



Series: Exodus: Into the Wilderness

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Speaker: Spence Shelton, Lead Pastor

Text: Exodus 15:1-21

Title: Why We Sing

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Starting Point Follow Up

Hey I want to take a second and celebrate what God is doing here. You know the first weekend of every month we have starting point which is our first step for those new to Mercy to find out about who we are and what we are about. But man that's a big thing to step out of

¹ WORKS CITED

JD Greear, "Freedom at Last" (The Summit Church, Raleigh, NC, August 10, 2008.),

<https://summitchurch.com/message/freedom-at-last/>

Tim Keller, "The Great Escape" (Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York, New York, October 6, 2022.),

<https://gospelinlife.com/sermon/the-great-escape/>

the crowd when you are new. and last weekend during what is still really a summertime where typically people are gone on vacation still, we had right at 50 people go through starting point. Can we celebrate that next step these folks took?

We love being a church that welcomes new people every single service so if you've been at mercy even for just a little while but especially if you are a member here I hope you will also see yourself as an ambassador here. Like we have a greeting team but we are ALL the greeting team. And if you are a member just take some time to welcome those around you like right after the service because there is a good chance they are new and man people come to a church a few times because of quality and options but they stick because of relationships. So, let's do this real quick let's pray for those newer to our church & then let's get into the message.

PRAY

Exodus 15 intro - The Song of Moses

So we are in a series in Exodus all about following God in the wilderness and this is the big idea we said we are going to revisit each week. As Israel goes through the wilderness from Exodus 13 - 19 man it could seem like the wilderness is spiritual punishment for things they

did wrong. It could seem like it's spiritual abandonment - like God forgot them. But what we will see is that the wilderness, if we will open our eyes and hearts, **The wilderness is God's workshop.**

What's the wilderness? It's times of pain, disappointment, and suffering where you don't know when it will end. Not just moments but Seasons where life is not easy or life is not certain. The Israelites were in the wilderness for 40 years and they didn't know it was going to be 40 hours or 40 days much less 40 years. And there's no question here in our church there are some of you here who are in the wilderness. And my experience in life is that if you aren't in the wilderness now, either you or somebody you love probably will be.

- Relationship wilderness - Like a marriage that has gone cold or maybe ended. Or a dating relationship that has gotten confusing and distant. Or a friendship that you guys used to be so close but now it's awkward. And you are like WHERE AM I?
- Injury & Illness - The unexpected diagnosis or unexpected injury. Man sickness can become wilderness real fast. Maybe it's the wilderness of infertility or miscarriage
- Maybe it's the wilderness of career. You are disappointed and bored maybe as a college student you are that way with your major. Bored,

disappointed and now not sure what to do. Maybe you are out there and just hate your job. Lots of people are bored by and hate their job and maybe that's your wilderness. Like what am I doing today & tomorrow?

Wilderness is pain, disappointment, or suffering that you are IN and don't know when it will END.

When you lean into the wilderness as God's workshop There are things he will restore and strengthen in your soul that can only really happen...in the wilderness. And today's passage is critical to understanding *how* he works in the wilderness.

Today we are looking at the first worship song ever written. Pretty cool. It's a song written for Israel by their leader Moses. And he writes it JUST after God has saved Israel from the Egyptians by dividing the sea so Israel could walk through and then bringing the water back down onto the Egyptians drowning all of them. Some scholars say this is the first thing Moses wrote. The rest of what he would write would be a long time later but this right here he wrote immediately after it happened. So that Israel would be able to Worship God...in response to what he did for them. They could celebrate his faithfulness in times of wilderness.



That's what's so important about Exodus 15. It shows us why we sing. And we are going to talk about it today. Because the most formative worship...and the worship that is most noticeable and attractive to the world...is when we worship our way through the wilderness.

So today I want to talk about 3 things as we go through this passage. Why We Sing, What We Sing, and How we sing. This is one of those, I hope, one of those culture setting weekends for us Mercy Family. And if you are like...why is he preaching a SERMON...about SINGING? Well, cause that's the passage that we've come to. And therefore you NEED it. Don't worry it's gonna be really good for you. Again, why we sing, what we sing, and how we sing. Keep it real simple.

Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord.

They said: I will sing to the Lord,

Ok quick pause here to say - do you see who is singing? Moses AND the Israelites. My buddy Kyle Mercer who is the pastor up at Two Cities Church in Winston Salem said about this verse - Notice it doesn't say Moses SANG and the ISRAELITES stood there looking bored. No, they ALL SANG.

Sometimes I'll look around here and man some of y'all look downright bored. Heads up - we ain't here to entertain you. And I want you to know you were actually formed by God...in such a way that your soul is lifted up and encouraged by singing.

Do you remember the spring of 2020? It was pretty awful right? Well when everyone went into their homes...the things that blew up online were Casts of musicals...singing together. When Italy was shut down, the things that went viral online were people singing from their balconies together.

The national institutes of health has said singing releases hormones and endorphins that improve immune system function and increase levels of happiness. Isn't it awesome when science catches up with scripture?

Like why do you think there is a WHOLE BOOK in the middle of your bible that is...SONGS? The Psalms are the longest book of scripture. Why? Because God created you to sing. And as you sing, your soul is lifted up.

Why we sing: God made us to be lifted up by song.

And if you are like...yeah singing isn't really for me. Well, first off you are lying. I know this because you get to

your college and sing the alma mater at the end of the football game and you are singing at the top of your lungs. Or maybe it's a Taylor Swift concert. She doesn't even need a mic for those things. Because all 80k people in the stadium are SINGING her songs back to her. Moms & Dads sing to their kids. Kids sing about anything. Man little kids will just walk around singing about WHATEVER. You know what I'm saying? My point is, we are all into music in some way or another because we were made for melody.

for he is highly exalted; he has thrown the horse and its rider into the sea. 2 The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. This is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him.

The Lord has become my strength and my song, he has become my salvation. Man there is so much in here. The Lord is my strength and my song. I love this - that's how you know you actually GET the gospel. The Lord becomes your strength. You actually believe John 15:21 that apart from Jesus you can do nothing. And the Lord doesn't become your strength until you realize you are weak. When you are STRONG & LIFE IS GREAT & EASY & YOU ARE A SELF-MADE PERSON PROUD ABOUT YOUR OWN LIFE...man it's hard to know God. It's not until your back is against the ocean and God takes your

THROUGH. It's not until you experience God in the wilderness...that the Lord becomes your strength.

Ask these Christians that have been around a minute and they will tell you I knew God but didn't really fully depend on him "until." Until the trial. Until the heartache. Until the pain, disappointment, or suffering. Until the wilderness.

By the way, this is why we try to sing songs written by Christians from different generations. There's something about a hymn that Christians have sung for hundreds of years. Like the doxology for example. Written in 1674 by an Anglican bishop. That's an old song. Really short. But as we sing it now we grab hold of something time tested. We grab hold of a faith passed down from generation to generation. One of the first songs my oldest son learned and it was the cutest thing having him sing it in the back seat of the car.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow, praise him all creatures here below, praise him above ye heavenly hosts, praise father, son, and holy ghost. Amen.

In the wilderness of his life I want him to worship the God who saw me through the wilderness of my life. In wilderness we need to grab hold of something that is

not only true but tested & handed down in love. I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him. May it be for us sitting in here that our children will sing those words.

Man the wilderness is God's workshop and what God re-works in us in the wilderness is to depend on him. And as we do he becomes our strength and man through our dependence on HIS strength we become strong. And when you experience HIS strength and how much greater it is than yours...well then he becomes your song.

You begin to sing. You begin to Enjoy God. If you don't enjoy God, you've probably never felt like you needed him. Which means you don't fully see the beauty & power of the gospel yet. The gospel announces that you were like Israel. Enslaved to a master called sin. And you had no way out. No power to get out. And God comes along and says even though you rebelled against me, I love you. And I will make a way. So he sends his son to pay for your sins. Releasing you from sins Debt as he dies on the cross. Then he rises out of the grave defeating death itself and says YOU can live a life with resurrection power NOW AND you will live forever WITH HIM. In the words of verse 1 - He threw the sin and death into the grave! He has become our salvation! SO I WILL PRAISE HIM AMEN!?

Why we sing: The God of the Gospel is worthy of our song

He is worthy! That's especially true when we gather. Sometimes I think we think singing is the warm-up stretching so we can get ready for the sermon. Guys, it's just not. It's worship! And hey I love you and somebody needs to say it: when you casually arrive late...Not when life happens and the kids are crazy but when you just casually arrive late. Like you go to starbucks and arrive late...you are not missing WARM-UPS. You are missing what you are made for. You are missing something formative! Hey lastly real quick before we go on to how we sing, I want to say one more thing about why we sing: God made us to, he is worthy of it, and

Why we sing: Because God tells us to sing

Again I go back to the Psalms - a whole book saying SING TO THE LORD (Psalm 96 & 98) and I will Sing to the Lord (104). This is the response of God's people throughout scripture. When King David's son dies, he ends his fast, takes a shower, and then goes and sings worship songs to the Lord. God's people regularly stop what they are doing to worship him and at the center of their worship is SINGING. Jesus, before he is betrayed...Mark 14...he sends Judas out and before they

go out to the mount of olives it says they sang a hymn together. The early church in Acts - they sing together. Paul tells the ephesians in chapter 5 to sing to one another. Revelation guess what it says we'll be doing? We'll be joining with believers from every tribe, tongue, nation, & TIME period and we'll be singing. Ok, I want to do what we sing next. Cause we are going to walk through this song. THEN we'll talk about how we sing.

3 The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is his name. 4 He threw Pharaoh's chariots and his army into the sea; the elite of his officers were drowned in the Red Sea. 5 The floods covered them; they sank to the depths like a stone.

How awesome is this guys? He says the Lord is a WARRIOR. This is a war cry. I've told our worship team I want to sing THAT. I think one of the reasons men struggle to come to church is because church music can sometimes feel like you are slow dancing with Jesus to a romantic love ballad. And I'm like man, that just is not what this is. This is 600k men with their women and children and they are SINGING A WAR VICTORY SONG. THE LORD IS A WARRIOR! There is confidence & celebration because THEIR GOD delivered them from an enemy too big & too strong for them to ever defeat on their own. AND THEY SING HIS FAITHFULNESS TO HIM!

What we sing: We sing about God's faithfulness

This is specific. Which I love. It is specific to what happened right here. Now it's also holy spirit inspired scripture so I know we treat it with a special reverence reserved for scripture. BUT, one thing I love about the church in each age is that we keep writing new songs. In fact we'll close our service today singing a song our worship team wrote a few years ago as they reflected on the glory of Jesus and the goodness of God towards us in the early years of our church.

My question to you is - How has God been faithful to you? Are you looking back & praising him for it? You may not write a song but you can tell the story. And WHEN YOU ARE IN THE PRESENT WILDERNESS YOUR HEART NEEDS TO SEE THE RECEIPTS AGAIN OF GOD'S FAITHFULNESS TO YOU.

6 Lord, your right hand is glorious in power. Lord, your right hand shattered the enemy. 7 You overthrew your adversaries by your great majesty. You unleashed your burning wrath; it consumed them like stubble. 8 The water heaped up at the blast from your nostrils; the currents stood firm like a dam. The watery depths congealed in the heart of the sea.

9 The enemy said: "I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil. My desire will be gratified at their expense. I will draw my sword; my hand will destroy them."

10 But you blew with your breath, and the sea covered them.

They sank like lead in the mighty waters.

Moses is putting their red sea receipt back in front of their eyes with vivid recall and saying THAT'S OUR GOD! And it was put down in scripture so we could say it too. We have an enemy that is too strong for us. Who is evil & hates you & hates the church and wants your destruction and he's stronger & smarter than you. BUT, the right hand of God...which is just symbolic of the hand of strength...the right hand of God named Jesus Christ shattered the chains our enemy had on us. He defeated sin and death and through that victory declared satan has no rights to us. The cross & empty tomb are our receipts. The Holy Spirit given to us is our receipt. Baptism is our receipt. Communion that we will receive together in a moment is our receipt. WE LOOK BACK at God's work as a VICTORY and our songs are the full expression of our souls in adoration of our God who saved us.

Why do we sing? We were made to, he tells us to, & he's worthy of it. What do we sing? WE SING OF HIS FAITHFULNESS! What else do we sing?

11 Lord, who is like you among the gods?
Who is like you, glorious in holiness,
revered with praises, performing wonders?

What do we sing: We sing about God's Glory

What you will notice is there is very little about Israel in this song. It's all God directed. The Lord Is...The Lord is...Who is like you?

Which is so important. Our worship team works hard to serve you guys each weekend. Most of these folks are volunteers and members of mercy and they are here to put substance above style. Look, we ain't a flashy church. I'm sure you can find that if you want. We try to do things with excellence...absolutely. But we are more concerned with the substance of what we are singing than the form it takes because substance matters more and form will change over time.

So these men and women work to build the kind of worship gathering that is going to guide the rest of us to lift our EYES UP OFF OF OURSELVES AND OUR WILDERNESS AND ONTO OUR GOD! AND THAT IS SO GOOD FOR US.

THEY select songs that are God-centered & gospel-centered because GOD and his glory is better for us than being preoccupied with ourselves. God must be the object of our worship, the subject of our worship, and the power of our worship.

12 You stretched out your right hand, and the earth swallowed them. 13 With your faithful love, **First mention of hesed you will lead the people you have redeemed; you will guide them to your holy dwelling with your strength.

17 You will bring them in and plant them on the mountain of your possession; Lord, you have prepared the place for your dwelling; Lord, your hands have established the sanctuary. 18 The Lord will reign forever and ever!

The last thing we sing about is our hope in God's future forever victory he wins for us.

What we sing about: God's Eternal Kingdom

See if the wilderness is God's workshop, worship is his instrument whereby he takes our eyes off of ourselves and the uncertain present. And when we look back, what do we see? FAITHFULNESS. When we look up, what do we see? GLORY. When we look ahead, what do we see? AN ETERNAL KINGDOM WHERE GOD REIGNS

AND WE REIGN WITH HIM. I told you earlier Israel was singing about God as a warrior. If you look at Revelation 19 you will see Jesus as a rider on a white horse who makes war. His eyes are like a fiery flame and his robe is dipped in blood and a sword comes out of his mouth to strike the nations. He is a warrior who is coming for his people. And some of you may shrink back a little at that but the reality is if you would realize the size and scope of the enemy who is out to destroy you...your heart would be filled with HOPE & JOY that the one 1 John 4 - the one who is in you is GREATER than the one who is in the world. Somebody say amen. The one who fights FOR YOU is greater than the one prowling around looking to destroy you. See we sing because the battle is REAL and the battle is WON.

The song closes with a brief narrative summary and then a little Chorus that Moses' older sister wrote.

19 When Pharaoh's horses with his chariots and horsemen went into the sea, the Lord brought the water of the sea back over them. But the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground. 20 Then the prophetess Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women came out following her with tambourines and dancing. 21 Miriam sang to them:



Sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted; he has thrown the horse and its rider into the sea.

Why do we sing? WE sing because we are made to, because he tells us to, and because he is worthy. What do we sing? We sing of his faithfulness, his glory, and his eternal kingdom.

We don't sing about ourselves. How do we sing?

How we sing: We sing with joy, conviction, and hope

We sing with joy because our God has saved us from sin and death. We sing with conviction because our confidence and our focus is not on our wilderness circumstance but on our unchanging glorious God. We sing with hope because our God is preparing a place for us to reign with him forever in glory. Revelation 15 John sees this vision of that forever moment that we will stand in and here's what he says:

2 I also saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had won the victory over the beast, its image, and the number of its name, were standing on the sea of glass with harps from God. 3 They sang the song of God's servant Moses and the song of the Lamb:

Great and awe-inspiring are your works,

Lord God, the Almighty;
just and true are your ways, King of the nations.

4 Lord, who will not fear and glorify your name?
For you alone are holy. All the nations will come and worship before you because your righteous acts have been revealed. -- Revelation 15:2-4 (CSB)

Through the redeeming victory of Christ, The song of Moses will become our song.

So what is the wilderness you are walking in right now? What I know for certain is that our God has not left you behind in it. He wants to use that wilderness as a workshop and one of his most powerful instruments he uses is worship.

2 The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation

Is he your victory anthem? Is he what your heart raves about? He's worthy. You were made for him. He calls you to him. To sing of what he's done, of how glorious he is, and of his future victory. With joy, conviction, and hope. Will you receive him?

Communion - The church remembers the Lord.