

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF EXODUS

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Exodus 15

This chapter opens with Israel's magnificent song of triumph on the shore of the Red Sea, when they had seen "**that great work which the Lord did upon the Egyptians.**" They had seen God's salvation, and they, therefore, sing His praise and recount His mighty acts.

"Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the Lord."

Up to this moment, we have not heard so much as a single note of praise. We have heard their cry of deep sorrow, as they toiled amid the brick-kilns of Egypt; we have hearkened to their cry of unbelief, when surrounded by what they deemed insuperable difficulties; but, until now, we have heard no song of praise. It was not until, as a saved people, they found themselves surrounded by the fruits of God's salvation, that the triumphal hymn burst forth from the whole redeemed assembly. It was when they emerged from their significant baptism "**in the cloud and in the sea,**" and were able to gaze upon the rich spoils of victory, which lay scattered around them, that six hundred thousand voices were heard chanting the song of victory. The waters of the Red Sea rolled between them and Egypt, and they stood on the shore as a fully delivered people, and, therefore, they were able to praise the Lord.

In this, as in everything else, they were our types.

We, too, must know ourselves as saved, in the power of death and resurrection, before ever we can present clear and intelligent worship. There will always be reserve and hesitancy in the soul, proceeding, no doubt, from positive inability to enter into the accomplished redemption which is in Christ Jesus. There may be the acknowledgement of the fact that there is salvation in Christ, and in none other; but this is a very different thing from apprehending, by faith, the true character and ground of that salvation, and realizing it as ours.

The Spirit of God reveals, with unmistakable clearness, in the Word, that the Church is united to Christ in death and resurrection; and, moreover, that a risen Christ, at God's right hand, is the measure and pledge of the Church's acceptance. When this is believed, it conducts the soul entirely beyond the region of doubt and uncertainty.

How can the Christian doubt when he knows that he is continually represented before the throne of God by an Advocate, even **“Jesus Christ the righteous?”** It is the privilege of the very feeblest member of the Church of God to know that he was represented by Christ on the Cross; that all his sins were confessed, borne, judged, and atoned for there. This is a divine reality, and, when laid hold of by faith, must give peace. But nothing short of it ever can give peace. There may be earnest, anxious, and most sincere desires after God. There may be the most pious and devout attendance upon all the ordinances, offices, and forms of religion. But there is no other possible way in which to get the sense of sin entirely removed from the conscience, but seeing it judged in the Person of Christ, as a sin-offering on the cursed tree. If it was judged there, once for all, it is now by the believer to be regarded as a divinely and, therefore, eternally-settled question. And that it was so judged is proved by the resurrection of the Surety. **“I know that whatsoever God doeth it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it nor anything taken from it: and God doeth it that men should fear before him”** (Ecclesiastes 3:14).

However, while it is generally admitted that all this is true in reference to the Church collectively, many find considerable difficulty in making a personal application thereof. They are ready to say, with the psalmist, **“Truly, God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart. But as for me,”** &c. (Psalm 73:1, 2).

- They are looking at themselves instead of at Christ, in death, and Christ, in resurrection.
- They are occupied rather with their appropriation of Christ than with Christ Himself.
- They are thinking of their capacity rather than their title.
- They are kept in a state of the most distressing uncertainty; and, as a consequence, they are never able to take the place of happy, intelligent worshippers.
- They are praying for salvation instead of rejoicing in the conscious possession of it.
- They are looking at their imperfect fruits instead of Christ's perfect atonement.

Now, in looking through the various notes of this song, in Exodus 15, we do not find a single note about self, its doings, its sayings, its feelings, or its fruits. It is all about the Lord from beginning to end. It begins with, **“I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.”**

This is a specimen of the entire song. It is a simple record of the attributes and actings of the Lord. In Exodus 14 the hearts of the people had, as it were, been pent up, by the excessive pressure of their circumstances: but in Exodus 15 the pressure is removed, and their hearts find full vent in a sweet song of praise. Self is forgotten. Circumstances are lost sight of. One object, and but one, fills their vision, and that object is the Lord Himself in His character and ways. They were able to say, **“Thou, Lord, hast made me glad through thy work; I will triumph in the works of thy hands”** (Psalm 92:4).

This is true worship. It is when poor worthless self, with all its belongings, is lost sight of, and Christ alone fills the heart, that we present proper worship. There is no need for the efforts of a fleshly pietism to awaken in the soul feelings of devotion. Nor is there any demand whatever for the adventitious appliances of religion, so called, to kindle in the soul the flame of acceptable worship. Oh! No; let but the heart be occupied with the Person of Christ, and **“songs of praise”** will be the natural result.

It is impossible for the eye to rest on Him and the spirit not be bowed in holy worship. If we contemplate the worship of the hosts which surround the throne of God and the Lamb, we shall find that it is ever evoked by the presentation of some special feature of divine excellence or divine acting. *Thus should it be with the Church on earth; and when it is not so, it is because we allow things to intrude upon us which have no place in the regions of unclouded light and unalloyed blessedness.*

In all true worship, God Himself is at once the object of worship, the subject of worship, and the power of worship.

Hence Exodus 15 is a fine specimen of a song of praise.

It is the language of a redeemed people celebrating the worthy praise of Him who had redeemed them.

“The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: He is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father’s God, and I will exalt him. The Lord is a man of war, the Lord is his name . . . thy right hand, O Lord is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy . . . who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? . . . Thou, in thy mercy, hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation . . . The Lord shall reign for ever and ever.”

How comprehensive is the range of this song.

- It begins with redemption and ends with the glory.
- It begins with the Cross, and ends with the kingdom.
- It is like a beautiful rainbow, of which one end dips in “the sufferings,” and the other in “the glory which should follow.”
- It is all about the Lord.
- It is an outpouring of soul produced by a view of God and His gracious and glorious actings.

Moreover, it does not stop short of the actual accomplishment of the divine purpose; as we read, **“Thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation.”**

The people were able to say this, though they had but just planted their foot on the margin of the desert. It was not the expression of a vague hope. It was not feeding upon poor blind chance. Oh! no; when the soul is wholly occupied with God, it is enabled to launch out into all the fullness of His grace, to bask in the sunshine of His countenance, and delight itself in the rich abundance of His mercy and loving-kindness. There is not a cloud upon the prospect, when the believing soul, taking its stand upon the eternal rock on which redeeming love has set it in association with a risen Christ, looks up into the spacious vault of God’s infinite plans and purposes, and dwells upon the effulgence of that glory which God has prepared for all those who have washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb.

This will account for the peculiarly brilliant, elevated, and unqualified character of all those bursts of praise which we find throughout sacred Scripture. The creature is set aside; God is the object. He fills the entire sphere of the soul's vision. There is nothing of man, his feelings, or his experiences, and, therefore, the stream of praise flows copiously and uninterruptedly forth.

How different is this from some of the hymns which we so often hear sung in Christian assemblies, so full of our failings, our feebleness, our shortcomings. The fact is, we can never sing with real, spiritual intelligence and power when we are looking at ourselves. We shall ever be discovering something within which will act as a drawback to our worship.

Indeed, with many, it seems to be accounted a Christian grace to be in a continual state of doubt and hesitation; and, as a consequence, their hymns are quite in character with their condition. Such persons, however sincere and pious, have never yet, in the actual experience of their souls, entered upon the proper ground of worship. They have not yet got done with themselves. They have not passed through the sea; and, as a spiritually baptized people, taken their stand on the shore, in the power of resurrection. They are still, in some way or another, occupied with self. They do not regard self as a crucified thing, with which God is forever done.

May the Holy Ghost lead all God's people into fuller, clearer, and worthier apprehensions of their place and privilege as those who, being washed from their sins in the Blood of Christ, are presented before God in all that infinite and unclouded acceptance in which He stands, as the risen and glorified Head of His Church. Doubts and fears do not become them, for their divine Surety has not left a shadow of a foundation on which to build a doubt or a fear. Their place is within the veil. They "**have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus**" (Hebrews 10:19). Are there any doubts or fears in the holiest?

Is it not evident that a doubting spirit virtually calls in question the perfectness of Christ's work - a work which has been attested, in the view of all created intelligence, by the resurrection of Christ from the dead? That blessed one could not have left the tomb unless all ground of doubting and fearing had been perfectly removed on behalf of His people. Wherefore, it is the Christians' sweet privilege ever to triumph in a full salvation. The Lord Himself has become his salvation; and he has only to enjoy the fruits of that which God has wrought for him, and to walk to His praise while waiting for that time, when "**the Lord shall reign for ever and ever.**"

*But there is one note in this song, to which I shall just invite my reader's attention. "**He is my God and I will prepare him an habitation.**"*

It is worthy of note that when the heart was full to overflowing with the joy of redemption, it gives expression to its devoted purpose in reference to "**a habitation for God.**"

Let the Christian reader ponder this. God dwelling with man is a grand thought pervading Scripture from Exodus 15 to Revelation. Harken to the following utterance of a devoted heart: "**Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob**" (Psalm 132:3-5). Again, "**For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up**" (Psalm 49:9; John 2:17).

I do not attempt to pursue this subject here; but I would fain awaken such an interest concerning it in the breast of my reader, as shall lead him to pursue it, prayerfully, for himself, from the earliest notice of it in the Word until he arrives at that soul-stirring announcement, **“Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes”** (Revelation 21:3, 4).

“So Moses brought Israel from the Red Sea; and they went out into the wilderness of Shur: and they went three days in the wilderness and found no water” (ver. 22).

It is when we get into wilderness experience, that we are put to the test as to the real measure of our acquaintance with God and with our own hearts. There is a freshness and an exuberance of joy connected with the opening of our Christian career, which very soon receives a check from the keen blast of the desert; and then, unless there is a deep sense of what God is to us, above and beyond everything else, we are apt to break down, and, **“in our hearts, turn back again into Egypt.”**

The discipline of the wilderness is needful, not to furnish us with a title to Canaan, but to make us acquainted with God and with our own hearts; to enable us to enter into the power of our relationship, and to enlarge our capacity for the enjoyment of Canaan when we actually get there. (See Deuteronomy 8:2-5).

The greenness, freshness, and luxuriance of spring have peculiar charms, which will pass away before the scorching heat of summer; but then, with proper care, that very heat which removes the fair traces of spring, produces the mellowed and matured fruits of autumn. Thus it is also in the Christian life; for there is, as we know, a striking and deeply instructive analogy between the principles which obtain in the kingdom of nature and those which characterize the kingdom of grace, seeing it is the same God whose handiwork meets our view in both.

There are three distinct positions in which we may contemplate Israel, namely:

- In Egypt,
- In the wilderness, and
- In the land of Canaan.

In all these, they are “our types;” but we are in all three together. This may seem paradoxical, but it is true. As a matter of actual fact, we are in Egypt, surrounded by natural things, which are entirely adapted to the natural heart. But, inasmuch as we have been called by God’s grace into fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ, we, according to the affections and desires of the new nature, necessarily find our place outside of all that which belongs to Egypt,, (i.e., the world in its natural state), * and this causes us to taste of wilderness experience, or, in other words, it places us, as a matter of experience, in the wilderness. The divine nature earnestly breathes after a different order of things - after a purer atmosphere than that with which we find ourselves surrounded, and thus it causes us to feel Egypt to be a moral desert.

* There is a wide moral difference between Egypt and Babylon, which it is important to understand. Egypt was that out of which Israel came; Babylon was that into which they were afterwards carried. (Comp. Amos 5:25-27 with Acts 7:42, 43). Egypt expresses what man has made of the world; Babylon expresses what Satan has made, is making, or will make, of the professing Church. Hence, we are not only surrounded with the circumstances of Egypt, but also by the moral principles of Babylon.

This renders our “days” what the Holy Ghost has termed “perilous” (calepoi - “difficult”). It demands a special energy of the Spirit of God, and complete subjection to the authority of the Word, to enable one to meet the combined influence of the realities of Egypt and the spirit and principles of Babylon. The former meet the natural desires of the heart; while the latter connect themselves with, and address themselves to, the religiousness of nature, which gives them a peculiar hold upon the heart. Man is a religious being, and peculiarly susceptible of the influences which arise from music, sculpture, painting, and pompous rites and ceremonies. When these things stand connected with the full supply of all his natural wants - yes, with all the ease and luxury of life, nothing but the mighty power of God’s Word and Spirit can keep one true to Christ.

We should also remark that there is a vast difference between the destinies of Egypt and those of Babylon.

Isaiah 19 sets before us the blessing that are in store for Egypt. It concludes thus: “And the Lord shall smite Egypt; he shall smite and heal it: and they shall return even unto the Lord, and he shall be entreated of them, and shall heal them . . . in that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land, whom the Lord of Hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance”(ver. 22-25).

Very different is the close of Babylon’s history, whether viewed as a literal city or a spiritual system.

“I will also make it a possession for the bittern, and pools of water; and I will sweep it with the besom of destruction, saith the Lord of hosts” (Isaiah 14:23). “It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation” (Isaiah 13:20).

So much for Babylon literally; and looking at it from a mystic or spiritual point of view, we read its destiny in Revelation 18. The entire chapter is a description of Babylon, and it concludes thus: “A strong angel took up a stone, like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, “Thus, with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all” (Verse 21).

With what immense solemnity should those words fall upon the ears of all who are in any wise connected with Babylon - that is to say, with the false, professing church. “Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues!” (Revelation 18:5). The “power” of the Holy Ghost will necessarily produce, or express itself in a certain “form, and the enemy’s aim has ever been to rob the professing church of the power, while he leads her to cling to, and perpetuate the form - to stereotype the form when all the spirit and life has passed away. Thus he builds the spiritual Babylon. The stones of which this city is built are lifeless professors; and the slime or mortar which binds these stones together is a, form of godliness without the power.”

Oh my beloved reader, let us see to it that we fully, clearly and influentially understand these things.

But then, inasmuch as we are, in God's view, eternally associated with Him who is passed right through into the heavenlies, and taken His seat there in triumph and majesty, it is our happy privilege to know ourselves, by faith, as "sitting together with him" there. (Ephesians 2). So that although we are, as to our bodies, in Egypt, we are, as to our experience, in the wilderness, while at the same time, faith conducts us, in spirit, into Canaan, and enables us to feed upon "**the old corn of the land,**" i.e., upon Christ, not as One come down to earth merely, but as One gone back to Heaven and seated there in glory.

The concluding verses of this 15th chapter show us Israel in the wilderness. Up to this point it seemed to them to be all fair sailing. Heavy judgments poured upon Egypt, but Israel perfectly exempt - the army of Egypt dead upon the sea shore, but Israel in triumph. All this was well enough; but alas! the aspect of things speedily changed.

The notes of praise were soon exchanged for the accents of discontent.

"When they came to Marah they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?" Again, **"the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness: and the children of Israel said unto them, Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full! for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger."**

Here were the trials of the wilderness:

- **"What shall we eat?"** and
- **"What shall we drink?"**

The waters of Marah tested the heart of Israel and developed their murmuring spirit; but the Lord showed them that there was no bitterness which He could not sweeten with the provision of His own grace.

"And the Lord showed them a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet; there he made for them a statute and an ordinance, and there he proved them."

Beauteous figure this of Him who was, in infinite grace, cast into the bitter waters of death, in order that those waters might yield nought but sweetness to us for ever. We can truly say, **"the bitterness of death is past,"** and nothing remains for us but the eternal sweets of resurrection.

Verse 26 sets before us the momentous character of this first stage of God's redeemed in the wilderness. We are in great danger, at this point, of falling into a fretful, impatient, murmuring spirit. The only remedy for this is to keep the eye steadily fixed on Jesus - **"looking unto Jesus."** He, blessed be His name, ever unfolds himself according to the need of His people; and they, instead of complaining of their circumstances, should only make their circumstances an occasion of drawing afresh upon Him.

Thus it is that the wilderness ministers to our experience of what God is. It is a school in which we learn His patient grace and ample resources. **“Forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness”** (Acts 13:18).

The spiritual mind will ever own that it is worth having bitter waters for God to sweeten.

“We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Romans 5:3-5).

However, the wilderness has its Elims as well as its Marahs; its wells and palm trees, as well as its bitter waters.

“And they came to Elim, where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees: and they encamped thereby the waters” (Ver. 27).

The Lord graciously and tenderly provides green spots in the desert for His journeying people; and though they are, at best, but oases, yet are they refreshing to the spirit and encouraging to the heart. The sojourn at Elim was eminently calculated to soothe the hearts of the people, and hush their murmurings. The grateful shade of its palm trees, and the refreshing of its wells, came in, sweetly and seasonably, after the trial of Marah, and significantly set forth, in our view, the precious virtues of that spiritual ministry which God provides for his people down here. “The twelve” and “the seventy” are numbers intimately associated with ministry.

But Elim was not Canaan. Its wells and palm trees were but foretastes of that happy land which lay beyond the bounds of the sterile desert on which the redeemed had just entered. It furnished refreshment, no doubt, but it was wilderness refreshment. It was but for passing moment, designed, in grace, to encourage their depressed spirits, and nerve them for their onward march to Canaan. Thus it is as we know, with ministry in the Church. It is a gracious provision for our need, designed to refresh, strengthen, and encourage our hearts, **“until we all come to the fullness of the measure of the stature of Christ”** (Ephesians 4).

~ end of chapter 15 ~

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