

The LORD is My Strength and My Song

Exodus 15:1- 5, 11

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Ex. 15: 1 Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD:

*"I will sing to the LORD,
for he is highly exalted.*

*The horse and its rider
he has hurled into the sea.*

**2 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.*

...

11 Who among the gods is like you, O Lord?

12 Who is like you – majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?

Theme: The Lord our God is worthy of our praise and thanksgiving in times of hardship and in times of joy.

This wonderful song of praise and thanksgiving is the song of Moses, and is continued by the song of his wife, Miriam. It comes to us in the context of deliverance from Egypt.

I have been preaching on a series entitled: The Story of Salvation from Genesis to Jesus. This is a part of that story. God's people, the Israelites, were delivered from starvation by going into Egypt during the 7 year drought that would have taken the lives of thousands of people had God not intervened. The Pharaoh of Egypt had been given a dream in which Joseph, who had been sold into slavery by his brothers, was able to interpret. It was a dream predicting the 7 year drought. Joseph was put in charge of almost everything in Egypt, second only to the Pharaoh himself. It was then that his brothers, who had sold him into slavery, showed up asking for grain. A very dramatic scene ensued and through Joseph the Israelites were saved from starvation. They were welcomed into Egypt, they made a home there, and they prospered.

But, over the years things changed. New men came into control. The new Pharaoh felt threatened by these Israelites who were growing in numbers and who were thriving. He was afraid that maybe these foreigners within his own borders would somehow, and for some reason, rise up in power and be a threat to his reign. So he made things difficult for the Israelites. He turned them into slaves and made life absolutely miserable for them.

It became most intolerable when the Pharaoh felt so threatened by the Israelites that he ordered every baby boy be taken from his mother and drowned in the Nile River. It was then that the Israelites cried out to God for deliverance. God began the deliverance

process by sparing the life of a boy named Moses, who was then raised in the very courts of Pharaoh by the Pharaoh's daughter with the help of Moses' mother!

When Moses grew up, he eventually was used by God to deliver the Israelites from Egypt. God had to convince the Pharaoh to let them go, but God has His ways. Many plagues, including the death of the first-born son in Egypt, convinced the Pharaoh to let the Israelites go. When the armies of Egypt pursued them, God parted the Red Sea and helped them to cross.

When the Egyptian army followed them into the sea, God only had to close the waters after the Israelites were safely across. It was a very dramatic deliverance and Moses and his wife Miriam broke into song.

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13 Who among the gods is like you, O Lord?

14 Who is like you – majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?

God's people would celebrate forever the dramatic deliverance from Egypt with a feast called the "Feast of Passover". Forever they would know that God is a powerful God who can deliver His people. They would never doubt the power of God again, right? I mean what can be more dramatic than this awesome and wonderful deliverance of God's people through the miraculous dividing and closing of the Red Sea?

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That wonderful song is found in Exodus 15 verses 1-21 This praise ends with the words: "Miriam sang to them"

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

What a wonderful song! What a wonderful deliverance. No wonder the Israelites have a feast of thanksgiving, praise, and worship every year called the Feast of Passover. How could they possibly ever doubt the power of God again?

What is surprising to me is what follows in the very next few verses:

22 Then Moses led Israel from the Red Sea and they went into the Desert of Shur. For three days they traveled in the desert without finding water. 23 When they came to Marah, they could not drink its water because it was bitter. (That is why the place is called Marah.) 24 So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What are we to drink?"

Grumbled? What? Let me read it for you again: Verse 21”:

Sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted.

The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea.” That’s verse 21!

Then in verse 24 we read: *So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What are we to drink?"* Huh? I don’t get it! Three (3!) verses later they grumbled against Moses saying, what are we supposed to drink?

The day of miracles is over. We cannot believe God for a single thing more. It’s nice that God took care of us once, but that was then. This is new. We can’t expect God to keep doing miracles, can we? I mean use your common sense here, Moses. Things were tough back in Egypt, but if my memory serves me well, I do believe we had water! We didn’t have much, but we had water! We had to work hard, but we had water! We sweat in the heat of the sun making bricks, but we did have water. But Moses! Now we don’t even have water!!!

- *I know God delivered us from Egypt, Moses.*
- *I know about the 10 plagues.*
- *I know about how the Lord sent plagues of flies, and frogs, and darkness, and finally the death of the first born son.*
- *Yes, I know that none of that affected us. God took care of us.*
- *I know the Lord made us to pass through the Red Sea on dry ground.*

But Moses, this is different! We need water to drink. Our children will die, Moses! Our wives are very unhappy. Some of the people were saying we were better off in Egypt, Moses! At least they had food and water. We are going to die here. You can’t expect God to keep coming up with some miracle!

We had a very nice celebration of thanksgiving back there a week ago. That was fun. It’s always nice to celebrate God’s goodness. But, Moses, that was last week. This is a new week and we don’t have water!!! You brought us here to this God-forsaken place. We finally came across this little pond but, Moses, it stinks! It’s a mere swamp. Who knows what’s growing in it. It smells like puke! If we drink this stuff we’ll all puke! Let’s call it “Marah”! Let’s call it “Puke”! The fact that it’s water is a mockery to us, Moses. It will make us sick! Moses, you make us sick!!!

You see, it’s a week after thanksgiving! It’s over! The party is over! We can’t trust you, Moses. We can’t trust this God who brought us out of Egypt. That was last week, Moses! You brought us out here to die! I guess there weren’t enough tombs in Egypt. So God brought us out here in this stinking God-forsaken place so we could die and rot in the desert of Shur! Maybe we should just have a funeral service for all of us, lay down and

die of thirst. Maybe you could just stone us to death, Moses. That would be more merciful. We would suffer less. Dying of thirst is horrible!!! The complaints went on!

Well, that was then! We are not like that, are we? I mean when things get tough, we don't grumble and complain and get down right nasty with one another, do we? We don't stop trusting God, do we? We don't start yelling at one another and calling each other names and abusing the leadership, do we?

It's interesting. Every time a new challenge or uncomfortable situation comes up, it's hard to remember that God brought you through before and can be trusted again. That's as true for me as it is for you. When finances get tight, when my health is poor, when I need guidance in my life, my first tendency is to get discouraged. Then I begin to pray. Finally I begin to trust as I see how things might work out.

But God is very merciful, longsuffering and forgiving. In His love and protection of those who He delivered from Egypt he took care of the water that stunk. He told Moses to take action. He said, "Take a stick and throw it into the water". What good was a stick going to do? Over the years probably a lot of sticks dropped into that water if there were any trees around at all. Sticks don't sweeten water. They don't purify anything. They just clutter things up. Unless, of course, throwing the stick into the water is an act of obedience to God. It was. Moses did, and the water became pure, drinkable, and sweet to the taste.

There was a lesson to be learned. This is it: *"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."*

Listen carefully. Pay attention. Obey the Lord. Keep His commandments. If you do, not only will you have water – a basic need – you will have everything you need. You will be blessed with good health. "For I am the Lord, who heals you."

Does that mean that you will never get sick, that you will never have challenges, that your faith will never be tried again? I don't think so. It means that every time you come up to the waters of Marah, every time life gets bitter, if you trust in the Lord, you will discover that God will take care of you.

What happened next is delightful.

27 Then they came to Elim, where there were twelve springs and seventy palm trees, and they camped there near the water.

Things became good again! Behind them was the oppression of Egypt. Before them was the hope of the Promised Land. Behind them was the worry of dying of thirst in the dessert. Right before them were twelve springs, more than they could possibly need, and seventy palm trees swaying in the breeze - things of beauty.

“And they camped there near the water” the text says. It was a great place to camp. You might not want to live in the desert forever, but it was a great place to camp. It was a place of refreshment; it was a promise that things would improve; it was a promise that God was still with them.

It’s Thanksgiving Sunday. You are invited downstairs for a wonderful meal. We might call the place “Elim” – a place of refreshment. You will be surrounded by good friends, by Christians who trust in the same Lord. You will be able to talk, to share the goodness of God. Elim! - a place of refreshment. You’re invited.
Let’s pray!