 "I saw in heaven another great and marvellous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because with them God's wrath is completed. And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God and **sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb**: "Great and marvellous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."

For all of these reasons it is worth making **a number of kind-of "cross-sections" through it** so we can **suck as much of the goodness out of it as we reasonably can**:

- **FIRST-OFF** - it is **a very PERSONAL song** - and that has to be what "**WORTHY WORSHIP**" is - an expression that we ourselves OWN - and so we see, right up front plenty of I's and MY's.
- **ALSO** - we see that this song is **one that contains AFFECTION**:

Verse 2 starts "The LORD (Yah) is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation..."

Although it is not immediately obvious in our English versions, the word used here for LORD is the shortened form - it is **not** YAHWEH but simply YAH - it **indicates a much more affectionate tone of address**.

It is really not that common altogether - "**YAHWEH**" comes nearly **7,000 times** in the OT but the contraction "**YAH**" weighs in **only 50 times** (if you do the math that is less than 1%).

So it's **PERSONAL**, it's **AFFECTIONATE** - Q. What else?

- **JUST ONE OTHER THING I'LL MENTION**- it's VICTORIOUS, it's TRIUMPHANT.

Three times over we get the same message - it's at the start, it's at the end and another place too - as Verse 1 has it: "I will sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. **The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea.**"

You have every reason to sing when you are handed VICTORY on a plate.

The song has a chorus that gets repeated by the women - Verse 18:

"Sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. **The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea.**"

It is clear that this victory is **not** something that was "**narrowly won**" - **NO!** - You see the enemy has been HURLED into the sea - all very DECISIVE and WONDERFUL.

The song has 3 parts

OK, well that's got us off the ground - let's now do another cross-sectional cut - and here we notice that the song has got **3 PARTS TO IT** and all of them really continue to assist the singers to enter into exciting and "**WORTHY WORSHIP**".

These **3 PARTS** are *not* too hard to spot:

- **Verses 1-10** are **focussing on the PAST** - on what God, the LORD has already done in this very great act of Salvation and Redemption from Egypt and all the power of slavery that it had, up to that moment exerted.

One of the things that good worship hymns of the past have in abundance (and this is one of the reasons that a fair few have stood the test of time) is that they have both a **STRONG THEOLOGY** and also a **STRONG DOXOLOGY**.

Q. What does that mean?

Well by a **STRONG THEOLOGY** - I mean that they keep God at the centre of the thinking and they show forth different aspects of who He is.

We are reminded (Verse 3) that the LORD is His name - this speaks of that Burning Bush episode and that our God reveals Himself as **ETERNAL**. We are reminded in the same verse that our God is **NOT PASSIVE** - He is not a sit-back God - He takes issue, He wages war against all that is godless, all that is harmful to the good of His people.

We are reminded that He is an **OMNIPOTENT** God - Verse 6 "Your right hand, O LORD, was majestic in power. Your right hand, O LORD, shattered the enemy."

We call back to mind that our God is a God of **WRATH** - yes this is something we can lose sight of but because our God is **ALL HOLY** it means that He must stand against and hate all that represents sin and unholiness.

By a **STRONG DOXOLOGY** - I am talking about the fact that this song **NOT ONLY** speaks about who God is but also goes on to praise Him for what He has done.

Verse 1 "The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea" - Verse 4 "Pharaoh's chariots and his army he has hurled into the sea." - Verse 10 "...you blew with your breath, and the sea covered them. They sank like lead in the mighty waters."

And all of this brings forth a worshipful response.

Q. Have you ever wondered what "**WORTHY WORSHIP**" - (that is **WORSHIP THAT IS WORTH THE NAME**) is made up of?

Let me give you a **simple definition**:

"**WORTHY WORSHIP**" (in the English - the word "**WORSHIP**" came originally from the Saxon weorðscipe - weorð "worthy" and scipe meaning the state or condition of being - hence it is really "**WORTH-SHIP**") consists in **TWO THINGS**:

1. SEEING what God is worth

2. GIVING God what He is worth

And we see the response part in these opening 10 Verses because there are a PAIR OF BOASTS - if you like a matching OR balancing PAIR OF TESTIMONIES.

In Verse 9 we see **the BOAST OF PHARAOH**:

"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.'"

No less than 7 times it is all about what HE is going to do and to accomplish.

Then in Verse 2 we have **a MATCHING BOAST, but this is from Moses**:

"The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him."

Just the same - 7 times, Moses makes his confident boast in what the LORD will do and accomplish.

Let me head on to the 2nd major part of this song (and I am just skipping over verses 11&12 which I'll come back to because they function as the hinge of the song).

- **So then, Verses 13-21** are now, by contrast, forward looking - **focussing, not on the PAST but onto the FUTURE** and that **faith-filled ANTICIPATION** regarding all that God will now proceed to do.

It is very obvious from Verses 13 thru to 18 that you keep reading the word WILL. And it tracks the necessary stages of the journey that they have ahead and predicts what the impact of their God will be.

- so - they are going to know guidance in the onward journey
- the nations are going to tremble (because of course this news of the TOTAL DESTRUCTION of the Egyptian crack forces will get around like wildfire on the INTERNATIONAL GRAPVINE)
- all those nations that are going to be their arch-enemies when they are in Canaan (the Philistines, the Edomites, the Moabites) - well these are going to be (Verse 16) "as still as a stone"
- the Canaanites - who they are going to dispossess from their land (Verse 15) are going to "melt away".

Summing it up in Verse 18 - (by way of faith in their WONDER-WORKING God) - "The LORD will reign for ever and ever."

So these are the main parts of this song - and joining these matching parts together are:

- **Verses 11&12** which are like a hinge about which they smoothly turn.

Let me read them: "Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you— majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? You stretched out your right hand and the earth swallowed them."

It is a STATEMENT OF WONDER.

The repeated questions: "Who among the gods is like you - who is like you..." are RHETORICAL QUESTIONS - they

are not looking for an answer - they are saying "CLEARLY - no-one is like you BECAUSE:

You are MAJESTIC IN HOLINESS

You are AWESOME IN GLORY and

You are actively WORKING WONDERS

It is a wonderful THREE-FOLD statement of REVELATION about their God - it is very much like the CHORUS of that song we were just singing (Who has held the oceans in his hands - behold our God):

"Behold our God, seated on His throne. Come, let us adore Him. Behold our King, nothing can compare. Come let us adore Him!"

And this song, this Song of Moses - should stir us as well - stir us to exclaim once again:

"Who among the gods is like you, O LORD?"

Micah in Chapter 7 reads like this:

Verse 15 "As in the days when you came out of Egypt, I will show them my wonders."

Then Verses 18&19 "Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea."

This shows us how to translate Egyptians chariots being HURLED into the depths of the Red Sea.

So then #1 SINGING - What worship! BUT - NOW - #2

2] GRUMBLING - What! Q. No worship? (Exodus 15v22-27)

I am sure that if you have read this part of Scripture before you have probably asked yourself this question:

Q. How is it possible for a people:

- **that have just** (that is only 3 days earlier) walked across the floor of the Red Sea upon dry ground with mighty walls of water on the left and on the right,

- **who have just** seen all of their enemies dead, buried and gone,

Q. How is it possible **that they have a total personality change and immediately start GRUMBLING?**

Q. Do we have here a people who suffer from **TOTAL AMNESIA** (memory loss)?

Q. Are these people somehow suffering from a phenomenon of **MASS SCHIZOPHRENIA?**

Well - before we get into that - what we can say is that: ***** there is A CLEARLY OBSERVABLE PATTERN ***.**

Wind the story back just a couple of chapters and note the order of events:

- **they celebrate the Passover** and they rejoice that God has stepped into save them and their firstborn from the most devastating of all the plagues.

They also rejoice that they are now on their way out of Egypt and all the Egyptians have been made favourable to

them and they plunder the Egyptians of gold, silver and clothing.

- **then - three days later** - they are at the edge of the sea, they are once again feeling threatened by Pharaoh and they GRUMBLE and they give Moses a right earful and believe they are all going to die!!

Now they are on the other side of the Red Sea - **the pattern seems to be pretty accurately repeated:**

- **one moment** - they are at the heights of worship, and singing and celebrating
- **the next** - they are turned inside out and they are grumbling and their worship has gone down the plug-hole!!

What I want to do **for the rest of our time** is to simply look at:

- **FIRSTLY - how God responds** to this latest sorry episode
- **AND THEN - by way of conclusion**, to hopefully **unravel this massive DISCONNECT** between
-> **worshipping one minute**
and then -> **griping the next**

How God responds

Q. So how does God respond?

Well He does two things:

- **THE FIRST** - is that He sees and understands this as a **"TEACHABLE MOMENT"**:

The second half of Verse 25: "There the Lord made a decree and a law for them, and there he tested them. He said, **'If you listen carefully** to the voice of the Lord your God and do what is right in his eyes, **if you pay attention** to his commands and keep all his decrees, **I will** not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians, for I am the Lord, who heals you.'"

You see God knows that we need the desert.

We don't go from GRACE straight through to GLORY - instead

we go from TRIUMPH to TRIBULATION

Having been SAVED we go on to being SANCTIFIED.

And as we said last week:

"YES - it only took a single day to get Israel out of Egypt **BUT** it was going to take 40 years to get Egypt out of Israel"

God is in the business of setting us **TESTS** - in order to **bring out the best**

(Bear in mind Satan mimics this by way of **TEMPTATION** - which is in order to **bring out the worst!**)

And what we see is that God gives them a working principle to use - which is of the form:

IF YOU DO X and **IF YOU DO Y THEN I WILL DO Z**

The design of these tests is to enshrine in us REPLACEMENT PATTERNS - patterns of blessing and not cursing.

- **THE SECOND** thing is that God **"GIVES MORE GRACE"**:

He points out some wood or possibly a tree and He miraculously heals the water of life by way of it. Now it may be stretching the Scripture a bit far - but at least by way of parallel we can see that ultimately it is through what the wood of the cross means to us that the curse is taken from our lives through what Jesus achieved there.

Notice the way that right after Marah - bitter - came Elim a place of fulfilment and abundant provision.

Charles Spurgeon preaching on this chapter observes that Marah was actually a more productive place for them than Elim.

I am sure that they must have looked back and kicked themselves. If only we had just trusted God, if only we had just waited for God's provision - then our faith would have been rewarded, our trust would have been justified.

Ok - I want to conclude - we've seen:

SINGING - "What worship!"

GRUMBLING - "What! Q. No worship?"

3] CHANGING - "Q. What IS worship?"

Let me return to that brief definition of "**WORTHY WORSHIP**" that I mentioned earlier - I'll just re-state it:

FIRST IT'S: SEEING what God is worth

and then

SECOND IT'S: GIVING God what He is worth

In the book "Changing Lives Through Preaching and Worship" one of the chapter authors brings together the sermon message AND the worship, he says:

(Tim Keller) "If the morning's sermon is on the **Sovereignty & Goodness of God**, I haven't worshipped unless that truth descends from my mind and touches my emotions and will."

We talk about people who are more left-brain (those very LOGICAL TYPES) and those people who are more right-brain (those more CREATIVE TYPES).

And our worship needs, in a sense, to involve and bring together BOTH parts:

- we need **our MINDS to be ENLIGHTENED**
- AND we need **our HEARTS to be EXPANDED & ENLARGED**

When they thirsted day after day God did not yield to their immediate need BECAUSE He had a mind to attend to a more deep-rooted need.

The water would **RE-HYDRATE THEM** for sure

BUT it would not act as a **RESERVOIR** from which they might regularly drink.

Jeremiah the prophet shows us that we are always in jeopardy because of our very broken nature inside:

Jeremiah 17 verse 9 "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?"

The man Job was clearly one who understood what Jeremiah knew:

Job 15 verses 14-16 "What is man, that he could be pure, or one born of woman, that he could be righteous? If God places no trust in his holy ones, if even the heavens are not pure in his eyes, how much less man, who is vile and corrupt, who drinks up evil like water!"

Job was not a perfect man - he faced the prospect of **RESIGNING HIMSELF TO "SERIOUS GRUMBLING"**.

After all he didn't just face 3 miserable days getting thirstier and thirstier - No!:

- he lost his **possessions**
- then he lost his **precious children**
- then **his wife** turned against him and told him to "curse God and die"
- after this **his health** was taken from him so that he had sores from the top of his head to the soles of his feet
- AND IF THAT WASN'T ENOUGH - he ends up being surrounded by a **band of false comforters**

So I think that Job can help us here - let me read:

Job 23 verses 10-12 "But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.

My feet have closely followed his steps; I have kept to his way without turning aside. I have not departed from the commands of his lips;

I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread."

For Job - the worship of God meant "TREASURING"

He had BOTH sides -

Of -> SEEING what God is worth -> he allowed his MIND to be ENLIGHTENED by God's words and then

Of -> GIVING God what He is worth -> he allowed his HEART to be EXPANDED, to be ENLARGED

Job, of course, is not the only one who speaks of this TREASURING - take Jesus and the sermon on the mount - He pictures people exactly like these Israelites here in Exodus 15:

He says (Matthew 6 verse 19) "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth...rather store up treasures in heaven..."

And then a couple of verses later he continues:

"...do not worry, saying, Q. What shall we eat? or Q. What shall we drink? or Q. What shall we wear? For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

The problem

In the final analysis the problem of these Israelites was that of:

- a lack of HEART CHANGE
- their WORSHIP was not "WORTHY WORSHIP" but "TRUNCATED WORSHIP"

Scripture says "TASTE and SEE that the LORD is good" - for the Israelites and perhaps for you and me in like tradition - we SEE things, we SEE that the LORD is good BUT we do not INTERNALISE that - we do not truly TASTE the goodness.

Conclude

Remember WORSHIP, that is worthy of the name, is TWO PHASE:

- we must **SEE what God is worth** (after all it is WORTH-SHIP)
- AND we must **GIVE God what He is worth** (this is the RESPONDING, the TREASURING, that part where we are DELIGHTING also - deep-down. This is where our MINDS and our HEARTS are properly RESONATING TOGETHER).

May the Lord help us in this to be truly sustained in and through our WORSHIP OF HIM.

Let's pray....AMEN