

Sermon Moses: His Song

A Sermon by Stephen Taylor

This week marks the 25th anniversary of a very special weekend. The Ark had been going for five years when we as a CU came up to my parents' home in Norfolk and I was baptised. We made a weekend of it, leaving Liverpool St on the Friday night and putting on a 'Jam and bread' style concert on the Saturday, before the big event itself on the Sunday morning. It was a coming together of two worlds – my childhood one and the student one, and also a time when Paula met her future in-laws, although she wasn't to know that at the time.

It was a weekend, as you can imagine, where I was quite nervous, not least because I'm really not very keen on water. I love being on it, and looking at it, but being in it was never my favourite pastime, and going under it, in front of lots of people was of some concern. It was also a tremendous celebration of the faithfulness of the Lord, where music would have played a big part.

My song that I chose was 'May the mind of Christ my Saviour' and if you'll indulge me we'll have that at the end. But this morning we're looking at Moses' song, which was sang in the context of a lot more water back in the days of the exodus.

How did Moses cross the Red Sea? Well it wasn't by boat, as we did last year, but through the miraculous power of a unique God, and it's this God, his God, our God, that is the focus both of this song and our thoughts this morning:

The Lord who was
The Lord who is
The Lord who is to come.

Let's begin then, with the Lord who was. We have a God who was there at the beginning. 'In the beginning' wrote Moses himself in Genesis chapter 1, 'God created the heavens and the earth.' Right from the start the Lord had full control over creation, for it was His world in the first place. To put together the world and everything in it in just six days, as it says in Genesis 1, was not a problem for God and it's not a problem for me, either. Just a small matter, then, to drive the sea back with a strong east wind and turn it into dry land.

So it was only right that Moses and the Israelites should pause to celebrate and to worship at this point, for something quite extraordinary had happened, an event that would resonate right through the Old Testament and indeed into the new as well.

The Lord who was. 'He is my God' sang Moses, 'and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him.' His father, you may remember from chapter 1, was a man of the house of Levi, so you could say it was in the genes. We hear no more of him, but he's acknowledged in this song, although it has to be said that 'father' could be a generic term for all who came before.

Moses goes on to describe in colourful detail the Lord who was in all his might; look at v6:

Your right hand, O LORD,
Was majestic in power.
Your right hand, O LORD,
Shattered the enemy.
In the greatness of your majesty
You threw down those who opposed you.

This song was, as it says on a box of Kelloggs cornflakes, 'the original and best'. There are numerous other references through the Old Testament to this great and awesome event, particularly in the psalms. Psalm 78:13 and 14:

He divided the sea and led them through;
He made the water stand firm like a wall.

Psalm 114

- ¹When Israel came out of Egypt,
 Jacob from a people of foreign tongue,
²Judah became God's sanctuary,
 Israel his dominion.
³The sea looked and fled,
 the Jordan turned back;
⁴the mountains leaped like rams,
 the hills like lambs.
⁵Why was it, sea, that you fled?
 Why, Jordan, did you turn back?
⁶Why, mountains, did you leap like rams,
 you hills, like lambs?
⁷Tremble, earth, at the presence of the Lord,
 at the presence of the God of Jacob,
⁸who turned the rock into a pool,
 the hard rock into springs of water.

And it's good to pause, as Moses did here, as we did the other week for the Ark, and acknowledge the faithfulness and power of the Lord, the Lord who was. Why was it, o sea, that you fled? It's a question that many scholars with lots of letters after their name have grappled with over the centuries, but all they needed to do was look at the next verse and they would have had their answer

⁷Tremble, earth, at the presence of the Lord,
 at the presence of the God of Jacob,

The Lord who was. The Lord who met with Jacob so memorably when he had his dream of the angels on the ladder. The Lord who had his hand upon the infant Moses when he was floating down the Nile. The Lord who shut the mouths of the lions in the time of Daniel. The Lord who opened the mouth of

the big fish that swallowed Jonah. The Lord who came down to this earth as a baby at the first Christmas and died for our sins at the first Easter.

The whole paragraph I'd written was underlined in green but I'm not answerable to a computer but to the Lord who was, and indeed the Lord who is.

Who is like our God? Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you – majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? Having typed this it sent a shiver down my spine, partly because we could have done with a bit of heating on, but more perhaps as a tremble in the presence of the Lord who is, now in the present day.

Some may look at the church, in its widest sense and think that God is in decline. It's easy for us to fall into the same trap when they're not being bussed into Sunday School any more. But this morning we celebrate the God who is. I was once told in reference to local events 'you've got a bit of competition now' to which I would say, respectfully 'there is no competition. Who among the gods is like you?'

Majestic in holiness. We are used to the idea of something, or someone, being majestic. The pomp and ceremony of a state occasion. The concept of holiness may be less familiar. We might think of a movement, a huddle, or even a term of contempt. But the holiness of God is both real and indeed comforting. It's real in that it's intrinsic to his character and to be taken very seriously, it's comforting because it's a reminder that God is good and God is light. In Him there is no darkness, no injustice, no problem. Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty.

The Hebrew word for 'holy in the Old Testament, 'qodesh', is most probably separation. God is separate from other beings, utterly pure and perfect. One song that was very in back in 1989 was 'When I look into your holiness, when I gaze into your loveliness, when all things that surround become shadows in the light of you... and it goes on in a similar vein until the response 'I worship you, I worship you, the reason I live is to worship you.' John Calvin wrote in similar vein centuries earlier:

"It is for God above all things that we are born, and not for ourselves". The Lord is majestic in holiness, and secondly we see that he is:

Awesome in glory. The glory of God is also something that's easy to overlook. Jesus is indeed the best friend I could have, and we can always 'take it to the Lord in prayer', but we always need to remember in doing so we approach a holy and glorious God. Moses would go on to experience the glory of God in a truly awesome way. When he came down from Mount Sinai with the stone tablets in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord.

Ezekiel chapter 1, which I'm due to read on Nov 14th in my journey through the Bible in a year, is one that could give rise to all sorts of interesting dreams,

as it's one of the weirder parts of Scripture, but when you plough through the wheels and living creatures that are so vividly described you are rewarded with, quite literally, a glorious climax:

²⁵Then there came a voice from above the expanse over their heads as they stood with lowered wings. ²⁶Above the expanse over their heads was what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. ²⁷I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. ²⁸Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him.

This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell face down, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

It was an unexpected treat to be able to visit St Paul's Cathedral on Tuesday albeit with 60 six and seven year olds. For strip away the tourist element and all the stuff that goes with it and you have a breathtaking structure that for me evokes the 'otherness of God' which can frequently be lost in our informal worship setting. That we have a God who is 'awesome in glory'. According to Bruce Milne, who wrote the excellent book to which I've often referred 'Know the truth' "His glory carries us to the heart of all that is essential to his being as God, his divine majesty, his sheer Godness".. He goes on to say that

"this view of God is anathema to the modern generation. It is also resisted by some who argue that a self-sufficient God whose action is directed towards his own glory is unworthy of worship. This forgets, however that the God of glory is the God of grace who sacrificed himself on a cross to save us".

The Lord who is - majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders. As the hymn writer says:

'My God, how wonderful Thou art, your majesty how bright, How beautiful Thy mercy seat, in depths of burning light.'

The Lord who is, the wonder working God. You may have an opinion on miracles but if you're a Christian here this morning you are one! If the Lord has spoken to you, convicted you of your sin and you've experienced his grace and forgiveness that we were talking about the other week from Ephesians then what has happened to you is nothing short of miraculous. It's good, as we saw back in the summer, to 'stop and consider God's wonders', the challenge to Job from the Lord. You may not have had a Red Sea moment, but if you're a Christian here this morning you've had an 'I see' moment, when your eyes have been opened to the majestic holiness, awesome glory and wonder working Lord who called you.

I wonder this morning if such a moment is part of your experience, and if it is, how long ago was it? Moses was in such a moment at the time of writing this song, and need you wonder because he had just witnessed something truly remarkable. 'The Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.' (Ex 14:29).

The Lord who is, in the song of Moses. I would encourage us all to pause and reflect on the holy, glorious, wonder working God that we have. I was greatly blessed in doing so on the day I wrote this. It was the morning after the weekend before, with the Ark celebration and the church meeting. It was

raining and I was surrounded by autumn leaves we had gathered the previous day for an Ark craft. Although Bethany was off school 'sick' that word was in very big inverted commas. And I found my 1989 diary which contained a vivid account of the weekend I described at the beginning, including such lines as 'Dad picked our instruments and gear up' – I've done that a few times since – and 'Mum and Dad coped remarkably well' referring to the ten music students in the manse, which fortunately was detached. There's also reference to a Doreen Collingham, a missionary from Nigeria who spoke at the evening service we thought nothing of staying on for before returning to London arriving about midnight just before the tubes stopped running. Reading all of this I felt a tremendous burst of praise and worship which I wasn't anticipating having before the weekend.

Paul tells the Ephesians to 'sing and make music in your heart to the Lord'. If you're not confident of making a joyful noise out here you can do it in here. For we have an awesome God who is worthy, who deserves who deepest praise.

And so Moses has sang of the Lord who was, the Lord who is, and finally he looks ahead to the Lord who is to come. Between verses 15 and 18 there are four 'you wills' referring to the future action of God. Verse 13: In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling.

Earlier this year it was my privilege to share with the children at Whitehall what a redeemer is, with the statue of Christ the Redeemer all over the media when the World Cup was upon us. I mentioned it here, too. Someone who pays the price for something we have done wrong. If we are Christians here this morning then we are among the people the Lord has redeemed. But what this verse says is in his unfailing love the Lord will lead the people he has redeemed. He doesn't just redeem us and leave us to it. We are led, in his unfailing love. He leads me, Psalm 23, by quiet waters. He leads us where he knows we need to be. The quiet waters on the day I wrote this were the raindrops on the window and I felt suitably led as I put this together.

Back in that weekend in 1989 our golden Labrador would have added to the chaos of a manseful of music students. Taking Bonnie for a walk was more like her taking me for a walk, because whenever she led me and pulled me often without warning in the direction of the cat, the bird or the other dog that had sent her into a frenzy, and I had to hold on for dear life to dog and lead.

This is not the kind of leading that Lord gives. It says 'in your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed.' Elsewhere, in Isaiah 40, it says 'he gently leads those that have young'.

But let's not mistake love and gentleness for sentiment and weakness. For Moses continues his song with 'in your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling'. We have a God of love *and* strength. Remember Ephesians 1, that prayer that Jason took us through a few weeks ago:

That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority.

To be guided by that strength, bearing in mind the Lord is outside of time and space and isn't hampered by chronology as we are, is of great comfort. I'm reminded of the words of that beautiful hymn:

**Lead us, heavenly Father, lead us
O'er the world's tempestuous sea;
Guard us, guide us, keep us, feed us,
For we have no help but Thee;
Yet possessing every blessing
If our God our Father be.**

On the Thursday before the Ark 30th weekend I was walking down from the top of Davenport Rd admiring as ever the lovely view on the horizon, when I was reminded of Psalm 121:

I will lift up my eyes to the hills – where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.

This was a tremendously encouraging word given the busyness that was coming up, and it was certainly borne out in practice.

Moses goes on in verse 17: 'You will bring them in and plant them on the mountain of your inheritance, the place, O Lord, you made for your dwelling.' Of course these words would prove prophetic; after all Moses is described as a prophet who the Lord knew face to face.

The fourth 'will' comes right at the end of the song: 'the Lord will reign for ever and ever.' Shades of a famous song I sang in another St Paul's, no that one, but a more modest place of worship in Mill Hill, where we sang the Messiah including that uplifting Hallelujah chorus. For he will indeed reign for ever and ever, the King of kings and Lord of Lords.

Well that was my story and Moses song. I can't honestly say I've been praising my Saviour all the day long ever since, but it's good to reflect, as Moses did, on the Lord who was, the Lord who is, and the Lord who will be. The one who will bring His people to his dwelling place. Lord, you have been our dwelling place, wrote Moses in Psalm 90, throughout all generations.

It's been of great value to go back a generation and share that weekend with you and in closing I would encourage you to think about baptism for yourself, if you haven't as yet taken this step in following the command of the Lord Jesus. It doesn't make you a Christian but it's a sure sign that you are one. We haven't had the baptistery open for a while but that's not why I'm asking. We don't have to answer to OFCHURCH with any stats about that. But I can't overemphasise the value of declaring to others the difference Jesus has made to your life, and if that's something you'd like to think about do contact me afterwards.

And may the Lord who was, the Lord who is, and the Lord who is to come, one God through all generations, strengthen and inspire us both now and in the days to come. Amen.