

## Sing to the LORD!

Exodus 15:1-21

### INTRO:

As we've been studying through Exodus, we've seen that this whole book is a theological narrative. It's a story about God showing His covenant faithfulness and power by rescuing His people out of slavery, bringing them into a closer relationship with Himself and leading them to the land that He had promised to them. It's a story with a purpose. In reading and studying it we are intended mainly to learn, not about Israel, but about Israel's God-YAHWEH. But we also learn about how God's people are to relate to Him. And, while there are direct commandments given about how God's people should relate to Him (the command to keep the Passover, the 10 commandments, etc...) much of what we learn is by description, not prescription.

For instance, last week we learned that we should relate to God with humble faith, rightly fearing this awesome God who can totally eliminate the most powerful army on earth in an instant. We weren't given this as a direct command, but it was clearly demonstrated in the course of the narrative.

And, similarly, in our passage today we learn that *worshipful singing by God's people is a normal response to His saving work*. We learn it from what is narrated, not from a direct command (though, through Scripture, we *are* also commanded to sing, as we'll see shortly). But here, it's simply demonstrated for us, as the whole nation of Israel stops on the shore of the Red Sea and breaks into song as a response to God's dramatic decimation of the Egyptian army.

**Worshipful singing is a normal response to God's saving work.** I want to help you see this here in Exodus 15, and throughout Scripture. My prayer is that Peine Ridge Church will be stirred up to sing more frequently, with more joy, and with more true worship.

I want to do this today by simply taking that statement and emphasizing and unpacking different words in it. So first, I want you to be convinced from God's word that...

Worshipful singing is a *normal* response to God's saving work.

I think this is important to see right off the bat because singing may not be a normal activity for some of you. To even have a song thrown into the middle of a story like we have here in Exodus 15 may seem weird to you, unless you've read a lot of Tolkien. He threw songs into his stories all the time. Or, if you like musicals, you might be totally comfortable with the idea of breaking into song at random. I'll admit that this happens fairly often in our home. But, I realize that we're probably the oddball family in that regard. I'm guessing that spontaneous singing is *not* normal for most of you. So, before we get into this particular passage, I want to show you that, for the Christian, worshipful singing *should be* normal.

The first thing that clues us in to this is the sheer number of songs in Scripture. God has given us at least 185 songs through the inspired writers of Scripture. Of course, 150 of those are the most familiar, comprising the book of Psalms. But, there are at least 35 more songs throughout Scripture, including two more whole books of the Bible in addition to the Psalms that are made up entirely of songs (Lamentations & Song of Solomon). And, in fact, there are probably *more* than 185 songs, because there are sections of poetry in Scripture that aren't explicitly *called* songs, but were most likely intended to be sung. From this evidence, it is apparent that singing is normal for the people of God.

And, if the large number of songs in Scripture doesn't convince you that singing should be normal for the people of God, consider this- through His Word God frequently and explicitly *commands* us to sing. And not just once or twice, but over and over in the OT *and* the NT we are told to *sing*. There are more than four hundred references to singing in the Bible and at least *fifty* direct commands to sing!

Here are a handful out of those fifty:

**Exodus 15:21**- "SING to the LORD, for he has triumphed gloriously!"

**1 Chronicles 16:23** - "SING to the LORD, all the earth! Tell of his salvation from day to day."

**Psalms 9:11** - SING praises to the LORD, who sits enthroned in Zion! Tell among the peoples his deeds!

**Psalm 30:4** – SING praises to the LORD, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name.

**Psalm 68:4** – SING to God, Sing praises to his name; lift up a song to him who rides through the deserts;

**Psalm 96:2** – SING to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.

**Psalm 98:1** – Oh SING to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things!

**Psalm 149:1** – Praise the LORD! SING to the LORD a new song, his praise in the assembly of the godly!

**Isaiah 12:5** – “SING praises to the LORD, for he has done gloriously; let this be made known in all the earth.

**Jeremiah 20:13** – SING to the LORD; praise the LORD! For he has delivered the life of the needy from the hand of evildoers.

AND in the New Testament:

**Ephesians 5:19** – ..be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, *SINGING* and making melody to the Lord with your heart,

**Colossians 3:16** Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, *SINGING* psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

We are commanded to SING! It is *normal* for Christians to sing!

Now, all this doesn't necessarily mean that you should break out into loud song as you go about your day. Some of you would probably get fired for doing that... But, it *does* mean that you should be eager and ready to sing often, and especially when we gather together because worshipful singing by God's people is a *normal* response to His saving work!

Now I think it almost goes without saying that not *all* singing is automatically pleasing to God. There's a lot of music in the world that celebrates lust and greed.

So, for the Christian, singing should not merely be normal, it must also be *worshipful*.

**Worshipful** singing is a normal response to God's saving work.

So, what makes singing worshipful? This has to do with both *what* we sing and *how* we sing. First of all, *what* we sing is important. I think most of us have no problem discerning that the vast majority of songs out there in the world are not what Christians should be singing to feed our souls and strengthen our faith. Not all, but most, songs are not going to be beneficial.

But, what's much more difficult is discerning which so-called Christian songs, or which "worship songs" we should sing. The truth is that a fair number of songs that we put in those categories are actually humanistic, man-centered, and self-help in nature. I think a lot of progress has been made in this over the past 5-10 years, and there are a lot of Christian artists now writing really good songs. But, because songs have such power to stick in our minds and infiltrate our hearts, we still need to be discerning about what we sing. And the songs of Scripture give us the guidance that we need.

Worshipful singing *primarily* focuses on God- His character, His promises, His mighty acts in the world- not us. This isn't to say that we should never use the word "I", "me" or "us" or "your people" in our singing. We see those pronouns **thirteen** times throughout this song in Exodus 15.

Now, thirteen references to "me" or "us" might seem like a lot, but anyone want to venture a guess how many times we see God's name or pronouns referring to Him in this song? **Forty-two** times! And, even in those thirteen instances that refer to "I" or "my", God is still the obvious focus! **Exodus 15:2** *"The LORD is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation; this is my God and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him."*

And this is generally the same kind of proportion we see in all the songs throughout Scripture. We need this relentless God-centeredness in our worship songs because we all naturally spend our whole week thinking about ourselves. We need songs that help us take the focus off of ourselves and put it where it should be- on the awesome God who has saved us and is, right now faithfully leading us to the Promised Land.

*"Focusing our attention in worship relentlessly on God is not mundane or tedious. Rather, it places the focus where it ought to be. We do not sing in worship to reflect*

*our moods any more than our sermons and Sunday school lessons should reflect our pet theories on the Gospel. Rather, quite bluntly, we sing in an effort to take us away from what we think and draw us toward what we ought to think, feel, and experience. We sing to create a mood more than to reflect one.”* – Peter Enns

Saying “I” in a song of worship isn’t wrong, but worshipful singing will primarily focus on God. It declares His awesome power in Creation and in Redemption. It declares His character and His promises. That’s the “*what*” of worshipful singing.

But even singing songs with the right *content* doesn’t necessarily make singing worshipful. Jesus condemned the people of his day for simply mouthing true things about God – **Matthew 15:7-8** “*You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: 8 “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me;”*

**How we sing matters, right along with what we sing.** I don’t mean that you have to have a beautiful voice. That’s not a requirement at all, actually. What is required is that you have to have a God-focused heart. Worshipful singing is sincere & faith-filled. Notice that this song rises up in chapter 15 after this statement at **the end of chapter 14**, “*Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.”*

Do you believe in the LORD? Do you believe that in Christ alone your hope is found? Is He truly your light, your strength, your song? Do you truly have no guilt in life or fear in death because of His power at work in you?

This doesn’t mean that you never struggle to believe this, or that you shouldn’t sing if you aren’t feeling it on a particular day. We all struggle with this at times and I’ll talk more later about how to sing when you’re struggling to believe the lyrics, but I want to urge you not to simply mouth words that you *know in your heart* that you actually reject. Our singing must be sincere. Hypocritical singing is not worshipful singing. Singing is *only* truly worshipful when it rises up as a response of faith from those who have actually experienced the amazing grace of God– grace that comes only to those who trust in Jesus.

Worshipful singing is a normal *response to God's saving work*.

This becomes very clear in the text when we see that **verse 1** is connected to **verse 19**. They sang this song...Why? **V.19 "FOR..."** Their singing was in response to God's saving work!

I want to point out a couple of implications of this- that worshipful singing is a *response*. **First of all, singing as a response means that the majority of our singing should be specific.** This song in Exodus 15 celebrates *specific*, awesome saving acts of God. Verses 4-12 describe specifically how God destroyed Egypt and rescued Israel through the Red Sea. **V.11** "*Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?*" General truths about God, but then connected **v.12** to God's specific saving act- "*You stretched out your right hand; the earth swallowed them!*"

Then Verses 13-17 focus on specific effects of that dramatic rescue- the other nations that Israel will need to pass by or confront on their way to the Promised Land will hear of Yahweh's reputation and be terrified to fight them. Our songs of response need to be very specific about what God has done for us, because we, like the Israelites, are so quick to forget God's power when we get even a few steps into a season of spiritual wilderness wandering.

So, while it's not necessarily wrong to simply sing "God is great, God is good, God is awesome, God is loving", the songs God has given to us in Scripture teach us that in our singing we should mainly focus on the *specific* saving work of God. That's why, every week, we try to make sure we sing *at least* one song that talks about the Cross, because the atoning work of Christ is at the core of our faith. Christ's death, burial and resurrection for the sake of sinners is the greatest act of saving work that God has wrought, and we should sing about it specifically!

Also, notice that worshipful singing in response to God's saving work helps us to look forward with stronger faith to specific promises God has made for our future. **V17** *You WILL bring (your people) in and plant them on your own mountain, the place, O LORD, which you have made for your abode, which your hands have established. 18 The LORD WILL reign forever and ever!*"

What God has already done to rescue us gives us a firm foundation for our faith, assuring us that He will finish the work He has begun and *will* bring

us into eternal rest in His presence! Worshipful singing in response to what God has done in the *past* gives us “strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow!”

And really, making time for worshipful singing only makes sense if our knowledge of what God has done for us in the past gives us reason to trust Him to protect us, sustain us and provide for us *right now AND in the future*.

Here’s what I mean... when you think about Israel’s situation after crossing the Red Sea from a naturalistic, pragmatic point of view, stopping to sing is a dangerous waste of time. We too easily read about people in the Bible without thinking about the fact that they are *real* people, with *real* needs and struggles. Parents had kids to take care of. Kids aging parents to worry about. Just like we do. And, yes, they’ve just been miraculously saved, but these Israelites are out in the wilderness with minimal supplies and, as we’ll see next week, they were in a survival situation where lack of drinkable water was a huge issue.

I watched an episode of *Man vs. Wild* the other night and the host, Bear Grylls- having been dropped out in the Swiss Alps in the winter- focused on the priorities of survival- shelter, fire, water and food. He dug into the snow for shelter. He made a fire and melted snow for water. He dug into a rotting carcass to eat maggots... The point is, *never* did he sit down, write a song and break out singing. Singing is NOT a survival priority. From that standpoint, the Israelites taking the time to stop, compose a song, teach it to everyone and then sing that song together makes absolutely no sense. In fact, when looking at the world through a naturalistic lens, singing *never* makes sense!

But, in the life of faith, worshipful singing by God’s people is a normal response to His saving work! Yes, singing is commanded, but that isn’t the main reason that Christians sing. We sing mainly as a joyful response to God pulling us out of the depths of our sin! The duty to sing becomes a delight. As the great hymn-writer John Newton once wrote,

*“Our pleasure and our duty,  
Though opposite before:  
Since we have seen his beauty,  
Are joined to part no more.”*

So, if you *don't* delight to sing, if you just tolerate it on Sunday mornings, or if you sing in our worship gatherings the same way you sing along with a country song- just because you like singing- then you need to stop and evaluate your heart. Have you lost your wonder at the fact that God would love a depraved sinner like you enough to send His Son to give His life for you? Are you no longer awestruck that Jesus would suffer and die to redeem your wretched soul? Are you no longer amazed that the HOLY Spirit would come to dwell in your sin-soaked heart? The normal response to these glorious truths is heart-deep, all-in, full-throated singing!

Or do songs of praise to God not well up to overflowing from your heart because you're not resting in Jesus as your Savior? Do these things strike no chord of joy in your heart because you've never experienced them as real? If not, why not today? Why not right now? Maybe you think you're too much of a rebel against God? Maybe you think you're too much of a sinner for Jesus to save? Maybe you think you've heard the Gospel and rejected it too many times? Maybe you're too ashamed to admit- even to God!- that even though you've been calling yourself a Christian for years, you know deep down that you're a hypocrite? Whatever the state of your heart may be, I urge you to believe today what the Apostle Paul says in 1 Timothy, that Jesus Christ came into the world for exactly this purpose- to save sinners! Trust Him to save you today!

**We don't sing primarily because we love singing, or keep quiet because we don't love singing. We sing because it is a response of love to the Father who chose us, it's a response of praise to the Son who has rescued us, and it's a response of joy in the Spirit who enables us to sing with true worship from the heart!**

Worshipful singing is a normal *response to God's saving work*.

I want to close with four **applications**...

1. You need to sing! Throughout the week, throughout the day. Worshipful singing may seem like a burden. It may seem awkward. But it's actually a gracious gift from God. **Martin Luther**- "*Music is a gift and grace of God, not an invention of men. Thus it drives out the devil and makes people cheerful... The devil, the originator of sorrowful anxieties and restless troubles, flees before the sound of music almost as much as before the Word of God.*"

For the sake of your faith, for the life of your soul, for the courage of your heart you need to sing!

But also, for the sake of those you love, you *need* to sing!

**(Morgan on the bathroom floor... "Jesus Strong and Kind")** Will you have any songs to sing when your child, or parent, or spouse, or friend is sick or dying?

2. We need you to sing! We need your voice! Not just for the "professionals" on stage... Sunday morning... our focus shouldn't be on having a personal "worship experience." You can do that at home. When we gather together, we sing to God as a way to serve one another. Ironically, it's only by shifting our focus away from ourselves that we can actually have *authentic, real* "worship experiences." By definition, I can't *truly* worship if my focus is on what I'm getting out of it. This means we (including me) need to lay aside some of our musical preferences, lay aside our fears about the quality of our voice, lay aside our inhibitions and sing out for the sake of our brothers and sisters! **An application: Scripture & Song Gathering tonight...**

3. Sing thoughtfully- I actually love when people ask me about lyrics! "Your love is like the wildest ocean" Is God's love wild? Or reckless? I, and the other pastors need your help in guarding what we sing. And it's so encouraging to me when someone questions a lyric because I know they're actually paying attention to what they're singing and not just mouthing along, or getting caught up in the emotion of a song!

4. Sing prayerfully- I mentioned earlier that we shouldn't hypocritically sing things that we know we don't believe. We may sing things we don't currently *feel* to be true. We *don't* sing merely in response to how we feel on a given day. We sing in response to what God has done, because it reminds us, and those around us, of what is true about Him. So sing prayerfully. If you're singing and you recognize that you don't believe what you're singing, stop, confess that as sin, pray for greater faith! And then keep singing, because God may just answer your prayer for greater faith *through* your singing.

Or, it might not be that you don't believe what you're singing, it's just that your mind wandered off- maybe your phone vibrated? - stop, confess to God, tell Him you're sorry for thinking so little of Him, and then re-engage in singing!

Lastly, pray for others. Get to know people well enough that you know how they're struggling, how they're hurting and pray for them to believe and rest in the truths we're singing. And then, sing those truths out to them!

*“Our churches are called to be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power (Eph 6:10). We are not a people scurrying into a corner nursing wounds of defeat. We are a city on a hill, stars shining in a dark world, a people of victory and joy, filled with the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit, serving a Savior who shall reign forever. When we sing, it is a battle cry of hope for the wounded, for the weary, for the lost. Sing of Jesus. Sing of your Lord and Savior and greatest Friend. Sing yourself strong. Sing the Church strong. Show and sing up!” - The Gettys*