

Introduction:

- A. **So what is it that stirs us when we sing “The Star Spangled Banner”?** Is it because you love to picture the flag still flying over Fort McHenry despite a long night of shelling from British warships? I’m guessing that’s not it. Actually, the thing about our National Anthem is that it has accumulated thousands of American stories and pictures. **It evokes our history and our hope.** We sing it and glimpse our soldiers in battle, in parades, and in cemeteries. We sing it and we think of our hometowns and ballgames and freedoms; we remember standing in classrooms to recite The Pledge of Allegiance. We remember the patriotism that rose up in dark nights of national fear or sorrow, and when we sing finally, *“o’er the land of the free.... And the home... of the... brave,”* well, we want to be those people.
- B. **God’s people have an anthem like that in the Bible—in Exodus 15. It, too, evokes our history and hope.** But I’d be surprised if anyone here knows this national anthem by heart like we do “The Star Spangled Banner.” Other than a couple of lines, you probably have never sung this song. But it is still our national anthem. It celebrates the story of how God crushed the Egyptian army in the waters of the Red Sea, the final blow of Israel’s deliverance from bondage. It is the story of our spiritual forefathers’ deliverance. But it carries the weight of thousands of redemption stories. **It is the lyric all God’s people can use.** Many of the songs we Christians sing are echoes of this song. A theme and variations. And what’s more, the Bible says that this is a song we will sing forever.
- C. **V.1** begins, *“Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD: “I will sing to the LORD for he is highly exalted.”* **God’s people sing.** We do not only tell our stories and preach sermons and follow liturgies. **We sing.** We let our hearts find voice and, more often than not, we do it

together. It is a central part of Christian worship and fellowship. **Eph 5:19** says that being filled with God’s Spirit leads naturally to “*speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord.*” **Much of the repertoire of God’s people springs from this great anthem.** Turn to Ex. 15. There’s an old gospel song titled, “How can I keep from singing?” Good question!

Vv.1-2...

I. HOW CAN WE KEEP FROM SINGING WHEN WE’VE EXPERIENCED THE LORD’S MIGHTY SALVATION? (15:1-12)

*I will sing unto the Lord for he has triumphed gloriously,
The horse and rider fell into the sea.*

This song celebrates God’s culminating victory of the Exodus.

It isn’t about the plagues or the Passover or plundering the Egyptians. It celebrates how God led the Israelites through the Red Sea on dry ground and then suddenly brought those same waters down upon the relentless Egyptians, destroying them one and all, once and for all. It was **God’s grand finale**. The effect of this story—this whole story of Israel’s salvation—was to reorient God’s people to the LORD, *I AM WHO I AM*. Look at this story. *Here is your God!* Why do we sing?

A. We sing because God saved us when we had no hope. **We are people who have been attuned to our need to be saved.** No other religion drums that into their followers. We were lost and needed to be found. We were slaves and needed to be set free. We were condemned sinners who needed to be We faced terrible problems with no help in sight. We were afraid and ashamed and alone.

And then we heard the gospel—the good news that God loved us and sent Jesus to die for us and give us new life. Of all the amazing things, **God himself came to our defense. God Almighty flexed his muscles to deliver us. The God who we had ignored and defied came to us and**

saved us. Now we sing in the shadow of God’s fiery pillar and celebrate our new life guarded by the blood of the Lamb. We sing, “*The LORD is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation.*” So we sing...

*A mighty fortress is our God,
a bulwark never failing.*

We sing the songs of our salvation.

*Redeemed, how I love to proclaim it,
redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.*

*He touched me, O he touched,
and O the joy that floods my soul.*

*Because the sinless Savior died,
My sinful soul is counted free;
For God the Just is satisfied
To look on him and pardon me
To look on him and pardon me.*

- B. We sing because the LORD is a mighty warrior. The language of **vv.3-10** is vivid. Here is Pharaoh the braggart challenging the I AM to a kind of hand-to-hand combat. Pharaoh said, “*I will draw my sword and **my hand** will destroy them.*” But in the end Israel sings to the LORD, “***Your right hand** shattered the enemy.*” Listen to **vv.3-10...**

A mightier foe than Pharaoh threatened us and a death deeper than the sea would have surely engulfed us **but our God is a warrior.** He wrenched apart the chains of sin and death that bound us. He crushed the head of the serpent who owned us. And he cut a corridor through the death itself so we can pass through on dry ground.

*No power of hell, no scheme of man,
can ever pluck me from his hand.
Till he returns and calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I stand.*

- C. **V.11...** We sing because there is no God like the LORD. We have seen other gods in the Exodus story for in the plagues the LORD took on Egypt’s gods one by one, from the river

god to the sun god, as if to say, *Go ahead! See how other gods measure up against the LORD.*

1. ***“The LORD is majestic in holiness.”*** God’s holiness is not contained in the high courts of heaven. It was God’s holiness that brought him to the aid of his people when they cried out to him, God’s holiness that refused to tolerate the defiance of Pharaoh in his human trafficking, God’s holiness that commandeered the earth itself to swallow his enemies.
2. ***“The LORD is awesome in glory.”*** We glimpse God’s glory in Isaiah’s vision of God *“high and lifted up”* attended by the six-winged angels and the constant chant, *“Holy, holy, holy.”* But to see God’s awesome glory look to the waters falling in upon the chariots of Egypt while Israel watches from astonished safety. Or better yet, to see God’s brightest and most awesome glory peer into earth’s darkest hour, the day when all the weight of all the world’s sin came to rest on one perfectly righteous man crucified, and when God the Father forsook God the Son, all for the love of sinners. *There* is the LORD’s awesome glory on display.
3. ***“Working wonders.”*** Some suggest that if we only knew the whole story the Exodus would have a perfectly natural explanation. Not according to this phrase! It means that our God does supernatural deeds that can *only* be explained as divine intervention—*invasion* is more like it—the miracles of the Almighty. And the LORD is the only God who can *work such wonders* as these.

O worship the King, all glorious above

And gratefully sing his wonderful love

Our shield and defender, the Ancient of Days,

Pavilioned in splendor and girded with praise.

All hail the power of Jesus’ name, let angels prostrate fall

Bring forth the royal diadem

and crown him Lord of all!”

Now the song turns from celebrating God's salvation to confidence in God's leading: **vv.13-18...**

II. HOW CAN WE KEEP FROM SINGING WHEN THE LORD HAS PROMISED TO LEAD US SAFELY TO OUR EVERLASTING HOME WITH HIM? (15:13-18)

- A. Do you know why you can count on God to lead you all the way home? V.13. Because of God's "unfailing love" for the people he has redeemed and because God is strong enough to guide us. This is the OT's great *love* word, *hesed*, carrying more than any English word can contain. It means *unfailing, loyal, covenant-keeping love*. It suggests wedding vows and the invincible love of a perfect Father for his children. God would have to stop being God in order to stop loving those he has redeemed. "*He who began a good work in you will see it through to completion*" because he simply *must*.

So he will bring all his strength to bear in order to get the redeemed all the way home. There are enemies and obstacles, to be sure, but I we ourselves can be the greatest hindrance to homegoing, stiff-necked and meandering as we are. We are people prone to wandering and complaining and idolizing other gods. But God in his love and strength will never abandon those whom Christ has redeemed.

*The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to its foes;
That soul, tho' all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no, never, no, never forsake!*

- B. You saw in vv.14-16 God's promise that the enemies ahead of Israel would cower in fear, having heard what the LORD did for them. That is, in fact, what happened. The book of *Joshua* gives several instances of that. The first happened when Israel's spies got inside the walls of the first great fortress, Jericho, and were hidden by Rahab. She told them why she sided with them in **Josh 2:9-11:**

“I know that the Lord has given you this land and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard of it, our hearts melted in fear and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below.”

Do you remember how demons would react when they saw Jesus? **Mark 5:8** tells of one: *“He shouted at the top of his voice, ‘What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God’s name don’t torture me!’”* That same mighty Jesus lives in you by his Spirit. *“Greater is he who is in you than he who is in the world.”* And you better believe that the *“he who is in the world”*—Satan, and all his demons—knows it! Israel themselves were never a threat to anyone, nor are we. But the strong God who guides us cannot be defeated.

***Precious Lord,** take my hand, lead me on, help me stand.*

Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah,

Pilgrim through this barren land.

I am weak, but thou art mighty,

Guard me with thy powerful hand.

- C. We sing because the LORD will not rest till we are all safely home with him. **V.17...** ***“You will bring them in.”*** Here is a picture of a people who were once slaves and who are weary from the long wilderness journey, finally marching in a great and triumphal procession up the last approach to the city of God, with Christ himself at the head of the glad column. *Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Psalm 121...*

“You will... plant them on the mountain of your inheritance.” Isaiah saw the Messiah proclaiming good news to the poor, binding up the brokenhearted, setting

prisoners free, and anointing mourners with the oil of joy. Then he said, *“They will be called oaks of righteousness, a **planting of the LORD** for the display of his splendor.”* God’s people, planted on God’s holy mountain, will be his splendid oaks of righteousness. They—we—will be for the God who has everything his own treasured inheritance, the people he paid a dear price to redeem.

And when I come to die, o when I come to die,

And when I come to die, give me Jesus.

Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight,

The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;

The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,

Even so, it is well with my soul.”

Conclusion

This song shapes all our songs of redemption and **Rev. 15** tells us that we will sing it forever: *“And I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name. They held harps given them by God and sang the song of God’s servant Moses and of the Lamb.”*

I love something **Bruce Thielemann** said a few years ago: *“There is one thing that is part of our worship that is not part of the worship of any other major faith on earth. That is singing. Christianity is the one faith that puts a song in your heart. Confucianism has no chorales. Shintoism has no songs. Islam has no glorias. And atheism has no anthems.”* [#2612]

Were we not to sing to the LORD our souls would be stunted and God would be robbed of the fellowship of our gladness.

It seems to me I remember from somewhere in my childhood etiquette training, “Do not sing at the table.” Today, we will ignore that and as we come to the table of our triumphant Lord Jesus Christ, we will sing. We will not come somber and sober today as we might other times. Today we take our cue from Miriam: **vv.20-21:**

Then Miriam the prophet, Aaron's sister, took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women followed her, with timbrels and dancing. Miriam sang to them:

"Sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted.

Both horse and driver he has hurled into the sea."