

## The LORD of the Storm!

Psalm 29

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This morning, we come to Psalm 29, which is unlike any other Psalm we have covered so far. When we read it, the first thing we should notice is that it consists entirely of praise to God. There is no appeal for help, no lament over suffering, or any charge about how we should live our lives. It is pure praise to Yahweh, and it doesn't call us to do anything except worship the LORD for who He is.

Secondly, Psalm 29 is pure poetry. I know what you are thinking, "*Aren't all Psalms poetry?*" Yes, they are; however, Psalm 29 reaches new heights of poetic expression. If you remember, one of the main elements of Hebrew poetry is repetition and parallelism. We see these literary devices in every Psalm, but in Psalm 29, they are elevated to a higher level.

The call to "*ascribe to the LORD*" is used three times in the first two verses. Then, God's covenant name "*Yahweh*" is used eighteen times in the eleven verses. Finally, in the middle section, vv. 3-9, the phrase "*the voice of the LORD*" is used seven times.

Psalm 29 is a poetic description of the LORD's storm. The first two verses are the *call before the storm*. Then vv. 3-9 *describes the force of the storm* as it moves from the *mighty waters to the mountains, where it flattens the cedars, and finally to the wilderness*. The final two verses are the *calm after the storm*.

At the staff meeting this week, I asked the staff to pray for me as I preach Psalm 29 because I want to do it justice. Psalm 29 is a majestic Psalm, and people who appreciate poetry recognize its depth. I like poetry, but I wouldn't say I'm a great lover of poetry. I just don't have a poetic spirit, so I have to work harder at preaching the Psalms, but I am growing and improving as I live in the Psalter.

However, the great 19th-century preacher Charles Spurgeon had a great poetic soul, and here is his advice for reading Psalm 29:

*Just as the eighth psalm is to be read by moonlight, when the stars are bright . . . [and] the nineteenth [Psalm] needs the rays of the rising sun to bring out its beauty, so [Psalm 29 should be read] beneath the black wing of [the raging storm], by the glare of the lightening . . . [because Psalm 29] marches to the tune of thunderbolts. God is everywhere conspicuous [in Psalm 29], and all the earth is hushed by the majesty of his presence.*

This morning, we will walk through Psalm 29 in three movements: 1. *The call before the storm* (vv. 1- 2), 2. *The force of the storm* (vv. 3-9), 3. *The calm after the storm* (vv. 10-11).

### I. The Call Before the Storm (vv. 1-2)

Have you ever been in court or watched a movie or TV show where the judge walks into the courtroom, and the bailiff announces, "*All rise for the honorable Judge \_\_\_\_\_*." No one debates whether the judge deserves honor; the position itself demands respect.

Psalm 29 opens with a similar, yet far greater, summons: the King of heaven calls all beings to acknowledge His glory. Psalm 29 opens with a call to worship. Three times in two verses it commands us to "*ascribe to the LORD*." Look at vv. 1-2 in your Bible or Service Guide:

*Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,  
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.  
² Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;  
worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness.*

Notice that David addresses not only earthly worshipers, but “*heavenly beings*.” Because the angels themselves are summoned to recognize God’s unmatched glory and strength, we immediately feel the majesty of Psalm 29. David knows that even as the highest created beings are called to worship Yahweh, so God’s people are to give God the highest glory and worship.

David calls us to worship the LORD in three ways: His *glory*, *strength*, and *the splendor of His holiness*. The word *glory* suggests a visible manifestation of all of creation submitting to the glory of the LORD. In the same way, the word *strength* reinforces the greatness of God’s revealed power and glory. John 1:14 reminds us that the fullness of the display of God’s glory and strength is seen in Jesus Christ, when John writes:

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory,  
glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

Jesus is the visible manifestation of the glory and strength of God, and it is before Him that we bow and worship. When we consider all that God has done for us in Christ, we cannot help but bow in worship. You see, the fullness of God’s glory is seen in Christ, and the pinnacle of that glory culminated in Christ’s crucifixion. This was where God’s power and glory were on display as Jesus humbled Himself, took our sin, and then defeated death by His death.

Finally, he calls us to worship God in the “*splendor of holiness*” or “*in the beauty of holiness*.” This phrase means to bow down and worship Him because of His magnificence and *holiness* (*the perfections of His nature and character*). We must remember that God is not just *holy*, but He is *holy, holy, holy*, which means He is infinitely holy.

We struggle to grasp what infinite means, much less His holiness. God is infinitely holy, and we really do not have a category in our minds for this kind of holiness. That category has to be created by God Himself when we are given new life in Christ, and even then, we cannot plumb the depths of God’s infinite holiness because we are finite. We are limited in what we can grasp. However, we are still called to strive to understand what it means to worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness.

The bottom line is: Worshipping God in the *beauty of His holiness* has implications for us, because we are called to holiness. Hebrews 12:14 reminds us to,

*Strive for . . . the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.*

The holiness with which we worship the LORD is an imputed holiness that comes to us from Christ’s righteousness. It has to be given to us, and then we begin to live our lives out of His holiness and for His holiness.

Here’s the deal: We must dismiss the idea that striving for holiness is ridiculous or undesirable. The great 18th-century pastor and theologian Jonathan Edwards tells us that striving for holiness is a display of the beauty and glory of God. He wrote:

*We drink in strange notions of holiness from our childhood, as if it were a melancholy, morose, sour, and unpleasant thing; but there is nothing in it but what is sweet and ravishingly lovely. [In reality, it is] the highest beauty and [pleasantness]. [It is] vastly above all other beauties. [It is] a divine beauty, [that] makes the soul heavenly and far purer than anything here on earth. . . . [The beauty of holiness is] a sweet, pleasant, charming, lovely, amiable, delightful, serene, calm, and still nature. [It is] almost too high a beauty for any creatures to be adorned with; [because] it makes the soul a . . . sweet and delightful image of the blessed Jehovah.<sup>1</sup>*

So, let’s think about how we worship. To worship the LORD in *glory, strength, and the splendor of holiness* teaches us that worship is not primarily about how music makes us feel or whether a service fits our preferences. Worship is about responding rightly to who God is as He has revealed Himself to us in the person of Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Beauty of Holiness*, Sept. 16, 2016; <https://www.joycf.org/blog/post/the-beauty-of-holiness>.

If this is what worship is, then this challenges our casual, consumeristic approaches to worship. Think about it: If worship is primarily about what we receive rather than whom we adore, we have misunderstood its purpose. True worship begins with God's worth, not our preferences, not our felt needs, not our wants, nor our talents as they are displayed on stage.

Let's think about our own corporate worship services and what we hope they accomplish. Our worship services are designed to help us take the eyes of our hearts off the difficulties of our situation and focus them on the grace and glory of our ever-present Savior. Worship is designed to fill you with Christ-infused joy that no person, situation, or disappointment has the power to take away. Worship is designed to keep your eyes focused on the presence of our Savior and His promises and purposes for our lives. It is designed to help us drink from the deep well of the grace of our sovereign King.<sup>2</sup>

So, how's your heart of worship? Are you ascribing to the LORD the worship that is due to Him? Are you worshipping Jesus for who He is and what He has done to save sinners? Are you worshipping Jesus in the beauty of holiness, or do you approach worship as what you can get out of it?

You see, Psalm 29 begins by calling us to ascribe to the LORD, not ponder our own lives and felt needs. Psalm 29 calls us to take our eyes off ourselves and put them on God, worshipping Him alone.

## II. The Force of the Storm (vv. 3-9)

Psalm 29 is a rich hymn of praise that is built around the phrase "*the voice of the LORD*." It occurs seven times in these verses to emphasize the completeness, divine perfection, and power of God's word. These verses are not a static description of God's sovereignty but a graphic description of the storm of the battle and the powerful victory achieved by the *word of God*.

Let's consider the wider biblical perspective on the significance of storms stirred up by God. These storms may be types that help us understand that God brings salvation through judgment.

In Genesis 6-8, Noah and his family are saved through a terrible storm, which is a type of salvation found in Christ. The Exodus, which also pictures salvation in Christ, includes a hailstorm (Exodus 9:22-35) and the great wind that parted the Red Sea (Exodus 14-15). In Psalm 18, God's Messiah is rescued through the storm that God sent. The prophet Jonah was judged and rescued through a storm that was on the sea. Then, in the New Testament, we see that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit came through a great wind and tongues of fire. When we consider the storms in the Bible, we see a double-edged purpose. Peace can come to God's people only after a storm of judgment.

The greatest storm in the Bible occurred at the cross. Here we see the storm of God's judgment poured out on Jesus. There was darkness and an earthquake as the storm of God's wrath was poured out on Christ for our sins. This was the only hope God's people had for peace with God. And it is only by enduring the storm of God's wrath on the cross that Jesus can return in His second advent to save those who are eagerly waiting for him (Hebrews 9:28).

Our God is the LORD of the storm, and He brings judgment and salvation through the storm. The storms of the LORD accomplish His purposes. Now, as we consider the power of the word of God and that storms are instruments for God's judgment and salvation, let's listen to vv. 3-9 again:

*The voice of the LORD is over the waters;  
the God of glory thunders,  
the LORD, over many waters.*

<sup>4</sup> *The voice of the LORD is powerful;  
the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.*

<sup>5</sup> *The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;  
the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.*

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Tripp, *Sunday Matters*.

<sup>6</sup> *He makes Lebanon to skip like a calf,  
and Sirion like a young wild ox.*

<sup>7</sup> *The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire.*

<sup>8</sup> *The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;  
the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.*

<sup>9</sup> *The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth<sup>3</sup>  
and strips the forests bare,  
and in his temple all cry, "Glory!"*

Now, let's break down these verses and apply them. In the ancient world, storms were often associated with chaos and fear. In Psalm 29, David declares that even the most uncontrollable forces of nature are under God's command. The waters do not threaten Him; they obey Him. I want to point you to two truths about *the voice of the LORD*.

#### A. The Voice of the LORD Is All-Powerful (vv. 3–4)

*The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD,  
over many waters.*

In Scripture, large bodies of water like the sea and rivers often symbolize chaos and danger.<sup>4</sup> However, David declares that God's voice rules even over forces humans cannot control. Thunder becomes a metaphor for the divine authority of the LORD's voice. God is identified here as "*the God of glory*," linking His speech to thunder and therefore His self-revelation. His voice is described as powerful and majestic—terms associated with kingship.

Think of the storms that we have in the Midwest. When thunder cracks overhead, conversation stops because the storm's powerful forces have captured our attention. It even demands our attention.

I remember when the derecho hit our area a few years ago. Sam was at the house with me when the storm blew in, and it was mesmerizing. She ran to the basement and kept calling for me to take cover. However, I stood at the large window in our kitchen, captivated by the storm's force. I knew I was in danger by standing in front of a large window and watching trees fly by our house, yet I couldn't leave. The storm was majestic and powerful. I was drawn to it.

In the Gospels, Jesus calms the storm with a word. The disciples had been terrified by the storm, and now they were beyond terrified, for the One in the boat with them stopped the storm by simply speaking to it.

They asked — "*Who then is this?*" — and the answer is found in Psalm 29. He is the LORD of the storm whose voice rules the storms and the waters.

Then v. 4 tells us:

*The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.*

God's speech is not empty sound. When God speaks, things happen. Scripture consistently portrays God creating, sustaining, and governing the world through His word. Scripture tells us that when God speaks, His word will not return without accomplishing its purpose.

The New Testament reveals that Jesus Christ is the eternal Word made flesh (John 1:1–3, 14). The same voice that spoke the universe into existence later spoke to storms and said, "*Peace! Be still!*" Psalm 29 prepares us to recognize Jesus not merely as a teacher, but as the Lord of the storm and the very powerful Word of God who has come in the flesh.

#### B. The Voice of the LORD Is Almighty (vv. 5–9)

Let's read these verses again:

*The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;*

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<sup>3</sup> The ESV translates the phrase "*makes the deer give birth*" but is probably more accurately translated: "*He makes the oaks to shake.*"

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 1:2; Psalm 69:1.

*the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.*

<sup>6</sup> *He makes Lebanon to skip like a calf,  
and Sirion like a young wild ox.*

<sup>7</sup> *The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire.*

<sup>8</sup> *The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;  
the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.*

<sup>9</sup> *The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth<sup>5</sup>  
and strips the forests bare,  
and in his temple all cry, "Glory!"*

The cedars of Lebanon were symbols of strength and permanence. They were known throughout the Ancient Near East as the most spectacular trees in the region. They symbolized strength, wealth, and human achievement. Yet, Psalm 29 portrays them as being easily broken. David says God's voice shatters what appears unbreakable. Fire flashes, mountains skip, wilderness trembles, and the oak trees shake. Nothing in creation can resist His almighty voice.

The almighty voice of the LORD can be both comforting and unsettling. It is comforting because no power can thwart God's purposes for His people. It can be unsettling, because we are reminded that our own strength and stability are fragile.

Verses 5-9 call us to abandon false securities and trust in the LORD alone. Let me ask you a question about what you consider secure in your life: Do you have any, what we might call, modern "*cedars*" that symbolize your strength and security? What might you be trusting in? Your financial security? Perhaps it is the current political power. Maybe you're depending on technology and AI to make your life better. Perhaps it is your education and personal achievement that give you hope and security.

Friends, Psalm 29 humbles us by reminding us that all such securities are provisional. God's voice alone is almighty. Only the word of the LORD accomplishes all of its purposes. If you're trusting in anything except the word of the LORD, then His word might shatter your securities in order to save you and help you build your life on the secure foundation of Christ. So, what is your security: Jesus or something else?

At the cross, human pride reached its climax—rejecting and crucifying the Son of God. Yet through that apparent defeat, God shattered cedars of human pride and power. On the old rugged cross, He defeated the ultimate cedar of sin and death. On the cross, the storm of God's wrath was spent on Christ so that we may know the calm after the storm as the peace of Christ. This leads us to our last point: *The calm after the storm* (vv. 10-11). III. The Calm After the Storm (vv. 10-11)

David closes Psalm 29 with the calm after the storm:

*The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;  
the LORD sits enthroned as king forever.*

<sup>11</sup> *May the LORD give strength to his people!  
May the LORD bless his people with peace!*

After the clouds pass and the skies clear, we see that God is on His throne. The storm didn't mean that God had lost control. Instead, God rules over the wind, the rain, the flashing lightning, and the earthshaking thunder.

God reveals His glory in judgment. The only other place the Hebrew word "*flood*" (v. 10) appears in the Old Testament is in the flood account in Genesis when God judged the world for its wickedness. David intentionally uses this word to connect the destructive power of the storm he witnesses with the flood that came on the earth in the days of Noah. Just as God sat in judgment on the wind, rain, and storms in the Genesis account, so He rules

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<sup>5</sup> The phrase "*makes the deer give birth*" should be translated "*makes the oaks to shake.*"

over every other storm. This doesn't mean that a particular storm is a sign of God's judgment on the people in its path. However, every violent storm should be a reminder of the final storm of judgment that will come one day.

Psalm 29 culminates with peace for God's people. God is the strength of His people. This is not generic peace, but covenant peace (shalom)—wholeness, reconciliation, and rest. In the gospel, this peace is secured through Christ's atoning work. He bore the divine storm of God's judgment so believers could receive the divine blessing of peace with God.

The question as we close is: *Do you know this great, untamable, uncontrollable God?* He is indeed fearsome – make no mistake – He is good. So, is this the God you worship? Are you ascribing to the LORD the glory due to His name because you know who He is?

Years ago, the brilliant Bible translator J. B. Phillips wrote a book titled *Your God Is Too Small*. In it, he starts out with this insight:

*As we grow from childhood to adulthood, our concepts about reality grows bigger – our historical knowledge, our psychological awareness, our cultural sensitivities, and more. Our mental horizons get stretched in every direction. But if our thoughts of God aren't developed too, he starts to look smaller. He can even shrink to the vanishing point. And how can an adult worship a God who seems outclassed by everything else, especially everything terrifying? Phillips goes on to say, "If, by a great effort of will, [a person] does [keep believing in God], he will always be secretly afraid lest some new truth may expose the [childishness] of his faith."<sup>6</sup>*

Phillips is right, we must grow in our knowledge of God. Along these lines, the 20th-century pastor, A. W. Tozer, famously wrote:

*What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion, and man's spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God. Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God. For this reason, the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God. This is true not only of the individual Christian, but of the company of Christians that composes the Church. Always the most revealing thing about the Church is her idea of God, just as her most significant message is what she says about Him or leaves unsaid, for her silence is often more eloquent than her speech. She can never escape the self-disclosure of her witness concerning God.<sup>7</sup>*

So, when you ascribe to the LORD *the glory due His name*, is it out of knowledge of who He is? Are you growing in your understanding of the nature and character of God, or are you just doing what you have always done and going through the motions, hoping to pick up a scrap of truth here and there?

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<sup>6</sup> Ray Ortlund, *Good News at Rock Bottom: Finding God When the Pain Goes Deep and Hope Seems Lost*, 13.

<sup>7</sup> A. W. Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*.