

The Celebration of the Crowds

Exodus 15 & Luke 19:29-38

March 29, 2015: Palm Sunday & End of Exodus Series

Welcome/intro—as we start this morning I want to celebrate and note that over the past 24 hours we've had our second 24-hour prayer event at the church office—thanks for pryaing!

If you're just joining us, this is our last week in what's been a great 6 weeks or so looking at the Old Testament book of Exodus

Now, today is our last in our Exodus series and next week is Easter Sunday. And next Sunday we're going to kick off a brand new series for about 4-5 weeks talking about Forgiveness.

For many of us, some of the most significant events in our lives is something stupid we did or something stupid someone else did to us

So we're going to spend a few weeks tackling forgiveness, starting next Sunday, Easter Sunday

encourage you to not only join us but to think about who you know who might be struggling with issues of forgiveness to invite them to join us

If you're just joining us, today as we close out Exodus we're at the point in the story where the Israelites who have been slaves for over 400 years in Egypt have finally been set free

And last week Steve Tamayo gave one of the best messages all year—seriously, if you weren't here you should go on-line and listen to it

Pharaoh let's the slaves go but then he has a little bit of slave-release remorse, it's kind of like buyer's remorse only different

he has some slave-release remorse and decides to go after the Israelites

So the Israelites are stuck with the Red Sea in front of them and Pharaoh's armies behind them and of course the people totally freak out!

But what God does is he parts the Red Sea and the people cross over on dry land

And when Pharaoh's armies attempt to come after them the sea crashes in on them and the Israelites are finally free from the tyranny of Egypt

And today we're pick up right up on the heels of that magnificent event as the people of Israel celebrate God's faithful activity immediately after the parting of the Red Sea

One thing that it seems every family with kids has in common is they have some story that they later entitle “The Ill-Advised Travel” story

And the Ill-Advised Travel story generally sounds something like this:

We were young and foolish

[PPT] And “for some dumb reason we thought it would be a good idea to drive with our small children from _____ to _____ . “

Now this part of the story operates like a Mad Lib where people fill in the blanks with two locations that are so ridiculously far apart that later they realize that NOBODY in their right minds should be making that drive, much less someone with small children

We thought it would be a good idea to drive from Pittsboro to Baja California; or Miami Beach to Seattle, Washington; or Freeport, Maine, to Macchupichu, Peru
WHO KNEW this would be such a bad idea????

Well several years ago, Kelly and I were preparing for what was shaping up to be our ill-advised travel story—we were going to drive from our house in Durham to Kent, Ohio, to see the grandparents

and we felt like we could probably make the 10-hour or so trip with our 2, 4, and 6 year old in probably about 14 hours or so

So we loaded up the car and we loaded up with all kinds of toys and goodies that we were going to distribute every few hours to keep them engaged
and we’d never done portable DVD players in the car before but we’d bought those special for this trip and we had those stowed away and hidden
in the hopes that we could get through maybe the first half of the trip without having to park them in front of the screen to get them to settle down

And on that fateful day we’re driving and we’re driving and we’re driving: through North Carolina, Virginia, and into West Virginia

and the craziest thing is happening. We get all the way to West Virginia and we haven’t made one stop yet

We finally stop at a rest center in West Virginia because we figure that’s one thing that West Virginians probably do really, really well

And our kids are rock-stars.

They’re not complaining, they’re not whining, they’re totally engrossed in the toys and activity books that my wife Kelly has bought especially for the trip

And we decide to keep going without breaking out the DVD players because they’re somehow not completely melting down

And we make it all the way to Kent, Ohio, 10 hours after we left our house, having made only 1 stop
and we still have the DVD players, aka our secret weapon of mass destruction and guaranteed silence stashed away for the return trip home

And this was such an improbable experience and it so shattered our somewhat miserable expectations,
that as soon as we got there, we just had to tell the grandparents this crazy story: 10 hours, 1 stop, this was beyond our wildest dreams!

And all weekend long, we kept re-telling the story of 10 hours of driving and just one stop
just not believing that something that we knew could have been utterly miserable turned out to be so wonderful

And to this day, we re-tell the story of the 10-hour trip to Kent, Ohio when we made only 1 stop
sometimes in order to shame our now 7, 9 and 11 year olds into behaving!

It's a celebration story that we re-tell and we re-celebrate because the re-telling and recounting and remembering is all part of it, right?

You come off a great group presentation at work or a great experience with your grandkids or a great experience at Disney world or after watching your basketball team pull out a great win

And part of the joy of celebrating is re-telling the story, re-hashing the great moments, remembering the points when you thought all was lost and how it all turned out in the end

The passage we're reading today is just this—it's a celebration that recounts what God has just done in the parting of the Red Sea
and this crowd is going to appropriately sing and remember and re-tell and celebrate what God has done

And as they do this, they're going to teach you and I a little bit about how to celebrate, how to remember God's goodness

Three elements to how they celebrate that I think we can learn from in this passage in terms of how celebration functions in our lives in healthy ways:

1. **Looking Back:** They're retelling the story, just like we did when our kids went 10 hours with one bathroom break
2. **Looking Up:** Moving from the events that happened to what that tells them about GOD, his character, his nature

They're continuing to answer the question that's driven much of this story, Pharaoh's great question "Who is the LORD?"

They're going to continue to fill this in for themselves because the Israelites are just now getting to know who God is and what his character is like because they're JUST NOW meeting him

3. **Looking Forward:** This is important: at about the $\frac{3}{4}$ point of this song, they're going to move from looking backward at what just happened and they're going to move from looking upward as to who this God is

and they're going to start looking forward at what they trust that this God can and will do in the future

3 movements to this song of celebration that teach us about how to celebrate with God in mind: looking back, looking up, and looking forward. Let's see how this plays out in the passage

If you've got a Bible turn to Exodus 15/no Bible on screen/no Bible at all, free Bibles available on the book table

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

[And it opens with the upward and backward look: who God is in light of what he has done for them]

"I will sing to the Lord,

for he is highly exalted. [starts with a "look up"]

Both horse and driver

he has hurled into the sea. ["there's a looking back]

² "The Lord is my strength and my defense^[a];

he has become my salvation.

He is my God, and I will praise him,

my father's God, and I will exalt him. [there's a looking up again]

[Here's some more upward and backward looking celebration]

³ The Lord is a warrior;

the Lord is his name.

⁴ Pharaoh's chariots and his army

he has hurled into the sea.

The best of Pharaoh's officers

are drowned in the Red Sea.^[b]

⁵ The deep waters have covered them;

they sank to the depths like a stone.

⁶ Your right hand, Lord,

***was majestic in power.
Your right hand, Lord,
shattered the enemy.***

...

[THEREFORE! Here comes another LOOK UP!]

***11 Who among the gods
is like you, Lord?
Who is like you—
majestic in holiness,
awesome in glory,
working wonders?***

***12 "You stretch out your right hand,
and the earth swallows your enemies.***

[Okay, now watch this turn—from backwards at what just happened to upwards at who God is and now they start to look **forward** to what this same God will do]

***13 In your unfailing love you will lead
the people you have redeemed.
In your strength you will guide them
to your holy dwelling.***

***14 The nations will hear and tremble;
anguish will grip the people of Philistia.***

***15 The chiefs of Edom will be terrified,
the leaders of Moab will be seized with trembling,
the people^[c] of Canaan will melt away;***

....

Now pause here: these people: the Canannites and the Edomites and the Moabites are all either on the way to the land God has promised to take them to or they are currently inhabiting the land God has promised them

So who are the Israelites singing this song to? Are there any people of Canaan there? Are the Edomites present? Any Moabites around? NO!

Who are they singing this song to? Each other! Why?

Because the Edomites and Canaanites and Moabites all have kings and armies and protective walls and fortresses and the Israelites have NONE of that

But what are they saying here? Does it matter that these other people have these other things and they don't? No! Why?

Because this God that they follow has thrown the Egyptian horse and rider into the sea! He's got the power and authority to overthrow greater armies than the Edomites had!

This is the community worshipping together and speaking the truth to one another about who God is and how he can be trusted even in the face of obstacles that are much greater than they are

My friends, when WE are operating in Christian community the way that God intended for us to, this is what we're doing: we're reminding each other, encouraging each other in who the Lord is—we'll talk more about that in a minute

The song finishes

...

***18 "The Lord reigns
for ever and ever."***

In our small group this past week we talked about how some of us are no good at this celebration thing. We're too busy, on to the next task, on to the next challenge

But in this story these people are several hundred thousand people, maybe over a million with women and children, and they're in the desert with little water and no guaranteed food source

There was plenty of problems ahead; but they stopped here and they celebrated.

Those of us who are drivers, who are strivers, who are always on to the next thing, we need to see what's happening here and absorb it: it is a good thing to celebrate

We can always be in such a hurry onto the next thing that we miss the joy available to us in the pausing and celebrating.

Let's not hurry our way through life! Let's take the time to celebrate whatever there is to celebrate!

Others of us are great at celebrating, we're always looking for an excuse to celebrate, but for some of us who enjoy celebrating, sometimes we're really good at looking back, and sometimes we're really good at celebrating what's right in front of us

but how good are we at making the upward movement? How skilled are we at remembering and celebrating the Lord who is over all things and who provides all things

And this gets tricky because it's so, so, so abundantly clear here at the Red Sea that God is at work, but in our own lives it's not always as clear, right?

I was talking with a guy on the soccer sidelines this past week who's not a Jesus-person who had done some consulting with Chick-Fil-A—and he had a lot of respect for Chick-Fil-A but he said he didn't really understand their culture

And he said that in one meeting they were talking about how God used the firewall in the computing system to stop a virus from spreading throughout their whole system

And he was kind of like: "Dude, I'm not so sure that was God. I think that's just what a firewall is supposed to do!"

I want to suggest to those of us who are Jesus people that it is perfectly appropriate to both celebrate the firewall doing it's job

AND to celebrate the God who uses firewalls all the time to protect computers from melting down and fall apart

We can both acknowledge that there is human agency in something like whoever designed the fire wall for the computer or who made the brakes work on your car

AND we recognize the God who is Lord over that firewall and who is Lord over your brakes and the brakes that worked on the other person's car as well.

Because unfortunately we know that firewalls don't always work, do they?

And unfortunately the brakes, or the people who are supposed to be working the brakes don't always stop the car in time, do they?

And so celebration matters

but celebration that only remains on the horizontal axis and that never gets around to moving upward to the Lord

misses part of the critical work of celebrating and naming and US understanding the answer to this great, mission-critical, life-critical question: "Who is the Lord?"

Here's why that's so important for us:

if we don't engage on the vertical axis to answer to the question "Who is the Lord" then what happens when we face challenges in the future where we are in over our heads and we need help

we will not be equipped to trust or turn to the Lord and know that he is faithful

At the end of the day and at the end of your life, the single most important question hovering over your life

is not who are you, not what will you do with your life, not where you should live or who you should marry

or whether your money will last throughout your retirement

The single most important question that you've got to answer hovering over your life is "who is the Lord?"

All those other good and important questions can rightly find their answers if we've got the answer to this question

We have to grow in God-confidence as we fix our eyes on the Lord

Because when threats or pain comes or other gods pull at us, we have to know that the Lord is bigger than all this and he's our confidence
this is all the outcome of answering this question "who is the Lord?"

The people in this song sing to each other with great confidence about how God is going to take care of them—this is the community of God encouraging one another in the face of all kinds of obstacles

and this is part of why the Scriptures encourage you to go to church!

We together are growing in answering this question who is the Lord because every week all during the week all these other gods and all these fears and worries pull our eyes away from the Lord

threaten to choke out the wheat that's growing of the gospel

Our small groups exist to remind each other and encourage each other and help each other answer the question in the midst of all of life's challenges and obstacles: "Who is the Lord?"

And we gather each week to worship the Lord and to say to one another: the Lord reigns. No matter what you're up against this week, the Lord Reigns. I'm here to tell you this week: the Lord reigns.

We remind each other of that and then we work it out in our lives.

In this story, these people very rightly stop and celebrate by looking backward, upward and forward and in all of this they are fully embracing what God has done and will do for them moving forward

But here's what happens literally in just a few sentences: the community travels a bit, has a hard time finding water, and what do they do?

[²⁴ So the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What are we to drink?"] They GRUMBLE

And do you know what they'll do over and over again over the next 40 years under Moses' leadership?

They'll GRUMBLE and COMPLAIN and REBEL against the Lord over and over and over again

Sometimes fear or anxiety or pain causes them to grumble or complain or rebel, like when they need water and it's hard to find

Sometimes they're just drawn to other gods like when Moses disappears for a couple of weeks to get the 10 commandments and the people build a golden calf and start worshipping it instead of God

And Sunday School kids, time to shine: when this same community who are all worshipping and praising God and saying all this great stuff about how their enemies ahead are going to be scared in this moment

When these people come up to the edge of the promised land, what do they do?

They freak out, melt down, forget, DIScourage each other rather than ENCourage each other and they say they can't do it—they fail

This same crowd that very rightly and very appropriately sings the praises of God will in very short order rebel against God and build a calf made out of gold and worship it
and then after that they will get to the promised land and forget what they know to be true in this moment: that God is big enough to deliver them

Now the fact that they forget God and worship this golden calf or fail later doesn't NULLIFY what they're doing here, it just shows us what we know to be true about ALL of us if we're honest.

That we forget easily. That pain and fear and sometimes other gods or other prizes speak louder than the promises and presence of God.

And before we get too high and mighty and roll our eyes at these people, I want to suggest to you that these same impulses are at work in our own hearts as well.

For MANY of us some part of our stories read something like we had an experience where God came through for us, delivered us, rescued us and we knew it and acknowledged it—clinging to God during the crisis!

But then within a few days or a few weeks or a few months the buzz wore off, we sort of drifted off

and eventually we returned to old ways or old habits and lives fairly disconnected from God

This crowd worships and celebrates God who parted the Red Sea for them—yes!
And this crowd in a few days will also turn against God and worships a golden calf—boo!

Both of those impulses are co-existent in their hearts and both of those impulses are co-existent in our own hearts, too

but in the long-run they cannot co-exist at the same time—one of them must choke out the other

And you and I have a good and important work to do of fixing our hearts and eyes on God, getting as deep to the bottom as we possibly can to the question “Who is the Lord?”

to the point where we fully and totally trust him because he alone is fully and totally trustworthy

And then secondarily we’ve got to go to work to weed out those things that compete for our affections and compete for our worship, because those things could literally be our deaths.

In this story we see this all-too-familiar and very human crowd: there is both of the good worship impulse and the false worship and fearful impulse

and those two realities connect us today on Palm Sunday with another crowd

Because a couple thousand years after this party at the Red Sea, we get another crowd and another celebration

Jesus is getting ready to enter into Jerusalem at the end of his life, and he’s going there for one purpose: to die for the sins of the entire world, including yours and mine

And he sends his disciples on ahead to find a donkey or a colt, for him to ride into Jerusalem on, which he does to fulfill a prophecy from the Old Testament

And here’s what happens:

³⁵ They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. ³⁶ As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

³⁷ When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

***³⁸ “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”^[b]
“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”***

Leading up to this event over the course of three years, many people had seen the miracles Jesus had performed

and here he comes to Jerusalem, the capital city, and they give him a king’s welcome

And just like the Israelites at the Red Sea, they look backward at those miracles and they celebrate

and they look beyond the miracles and upward to the God who has sent Jesus, the king who comes in the name of the Lord and brings peace and glory
and they bow down, they cry out, they praise, they put down their cloaks, they wave palm branches

This is the triumphal entry of a king into the capital city in the land promised to the Israelites several thousand years ago that God has given to them

And when this crowd worships Jesus, they are doing exactly what they were made to do;

This is the good moment, the right moment, where the people see things clearly and worship rightly

Now, as the week goes on, what's going to happen is that there's going to be a crowd of people who turn against Jesus

And there's some dispute as to whether it's this SAME crowd and this SAME group of people

or if it's more likely that here on Palm Sunday we've got a large gathering of Jesus followers who are excited about Jesus and on-board

BUT at the same time there's a group of OTHER people in Jerusalem who are less on board with Jesus who are persuaded by the religious leaders to turn against Jesus

But either way, within a few days, we've got a crowd of people who shout at the top of their lungs for Jesus to be crucified.

And at the very least, the people in this triumphal entry crowd are scared and fearful and hiding especially his twelve disciples

just like the crowd at the Red Sea will eventually act fearfully and scared at the promised land

And just like in Exodus where we've got this crowd of people who are faithful one moment and then who rebel the next

in the Jesus story we're also going to get a crowd of people who are faithful one moment and faithless, rebellious the next

And the crowd at the Red Sea and the crowd in Jerusalem 2,000 years later and our little crowd here today, we've all got the same basic problem

If you're here this morning on a faith journey trying to figure out what you believe and what you think, so glad you're here

part of the challenge for you is to figure out if you think that Jesus really is the King sent by God to take a broken messy world and do what he has to do to ultimately make all things right

Jesus is the sent one, the promised one, who has laid down his life to redeem and restore all things

That's the story of the Scriptures, that's the right worship that gets offered to him on Palm Sunday as he rides into Jerusalem:

the king has come, and he has come to reclaim every square inch of what is rightfully his, and that includes you and me as people made in his image

Some of us are already Jesus-followers and we're here to worship—we're here to follow him and worship him, but in all of our lives that happens "kind of" right?

In all of our lives we battle with fear, pain, anxieties and other gods, other things that pull at us

The good news is that our struggle to fully integrate faith in Jesus into every area of our lives doesn't nullify the right worship

what it means is that we're fallen human beings who need a lot of grace

And it also means that we've got some work to do to live a more consistent life.

We need the Spirit of God to give us strength and power, creativity and energy and faith to respond more consistently to the challenges and situations we face.

And the first place where we start is by admitting the problem[PPT]:

"Lord, I admit that I worship you AND I struggle with _____ at the same time"

Fill in the blank: fear, anxiety, lust, pride, gossip, comparison, people-pleasing, vanity, selfishness, ambition for money or power, whatever it is.

We've got to be brutally honest with ourselves and with God because whatever's in the blank has got to go!

Because in the gardens of our hearts, that weed if left unchecked and untended to has the power to completely choke out the gospel and the larger and better life that God wants to give us

We can fill in that blank with honesty and confidence because the King is sitting on his throne and he has already extended grace upon grace to us

whatever is in that blank already stands forgiven, it has already been paid for and he's ready to help us fight it back

The other good news: God is never shocked by our sin! Listen, some of you might take some time to really pray about this blank

And you might realize today that there's something at work in you that you've never seen in you before

And whatever you might write in that blank might come as a surprise to you but God's NEVER surprised—if you write down “lust” or “vanity” or “gossip” in that line, it's not like God's like “I had no idea!”

The God who already knows you better than you know yourself has already forgiven and stands ready to offer you forgiveness

and he loves you so much that he is pleading with you now to leave behind whatever's in that blank so that he might give you something much better

For your consideration:

1. How do you cultivate celebration that looks backward, upward, and forward so that you might more fully answer the question “Who is the Lord?”
2. What are the various things in your heart that fight for your attention, affections, and worship?

This morning, Jesus is one of those things, that's why you're here, and he's jealous for every square inch of you

Whether you're a Christian already or this if your first time ever in a church setting, there are a whole constellation of things that are pulling at you for your affections and worship.

Can you begin to offer those things to the Lord and ask him to forgive you and ask him to weed those things out of your heart, to prune them back, and to help you to live a more fully integrated life?

About 4,000 years ago, a large crowd of a newly formed nation called the Israelites celebrated one the most significant miracles in all of history: the parting of the red sea

Within a couple of days, they were grumbling and rebelling against God and worshipping an idol made of gold

About 2,000 years ago, a man named Jesus rode in as a king into Jerusalem, and the crowd worshipped and welcomed him

By the end of the week, that crowd was scattered and fearful or corralled into crying out for his crucifixion.

And today, you and I gather as a small crowd to worship or at least consider this same Jesus; and at various points this week, just like those two crowds, we'll live lives of rebellion against Him

And the call to all of us and on all of our lives
is that we might take the bright spots, take the good moments, the clear moments, the right moments
and ask the Lord to multiply those and spread those out, to replicate those, to weave that trust and that into every area of our lives

So that right worship doesn't just happen in pockets or on occasion in our lives, but is woven into all our days, every moment of every day

As we look ahead to Easter weekend, my prayer for my fickle heart and for your fickle heart is that we might drill down deep into the question "Who is the Lord?"
and as we discover how magnificent and faithful he is that we might be set free from the stuff in the blank to trust in and worship him alone.