From Chaos to a Voice of Many Waters

On the Default Setting of God

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Default Settings

Let me start with a verse from James:

> But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. (James 1:6–8)

When we are in that state of doubting and tossing and instability, we are in the *natural state* of humanity. That is our default setting. Out of the box, we are unstable in our ways. But there is a different setting that God wants to bring to us. As Jesus says, it is out of the heart that all wickedness and unstable action proceeds, and it is out of the *transformed* heart that we are renewed. Jeremiah 31 promises a new heart. David, after his sin with Bathsheba, prays:

> "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10).

There is something God wants to do with humanity. Our default setting is doubt, instability, anger, violence, all the works of the flesh the New Testament catalogues. There is nothing to wring our hands over here, because we know God has provided a remedy. Isaiah names the same diagnosis:

"But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt" (Isaiah 57:20).

Doubting and instability is the default setting of humanity. But God has a remedy for it. And the remedy is not what we sometimes think, because *the default setting of God* is something else. The default setting of God is love. Love is what caused him in the beginning to create. That is why he created.

Order Out of Chaos

> In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. (Genesis 1:1–3)

Watch what God does. There is darkness. There are chaotic waters. The Spirit hovers, like a dove brooding over a nest, and then God *speaks*. The words go out, and the waters go from chaos to light, to land, to space and air. In the first three days he creates spaces: sea, land, sky. In the next three days he fills those spaces: fish for the sea, beasts for the land, birds and stars for the sky. First he creates the space, then he fills it. He brings order.

That pattern is what love *does*. God's default setting of love expresses itself as the bringing of order out of chaos. And he keeps doing it. By Genesis 10 and 11, the seventy nations are scattered, mutually anxious, speaking different languages, opposed to one another. The whole earth has become a Whoville of Grinches: small hearts toward each other, separated and afraid. At the end of chapter 11, God calls one old man and his barren old wife and begins to bring order out of that chaos all over again.

Out of Egypt

Four hundred and thirty years later, the descendants of that one old man find themselves as slaves in Egypt. *The ultimate chaos, short of death, is when you have absolutely no control of your life, when someone else dictates everything you do.* Death is the ultimate chaos; slavery is the next floor up.

And what does God do? He brings them out by a mighty hand. He tells Moses at the burning bush, "I will put My words in your mouth." The words will speak a new reality to Pharaoh, a reality in which Pharaoh has to let God's son go. And the words will speak a new reality to the children of Israel: They will learn to come out and serve God independently in a wilderness.

But first they have to go through the Red Sea. The Red Sea represents the dominating power of chaotic nations: the political, economic, social waters of Egypt embodied in Pharaoh's armies. God blows on those waters with his east wind all night (the Hebrew *ruach*: wind, breath, spirit, same word in every register). All night long he blows the waters out of the way, and the children of Israel cross on dry ground. When Pharaoh's armies pursue, they are consumed by the very waters they had most identified with. Pharaoh and his armies *are* the waters. They are the chaos.

This is not an indictment of Pharaoh's armies alone. This is an indictment of all of us. At one time we found ourselves among the chaotic peoples, operating out of the chaos of our own hearts. We were all part of the waters. It took the word of God hovering over us to bring out of us land and life and vibrance. Forty years later, God strikes the waters of the Jordan, stands them up in a heap, and Israel crosses *again* on dry ground. And Isaiah, generations later, presses the same imagery into a promise:

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you" (Isaiah 43:1–2).

Fight, Flight, Freeze, Fawn

Fear and doubt are the complementary powers that bring us out of stability and into chaos. They produce, depending on how we are wired, one of four responses: fight, flight, freeze, or fawn. Some of us freeze. Some of us fawn. Some of us run. I am a fighter. My brother was a freezer. When life was dealing him nastiness, he would just set his jaw and lean into the wind, pretending nothing was wrong. We later worked in a business together, and not making money made him double down (head down, push through) while it made *me* mad. We manifest fear and doubt differently. But however we wear them, they are the engine of chaos in our lives. Almost everything that goes sideways traces back to one of those two roots.

The Voice Over the Waters

When David is facing trouble, he answers the gravitational pull toward fear with *worship*. Psalm 29 is the answer to chaos:

> Give unto the Lord, O you mighty ones, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Give unto the Lord the glory due to His name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders; the Lord is over many waters. The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty. (Psalm 29:1–4)

Verse 5: "the voice." Verse 7: "the voice." Verse 8: "the voice." Verse 9: "the voice." Seven times in this short psalm. When God speaks, he takes what is wrong in the world and

begins to set it right. He breaks the adversarial things in our lives and remakes us through a heart that worships instead of a heart that fears.

There is a small but pointed example of this in the Gospels. The psalmist writes:

"Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength" (Psalm 8:2).

When Jesus quotes this verse in Matthew 21:16, he renders the line:

"Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise" (Matthew 21:16).

Strength and praise stand in for one another. When we begin to praise, we begin to defeat the power of doubt and fear that wants to corrupt every action of our lives. Praise *is* strength.

Songs in a Strange Land

When Israel finds itself in Babylon (twelve hundred miles from home, with a desert between captivity and the old land) even the songs go silent. The psalmist writes:

> By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion . . . How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill! If I do not remember you, let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth. (Psalm 137:1, 4–6)

The chaos of this world tries to break into our settledness and our calm. The heart of the redeemed is enlarged by song, but when we find ourselves in a strange land, sometimes we forget the song. When fear and doubt press in, the hand forgets its skill and the tongue cleaves to the roof of the mouth. Just when we most need to be singing, we are at our most silent.

And that is precisely when we have to draw closer to the throne room and join the cacophony of voices that already sound there. The angels know the end of the story. They sit there and see God enthroned, Christ at his right hand. They are not in doubt. What we have to do

is *transcend*: let the Spirit dwell in us, let our mouths become harps. The little harp of the human voice has to begin to sing out praise, because that is where the power is.

Ezekiel's Vision

Ezekiel was in that same Babylonian captivity. Twelve hundred miles of desert lay between him and any kind of help. The city he loved was burned down. The temple was rubble. And in the middle of it all, Ezekiel begins to see things that should not be possible. He sees a great temple in vision. He sees operating priests. He sees gates and chambers and waters. And then in chapter 43 he sees this:

> Afterward he brought me to the gate, the gate that faces toward the east. And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east. His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory. (Ezekiel 43:1–2)

Earlier in the book of Ezekiel, the prophet sees the glory of God *leave* the temple. It goes from the Holy of Holies to the holy place, from the holy place to the outer courts, from the outer courts to the gate of the temple, from the temple gate to the gate of the city, from the city gate to the mountain east of Jerusalem, and then keeps going east. Where is God going when he leaves the temple to be destroyed? *He is going with his enslaved people, who are going east in chains toward Babylon.*

And now, in Ezekiel 43, the glory of the Lord is *returning*: coming back from the east, from Babylon. Whom is he bringing with him? His children. Through the wilderness. Isaiah, the same prophet John the Baptist would later quote, said it this way:

> The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and

hill brought low; the crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth." (Isaiah 40:3–4)

A way through the wilderness so smooth that even the lame can walk on it. That is you and me, by the way. That is humanity in our default setting. And the glory comes back with a voice like the sound of *many waters*. Watch this transformation. What had been the chaotic waters of the peoples becomes the voice of the glory of God. The peoples themselves get redeemed into the chorus.

Pentecost Floods In

On the day of Pentecost, that sound, the voice of many waters, floods into the upper room. Jews from every nation under heaven are in Jerusalem, and what they hear is the rushing mighty wind and a hundred and twenty voices speaking, each man hearing them in his own tongue.

"And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language" (Acts 2:5–6).

The voice of many waters floods into the people of God. The Word and the Spirit set up order in them. And then *they* go out, and the order begins to settle wherever they speak.

One Like the Son of Man

Daniel, also writing from Babylon, saw further into this same plan. Daniel 7 is one of the most important chapters in the Old Testament for the New Testament writers, because they applied it directly to Jesus. Daniel sees a vision of an Ancient of Days seated on his throne with white hair like wool, and then:

> I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed. (Daniel 7:13–14)

The Son of Man receives a kingdom. All peoples, nations, and languages serve him. And then a few verses later, Daniel sees something extraordinary:

"But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever" (Daniel 7:18).

We never see the Son of Man again in Daniel 7. But we see the *saints* receive the kingdom. The Son of Man's glory and honor and power get *transferred* to a people. The everlasting kingdom is no longer just the Son of Man's kingdom. It is yours, too, yours as part of the people of nations and tongues now serving him.

Then in Daniel 10, Daniel sees a figure again:

> I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, a certain man clothed in linen, whose waist was girded with gold of Uphaz! His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like torches of fire, his arms and feet like burnished bronze in color, and the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude. (Daniel 10:5–6)

Notice the shift. Earlier the *voice of many waters* meant the chaos of the nations. Now Daniel hears *the voice of a multitude*, and it is no longer chaos. The redeemed nations have become the voice of the Son of Man's eternal kingdom.

"His Voice as the Sound of Many Waters"

Now jump to Revelation 1. John is on Patmos. He hears a voice:

> I, John . . . was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches . . ." (Revelation 1:9–11)

Seven churches. Seven cities. Those seven cities represent all cities, in all times, in all places, where the people of God are reaching toward God and trying to detach themselves from the chaos of this world. John turns to see the voice that speaks with him:

> Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters. (Revelation 1:12–15)

Look at the gathering of images. The white hair of the Ancient of Days from Daniel 7. The eyes of fire and the burnished bronze feet from Daniel 10. *His voice as the sound of many waters.* The same voice from Ezekiel 43. The same voice that hovered over the chaotic waters in Genesis 1. The voice that put the words in Moses' mouth. The voice that called Israel back from Babylon. The voice that broke into the upper room on Pentecost. All of it gathered up in *one like the Son of Man*.

And notice the feet: “like fine brass, refined in a furnace.” This is a Son of Man who *knows the furnace*. He was the fourth figure walking with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego when Nebuchadnezzar’s astonished voice asked, “Did we not throw three men into the furnace? But I see a fourth, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God” (Daniel 3:24–25). He is *in* the furnace with us. As we engage him there, his voice is the sound of many waters.

The Harlot Sits on Many Waters

But the waters can still be the *wrong* waters. Revelation 17 takes us back to the old chaos:

> Then one of the seven angels . . . came and talked with me, saying to me, “Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication.” (Revelation 17:1–2)

The waters support her. And in case there is any doubt about what the waters are:

“The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues” (Revelation 17:15).

Those peoples in Daniel 7 who were going to become the everlasting kingdom; *those* are the battleground. This chaotic water, this clamor of politics and economics and contested social policy; *that* is where the war is being fought for the human heart. None of us was born with a silver spoon in our mouth. We were not born of order. We were born of disorder. When we find ourselves raging with the political machine, raging over economic policy or social structure, when we have lost our peace over those things, we are *back in the waters*. There is no ultimate redemption to be found in getting our politics right, or our religion right, or our economics right. *Not so.*

And out of those waters, in Revelation 13, comes the beast:

"Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns" (Revelation 13:1).

Even after Pharaoh's armies were drowned, even after the dragon's flood was swallowed up by the earth in Revelation 12, still a beast rises out of the sea. One thing about evil in this world: it never seems to be down for good. It ebbs and flows. And it will ebb and flow in your life too. Every time we feel fear or doubt, we have to commit ourselves *again* to the God of order, and we do that through praise and worship.

A New Song

Now look at the answering image. Revelation 5:

> And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made us kings and priests to our God; and we shall reign on the earth." (Revelation 5:9–10)

When we begin to trust God and sing that new song, the hearts of the nations begin to turn. Our own hearts begin to turn. We simply have to open ourselves up to the new song and begin to sing it out loud.

And in Revelation 19, the song reaches full chorus:

> Then a voice came from the throne, saying, "Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!" And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns!" (Revelation 19:5–6)

What had been the clamor of waters supporting the beast and the harlot, that chaos that brought all the chaos about, has now been replaced. The *same peoples*, redeemed by the love of

God, have become a great multitude *as the sound of many waters*. The waters have been converted. *That is what God is all about.* He takes your chaos and my chaos, and sometimes when we come to Jesus we forget that we were once tumultuous waters ourselves, and now those waters are worshiping him. The sound of a great multitude. The sound of many waters. The sound of mighty thunderings. "Alleluia, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigns."

Out of Your Belly

How does this start? It starts when God puts a word in your mouth through the Spirit. Jesus said in John 14, "My Father and I will come and make Our home with you" (cf. John 14:23). And he sent the Spirit of truth, and that Spirit settled as a word on the mouths of the disciples at Pentecost. The multi-voiced sound of God began to come through his people, and they were heard in every nation and tongue.

And what happened to those who heard? Peter preached, and the crowd was *pierced*, the same sword that comes out of the mouth of the Son of Man in Revelation 1 came out of his servants too:

> Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:37–38)

Repent and be baptized. You will become agents of God, no longer agents of chaos, no longer troubled waters, but waters that stream *out*. Jesus said it in John 7:

"If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37–38).

That is what God has called us to. And when we realize that God is not going to peter out here with just a few little souls saved (when we realize that *God wins*, that the end of the story is the redemption of the multitude) then we can lift our heads. There will be more redeemed than we now imagine. Only the very hardest, most impenetrable heart finally refuses the love of God at the end. Even that Grinch heart can grow three sizes. Who are the Grinches in your life? And are *you* the Grinch? Can the God of heaven pour his Spirit into your life, the Spirit of love? Paul writes:

"The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us" (Romans 5:5).

That is our mandate. We become the kingdom and the voice and the words of God. And yes, the voice will pierce. Yes, it is a sword. But it only slays the old man. What comes out of the slain old man is a new creation. The writer of Hebrews puts it this way:

> For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)

Let *him*, for the rest of your Christian life, discern the thoughts and intents of your heart. When you became saved, you didn't get a new set of brains. There is a lifetime of learning what it means to be a child of God and love like he does.

No More Sea

And the end of the story? John writes:

"Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea" (Revelation 21:1).

No more sea. We don't have to go through the turmoil anymore. We can find our anchor, and that anchor no longer holds in the depths of the sea, but is anchored in the throne room of heaven. Does your anchor hold through the storms of life? We have a confidence beyond the veil, with Jesus Christ. Hold to that confidence firm to the end.

One last image. Ezekiel sees a river flowing out from the throne in the temple, and that river flows down into the great sea. And what had been a *dead* sea is brought to life by the river. The river that flows out of *your* belly, Jesus said it, is that same river. The sea was full of death. The river brings life. No more dead sea. Just the converted multitude, singing out from converted hearts, as the sound of many waters. Alleluia, for the Lord God Omnipotent reigns.