

The God Who Speaks

Psalm 29

Main point: Mighty effects follow when the Lord speaks.

Ascribe to the LORD, O sons of the mighty,
Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
² Ascribe to the LORD the glory due to His name;
Worship the LORD in holy array.
³ The voice of the LORD is upon the waters;
The God of glory thunders,
The LORD is over many waters.
⁴ The voice of the LORD is powerful,
The voice of the LORD is majestic.
⁵ The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;
Yes, the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon.
⁶ He makes Lebanon skip like a calf,
And Sirion like a young wild ox.
⁷ The voice of the LORD hews out flames of fire.
⁸ The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;
The LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.
⁹ The voice of the LORD makes the deer to calve
And strips the forests bare;
And in His temple everything says, "Glory!"
¹⁰ The LORD sat *as King* at the flood;
Yes, the LORD sits as King forever.
¹¹ The LORD will give strength to His people;
The LORD will bless His people with peace.

PSALM 29

Introduction:

Most of you will remember the 1970's commercial of two men on a plane conversing across the aisle while disinterested bystanders sleep, read, and gaze out the windows. Then suddenly, the name E.F. Hutton drops, and it causes a collective hush and eager eavesdroppers lean in. The ad ends with the famous and unforgettable tag line, "When E.F. Hutton Talks, People Listen."

What about when God speaks? Do we lean in, hand cupped over our ear, holding our breath in anticipation of His words? Speaking personally, I'm not sure if I am prepared in this present body to hear the audible voice of God booming down from heaven. Neither are you—but there is something about the voice of God that has universal application to us today from Psalm 29, and it is this:

- *God's voice is greater than the deepest, strongest, tallest, widest challenges in your life and demands a response of worship.*

Psalm 29 has been called *a hymn to God's glory*. It is a victory psalm of confidence in which we hear no lament, no doubt, no struggle of faith or collision with experience. It invites us to worship the God whose voice echoes throughout history and who gives strength, blessing, and shalom (peace) to those who worship rightly. It is designed to show us what feeling we should have when the thunderclouds roll over our heads, and the lightning flashes across the sky our lives. It easily divides into three parts.

In part 1—we hear **a call to praise** in verses 1-2.

In part 2—we see **a voice of power** in verses 3-9.

In part 3—we find **a refuge of peace** in verses 10-11.

Background:

It was T.H. Gaster, some years ago, who drew the analogy between the composer of Psalm 29 and General Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army. Just as Booth had determined that the devil should not have all the best tunes and so he adapted the popular music of his day for expressions of worship, so too the psalmist *adapted* the popular conceptions of his world and utilized them to express worship to his God.

Let me explain. Before Israel entered the promised land, it was inhabited by the Canaanites. They worshipped many false gods, one of which was Baal—the weather god associated with the storm, thunder, and lightning (*Num.22:41 Judg.6:25; 1 Kin.18:40*). You recall that it was the prophets of Baal that the mighty prophet Elijah slew as an act of judgment on Mount Carmel (*1 Kin.18*). In the records of antiquity, Baal is portrayed as some godlike figure with lightning as a weapon and whose voice is associated with thunder.

Here the psalmist rejects the possibility of any real power of Baal over the weather, but adapts the language of the storm and integrates it with his description of God's glory. With genius ingenuity, the psalmist transfers all attributes of weather control from Baal to the Lord. He leaves no room for confusion about the only God who commands the heavens. In doing so, he debunks and mocks the myths of pagan deities and elevates the truth of the one true and living God. From heaven where *the angelic hosts* pay Him homage (*vv.1-2*), to a *violent thunderstorm* that sweeps across the Middle East (*vv.3-9*), to *the universal flood* that covered the earth (*v.10*), Psalm 29 stands as a defense (polemic) against those who might be tempted to give glory to any other force at work in the world. It is the Lord who sits as the sovereign king over everything He has made.

Notice the war poetry of strength and glory in verses 1-2. Notice the storm imagery of thunder and lightning of verses 3, 4, and 10. Together, the *imagery* and *poetry* serve as a taunting battle cry that mocks the supposed powers attributed to Baal and proclaims that victory belongs to the Lord our God!

Just one other note by way of background. As you survey the Old Testament, one of the hard lessons for the Hebrews to learn, which is also true of us, was that their God was not only the Lord of history, but He was also the Lord of nature. If you read Hosea 1-3, you will hear the Lord rebuking Israel for her lack of faith by giving Baal credit for the fruits of the harvest. Listen to the controversy that God had with Israel in Hosea 2:8-13.

- "For she does not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the new wine and the oil,
And lavished on her silver and gold,
Which they used for Baal.
⁹ "Therefore, I will take back My grain at harvest time
And My new wine in its season.
I will also take away My wool and My flax
Given to cover her nakedness.
¹⁰ "And then I will uncover her lewdness
In the sight of her lovers,
And no one will rescue her out of My hand.
¹¹ "I will also put an end to all her gaiety,
Her feasts, her new moons, her sabbaths
And all her festal assemblies.
¹² "I will destroy her vines and fig trees,

Of which she said, 'These are my wages
Which my lovers have given me.'
And I will make them a forest,
And the beasts of the field will devour them.
¹³ "I will punish her for the days of the Baals
When she used to offer sacrifices to them
And adorn herself with her earrings and jewelry,
And follow her lovers, so that she forgot Me," declares the LORD.

Here is the takeaway: Never give credit to man or anyone for what only the Lord can do! God is sovereign over the realms of history and nature. You cannot separate the two. To be sovereign in human affairs means God must also be sovereign over the world of nature. Conversely, to be sovereign over nature, demonstrates that God is sovereign over history. Either way, in Psalm 29, we are given reasons to stand in awe of God.

Exposition:

Why should we stand in awe of God? The Psalmist begins with...

A. A Call to Praise (vv.1-2)

Ascribe to the LORD, O sons of the mighty,
Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
² Ascribe to the LORD the glory due to His name;
Worship the LORD in holy array.

Notice, the imperative "**ascribe**" is repeated three times, which summons the "**sons of the mighty**" to give glory to the Lord and to worship Him and Him alone. The *sons of the mighty* is a reference to the heavenly hosts or *angelic beings*, according to Job 38:7 and Job 1:6. To humble all men before God, David starts with the highest and comes down to the lowest. The chief function of angels is to acknowledge God's intrinsic glory—or the fullness of His revealed nature and strength. In Isaiah 6, we discover that God's holiness and glory is the very theme of the six-winged Seraphim's praise who continuously fly back and forth before the throne of God and cry, "*Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of Hosts. The whole earth is full of His glory [weightiness].*"

Now, if the angels in the highest place give God the greatest praise, what is expected of lower creatures on earth? Four questions are answered for us in this opening call to praise.

1. **Who deserves our praise?** Eighteen times in eleven verses, the repetition of God's name underscores this reality. "the LORD..." It is the Lord and the Lord alone.
 - **Psalm 89:6-7**—For who in the skies is comparable to the LORD?
Who among the sons of the mighty is like the LORD,
⁷ A God greatly feared in the council of the holy ones,
And awesome above all those who are around Him?

The Lord alone is worthy of praise in the heavenly choir of supernatural beings, but He is also worthy of praise in the realm of natural beings (*1 Cor.8:4-6; 4:7*). When we forget about grace, and that salvation is a gift, we become arrogant as opposed to humble, and our praise wanes rather than rises to God.

2. **What are we to praise Him for?** "Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength..." Glory (*doxa*) means the recognition of God's perfections. It is the outshining of His weightiness. Strength is the power of His being demonstrated from the lowest creature to the highest.

- **Psalm 21:1**—O LORD, in Your strength the king will be glad,
And in Your salvation how greatly he will rejoice!
- **Psalm 8:2**—From the mouth of infants and nursing babes You have established strength.

When God wants to demonstrate His glory, He deliberately picks those things that are *insignificant, small, and weak* to silence His enemies. It is a divine strategy of God to work through weak things to put haters to shame. God conquers His foes through the weakness of the weak.

3. **Why are we to praise Him?** "Ascribe to the LORD the glory due to His name;" The name of God is all that by which He has made Himself known. God's name in the mind of ancient Hebrews referred to His revealed character and essence. His name speaks of His self-revelation in all its forms. For instance:

- His *house* is connected to His name. (*Is.56:7*)
- His *works* are connected to His name. (*Ps.8:1; Ezek.36:21-23*)
- His *ordinances* are connected to His name. (*Zech.3:7*)
- His *Word* is connected to His name. (*Is.55:8-11*)
- His *people* are connected to His name. (*2 Chr.7:14*)

This is why to use His name in a vain, empty, common, flippantly way is a breaking of the Third Commandment—"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain" (*Ex.20:7*).

Taking God's name in vain does not only mean using God's name in connection with cursing or profanity; it also refers to using the Lord's name *lightly or without thinking—flippantly, carelessly, or irreverently*. This commandment plainly states that we are not to use the Lord's name as something common, worthless, or ordinary.

I grew up in an atmosphere where kids calling one another names was no big deal. It was common or ordinary. We called it "*rankin*" on someone. But, the moment "*rankin*" included the name of "*yo mamma*," then, the entire childish game changed from something playful to something serious. One moment we were laughing at each other and having fun, but the next moment we were ready to throw down (fight)! Why? Because we had a respect for our mothers that was different from anything else. The same must be true when we use God's name. We are never to use God's name in a thoughtless, careless, or ordinary way.

We violate this command when we irreverently say, "Oh my God," "Lord Almighty," "Good God," "Honest to God," etcetera. God's name should produce a sober, serious, respectful, and worshipful attitude.

- **Psalm 8:1**— O LORD, our Lord,
How majestic is Your name in all the earth,
Who have displayed Your splendor above the heavens!

4. **How are we to praise Him?** "Worship the LORD in holy array." As the Psalmist steps closer to consider the power of God's voice in verses 3-9, he sees that there is an attire befitting the rank and character of the one who comes to worship the Lord. Literally, it can be translated, "Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. Bow yourself down to Jehovah, in honor of the sanctuary. Prostrate yourself in the magnificence of His presence. In a word, ADORE!"

The call is to give, yield, render, and ascribe something to God. Adoring worship! Are you listening this morning with a heart yielded in worship? There is no task, no action, nor pursuit that is more profitable for your soul than in humbling yourself before God and adoring His excellent majesty.

As we come now to the body of this psalm, we discover that it is centered around the power of the voice of Yahweh as the reason for praise.

B. A Voice of Power (vv.3-9)

Seven times the Lord's voice is referred to in this section. There is a swelling crescendo of God's majesty that builds and builds and builds until a climactic moment is reached, and all say, "Glory!" Please note how the psalmist fleshes out the concept of Yahweh's voice with the dramatic descriptions of how it impacts creation.

1. In verses 3-4, **Yahweh's voice rumbles over the deepest waters.**

- The voice of the LORD is upon the waters;
The God of glory thunders,
The LORD is over many waters.
⁴The voice of the LORD is powerful,
The voice of the LORD is majestic.

What is more awe-inspiring than thunder as it echoes across the sky? Here David pictures a ferocious thunderstorm that formed over the mighty waters of the Mediterranean Sea. As we are brought to think of all the nerve tingling and heart-pounding effects when we hear thunder, David reminds us that in a wondrous and awful exhibition of power in a thunderclap, there is a presiding God, and He is Jehovah! Creatures of both land and sea tremble when thunders!

Now, since the glorious God thunders so powerfully and His voice is so majestic, will you not be still and stand in awe of Him?

2. In verse 5, **Yahweh's voice uproots/snaps the strongest trees.**

- ⁵The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;
Yes, the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon.

The scene shifts as the massive thunderstorm move ashore to the densely forested Lebanon range to the far north of Israel. The cedars of Lebanon were well known in the ancient Near East as the largest, most spectacular strand of trees in the region.

The trees supplied building materials for structures throughout the Mediterranean world from Egypt to Mesopotamia. You recall that King Solomon imported cedars from Lebanon for use in the building of his palace and the Jerusalem temple (*1 Kings 5:6-10; 7:1-12*).

Now, look at the picture! We all know that it is *lightning* that strikes, and *thunder* is merely the sound that we hear. But whoever questions the power of lightning? Here we see that even the tallest, strongest, most majestic cedars of Lebanon are snapped by it in a moment. There is no force known to man that is equal to it. Yet, lightning is not an independent agent. It is Yahweh's voice that commands the lightning!

Now, if the tallest and strongest trees are snapped as if they were toothpicks or pencils, do you think that your problems or obstacles are any match for the power of God?

3. In verse 6, **Yahweh's voice chases away the tallest mountains.**

- ⁶He makes Lebanon skip like a calf,
And Sirion like a young wild ox.

Now David uses the language of bold hyperbole to highlight the power of Yahweh's voice. Sirion is a name used by the Phoenicians to refer to Mount Hermon. The thunderclaps of God are so powerful that they cause the whole range of immobile mountains to skip like a frighten calf and dance to the Lord's tune.

The point of these descriptions reflects that the deepest, strongest, and tallest things in this world are no match for the power of Yahweh.

4. In verses 7-9, **Yahweh's voice shakes up the widest valleys.**

- ⁷The voice of the LORD hews out flames of fire.
⁸The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;
The LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.
⁹The voice of the LORD makes the deer to calve
And strips the forests bare;
And in His temple everything says, "Glory!"

There were at least three geographical regions called Kadesh (*Josh.14:7; 21:32; 1 Chr.6:72; Num.20:16*), and this most likely refers to that tract of wilderness land that encompassed the southern desert which included a forest.

The voice of the Lord is so powerful that it shakes the wilderness and cause changes to things that both animals and men find great difficulty changing. Job 39:1, 3 describes the great challenge that hinds have giving birth, but the fright of a thunderstorm is so overpowering that it agitates the deer, causing it to cast out their young prematurely. Now, here in Arizona, and even recently in Australia, we have witnessed what a fire can do in stripping a forest bare of leaves and branches from its trees and destroying animals, driving them from their dens, and leaving the forest without living inhabitants.

But here, it is not flames of fire, but the voice of the Lord. Oh, might we find a brief application here to speak to the things we believe are most difficult to overcome in our lives? Think of that long past of sin. Think of that long list of tasks. Think of that insurmountable obstacle that you can't seem to overcome, no matter what you do. Ah, David reminds us that which is difficult in the world of nature, and our circumstances carry no challenge for the power of God's voice!

All these descriptions are meant to show us that Yahweh *reigns over the natural world*, and those in the temple or palace of God in which His works are displayed, have one collective response to God's voice—GLORY! The angelic choir above agrees with the works of His hand on earth! The loud acclamation is: Glory! The seas shout, "Glory!" The storm-clouds declare, "Glory!" The thunderclap rumbles, "Glory!" The tallest trees cry, "Glory!" The towering mountains proclaim, "Glory!" The beast of the field says, "Glory!"

What do you say? You, who are the crown of God's creation? You young man or woman, you seasoned saint, you little boy or girl, you church member, you welcomed guest...what do you say in your heart to God's voice?

All in heaven worship! All of creation is personified and shown to worship! All know the glory of Yahweh! Have your eyes been opened to see it? Has your heart been renewed to acknowledge it?

The psalm concludes by briefly restating what has come before, but on a note of supreme confidence and praise.

C. A Refuge of Peace (vv.10-11)

Implicit language of His victory in verse 10 recalls that it was the Lord, not Baal, who sat enthroned and who presided over the flood.

- ¹⁰ The LORD sat *as King* at the flood;

This is the only time the word "**flood**" is used in the Psalms, but it appears twelve times in Genesis. It cannot be applied to a flood of trouble we face in our lives, or a flood of bad news we get, but only to that solemn event recorded in Genesis 6. It points us to that deluge in Noah's day, which unveils to us one of the only times when God was "*grieved in His heart*" (*Gen.6:6*).

David reminds us here that the majestic, glorious, sovereign God who controls the dominant elements of nature—like the clouds, lightning, thunder, winds, torrents of water, and earthquakes—is the same God who sat presiding over the universal judgment that destroyed His foes and saved His friends! The same God who sat enthroned exercised divine authority over the forces unleashed to undo human existence then, is the same God who holds the universe together NOW!

- Yes, the LORD sits as King forever.

The explicit consequence of His victory in verse 11 is that Yahweh is not a distant, irrelevant voice, but one who channels strength and promises to bless His people with *shalom*.

- ¹¹ The LORD will give strength to His people;
The LORD will bless His people with peace.

The God who speaks and shakes the heavens and the earth, who brings both creation and destruction to pass by the power of His voice, is the same God who breaks open the skies and announces the identity of the Man from Galilee, the Lord Jesus Christ as the "beloved Son with whom He is well pleased" (*Matt.3:13-15*). God has spoken fully and finally in Christ. He has revealed that He is the King and Savior who gives to all who repent of their sins and trust Him, protection from the wrath of God, and peace with God (*Rom.5:1*).

- **Ephesians 2:14-17**—For He Himself is our peace, who made both *groups into* one and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall, ¹⁵ by abolishing in His flesh the enmity, *which is* the Law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so that in Himself He might make the two into one new man, *thus* establishing peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile them both in one body to God through the cross, by it having put to death the enmity. ¹⁷ AND HE CAME AND PREACHED PEACE TO YOU WHO WERE FAR AWAY, AND PEACE TO THOSE WHO WERE NEAR;

Have you been reconciled to God through the Lord Jesus Christ?

Conclusion:

Nothing gets your attention faster than a strong, distinctive, powerful voice. Lloyd Ogilvie, a former Presbyterian minister and chaplain of the Senate, had such a deep, rich voice that they said, "When He spoke, it was as if God were speaking." Obviously, they have never heard the voice of God.

On NBC's talent competition show called "*The Voice*," judges sit with their backs toward contestants so that they can concentrate, not on the look of the participants or the style, but the voice. When they hear a voice with great potential, they hit a button to turn and see the sound they've been struck by.

I wonder if you have heard God's voice today speaking through His Word?

- **Hebrews 4:7**—He again fixes a certain day, "Today," saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before,
"TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE,
DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS."

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