



THUNDER DEVOTIONAL

JOB 37:4-5

“He thunders with his majestic voice, and he does not restrain his lightnings when his voice is heard. God thunders wondrously with his voice; he does great things that we cannot comprehend.”

EXPERIENCE

There is nothing quite like experiencing a thunderstorm while rafting in a river canyon. The boom of thunder echoes off the ridges on either side of you. The sky is wide open to see the flashes of lightning. You feel completely exposed. Yet, my brother-in-law was not convinced when I explained to him that we were relatively safe in the depths of the canyon.

We were rafting the middle Youghiogheny River on a stormy Labor Day afternoon with our children. I could read the concern in his eyes and his kids' outright terror was obvious. With each crash their bodies trembled. My words were of little comfort in the face of such threatening thunderbolts reverberating around us.

The ease of escaping indoors during thunderstorms has altered our natural fear response to such storms. People nowadays sometimes say how much they enjoy watching thunderstorms from their front porch or listening from the safety of their bedroom window. Easy to say when a thunderstorm poses little threat, but have you ever been caught outdoors during a massive thunderclap, or have you been caught off-guard by an approaching storm? When that rare thunderbolt detonates close by with such force that your teeth shake and the thunder rolls with the reminder of what just occurred, suddenly, thunder is not so quaint.

CONTEMPLATION

Every year I train a group of wilderness trip leaders how to respond to approaching thunderstorms. We talk about the key principle of descending. This same principle is relevant spiritually. Lowering oneself in reverent awe and worship before the omnipotent Lord God is the only appropriate response to a glorious display of his power. Thunder reminds believers of God's powerful presence and the majesty of his might. We are called to contemplate the Lord's strength and to appropriately fear his judgment and wrath. Thunder prompts us to ponder our own frailty and weakness. For, we do not have an arm like God, and we cannot thunder with a voice like his (Job 40:9). The Bible pairs thunder and God's voice in several places. The volume and rumbling of thunder conjure up images of anger and displeasure, or at the very least, sternness. Overlooking these attributes of God is tempting. We prefer cozy and comfortable over fear and trembling.

There is too little trembling before our awesome God these days. We modern Evangelicals would much rather concentrate on God's kindness—an understandable tendency! Yet, the Apostle Paul exhorts us in Romans 11:22 to pay attention not only to God's kindness but also his severity. Thunder prevents us from forgetting God's severity. Thunderclaps point us to biblical meditation on the more sobering attributes of God's character. Considering God's wrath and anger toward sin is beneficial. Remembering God's judgment is important. In many places throughout the Scriptures believers are urged to fear the Lord.

What does it mean to fear the Lord? I have appreciated the phrase, "reverent awe", as an explanation of fear for the Lord. And yet, this phrase does not capture the concept of trembling before God's power, especially as expressed in thunder. It is not unhealthy to experience a degree of trembling- type fear before our all-powerful and holy God. One thinks of the prophet Isaiah as described in Isaiah 6. Such an experience can be beneficial, especially as it evokes a humble recognition of our sinfulness and desperate need of the gospel. How might the severity of God expressed in thunder press you more deeply into God's lovingkindness? How might meditation upon thunder as an emblem of God's power, wrath, and judgment protect you from taking God's love and kindness for granted?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, it is so easy to take your grace for granted. I confess that at times I am presumptuous when it comes to your mercy. I act like I deserve your kindness. Thank you for your voice through thunder that speaks of those aspects of your character that I am prone to ignore. Thank you for awakening me from my stupor. Help me not to

neglect pondering your judgment, your anger, and your wrath. A greater understanding of these attributes paired with a right understanding of the gospel produces a deeper appreciation of your grace and love. My heart overflows with gratitude. Thank you heavenly Father for your overflowing grace extended to sinners such as me. In Christ name I pray. Amen.

CONFIRMATION

Thunder is easy to confirm as an emblem of God's majestic voice and his power, wrath, and judgment. Not only are these connections clearly seen from over twenty-five different Scripture passages¹, confirmed by our own fearful experiences with thunder, but these connections are also easily found in the writings of our forebears. The prince of preachers, Charles Spurgeon expounded on the emblem of thunder in multiple sermons. In one sermon, entitled "The Majestic Voice", Spurgeon writes, "The Christian will acknowledge the thunder to be the voice of God from the fact, that if he be in the right frame of mind, it always suggests to him holy thoughts. I do not know how it may be with you, but I scarcely ever hear the rolling thunder, but I begin to forget earth and look upwards to my God."²

American pastor and theologian, Jonathan Edwards made many references to the emblem of thunder. He wrote of how thunder elicits fear and trembling: "If we now do but see a flash of lightning and hear a clap of thunder, or feel the shock of an earthquake, what awful things do they seem to suggest to us, of the anger and displeasure of God. If we hear a severe clap of thunder, and imagine any person aimed at by it, and it directed upon him in divine wrath,

¹ See the "[Do Your Own Thunder Meditation](#)" for six examples of these verses.

² Charles Spurgeon, Sermon No. 78, <https://www.spurgeongems.org/sermon/chs87.pdf>, 1.

what a terrible apprehension does that suggest to our minds of that wrath, and of the inexpressible misery of the person that is subject to it.”³ One cannot help but also think of Reformer Martin Luther, who experienced something of what Edwards described. A thunderstorm transformed Luther’s life and altered the course of human history.⁴ See also an excerpt from a sermon of Cotton Mather below. One Sunday morning, Mather had a sermon prepared, but chose instead to preach on thunder extemporaneously when his gathered congregation heard a massive thunderstorm outside their church.



Cotton Mather

FROM [THE VOICE OF GOD IN THE THUNDER](#)

Mather was a well-known New England pastor in the late 17th and early 18th centuries. He preached a sermon reflecting on the emblematic aspects of thunder. He said: “First, it is to be premised, as herein implied and confessed, that the thunder is the work of the glorious God. It is true, that the thunder is a natural production, and by the common laws of matter and motion it is produced. . . . But, still, who is the author of those laws, according whereunto things are thus moved into thunder? Yea, who is the first mover of them? Christians, ‘tis our glorious God.

. . . Hence the thunder is ascribed unto our God all the Bible over; in the Scripture of truth, ‘tis called the ‘thunder of God,’ oftener than I can presently quote unto you. And hence we find the thunder even

³ Jonathan Edwards, *The Miscellanies* (Entry Nos. 501-832), [WJE 18:91](#).

⁴ See this brief narrative video describing Luther’s experience - <https://wearepatrol.com/blog/luther-part2>.

now and then, executing the purpose of God. Whose can it be but the 'thunder of God,' when the pleasure of God has been continually thereby accomplished? . . . The power of God is the glory of God. Now, his thunder does proclaim his power. It is said, 'the thunder of his power, who can understand?' —that is, his powerful thunder; the thunder gives us to understand that our God is a most powerful one.

. . . The omnipotent God in the thunder speaks to those [God's adversaries], that are found fighting against him; and says, 'Oh, do not harden yourselves against such a God; you are not stronger than he!' Yea, the great God is proposed as an object for our faith, as well as for our fear in his thunder. If nothing be too hard for the thunder, we may think surely nothing is too hard for the Lord! The arm that can wield thunder-bolts is a very mighty arm.

From hence pass on, and admire the other 'glorious attributes' of God, which he doth in his thunder display most gloriously: when it thunders, let us adore the wisdom of that God, who thereby many ways does consult the welfare of the universe. Let us adore the justice of that God, who thereby many times has cut off his adversaries; and let us adore the goodness of that God, who therein preserves us from imminent and impending desolations, and is not so severe as he would be."⁵

⁵ Cotton Mather's sermon *The Voice of God in the Thunder* can be found at: <https://www.bartleby.com/lit-hub/a-library-of-american-literature/the-voice-of-god-in-the-thunder/>, accessed on 9/1/2023.