

GOD IS KEEPING HIS PROMISES TO THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORY

Exodus 15:1-21

Please review this week's catechism question.

INTRODUCTION

Describe the last time you were impressed with or grateful for another person and expressed your appreciation either to that person or someone else. What kinds of things impress you so much that you usually say something in praise? Do you often verbally express gratitude or praise to others?

In our passage today the Israelites are on the southeastern shore of the Red Sea with the corpses of the Egyptian army washing up on the shore after God drowned them in the Red Sea. In the last verse of chapter 14 we are told that they now fear the Lord and trust him and Moses. Then, in response to what they have seen and out of their newfound faith, they break into a song of praise. They do what every human being naturally does when they observe something that impresses them. Like sports fans screaming when their team scores; like bargain hunters who call their best friend after making an amazing purchase; like parents after the birth of their child call friends and family, so the nation Israel declare in song their joy in God and his salvation. True faith always produces true worship. True faith understands the true greatness of God and his work and thus produces true worship. That is what Exodus 15: 1-21 records for us. Here we see modeled by the nation of Israel what the purpose of God is in the world and what the point of the Christian life is: worship. True worship is a heartfelt response to God and his salvation. We are going to make four observations about the nature of true worship in this study.

STUDY

1. What evidences do you see in the content of this hymn of praise and the descriptions of the Israelites that would lead you to believe that they sang this song with feeling, not indifferently?

First, it would be hard to imagine witnessing what they witnessed and not being overwhelmed with emotion. Can you imagine standing on the shore of the Red Sea and watching this amazing display of power that rescues you from certain calamity and having no emotional response and not uttering a single word? Relief, joy, fear, etc. would be the thing we would expect. Second, the language of the song/poem is full of emotion. "The Lord is highly exalted." "The horse and the rider he hurled into the sea." "The Lord is my strength and my song." "I will praise him." "Who among the gods is like you, O Lord?" While the language sounds sort of formal to us because it is religious or biblical language, yet it is full of emotion. Finally, all the women play tambourines, dance and sing a chorus in response. You don't dance when you're not happy. They have seen God's grace and power and so they enthusiastically praise him with this song. Miriam and the other women dance, play the tambourine and sing. This is all done with joy. The Israelites deeply felt the danger they were in and then they saw God's powerful saving act. Their hearts were full of fear of the Lord and trust in the Lord and joy in his salvation and so they declared his praise. These things are unbreakably bound together.

2. Compare Acts 2: 37-47, which recounts the response of people to the first Christian sermon. What similarities do you see?

At the end of it the audience was "cut to the heart" and cried out, "Brothers, what must we do to be saved?" Then a few verses later, after recording that 3000 people became Christians that day it says, "they were filled with awe" and they "ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God". They were terrified by the threat of God's justice and were relieved by the promise of forgiveness in Christ and thus joined together in worshipping God with his people. This is conversion, this is the mark of true faith. Through the preaching of the gospel they "saw" the greatness of spiritual reality, i.e., their sin, God's justice and Christ's glory as a savior. They were "affected" by what they saw and thus they responded in fear, faith, awe, and joy and so praised God for his mercy.

3. What have been ways you have seen your heart “affected” by the gospel?

4. Does your praise often come from a heart that is “affected” by the greatness of Christ and his saving work? Why or why not?

True worship is a heartfelt response to God and his salvation. It naturally arises when his power and grace are seen.

5. What is the majority of this song of praise about? What do most of the lines of the poem describe?

In the NIV there are 66 lines to the poem. 33 lines describe the destruction of the Egyptians at the Red Sea. 20 lines describe God’s future leading Israel into the land of promise and delivering them from their enemies in the future. The majority of the psalm describes what God has done to deliver them and what he is going to do in the future. While vv. 4-10 retell the work of God in destroying Egypt, vv. 13-17 describe what God will do in the future. The people of Israel look at what God has done at the Red Sea and understand that this event guarantees his future work. Therefore, they praise him for his future work. The future is secure because God has shown that he is for Israel by this mighty work. There will be many hazards along the way to the land of promise but the God who destroyed the Egyptians will also destroy every other enemy and plant them in the land of promise, on the mountain of the Lord.

6. Why is there so much repetition in the psalm?

When you are impressed with what someone else has done, you never tire of describing in detail what it is that the one you admire has done. Sports fans never tire of retelling the story of some great exploit by their favorite athlete. Sportsmen will gladly tell you about the huge fish that fought for an hour or the wily buck that tried to sneak by. Grandmothers will never grow tired of describing to you the accomplishments of their grandchildren. It is the nature of praise to give the details and delight in repeating them.

7. How are these verses, which describe the work of God in Christ, similar to this description of God’s work on behalf of Israel? (Phil. 1:6, Romans 5:9-10, 8:30-37, Eph 2:4-7, 1 Peter 1:3-5, etc.)

What occupies our attention as Christians is the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. The historical event of Christ coming into the world and of his living, dying and rising for us is what we never grow tired of talking about, singing about and praising God about. We delight to talk about and sing about the facts of the gospel. But also, just as Israel praises God not only for what he has done but also for what he is going to do, so we not only recount and worship God for what he did in Jesus but for what we know he is going to do in the future because of what he did in the life and death of Jesus. Our hearts are full of confidence in regards to the future and we regularly praise God for what he is going to do, all because of what he has done in the Christ. We face the future with confidence in our hearts and praise on our lips because we know that we cannot be harmed.

8. Do you delight to recount what God has done in Christ and what he is going to do for us through Christ? Why or why not?

True worship is a heartfelt response to God and his salvation. It recounts what God has done and what he will do.

9. What are some ways that God and his relationship to his people are joyfully acknowledge in the following verses because of what he has done and will do?

➤ Verse 2: *We don’t only worship God for being an impressive but distant God who deserves our admiration. We worship him because he is my strength, my song, my salvation and my God. While God’s destruction of Egypt preserved the nation of Israel, yet it also was the act by which he saved each individual in Israel. God is praised by the whole congregation but also by each individual. The powerful act of God in saving the entire people convinces each individual that he is a personal savior.*

- Verse 11: *He is the only God in the universe. There is no one and nothing like him. He is alone in his holiness, glory and power. He is infinitely more impressive than anyone and everything else. His acts prove there is no other god besides him.*
- Verse 13 & 17: *God loves his people and exercises his strength on their behalf to bring them to himself. As his people he is leading us to his holy dwelling. He is going to plant us on the mountain where he dwells. The point of all this is that the goal of this whole salvation is to live with God forever. It is indeed the chief end of man to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. He is out to bring his people to the place where he dwells so we can live with him forever. He is the goal of this act of salvation. His love for Israel is shown in not just setting them free from the burden of slavery, but setting them free in order to have them live with him forever.*
- Verse 18: *This act at this point in history and then God's future acts to bring his people to himself point to the ultimate fact that God alone is the eternal ruler of all things. His reign is an eternal reign. He is right now working to bring his entire people home to himself to live with him forever.*

10. How do the following NT verses point to the same glory?

- Romans 8:1-3 *The work of Christ is done for Paul personally.*
- 1 Timothy 1:12-17 *The work of Christ is experienced by Paul personally. The saving work of Christ results in the knowledge that he alone is God and alone deserves the praise.*
- Romans 11:32-36 *He is alone in his wisdom and glory. All things come from him, through him and are to him.*
- 1 Peter 3:18 *Christ died to bring us to God. God is the goal of life.*
- Col. 3:1-4 *Christ is our life. We will be revealed with him in glory. Living with him forever is the end of salvation.*

- Philippians 3:7-11 *The goal of life is to know Christ in his power and in his suffering and then live with him forever at the resurrection from the dead.*

11. What are ways that you have seen the glory of God in Christ? How often do you find your heart full of amazement at the greatness of God as he is revealed through the person and work of Christ?

True worship is a heartfelt response to God and his salvation. It describes the greatness of God and his purposes.

12. What phrases point to the presence of all the Israelites gathered and singing this song of worship to the Lord?

In v. 1 it is "Moses and the Israelites (literally: "the sons of Israel")." In vv. 20-21 we are specifically told that all the women participated in the worship by playing tambourines, dancing and singing an antiphonal response to the main hymn.

13. What the physical ways that the delight of Israel in God's salvation is expressed?

The all sing with their voices, the women play tambourines and dance.

14. Is it unusual (abnormal) that people express their delight through physical acts like singing, dancing, playing music, etc.? Why or why not?

Every human being regularly expresses the affections and emotions of their hearts in physical acts. We are physical creatures and so we show all of our emotions and preferences through bodily expressions. We cry, we scowl, we smile, we clap, we fall on our knees, we raise our hands in celebration, we bow our heads in reverence, we jump up and down in excitement, etc. As embodied creatures it is natural and normal for people to express their emotional state in physical ways. When your daughter dances in her recital you don't simply sit in your seat and whisper, while sitting on your hands, "yeah". You shout and you clap because of your delight. True affections for God often

produce bodily effects. We raise our hands, we shout, we cry, we stand, we sit, we kneel, we lay prostrate, we bow our heads, and we lift our heads. We express the affections of our hearts through the use of our bodies.

15. Does everyone express the same emotions/affections in the same way? What does this tell us about evaluating the spiritual condition of others by how they physically behave in Sunday morning worship?

No we are all different, due to upbringing, culture and personality in how we express our emotions with our bodies. We are not all the same in this and there is no ground for judging one another's sincerity or spirituality based upon either the presence or absence of bodily expressions of your delight in God.

16. Do you think you would have enjoyed the melody and musical style that these ancient, nomadic, Middle Eastern people used to sing this song and play their tambourines? Why or why not?

My guess would be that probably few of us would have liked the sound of the music these women played. We probably would not have liked the melody and the harmony of the singing. These were ancient Middle Eastern nomadic people. They were not people trained in music theory or with a history of the great classical music of Europe or of jazz or the blues or rock n' roll. Yet, God was pleased to receive this musical praise, which none of us would have liked.

17. What does the content of this song, the presence of tambourines and a musical style that we would not like tell us about how we conduct our musical worship?

First, there is no such thing as a "sacred" musical style. God does not prefer one style of music to another. The infinite varieties of combinations of tones that make up music can all be used to express the worth of God from the hearts and lips of those who love him. The critical event in musical worship is not the style of music but the hearts of those who sing and play. Second, our main criterion in selecting music ought to be the theological substance of the lyrics, not the style of music. There are songs, both old hymns and modern songs that

should not be sung in our worship because of erroneous doctrine or because of the absence of truth in the lyrics. Third, we are to gather together because we all love Jesus, not because we all love the same kind of music. We want our music to reflect our diversity and to require that we accept one another in spite of our differences. Therefore, we believe that if everyone leaves here Sunday morning and can say that they enjoyed at least one of the tunes that we sing and that they didn't like at least one of the tunes we sang, we will have succeeded. Fourth, all of God's people can and should be involved in musical worship.

18. Do you often leave Sunday worship disappointed with the music that we sang because you don't like the style? If so, how should you respond to that?

True worship is a heartfelt response to God and his salvation. It involves the whole people of God in a variety of physical and musical actions.