

The Voice

Psalm 29

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Turn with me to Psalm 29. It's where we're going to be spending our time this morning. This is a psalm of praise. And kind of like the theme of last week with Derek, who was our guest preacher, he was preaching on a loud psalm. And in many ways, this psalm is also loud. But it uses various images that are in nature, particularly the weather. You know how boring the weather is, right? You know, has it rained today? You know, "How's it going?" "Well, it's hot." Those things are sometimes ho-hum in our lives. But when life actually depends on the weather for provision but also safety in the calamity that may come with weather, it actually is a very powerful image. But in this image, David is drawing us in to the power and the majesty of the living God.

So follow along as I read from Psalm 29 this morning. Hear God's word.

Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness. The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord, over many waters. The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty.

The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars; the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon to skip like a calf, and Sirion like a young wild ox. The voice of the Lord flashes forth flames of fire. The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness; the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

The voice of the Lord makes the deer give birth and strips the forests bare, and in his temple all cry, "Glory!" The Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord sits enthroned as king forever. May the Lord give strength to his people! May the Lord bless his people with peace! [ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Our Father in heaven, we do give you praise for your word, and we ask that you would add blessing to us as we explore and meditate and hear your word preached. Help me, the teacher. And we lift this time up in prayer and praise to you and the ways you feed us by your word and nourish us in your grace. We pray this in Jesus's name. Amen.

There are always exceptions, but in a general sense, Americans love singing competitions. *American Idol* began back in 2002. *The Voice* began back in 2011. And both, to my knowledge, are still going strong. *The Voice*, if you've ever seen it, works like this. When contestants sing their first song in front of a panel of four judges, they are singing to the back of those judges' chairs. And so the judges can't see. They're not looking at what they're wearing. They're not looking at what their appearance is, but rather they're only focused on the voice. And the judges are determining if they want to be that contestants' coach for the duration of the season.

And so when I have watched the show, I particularly enjoy watching the moment when a judge is moved, when one of the judges wants to be that coach. They get excited. You see it on their face. You begin to see it on their body. They're enthralled by what they're hearing. And then they slam their hand down on the big red button. Their chair dramatically swivels around, and they get to see the contestant with their own eyes for the first time. And of course it is the drama of that moment that is certainly

exciting for the whole show. But I'm particularly enthralled by the judges, who are talented musicians themselves, who are producers, who are excellent singers in their own right. I love it when people who are excellent at something, like music or comedy for instance, when they themselves are moved by their own discipline, their own field that they excel at, where they begin to be moved by the music, to be moved by the lyrics, to see the passion that is in that contestant's voice. Their eyes get big. They might start mouthing words like, "Wow" or "Man, that's amazing."

And the music that's combined with the lyrics on the show, certainly just music in our everyday lives as well, can evoke so many different emotions. And sometimes music is so powerful that it can actually evoke different emotions in the same moment. So I love watching a musician be moved by the music of others.

And here in Psalm 29, we have a musician in the person of David. And he is moved. We see in Psalm 29 a dramatic symphonic hymn. It moves the singer to experience the majesty of God. It is a psalm of David for the praise of the Lord, and David is inviting worshipers into hearing the voice of the Lord by using very vivid imagery. And much of that imagery is around a thunderous storm.

So we're going to look at the psalm in three parts. Verses 1 and 2, we're going to be looking at how we give Him glory. Verses 3 through 9, we're going to be looking at how we hear His voice. And verses 10 and 11, we'll be looking at how we trust His majesty.

First, verses 1 and 2. We see in these opening verses how we give Him glory. Now, these verses are actually very similar to other places in the psalms in the scriptures. Psalm 96:7-8 as well as 1 Chronicles 16:28-29. Psalm 29 begins with this invitation to ascribe worship to the Lord. Now, to ascribe merely means to give or to attribute something to someone. So we're giving our worship to the Lord. We're attributing His glory, His strength, His power. And that's what we're learning, that this worship is specifically unto the Lord and calls Him by His divine name.

So who is doing this ascribing in this psalm? Well, we see right there in verse 1 "the heavenly beings." Your translation may say "the mighty ones" or "sons of the mighty." These are referencing something that's truly mysterious, and I don't claim to understand it. But they are the celestial beings that get to be in the presence of the Lord. These are the ones that David is saying are ascribing this praise and this worship to the Lord. They are honoring Him and the majesty of His existence. It's as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 8:6, "Yet for us there is one God the Father, from whom all things and for whom we exist, and the one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom all things and through whom we exist." They are attributing Him glory in order to honor Him for His reputation, knowing His power and His strength, experiencing His care and His comfort, and trusting in His sovereignty and providence, all the while praising Him for His salvation. His glory brings us to awe and wonder of His presence, and His holiness quiets us. It brings us to a place where we're worshiping as we bow before Him.

By beginning the psalm this way, David is drawing us into this drama of praise to the living God. And such praise is being given to Him whether it spills over your lips or not. But it's not just left to the celestial beings. David is inviting God's people to have a heart so full of the glory of God that such worship cannot be held back from your tongues. And by drawing us in, we are invited to participate, and we are to give to the Lord the glory due His name, and that we would bow before Him with humility in the face of His holiness. This is the essence of worship directed to the only God worthy of all praise. As Paul wrote elsewhere in Romans 11:36, "For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen."

As we give Him glory, we move in to the heartbeat of this psalm, verses 3 through 9, where we're the worshipers. We're seeking to hear the voice of the Lord. These four middle stanzas are the heartbeat,

the drumbeat, the syncopation of what's happening in this imagery of the psalm. David uses the phrase, "the voice of the Lord," seven times. It's repeated again and again. And in the imagery that he uses, it's really capturing the imagination of the people of God.

For example, just running through these pretty quickly, in verse 3, the voice of the Lord is described as a thunder storm. It's like picturing an orchestra performing a great piece of music where the woodwinds are blowing, just blowing like the wind. And the large kettle drums are rolling louder and louder with cymbals crashing at the crescendo.

In verse 5, the voice of the Lord is like that wind that can break mighty trees. Specifically, he references the cedars of Lebanon, which were well-known throughout the ancient world. We learn that King Solomon imported such trees for the various building projects in the temple. Their strength and durability were perfect for planks and masts. And other nations, Egypt and Syria, Persia, everybody was taking great pride that they were building things with trees from Lebanon. And metaphorically, scripture often compares these ancient kingdoms, even Israel, by describing how they're compared to these towering trees.

In verse 6, David continues with the imagery associated with Lebanon. He's alluding to the glorious mountains of the lands north of Israel. And the word "Sirion" is another name for Mount Hermon. Now, this part of the land—if you can kind of picture, you know, a north-south orientation, the northern part of Israel, the north boundary, is Mount Hermon. And many Israelites could see its peak. If they just lifted up their face and looked north in the distance, they could see this mountain. We don't know exactly for sure, but there is a tradition that when Jesus led Peter and James and John to witness His transfiguration of His glory, it may very well have been one of the summits in the mountains of this region. Now, of course, we don't know that for sure. But it would likely have been near this area of where Jesus was at the time of His ministry. And so the imagination of the mountains goes back to ancient Israel, and it captures the imagination of the disciples at the time of Jesus. And even though we might not know the geography of that part of the world, we are moved by mountains. We're moved and captivated by their grandeur, and we're often brought to awe of their immense qualities, and the weather that surrounds them, and the beauty, but also the danger that's very close to the knife's edge of that.

Verse 7, we see the voice of the Lord is likened to lightning. Verse 8, the voice of the Lord is likened to the moving storm that shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. Now, there's two possibilities for this location. There is a region called Kadesh that's north of Damascus. So, you know, northeast of Lebanon getting into Syria. That would make sense in this based on what's happening with the images that David's using. So that's a possibility. But another location, which I tend to agree with, is it's more likely connected to Kadesh that's in the Sinai Peninsula in the south below Judah. And that would have captured the imagination of the Israelites as well because you have the totality of their kingdom. You have the story of God's redemption bringing them out of the land of Egypt, bringing them to the place that the Lord gave them.

But whether it's in the northern parts or whether it's the southern parts, what is in mind here is this developing storm off the waters of the Mediterranean Sea moving inland over the northern mountains. And if we take the southern location, this storm is rolling to the south of the entire kingdom. The totality, the scope of this storm is seeing the immensity and the majesty of the Lord's voice. However you take it, they make logical sense for the poetic elements. And the good news is knowing the exact location certainly doesn't impact the meaning of the text because we're being brought into the image of what is happening in the power of this storm.

Verse 9 brings an interesting translation challenge that I want to make note of. Perhaps your translation in English, such as the ESV that we read, or the NASV, or even the King James Version goes

with this image of the deer. There are other English versions, however, that choose to translate the word, kind of like in the NIV. It uses the word "oaks." So what's the different between a deer and oaks, right? So there's a translation issue that's happening. Grammatically, both are correct. So what gives, right? On the one hand, the word that we read is the word for a deer. But the verb form would suggest something a little bit strange for the flow of the poem. The verb form would suggest that it is the voice of the Lord giving birth to deer versus making the deer give birth. Also, using the deer seems a little abrupt in the imagery. Although, in verse 6, he does use animals. But the imagery doesn't flow in parallel to when you see this picture of the shaking and the quaking of the storm that would strip a forest of its leaves and branches.

So on the other hand, the translation choice for those English versions that use something like oaks or large trees actually comes from just adjusting the vocalization of the word to a word that means "lofty tree." So for me, the "twisting of oaks," as in the NIV, personally makes more sense to the flow and the parallel nature of the poem. But either translation seeks to be faithful. But when you're going from one language to another, you have to make choices sometimes. So it's just good to sometimes know what those little footnotes in your Bible may be. It doesn't always seem evident why it's such a drastic choice. Either choice conveys the same sense. We're still being brought into this drama of the voice of the Lord and all of His power and His strength.

And it crescendos here with the storm's symphonic crash, where it says, "In his temple, all cry, 'Glory!'" As this psalm has very vivid metaphor and these word pictures, it begins to capture our imagination, too. It's ushering into the worship of the living God.

And that brings me to one more thing that kind of isn't necessarily apparent from the text if you're not an ancient Israelite but that may actually help us with some context. Historically, there has been a theory that David merely took this poem straight out of Lebanon and just changed the god's name from Baal to the Lord. That theory is not as well documented as much anymore. There's no credible evidence of that. However, the imagery is found in ancient manuscripts in Lebanon. And so the god Baal is significantly in this backdrop. David is repeating, however, not Baal's name, but he is repeating the Lord's name, the very living God who has created all things and who has sustained His people and has brought them up out of Egypt and placed them in the land, where He is covenanting with His people. And David repeats His name 18 times in this psalm.

Now, why might that be significant? Who randomly knows what Baal did as a god in their culture, right? If you're maybe only like me, and you like weird trivia, maybe you do know. But I'm going to tell you. Baal was a storm god that was responsible for the rain and responsible for the fertility of the land and the fertility of the people. And in Baal worship, he was the god who subdued the evil deity Yam, who was god over the raging waters of the sea. Baal was believed to have defeated Yam in battle, and by doing so, he subdued the chaos. And he was then enthroned as king among the gods with his own palace.

So what is so powerful in the imagery of what David is doing by bringing into the people of God of true worship to the true God, he is saying, "I know one who is more powerful. I know one who is stronger. I know one who is the very author of all things and the sustainer of all things." David is calling attention to Israel that it is not Baal who has glory due his name. It is not Baal who is powerful and full of majesty. No. It is the Lord who is creator and redeemer.

So this psalm, Psalm 29, is a psalm of praise to the living God. We glory in His power. We glory in His might. It is His voice we hear and respond with in our worship and in the ways we order our lives. So the question that I think this whole psalm evokes as we worship the Lord, but this middle section in particular, is whose voice do you hear? Who voice is powerful in your life? You see, when we are seeking a powerful voice, it means that we feel weak. We feel inept. We feel incapable. We feel out of control.

And the imagery of chaos of the storm and the waters, we're wanting piece. We're wanting calm. We're wanting it to make sense. We're wanting it to fit together. And we are so susceptible for our heart to drift to any voice, whether it's the voice of our own making, the voice of someone else or some other thing, or whether it's even to deny the voice of the Lord as powerful in these ways. And we just simply stripped all divinity and enchantment of the world away, and it's all-natural forces that have no rhyme or reason, and we're just left with chaos.

This psalm teaches us that there is a God who is powerful. And the one true God who is living and breathing is involved. And He is not just in the storm. He's not, like, the storm. The voice of the Lord is like that storm. He is above and beyond that storm. His power is in and of Himself. So whose voice are you tempted to listen to today? David is encouraging us to listen to the voice of the Lord.

And that brings us to this conclusion, which is how I'm going to conclude the sermon, which is verses 10-11. This ending is also the bookend. So the beginning is ascribing worship. Here in verses 10 and 11, it's back to as we're worshiping the Lord, we're seeing His majesty. He's enthroned over the flood. And the unique thing about that word, the "flood," the waters in verse 3 is kind of generic. But the word here in verse 10 is only used in scripture to talk about Noah's flood. God is over the flood. God is over chaos. God is in control. And He's bringing about His judgment, but in the midst of that, He is faithful and just and is motivated and compelled by His covenant love to His people.

So David is ending with who is enthroned. Again, it is not the other gods who are enthroned. It is the Lord God who is enthroned, and He is king forever. And out of this worship and out of this reality of who we are as a people under this God, who is all powerful and all strength is attributed to Him, from Him is where we get our strength. From Him is where we get our blessings. And so although sometimes I would want it to be more enveloped in the whole psalm, in some ways the beauty of David's poem is to end with the word "shalom," to end with the word "peace" as it is absent everywhere in the psalm until the very end. In contrast to all of the chaos, the Lord blesses His people with peace.

This is the good news of the gospel. This is the good news of a God who creates all things for His glory. He provides all manners of ways to know Him and brings people through His Son Jesus Christ to be restored in that right relationship with Him so that we would know that He is our God, and we are His people. And again, the beautiful fabric of God revealing Himself of who He is, and for us to know and to receive and to be blessed by that.

And as any psalm has its purpose, one of this psalm's main purposes is just worship. We can sing it. We can pray it. But it's also shaping us. It's teaching us how to believe. It's helping us to grab hold of something when we feel tossed and turned by the turbulence of our days. It's where the Lord's presence in our life is our anchor and our strength. Let us pray.

Our Father in heaven, we give you thanks and praise for who you are. All glory and honor is due you as we worship you. Bless us with a faith that is completely compelled by that narrative. We live in a noisy world, a distracting world. May your voice be more powerful. May your voice be more compelling than all the counterfeit things that we drift towards. May our safety and protection and our glory and our strength be in you and you alone. We pray this in Jesus's name. Amen.