

Songs of the Spirit | Using the Psalms to Connect With God

Salvation History

Psalm 106

May 13, 2018

We're looking at ten themes in the Book of Psalms, these poems of devotion that have been used by God's people for over 3000 years ("the vocabulary of the soul")... These poems have helped to shape people and to shape the Church before the coming of Christ and ever since.

The theme we cover today is what Bonhoeffer would have called "Heilsgeschichte" – the history of salvation...and that MEANS that today we're looking at history... Maybe some of you have already checked out: "Yuck! I hate history (with all the timelines and dates and memorizing facts...and names/places)" and...others may be thinking, "Man he lost me at the mention of POETRY"...but these historical poems are a way of compressing these monumental happenings to show their significance for us today.

These Psalms (esp 78, 105, 106) – they boil things down for us and we all WANT that – that's why we use Cliff's Notes and Golf for Dummies and YELP... we want the highlights and we DON'T want to miss the important stuff...the real take-away.

The Apostle Paul would look back on Heilsgeschichte (salvation history) and say, "Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction..." (1Co 10.11)

In other words, "these ancient events affect US... they teach us...and they are indispensable links in a chain WE CAN NOT AFFORD TO IGNORE... You know the famous quote, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it". (Santayana)

These poems take a giant swath of history and sort of reduce it to WHAT YOU DEFINITELY DON'T WANT TO MISS as you read the story of Israel...and especially important is WHAT GOD DID to get His people into and out of EGYPT. Let's look at salvation history as POETRY, PARADIGM and PRACTICE.

The Hebrew people were a singing people. They were a people of the Word.

The Jewish people are a reading and writing people and a people who are called to remember. They record history because they've been taught that history is HIS-STORY – the invisible Hand moves the human story and sometimes that invisible Hand becomes... visible... so, keep a record!

Thomas Cahill wrote a book called *How the Irish Saved Civilization*...and a few years later wrote a follow-up called *The Gifts of the Jews (How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels)*. Both books highlight the place of literature in these two great peoples.

The book about the Irish shows how a barbarous people (the chapter called The Unholy Irish is fascinating!) how this fierce/illiterate people were given the Gospel by a Roman slave turned monk named Patrick and how a network of monasteries was established and how in just a few generations the Irish became literate. And because they were a sort of playful people (like their leprechauns!) they took to words and made sport of words (You've probably seen the illuminated manuscripts, like the Book of Kells...and limericks) and the history and literature these Irish monks copied and distributed among the churches began to shape the national psyche.

No wonder Thomas Cahill wrote the follow up book about the Jewish people – two cultures shaped by a very literate devotion to God's Story and who were shaped by poetry and the singing of God's acts.

The Jewish people were people of the Word and also people of the POEM. And IN the Book of Psalms over 20 poems make significant reference to the Exodus and many, many more in the Prophets. Isaiah uses the hope of a New Exodus as a major theme in the second half of that book.

Here at the end of the FOURTH BOOK in the Psalms there are two of the most explicit retellings of the Exodus Story. And why? Why is what happened with Moses and the liberation from Egypt, why is the Exodus Story such an important motif for the whole Bible?

Exodus is the definition of salvation in story form. If I were looking for a word-picture of DRYNESS, I might say, "It's as dry as desert." If I wanted a metaphor or a symbol for stability, I might say, "SOLID as a _____." And again you'd expect me to say, "...as a ROCK." Or value, I might say, "Oh yeah, it's good as _____." And you'd guess "Good as GOLD."

And when the Hebrew people were to think of rescue, of God coming to the aid of His people to save them... they would always think, "Salvation as in EXODUS." It was the picture of salvation in story form... a definition of something too big to put into a simple phrase or sentence – it takes a whole STORY!

And that's why the Psalmists and the Prophets keep plucking this chord. They're looking back to when God saved them and made them a nation AND they look forward to when God will save them once again and gather them from the nations – Exodus is the paradigm of salvation history... go back and see! And here in the 106th Psalm that Salvation Paradigm is invoked in order to arouse a response in the readers, a response and practice that's indispensable to true spirituality i.e. lament (more in a few weeks), a sorrow for one's sins. He opens with praise and prayer toward God, and next the writer pours out this long lament USING the Exodus Paradigm, "BOTH WE and our fathers have sinned..."

And then he moves back and forth from the saving power and faithfulness of God TO the unfaithfulness and weakness of people. Even the people who'd seen God's salvation with their own eyes, the "Exodus Generation"; who'd seen YHWH triumph over Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt... the generation who'd stood by the sea and passed through as on dry land, the people who ate manna in the wilderness.

And they (v.12), "BELIEVED His words and sang His praise..." B U T ... (v.13) "They soon FORGOT..." "Our fathers, when they were in Egypt, did not consider your wondrous works; they did not remember Your abundant kindnesses but rebelled by the Sea..." It's that super-important Hebrew word "hesed" – it's like the NT word "charis" or grace – it's God's unilateral promise to His people – they QUICKLY forgot His commitment to them and to His own mission. They forgot grace (hesed) and everything fell apart. They crumbled morally/rebelled.

V.8 Yet HE saved them (see it's the story that defines the word "saved".) "Yet HE saved them..."

V. 10 "So, He saved them...He redeemed them..."

V. 13 "BUT they soon forgot His works...they craved intensely" ["craved after craving" (lit Hebrew)]

And so it goes: God responds to their "craving craving"; He sees their spiritual insanity and He sometimes uses the "defibrillator" of suffering to restart their hearts...to return them from absurdity to rationality. And ... YET...again (V. 21) "they forgot God, their Savior" – the KEY to their apostasy, the consistent cause of their falling away is their forgetting God's grace, His intentions, His commitment, His promises, His salvation...His "HESED" ...His EXODUS. (They Forgot.)

And it gets really, REALLY serious...amazing how a small detour (e.g. ingratitude, self-pity, grumbling, spiritual forgetfulness) can take a person to places he never imagined... They trade grace for karma...they forget God's promises/covenant and they figure that all gods are basically the same and they start thinking the Canaanite gods who are "this-for-that" gods... "All gods are basically the same..."

“But they mingled with the nations and learned their practices, and served their idols, which became a snare to them.”(35-36) And going from a walk with God based on GRACE (hesed; God saving US – not US forcing/placating Him) going from grace to transactional religion led eventually to child-sacrifice: (37) “They even sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons...”

AND the writer, looking back at the ancient paradigm, sees that, sadly, HE TOO – “WE AND our fathers have sinned...I’m like THEY were...”

Do you personally ever FEEL this? Do you ever notice how flimsy you are? How unsteady is your resolve? How you are seemingly PRONE to do bad things OR to do the “right things” but for rotten reasons (so that people think you’re better than you really are)? Have you recently had some experience to remind you that YOUR obedience and faithfulness to God and your love for others is like the morning dew in the Florida sun that quickly evaporates? Do you feel it?

Somehow, even God’s great works – saving His people so dramatically with signs and wonders, saving them from slavery in Egypt in ways they couldn’t deny...somehow, even crossing through the sea and eating manna...somehow...IT DIDN’T produce lasting results... the people craved craving and were like spiritual psychopaths... WE AND our fathers...”

It’s like we need...more...need a new chapter in heilsgeschichte; we need a New and Better Exodus. We need God to come again...to show the Invisible Hand, to come out of hiding and step into history, “Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the nations, that we may give thanks to Your holy name and glory in Your praise....(Save us from ourselves!)”

There’s this obedience gap...memory gap!

And then...into the breach – this obedience gap that we can’t bridge, this prone-ness to wander – into our own slavery to ourselves, our craving of craving... IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME – the Invisible Hand is bared (Isa. 52.10).

God enters our slavery. God becomes Man. The God-Man, Jesus Christ came and declared that He was the King of the Kingdom.

And remember on the Mount of Transfiguration when Jesus Christ meets with Moses and Elijah. It’s like those heroes of the faith are sent back into the game for a minute and they’re wondering, “Are we getting any better?” and Luke (9.31) records, “Jesus was speaking to them about His EXODUS which He was about to COMPLETE at Jerusalem.”

]God would complete the History of Salvation by taking on our flesh, living the life we failed to live and dying the death we deserved to die. He, Jesus Christ, becomes enslaved so WE might be free. He becomes cursed that WE could be blessed.

He, Jesus Christ, IS our New and Better Exodus and what He accomplished (on a Hill far away) IS our liberation. This IS the hesed of God, God’s grace and covenant loyalty and unwavering love.

As Exodus was the paradigm for the Hebrew Church so the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is OUR paradigm, the “High-Def video” of salvation.

And that brings up the final point – the PRACTICE of Exodus. The Apostle Paul, wrote to the Church at Corinth: “*Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave evil things as they also craved.*”

They looked OUTSIDE of YHWH for their deepest desires... they wanted gods they could control and these gods only required a few little sacrifices... and then a little more... and more...until they were paying the ultimate price – child sacrifice!

See, the thing about this historical poem... the way it boils-down the First Exodus AND the way it points to the Exodus fulfilled by Jesus Christ is by fixating on God and HIS DOING! The Exodus was free and it was all about FREEDOM! It was not something the Israelites paid for or controlled or initiated – they were helpless and God saved them.

And that's what the "It IS Finished" of salvation history is all about – Jesus Christ is the Writer of the story (history is HIS-story). He's the Promise; He's symbolized in it; it all points to HIM and HE IS THE FULFILLMENT of the Story.

And we are called to enter into the story every day, day-by-day by the practice of lament and celebration. We are called and invited to rehearse the story to ourselves and to our children (the 78th Psalm starts off with this whole idea – we're not sacrificing our children – we're passing on GRACE to them! – (QUOTE) "We will not conceal Your works from our children, but tell to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and His strength and His wondrous works that He has done." (Psa 78:4)

See, we get to say to our children, "We are the people of Abraham, the people of the Exodus, the people of Jesus... we don't have to be enslaved like the world to the cravings-for-craving... always wanting more and never satisfied...the quest to create an identity for ourselves by wearing just the right clothes...or by being cool enough... or individual and special and unique... or by any of the THOUSANDS OF TRANSACTIONS that the false gods require of us. ("Do THIS and I will give you THAT!")

No. We are people of hesed – we rely on God to save us and to establish us... We trust in Jesus Christ to set us free. We are prone to wander but He comes after us...He leads us to lament and to celebrate... to REPENT AND BELIEVE day-by-day and moment-by-moment ... to return to God as we see Him in Jesus and the Greater Exodus and then to see ourselves as the people of GRACE...the adopted/beloved children of God.

The way of escape/salvation from the insanity of this modern world and the absurdity of our own misguided desires, the Exodus that Jesus Christ accomplished is something into which we must enter daily... it's why we sing...and mourn...celebrate and depend and why we say in the closing words of this Psalm:

Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the nations, to give thanks to Your holy name and glory in Your praise. Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting even to everlasting. And let all the people say, "Amen." Praise the LORD! (47-48)