

Dr. John Oswalt, Exodus, Session 8, Exodus 15

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Dear Father, we thank you on this lovely day for the good news of the Resurrection. Thank you that death could not defeat you and that you are alive. Because you're alive, we have the promise of life eternal.

Help us, Lord, to live with that certainty. Help us to live as those who know the end of the story and know that we win. Thank you, Lord.

Forgive us when we forget that and become burdened down with the pressures and the difficulties of life. Thank you that you understand that. Thank you that you know what it is to be burdened, to be frustrated, to try so hard and seem, at least on the surface, not to succeed.

Thank you, Lord, that you shared all that with us. But thank you that you have won the victory and triumphed over it. Help us, Lord, to live as people of the Resurrection.

We thank you for the scriptures. We thank you for the freedom that we have to study them tonight. We pray that you will open their truth to us.

We recognize that there is no other book like this. But we also recognize that unless your Holy Spirit opens its truth to us, it is just another book. Thank you, Holy Spirit, that you are here and that you will keep your promise and open your word to us. In your name, we pray. Amen. We come tonight to the Song of Moses and Miriam.

This is, in many ways, the theme that runs through the Bible. Perhaps you remember that in the book of Revelation, we're told that the people sang the Song of Moses and of the Lamb. So, the tie-in here is very significant.

And the reflection that we find here on everything that has gone before is very significant. So, we'll spend a fair amount of our time looking at this poem. It's a poem in three stanzas.

The first stanza is brief and rather introductory. It's verses 1 to 3. The second and the third stanzas are the real body of the poem.

The second stanza being verses 4 to 12.

And then the last stanza being verses 13 to 18. Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to Yahweh. I will sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted.

Both horse and rider, he has hurled into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my defense. I don't like that.

My strength and my song. He has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him.

He is my Father's God, and I will exalt him. The Lord is a warrior. The Lord is his name.

I ask you to look at the pronouns in this stanza. What are they? I and he and I is all over the place. I will sing.

The Lord is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation. He is my God.

I will praise him. My Father's God, and I will exalt him. Now, what's the significance of that? All right.

Exactly. It's a personal pronouncement of his faith and of salvation. What is brought about? Relationship? Yes.

There's a new sense of relationship with God. Why is that? Because of God's actions. God has shown who he is and there is then this response on the part of Moses and of Israel.

Israel speaking in the sense of the common nation. So, the I here is not only Moses but it is Israel as well. God has demonstrated his faithfulness and as a result Moses and the people are saying he is my God.

No longer are they merely spectators. Now they are participants with God in this whole undertaking. Let's look at these references.

Psalms 18, verses 1 and 2. As soon as you find it someone read it out nice and loud. Psalm 118, verse 14. Isaiah chapter 12 verse 2. Habakkuk chapter 3, verses 18 and 19.

Isaiah, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah. Yes. Yes.

Yes. So, three times the verse is quoted directly and two more times are clear allusions. What does that say to us? Why do you think this is so? Why is this happening? Alright, they've learned to trust him.

Why use these words or at least these concepts five times in later books of the Old Testament? What does that say to us? Exactly. The song of Moses was being taught and remembered. Why? It's true.

It keeps hope alive. Yes. It was upbuilding and strengthening.

Reminds them of who they are. Yes. All things are good.

They kept forgetting it. Yes. It speaks of the absolute importance of the Exodus in their understanding of who they are.

There are lots of other great poems. There are lots of other great expressions of faith, but this one is clearly being used, taught, and remembered because of its connection to the Exodus event. Now, I've hammered this again and again, and as long as you're here and I'm here, I'm going to keep hammering it.

Our faith is inextricably connected with God's actions in history. How do we know we're the people of God? Because he led us through the Dead Sea, the Red Sea, didn't he? How do we know that we're the chosen people? Because he led us through the Red Sea. How do we know that God is God of God and Lord of Lord because he led us through the Red Sea? I didn't plan it this way, but I think it's very significant that this is Monday after Resurrection Day.

If Christ be not risen, we are of all people most to be pity, because we have believed a lie. Now, a friend of mine, when I was using that verse in connection with Old Testament events, said, well, I don't think you can do that. And I dared to disagree with him.

I think Paul didn't just dream that up after the Resurrection. It was part and parcel of his understanding of faith, Christ being risen. If the Hebrew people were not delivered from Egypt, if this is a, as is unfortunately all too popular today, a theology story, then I have to say, what about theology? Where did they get the idea that God is God alone? Where did they get the idea that they are the uniquely chosen people of God with a destiny unless God acted in their interest? So, this repetition, He is my strength, He is my song, He is my salvation, is directly linked to the fact of the Exodus.

Now, of course, Passover every year helps to drive that home as well. Father, why are we doing this? Oh, we were slaves in Egypt, but God led us out with a mighty hand. All the firstborn of Egypt died, but we live because He is God alone.

Now, what about those three words? What is their significance besides the fact that they all begin with F in English? What do those three words convey about God and our relationship to Him? Total reliance on Him. Yes, I think I'm right with you. Send that out a little more.

In what sense does this reflect total reliance on Him? All right? Yes. Yes. I think that's exactly right.

He is my strength. Enable me to face whatever life may throw at me. Not my strength, but He is my strength.

And, not somehow, but triumphantly. For the song. Not, well, I guess I'm going to make it.

There are days like that. And they come. But, thank God, that's not the sum total of our lives.

He puts a song in our hearts. We've talked a little bit about this before. The fact that singing is intrinsic to biblical faith.

I certainly have not plumbed over the depths of all of that connection. But it's true. It's true.

When God comes into your life, something happens that can only be fully expressed in a song. Just spoken words don't do it. It has to be sung words.

That's one of the things that Martin Luther, Isaac Watts, and Charles Westwood were absolutely committed to. The people in the pews need to be enabled to sing their faith. For much of the medieval church, it was the priests and the choir who did the singing.

And the people maybe would mumble some responses. But that was it. And when Luther said, no, no.

They're going to sing their theology. That was a revolution as important as the discovery of the Bible again. That's perhaps an overstatement, but it's not very much of an overstatement.

It's a great tragedy that we're losing that today. We'll see what happens there, but I get into a lot of Methodist churches.

And I'm always fascinated by, you know. Where is the triumphant, rejoicing declaration of our faith? When it's done right. One of the very unfortunate things that's happening is the congregation, by and large, is being drowned out by 180 men.

Karen and I were in a house church in Russia. The room was about as big as from this wall to that wall and across at the door. And, I mean, if you're going to do worship, obviously, you have to have a praise band.

And you have to have enough amps to blow the back wall out. And we, of course, were the honored guests, so we were on the front row. If I had had any here, I wouldn't have after that.

But it was just, if I may say it, ridiculous. They didn't need that amplifier. But we watched television from America.

And if you're going to worship, you have to have a used amplifier. But you're right. In many situations where the congregation is not overwhelmed by the amplifier, there are great ecstatic things.

Again, I'm on a hobby horse here, and I'll get off eventually. But one of the things that concerns me greatly in the present music movement in the church is amnesia. I was fascinated.

I was with a group of, may I say it, kids. I mean, if anybody under the age of 50 wouldn't get my age. And suggested that we sing. It only takes a spark to get a fire going.

Not a soul. That thing was only 30 years old. But you see, in popular music, something that's 10 years old is a golden oldie.

The whole idea is to quickly replace and renew. Our son Andrew is a pastor in the Junior Church in Columbus, Ohio, the largest Junior Church in the world. The lead musician is an old man.

He's 39. And he has a son who's 18. And the music that they, and again, I get into a lot of churches, hear a lot of music.

It's pretty rare that I know one of the songs they're singing. But Andrew reported that the 18-year-old son of the music leader chided his father for using that old music. So, my wish is that somehow we could find the happy medium.

The blend where, yes, we are singing praise of songs from our hearts. And yet, we are not losing our connection with that. And there you go.

Okay, I'll get off it. All right. And the reason he is our strength.

The reason he gives us a song is that he is our salvation. We know. We know.

I've quoted this before. I've quoted it everywhere. I thought of it again this morning.

I believe it's from Dick Rickey, though. He, like the bird, is feeling the branch give way to music, yet singing, knowing it has wings to fly. Yes, he is our salvation.

We know that. And because we know that, we can meet every situation with strength and with a song.

Well, half an hour for three verses, that's what she said. Okay. He is my God.

And I don't think we can overemphasize that in terms of its importance in our understanding of the rest of the song. Now look at verses 4 through 12. And what are the pronouns here? What's the dominant? First, second, or third? What's the dominant one? Second, yes.

Yes. Your right hand. Your right hand.

The greatness of your majesty. You threw down. You unleashed.

By the blast of your nostril. Uh-huh. Yes.

Verse 10. But you blew with your breath. So yes, there is you, and then there is somebody else.

As my brother has said, one expression of that is I. What's the other expression? What I'm thinking about is that third person. The deep waters covered them. They sank.

In the greatness of your majesty, you threw down those who opposed you. It consumed them by the blast of your nostril.

The enemy boasted I will pursue, and so forth. But you blew with your breath, and the sea covered them. They sank like lead.

Verse 12. You stretch out your right hand, and the earth swallows your enemy. So, the contrast that is painted here is between what God has done.

He hurled Pharaoh's chariots and army into the sea. In a real sense, there is no contrast. God is the active one.

You did it. You did it. You did it.

And they are thrown down. They are consumed. They boasted.

You blew with your breath, and the sea covered them. They sank like lead. And so, what's the conclusion that we should draw from that? Look at verse 11.

We've been talking about this all the way through, haven't we? What's the lesson? Those gods, the gods of those people, cannot hold a candle to you. You're in a different category. I've spent a fair part of my adult life trying to argue that case.

That Yahweh is not one of the gods. He is in a different category altogether. The gods are over here.

He's over here. And that's the point that is being made here. Isaiah then expands on this immensely in chapters 41 to 48 of his book.

Who is like you? And the answer is, possibly, nobody. They worship rocks and stones and stars. They're not one of those things.

Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, mm-hmm. Yeah, it's the same point that's being then developed here. You're my God, and you use them.

Yes. All right, let's push on. Verses 13 through 18.

How is the perspective of this stanza different from the perspective of 4 to 12? What direction are verses 4 to 12 looking? They're looking backward to what God has done for them. The enemy boasted you did this, you did that. They're swallowed up.

So, the perspective there is backward. What is the perspective of verses 13 to 18? It's future. Yes, yes.

In the light of what you have done, what does it mean for us in the future? So what impact will the news of the exodus have, according to these verses? Look at verses 14, 15, 16. The enemies are going to be terrified. And it's interesting.

We don't have really time to look at it. But if you look at Joshua chapter 2, Rahab says the very same thing to the five. She took her life in her hands.

She lied to the king. And she lines herself up with these two guys and risks her life for them. Why? Because she heard this message.

Everybody is scared witless. Because they've heard what your God has done, and that's exactly right.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. So, the fear of the Lord is the beginning for them if they will know him. Okay? No, I don't think so.

I think it means God, and they're saying God has bought us. We were slaves in Egypt, and by his actions, we've become slaves of God. He's bought us and taken us out of slavery.

And it's fascinating that in Joshua's final message, he says, the Lord has delivered you from the house of slavery, from the house of bondage. Now, decide who you are going to be a slave of. They say, well, no, no, no.

No, I'm not going to be anybody's slave now. I belong to me. And Joshua says, no, you don't.

It's not a question of whether you're going to be a slave. The only question is whose slave you're going to be. Our culture is that that's who they are.

Enslaved to passion, enslaved to pleasure, enslaved to power, enslaved to money, enslaved to desire. So God has bought them, and they are his people in that sense. Okay.

Look at verse 13. What is the keyword there? In your hesed you will lead the people you have written. This version says you're unfailing love.

What are some other versions? Mercy. Steadfast love. Unfailing love, yes.

Any others? Loving kindness. Again, you'll hear this until you're blue in the face. There is the keyword of the Old Testament.

Now, holiness goes with it, but in a real sense, this is an expression of God's holiness, and his holiness is an expression of this. John was not dreaming up something new when he said, God is love. God is hesed.

It's what the Old Testament is arguing over and over and over again. So, you just need to put a red flag in your brain somewhere, that when you see that, whatever word it is in your version, mercy or steadfast love or unfailing love or on and on, there are about, according to my count, nine different translations of this word that are used in different versions, trying to get a handle on it. As I've said to you before, it really takes a sentence to translate.

The passionate, undying devotion of a superior to an inferior, especially when undeserved. It's a word that is unknown outside of the Old Testament. It's very unusual.

Most Hebrew words are known from other Semitic languages, not this one. And yet it occurs more than 250 times in the Old Testament, about three-quarters of them referring to God.

So, what is it that caused him to do all this? What is it that caused him not to say those people are on their own? I know what they're like. I know how they're going to treat me.

Forget it. Let them rot in slavery. What do you think, Moses? How about we start over with you? How do you feel about that? You're going to see that in a couple of weeks.

Moses said, God, you can't do that. God said you're right. You better go down and talk to these people.

In your hesed, you will lead the people you hesed. Yep. Yep.

Yep. If nobody else has learned the lesson, one person has. Exactly right.

Exactly right. Yep. Yep.

And I suspect it would be, again, I want to walk a very fine line here. I believe we need to constantly reiterate the importance of the crises in the Christian life. The crisis of conversion, the crisis of sanctification, I think those are absolutely important.

At the same time, it might be a little difficult to figure out between, say, chapter 6 and chapter 15, just where the tipping point in Moses' life was. But as you say, we can say now wherever the point was, we can see the evidence that the point has happened. And he still is going to argue with me. Yeah.

Oh, yeah. There's no question. And the fact is, most of us don't know God well enough to argue with him.

We don't have a close enough relationship to say, God, we're not complaining, we're not griping, but to really get in there and say, God, what are you doing here? You don't. All right, let's push on. Look at verse 17 and tell me the purpose of the Exodus.

Where is he going to take them? Deeper into a relationship with him. There are three descriptions of Canaan here. The mountain of your inheritance.

I don't think inheritance is the best word. Your special possession. I think it's a better word or a better translation.

The mountain of your special possession. The place you made for your dwelling. The sanctuary.

Where is God taking them? Home. The temple. He's taking them, not so much to a geographical location, he's taking them into a relationship.

That's why the book of Exodus is going to develop as it does. You know, hey, he's got them out of Egypt now, so let's just take a straight shot to the land of Canaan. What's

this law about? And what's this tabernacle about? He delivered them to bring them into a relationship with himself.

As I said several times when we were looking at the plague, it is not subterfuge when Moses says, let my people go so that they may go into the wilderness and work with me. That's really what it's about. So, Lord, save me so that I can accomplish this or do that or the other thing.

And God says you don't understand. I'm saving you for myself. I think we can argue that.

I think we can argue that. We don't hear it until the end of chapter three after the fall has occurred, but it was customary for God to come and walk in the garden in the pool of Eden. That tells us about what had been going on before this tragedy.

Yeah. All right. Let's push on.

As I said to you before, the chapter divisions were put in somewhere in the five or six hundred A.D. We don't know exactly when. We have very few copies of the Old Testament between the Dead Sea Scrolls and 1000 A.D. because they burned scrolls rather than have them, and they began to wear out. They were sacred.

You burned them to ensure that they were not used for some profane purpose. But all we know is that the Dead Sea Scrolls have no chapters. When you come to the text from 1000 A.D., you've got chapter breaks.

The chapter breaks are not inspired. And this is one classic place where the chapter break is in the wrong place. The chapter break truly ought to come after chapter 15, verse 21.

Because with 15:22, we are into a new section. Chapter 15 functions very nicely. In your hesed, you bring us to yourself, is what I would title that third stanza.

15, I say, on the one hand, brings the previous section to a close. And verses 13 through 18 introduce us to what's coming in 15:22. Through the end of the book, to 4038. But we've got a couple of stages along the way.

They now know Yahweh's power. They now know that there is none like him among the gods. What they don't know is whether God can be trusted to take care of them.

He can whip any god, anything that calls itself god. Yep, that's clear. No ifs, no ands, no buts.

But does he really care about our most basic needs? That's what 15:22 to 18:27 is about—God's providence. We have had a revelation of his power.

Now, in this next section, 15:22 to 18:27, the providence of God. Does he care about us? Does he care about our most basic needs? Can we trust him every day? Yes, yes. In the big crunch, when it comes down to Egypt or Yahweh, yes, he's going to win.

We've got that clear. But, immediately in verse 24, we see it. This version says so the people grumbled.

The classic 15:22 to 18:27. Other versions are going to say they complained. It really, the word really is a little bit stronger than complain. It's to mutter.

So it really talks about an attitude, a cynical attitude, a tearful attitude. Why is that our first inclination? Now, maybe it's not yours, and if so, I congratulate you. But for at least some of us here, is it I, Lord? Yes.

Why is our first inclination to mutter? Thinking of ourselves, fallen nature, loss of control, displeasure. It really talks about our fearful inability to trust. We're used to being frail.

Yes, yes. When Peter and Masha first went to Russia and were working with these kids who were put out of the orphanage at age 15 or so, after about six months, we were talking on the phone, and he said, Daddy, how do you talk to somebody about trust, whose every trust in life has failed? So, like to comment, we're used to being frail. Even those of us in this wretched land who have come from good families, that sort of thing, we still have that deep, deep fear.

And it took me a long time to come to this, but I'm confident that the root of all sin is fear. They're afraid. We're out here, and if you ever get a chance to go to Israel and go to the Sinai Peninsula, you'll know if there is a God-forsaken place on the planet.

That's it. We're out here. We get our hopes up about this water hole, and it turns out to be alkaline.

What are you doing? So, what's the antidote to that? Don't give anything away just yet. What's the antidote to that? God can be faithful. Surrendering? Yes.

Willing? Willing to take a risk. Remembering? Yes. Give your true possible Lord's help.

Like Samuel, when he set up the stone called Stone of Elk, Ebenezer. We need some of those stones, our Lord. I haven't been here before.

Okay, well, you've proven yourself in the past, and I'll dare to believe you again. One second. Okay.

A lot has been made of verse 25, the tree that he threw into the water, and the water became shit to drink. A lot of sermons have been preached on that. Jesus was hanged on a tree, and that tree has taken the bitterness of life.

That's true. I'm not sure that's what this is about, but nevertheless, there is a truth to that, that they are at least parallel. In my mind, this is one more example of the variety of God's ways of working.

He could have said, hold your staff over that water, and it'll become sweet. But he didn't. He said, let me show you this tree over here.

If you'll throw that branch into the water, it'll neutralize that alcohol. God has a variety of ways of working, and we ought not, I said this last week, I'll have occasion to say it again, we ought not to try to dictate to God. You've got to do it this way every time. Or it's not you, the medical professor.

It's the gift of God, and God heals. We tend to think the only healing is the instantaneous healing that is, quote, miraculous. Years ago, I heard Dr. McPhee preach a sermon.

As you perhaps know, he was healed of tuberculosis when he was in his late 20s. Went on to live to be 94, I think. His wife, however, died of cancer at age 56.

She was not healed. And he preached a sermon that revolutionized my whole thinking on this matter. He said there are five gifts of healing.

You'll believe God for your gift. There's instantaneous healing, which he said is rare. There is the crisis point that has reached and turned.

When a person begins, they make the turn and begin to get better. There is miraculous healing to the cure. One example that I have thought of again and again and use always is Elvis Kelley, who is the president of Avon Park Clinic.

He was a student here in the seminary, graduated, went back to Michigan, and became deathly ill. He was at death's door, and one of the doctors said, Do you suppose it is histoplasmosis? Nobody in Michigan has histoplasmosis. Everybody in Kentucky has histoplasmosis.

You have it. And yes, it was. And they administered the medicine to him, and he was well in two days.

The fourth is a specific grace. And as he preached it, and as I have preached it, that's as much a miracle as it is a healing. It's the grace to triumph over injury.

And if we needed any better example than Paul, I can't think of one. No, Paul, I'm not going to heal you. Wow, Paul didn't have enough faith, huh? I don't think so.

I said I'm going to get greater glory through your suffering triumphantly than if I healed you. And the last one is the triumphant crossing. One of the things that John Wesley said is, Our people die well.

Yes, that's a miracle, too. So, God's healing works in a variety of ways, and I think that relates to what is said here. I will not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on you.

Now, I think there is wisdom there. And again, I want to try to speak very, very carefully here. But you know what? I can pretty much guarantee you that you will never get sick of it if you, as a virgin, marry a virgin and remain faithful throughout your life.

Now, is it a mean God who says, You are promiscuous, and I'm going to give you a case of syphilis for that? On the other hand, God has made the world to operate in certain ways, and if you operate in those ways, you can expect, most of the time, the absolute here. You may expect good and bad. So, do bad things happen to good people? Absolutely not. Are there guarantees that if you live according to God's standards, nothing bad will ever happen to you? Absolutely not.

On the other hand, if we live according to God's creation standards, we can expect certain good and bad because that's how the world is made. All right, we're going to stop right there, and we'll have to do three chapters next week.

It'll be a new record, but all things are possible with God.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you that you are the healer. We thank you that you have made us for health. Thank you that when we live according to your standards, health is the expected result. Thank you, Lord.

And thank you that in this fallen world, where sin has produced disease, this comes upon the best people at times. Thank you that there is grace in you to live triumphantly and, if necessary, to die triumphantly. Thank you.

And as we began, thank you for the truth of the resurrection and that eternal life is ours. You are our strength, our hope, and our salvation. Amen.