



EXODUS, PART 17: True Worship and Fickle Hearts

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For a long time now music has been a huge influencer on modern cultures. And even as technology continues to advance, and all of us continue to find more personalized ways of listening to and enjoying music, there always seems to be this common cultural hymnal that we all know.

Even today there are songs which the majority of us would know, and most of us at some point would find ourselves humming along with it.

As our culture continues to enjoy music we don't need to dig too deep to find that in music the lines between enjoyment and worship are blurred. I've been at concerts and I've often stepped back and been like, "whoa, this is weird." You have all these people singing together really heartfelt lyrics, and it can't help but feel like worship.

But we know this faux worship is really limited. The majority of songs we sing about today are about love and yet despite our ability as a culture to gather and sing about it, we still face divorce rates between 40%-50%. We still see infidelity happening at rising levels, we see pornography usage running through the roof. So regardless of how much we sing about love, it is failing to shape our lives.

Unfortunately even inside the church we see that worship in terms of heartfelt singing, though good, sometimes fails to produce long term change. Today we are going to see one of the best corporate worship events in the Bible. All of Israel is going to sing a wonderful, gripping, emotional song of praise to God, but in twenty two verses, we are going to see the lack of change that song produced in the lives of the Israelites.

In order for our music and our worship to change our lives, we first need to ask ourselves how we change. And the story of the Israelites is going to expose a problem, but also point to a solution. What we are going to see today is that **Exodus 15 shows us the people of God need more than a new song, they need a new heart.** Pray.

If you have your Bibles today we will be in Exodus 15, and this passage opens with **Ex. 15:1a**.

This song is the first corporate song sung by God's people in the Bible. Why? It's been 600 years since God promised Abraham to make him into a great nation. Why now? Because God wanted to tie the songs of his people to the events of their salvation. And in terms of Biblical salvation this was the first significant salvation event.

And from Exodus 15 the people of God is always a singing people. In Revelation 15, people are still singing this song! This is unique even among world religions. We love to sing. For we have a great reason to sing. In the same way cymbals clash when struck, strings resonated when strummed, Christians sing when saved. It is the spiritual principle of cause and effect.

But worship through song does two things: 1. It says something to us, and 2. It says something to and about God.

We want to look at this second point right now. If we want to understand how worship changes us we need to first understand: **How worship Praises God.**

Have you ever thought about what the songs you sing at church or listen to on Christian radio say about God? What do they say about his salvation (which we already see as the basis of worship)? Because what we want in terms of our corporate signing and our private devotion is not only to say things about God, but things said rightly about God. We want them to be true, helpful and drenched in God's salvation.

So what I want to do here briefly is look through the song of Moses and point out three truths God recorded in scripture for our benefit. Three truths that help us preserve the clarity of our salvation, and help us respond rightly in reverent worship.

Truth #1: God's Salvation makes us his people. Ex 15:1-3.

Did you hear the personal pronouns in that text? Now I want us to look back briefly on what we saw this same people group saying just a few hours ago **Ex. 14:11-12**. That's a big change. "Why have you done this to us" changes to, "You are my God."

Why? Because they were saved. Salvation is the demarcation line between God's people and other people. To see God apart from salvation is to be blind to his reality, but to see God inside of his salvation is to see true worship. It is to say, that is my God.

I know that there are Christians in here who are weary of all this worship: who can't wait for the songs to end, for the wordy preacher to sit down, and to go home. We had a young lady at GCF get saved this spring, she was someone who had come to church thinking she was saved for over a year. And I told her, "I can't imagine the burden church was to you."

I can't imagine the dryness of worship, and the weight of futility which rest on people who think they are saved, but who have never experienced in full truth the reality of salvation. For how can you be expected to worship a God who is not yours? How can you have affection for something which you do not know?

And if you are one in here who is dry and burdened by the task of worship I want to say to you that this God has come near to you in Jesus. Take Christ's salvation and worship God as one who says, this God is my God, he is my strength and my song. At the center of Christian worship is the presupposition that God is your God through the salvation of Jesus Christ.

In your songs, in your room, in your heart, is this present in your worship?

The second truth which should be present in our worship is: **God's Judgment makes him unparalleled. Ex. 15:4-12.**

I'm not going to spend much time on this text because last week we really dove into the power and importance of God's judgment as essential to understanding our salvation. But here we see that right worship includes components of God's judgment.

Do you realize that God is worthy to be praised because he is greater in power than anyone else? Who is like our God in power? For who can breathe and destroy the nations? Who is like our God in salvation, for he has saved us from the depths of death?

If you wrestle with seeing God as majestic, as worthy of worship, in encourage you to look at your own sin in the same way the Israelites looked back on the Red Sea. See the insurmountable obstacles that God removed with a word of his command.

Do your songs, your devotions and your thoughts understand the weight of judgment which stood against you? Does it lead you to appreciate in greater ways the God who saved you and the Jesus who ransomed you?

And lastly we see: **God's faithfulness makes him trustworthy. Ex. 15:13-18.**

Again we see the distinction in this song between the people of God and the other people. The people of God are led by God's loving kindness. This word for loving kindness is the word, *hesed*, a word we talked much of a few years ago when we went through the book of Ruth.

One commentator described this loving kindness as: "a love which finds its expression not in the beating heart but in the decisive will." God loved his people not because he felt like it, but because he wanted to. God's people were led by the unshakable desire of God himself, they were redeemed out of the deepest will of God, not by accidental chance but by divine premeditation.

This redemption, this love was so powerful that it led the enemies of God to fear. The Philistines were seized in terror, the Edomites dismayed, Moab trembled, and all of them stood still as the people of God would pass by.

Now I want us to look up at this map. **Map (1, 2, 3)**. When the Israelites sang this song, it was sung as past tense, but this is because they looked onto their future with such confidence that they saw the victory already happened in the heart of the sea.

God was going to clear the path, God was going to establish his people in the Promised Land, on the Holy Mountain, and it ends with this refrain: The Lord will reign forever and ever.

Immediately after the song is done we see this: **Ex. 15:19-21**. So we see in Exodus 15:1-18 the men singing, in verses 19-21 we see the women singing, this goes to show that everyone was singing the salvation of God. Everyone was singing as a result of the Red Sea, the Lord will reign forever and ever.

While the song is complete, the story isn't. We now see attributes which make worship praiseworthy. But now we are going to see **How Worship Preserves Us. Ex. 15:22-27**.

This is where the challenge comes for us. We saw Israel singing wonderfully true, truly emotional words to God. But despite its truthfulness and despite its corporate acceptance. It really didn't change anything.

The true reprieve of the song ended up being: The Lord will reign forever and ever, or at least for three days. They are only three days removed from wonderful salvation, and yet they cry out to God because they have no water. The only spring they come across is caked in desert salts which makes it bitter and actually dehydrating.

God looks down on these forgetful disingenuous people and he has grace on them. He shows Moses a fallen tree, and when Moses throws that tree in the water, the water becomes sweet.

But the really important thing here is what God says in, **Ex 15:25b-26**.

God tells his people, I've healed you. You are already saved. And saved people need to obey me. Saved people act differently. And at Marah, God began to test his people. Will God's people obey and live, or will they disobey and live under a curse? The sign of true worship isn't only in the truthfulness of our words, but also in the sincerity of our actions.

God saved us so that we might live a new life. Through salvation God made Israel his people so that they might act like his people!

So God says this: I saved you mightily, you have a songbook which rightly portrays my salvation, you have a sign of sweet water which should lead you to obey, so obey me, trust me, and you will know joy. And look at what follows: **Ex. 15:27**.

When Israel came to Marah they found no water, when they were taught about heartfelt obedience they left and camped by the water. They have seen and experienced a real salvation. God changed their location, he killed their foes, he gave them water, he brought them to a desert garden, why wouldn't people obey him?

Why would anyone doubt God's goodness in his commands? Who would be foolish enough to say, this God doesn't know what he is doing? And yet the track record which we will see through the book of Exodus is just that, the people choosing to disobey.

Their worship, though it accurately praised God, it failed to preserve them. This is where we have to remember that the salvation of Israel, though similar in language to our salvation, is not our salvation.

Where through the Exodus God changed the location of the people, it was only through the cross that God changed the heart of his people.

The people of God needed more than a new song in order to obey God fully, they needed new hearts. This is what Jesus came to do for us. No more was obedience something forced on us from the outside, but it would become something planted in us by God himself.

Look at the promise of this change given to the prophet **Ezekiel 36:25-28**.

Where in Exodus 15 a tree thrown into the water makes bitter waters sweet, in the gospel the King hung on a tree makes dead hearts alive.

Jesus says in **John 7:37-38**.

We find ourselves in the story of the Israelites, but we find ourselves with a better hope. We can obey God because we have the same trust the Israelites had. We have seen the judgment of God on the cross, we have seen the defeat of death in the resurrection, we know the promise of the coming New Heavens and New Earth, but more than knowing and singing about these things, God has given us through Jesus, a heart filled with the Holy Spirit capable of worshipping in spirit and in truth.

Here is the rub. We all sing. We all worship. We all say, know and recognize aspects of the gospel and our deliverance, but if those words, those signs and those symbols don't give us confidence to obey then we are not being true worshippers.

Here is the thing, some of you in here are still on the shore of the Red Sea, you see the bodies, you know the hope, you are ready to obey. But some of you are three days, three months, thirty years in the wilderness, but your salvation is still as true.

To feel again as you did when you first believed you don't need to relive some emotional experience, you just need to obey what God has commanded of us. Obedience isn't what saves us, but it is what preserves us.

As we live this side of the cross, but this side of eternity all we have are opportunities for our worship to remind us that our obedience is reasonable. We can obey because God has proved his trustworthiness. As the old Hymn says, "Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, and to take him at his word, just to rest upon his promise, and to know 'thus says the lord.'"

The task of the church is to sing the songs of God which remind us that we together can obey God. We want to guard the language of our worship so that it may encourage our right response to bitter water and dry deserts.

But if we turn with new hearts to the commands of God, and seek to love him, serve others and resist sin, we will know in even greater clarity and joy, our God the healer.

May our songs shape our obedience in salvation, and may our obedience resonate in our songs. For the Lord has saved us, and we are his.