

Text: Exodus 15:1-21

Title: "The Battle Hymn of Moses"

Time: 12/13/2020 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: In Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address," he spoke of his own "poor power to add [to] or detract [from]" the consecration given to the hallowed ground of the battlefield by the bravery of the men who died there.

That is the spirit every preacher needs as he comes to teach God's people each new portion of Holy Scripture. I feel deeply my poor power and need for the help of God's Spirit, and I hope to be careful not to add to or subtract from what the Bible says. The text of Scripture is consecrated and holy ground already, apart from me. Its truth alone has power to save.

But as I have had the privilege of teaching you through some of the holy ground of Scripture in the calling God has placed on my life, I have come from time to time to a passage that makes me feel especially inadequate. Our passage this morning is one like that. It seems that to do anything more or less than what we have already done, having read this great Song of Moses, is to do something less and unnecessary.

The greatness of this first song in the Bible has been described well as setting a precedent for all the songs of the people of God. Simply put, if our song is not like this song, our song is in that measure worse. We might call this song, "The Battle Hymn of Israel." We Americans have a "Battle Hymn of the Republic," given to us by Julia Ward Howe after her visit with Union troops on a battlefield of the Civil War. But when I think of a battle hymn for the churches of Jesus Christ, my mind follows that of many others to the song of Luther: "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." What these great works have in common with the Song of Moses is that they recognize that we are in the middle of a spiritual war as believers.

Christmas has often happened in wartime. Really, every holiday does so when it comes to spiritual warfare for the believer. So I have titled the message this morning simply, “The Battle Hymn of Israel,” and I would have us see four things Moses’s song tells us this morning in our battles with our enemy.

I. Moses’s song tells us something about his singing (vv. 1-2, 20-21).

Illustration: People sing in many ways for many reasons. This past week I saw a video about washing your hands during these days of Covid-19. The instruction was to lather up your hands, to rub them together, and to not stop until you have sung or hummed the tune to “Happy Birthday” twice. One reason to sing “Happy Birthday” twice in the days of Covid, evidently, is to make sure that you have washed your hands long enough.

Application: Do you sing? If so, to whom do you sing? What do you sing? Why do you sing? Moses’s song answers all these questions for us when it comes to his singing. Yes, Moses sang, and he did so with the people of God. God’s people should love to sing together. The largest book of the Bible is a songbook. Psalm 40 tells us that when we get saved, God puts a new song in our mouths, even praise unto our God, which many see and learn to fear and trust the Lord. Has the Lord put that song in your mouth? Do you love singing it?

Moses sang to and for the Lord (v. 1a). The Lord was his audience. The Lord was the one he hoped would be pleased by his singing.

Moses sang about the Lord. He sang about the glory of what the Lord has done, and of who the Lord is. Moses sang that the Lord has triumphed over His enemies and saved His people. Moses sang that the Lord is my strength, my song, my sal-

vation, my God, and my father's God. Moses sings about his God, not himself, in this song.

C. H. McIntosh comments on this characteristic of Moses's singing: "There is nothing of man, his feelings, or his experiences, and therefore the stream of praise flows copiously and uninterruptedly forth." The commentator then reflects on how many of our songs are not like that. Moses's song was about God, not about Moses. How much of our singing is about God, and how much of it is about us?

At the end of the song, Miriam joins in with timbrel (a tambourine-like instrument) and dance (vv. 20-21). Older than Moses, she likely would have been a woman in her nineties by now. She is a prophetess, and the musical ministries of God's people have always been categorized with other ministries as one form of prophecy. She dances as an expression of her great joy. She teaches us that we must sing with joy.

This is the first mention of dancing in the Bible, and because we live in a world that does a lot of dancing that I know displeases the Lord, I think it is important to point out a few things about the dancing we read about in the Bible. First, the Old Testament has two forms of the word *dance* - one that is masculine that means *the dancing of men*, and one that is feminine that means *the dancing of women*. Miriam and the women who joined her were doing what the Bible calls *female-dancing*. There is no Bible word for the dancing of men and women together. That was not done among God's people.

Second, the Bible mentions the dancing of women only a handful of times in Scripture, and this passage is the only one in which the literal dancing of women is completely without negative result. In chapter 32, Moses will come down from the mountain and see the golden calf and female-dancing (the same word we have here). In Judges 11 Jephthah's daughter dances out to see him after his rash vow. In Judges 21 the

women of Shiloh dance just before being kidnapped by the diminished tribe of Benjamin in the days of Israel's apostasy. And in 1 Samuel 18 the women of Israel dance as they praise both Saul and David, but David more, thus making Saul jealous of David. The only time female dancing is mentioned in the New Testament, it is that of the daughter of Herodias, which pleases Herod's guests and ends in the beheading of John the Baptist. Female-dancing in the Bible generally ends in a disappointing result. It is similar to polygamy in this way.

But what really concerns me, when it comes to the Bible words for *dance*, is that we live in a world in which many professing Christians want to dance with the opposite sex the way the world does, but they have great trouble singing songs like the song of Moses with great joy. They will point to Miriam's dancing in the Bible to justify their love of the world, while never pretending to really sing the song that she sang. I pray that we can be a people who do the opposite, who refuse to point to the word *dance* to justify our worldly ways, and who feel great joy singing what Moses and Miriam sang.

II. Moses's song tells us something about his God (vv. 3-8).

Illustration: Luther's hymn speaks of the Lord as a mighty fortress: "A mighty fortress is our God/A bulwark never failing/Our helper He amidst the flood/Of mortal ills prevailing/But still our ancient foe/Doth seek to work us woe/His power and craft are great/And armed with cruel hate/On earth is not His equal.

"Did we in our own strength confide/Our striving would be losing/Were not the right man on our side/The man of God's own choosing/Doest ask who that may be/Christ Jesus, it is He/Lord Sabaoth His name/From age to age the same/And He must win the battle."

Application: Moses's song tells us the same truth with a similar metaphor – God is a man of war who wins His battles. Yahweh is Luther's "right man on our side," and Jesus Christ is Moses's "man of war." The banner under which the Lord fights His battles is the glory of His own name, *Yahweh* – that is His cause (v. 3). And the baby of Bethlehem was called "Jesus (*Yahweh saves*), for He shall save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).

Those who oppose the Lord become like a stone sinking to the bottom of the sea (vv. 4-5). This happens because of the glory, power, greatness, and excellency of the Lord's right hand (vv. 6-7). The Father says to His Christ in Psalm 110:1, "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." The victories of God's battles come from God's right hand, because that is where Christ is seated in His glory. Jesus is victorious. He won the war at Calvary.

Finally, note that it only takes God's breath to mightily defeat the enemy (v. 8). Like Luther's hymn declares, "One little word shall fell him." It seems that this is especially a reference to the Spirit of God (remember His work with water in Gen. 1:2). We normally do not think of the Holy Spirit's wrath. We remember quickly the Father's wrath against our sin, and Revelation tells us of the wrath of the Lamb in final judgment on this world. The Holy Spirit is the same God. He too is wrathful in judgment against sin in triumphing over God's enemies.

A. W. Tozer on the Holy Spirit: "Are you sure you want to be filled with a Spirit who, though He is like Jesus in His gentleness and love, will nevertheless demand to be Lord of your life? Are you willing to let your personality to be taken over by another, even if that other be the Spirit of God Himself? If the Spirit takes charge of your life, He will expect unquestioning obedience in everything. He will not tolerate in you the self-sins even though they are permitted and excused by most

Christians. By the self-sins I mean self-love, self-pity, self-seeking, self-confidence, self-righteousness, self-aggrandizement, self-defense. You will find the Spirit to be in sharp opposition to the easy ways of the world and of the mixed multitude within the precincts of religion. He will be jealous of you for good. He will take the direction of your life away from you. He will reserve the right to test you, to discipline you, to chasten you for your soul's sake. He may strip you of those borderline pleasures which other Christians enjoy but which are to you as source of refined evil. Through it all He will enfold you in a love so vast, so mighty, so all-embracing, so wondrous that your very losses will seem like gains and your small pains like pleasures. Yet the flesh will whimper under His yoke and cry out against it as a burden too great to bear. And you will be permitted to enjoy the solemn privilege of suffering to 'fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ' in your flesh for His body's sake, which is the church (Colossians 1:24). Now, with the conditions before you, do you still want to be filled with [the] Holy Spirit?" [*God's Pursuit of Man in Three Spiritual Classics in One Volume* (1950; reprint Chicago: Moody Press, n.d.), 465-466.]

And so, Moses's song tells us something about his God. His God is our God. How well do we know Him?

III. Moses's song tells us something about his enemies (vv. 9-12, 14-16).

Illustration: I had a conversation with someone this past week, for whom I am praying. She has just received an inheritance and was telling me about being an heiress, and I shared with her that I too am an heir with an inheritance. But when I began to describe my inheritance in the Lord, she cut me off rudely and said that she does not want to talk about religion. I told her that religion is the most important thing to talk about and that it is Satan who has convinced her otherwise. She immediately protested that she does not believe in Satan.

Application: An enemy is dangerous to the degree that we do not believe he exists. This is especially true for us as believers. Our enemy is in relentless pursuit of our destruction (v. 9). But the text is clear that he is also headed for his own sure destruction (vv. 10-12, 14-16). Paul speaks of Israel's passing through the sea as their baptism into Moses. Prior to that baptism, they were led away from the way of the Philistines for fear that they would turn back (13:17). After their baptism, it was Philistia that now had reason to fear (15:14).

IV. Moses's song tells us something about his future (vv. 13, 17-19).

Application: I mentioned we are heirs. We are heirs with Moses. We are heirs with our Greater Moses. The song describes our future:

1. It is the future of the redeemed (v. 13). It is for those who have been brought out of the Egypt of their sin by the sacrifice of the blood of God's Passover Lamb.
2. It is a future that is secure in God's sanctuary (v. 17). The house of God is always the place of security for the people of God. We dwell in His presence by faith now, by sight then.
3. It is a future when Yahweh rules (v. 18). We are not going to have to worry about Dominion voting machines then.
4. It is a future that never ends (v. 18). The misery of the present time certainly has an end. Our struggle is temporary.
5. It is a future for which we have sufficient evidence (v. 19). Pharaoh and his chariots did indeed sink in the Red Sea. Again, this was Israel's baptism, the miracle of the Red Sea, which guaranteed their future. Our baptism remembers the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, our guarantee that the promise of our future will be fulfilled.

Conclusion: In the passage that calls this time Israel's baptism into Moses, Paul says these things happened and were written down for our example (1 Cor. 10:11). Everything that Moses's

song tells us about his singing, his God, his enemies, and his future, it also tells us about our singing, our God, our enemies, and our future. Moses's song is our song. Let's sing it the way he did. Luther showed us how:

“And though this world with devils filled/Should threaten to undo us/We will not fear for God has willed/His truth to triumph through us/The prince of darkness grim/We tremble not for him/His rage we can endure/For lo, his doom is sure/One little word shall fell him.

“That word above all earthly powers/No thanks to them abideth/The Spirit and the gifts are ours/Through Him who with us sideth/Let goods and kindred go/This mortal life also/The body they may kill/God's truth abideth still/His kingdom is forever.”

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*