

Psalm 29 // God and the Storm

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[0:00] So that's Psalm 29. The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars.

The Lord breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon leap like a calf, Syrian like a young wild ox. The voice of the Lord strikes with flashes of lightning.

The voice of the Lord shakes the desert. The Lord shakes the desert of Kadesh. The voice of the Lord twists the oaks and strips the forest bare.

And in his temple all cry glory. The Lord sits enthroned over the flood. The Lord is enthroned as king forever. The Lord gives strength to his people.

The Lord blesses his people with peace. Thanks, Amy. Again, just let me express my thankfulness to be back.

[1:25] Great to be with you. So keep Psalm 29 open. That'll be really helpful as we spend time in that this evening. Let's pray as we come to God's word. Father, we thank you that you are a God who speaks.

Indeed, your voice is powerful. And in your word you have spoken to us. And so we pray this evening, with all the things that are going on around us, all the things that are going on within us, we pray, Lord, that you would speak to us, that we may not walk out of this room unchanged.

And we pray that in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, it's summertime at the moment. I trust many of you have an opportunity to get away, to have a bit of a break somewhere, a bit of a change of pace.

It's one of my favourite things about summer. And every time I go and have a break somewhere, a holiday, one of the things I love to do is to find a book to read. Nothing weighty, nothing serious, just something that I can read and relax with.

And with the World Cup going on at the moment, I was reminded of a book that I read on holiday a few years ago called Football Leaks. And Football Leaks is the story of a team of investigative reporters and their investigation into the murky world of the finances of professional football.

[3:06] They tracked down how the most highly paid athletes in the game have elaborate tax avoidance schemes, how agents and private equity firms from the Cayman Islands control the transfers of players between clubs.

It was amazing to see the murky underworld of such a luxurious game. But it was also quite revealing the lengths to which these players and agents were willing to go to in order to prevent this investigation from happening.

They didn't like the fact that someone was digging into these secrets of their financial lives. And so there were things that they did to try and stop it. They intimidated the journalists.

They hired private investigators to try and sort of pick up dirt on the journalists so that they could blackmail them. There was all of this stuff going on. It was crazy. And yet then I thought, well, maybe it's actually not that crazy because we all have things that we would hate to see the light of day.

Things about ourselves. I have these things. I'm sure you're the same. Maybe you don't have 20 million pounds worth of secrets in the Caymans that you're trying to prevent getting out, but there are things that you are deeply ashamed of.

[4:21] That thing from decades ago that you have tried to forget, but you know you said that. You know that you did that.

You know what you're capable of on your worst day. Or that lie that you've kept from your parents for too long to now reveal it.

And so it's just easier to sort of go on and not reveal the truth. You don't want to be exposed. We build facades.

We build images of ourselves that we want other people to look at because we want people to think well of us. But deep down, we know what we can do.

We know what, at our worst, we are. And if you're like me, you find it all too easy to be consumed by thinking of yourself and covering tracks and preparing the image that you want others to see of you, Psalm 29 is good news for you, though it may not feel like it initially.

[5:32] Psalm 29 is good news for us because Jesus takes our eyes off ourselves. And Psalm 29 is commanding us to look away from ourselves and onto the God who is fully revealed in Jesus.

As we have Psalm 29 open, we're going to work through it, three points for our time. First up, we've got the angels, then the thunder, and then the shelter.

First up, point one this evening, the angels, these beings who are not terrified of being exposed.

Psalm 29, here we go. Verse one, Ascribe to the Lord, you 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 His holiness. So the writer, the psalmist, is speaking to these heavenly beings, speaking to the angels, the others who are around the throne of God in heaven.

[6:48] And he's imagining the angels who can see before them God sitting on His throne. God in all of His glory, God in all of His majesty, splendid holiness, that's all the angels can see.

And the writer, as he speaks to these angels, imagining that scene, commands them to ascribe these character attributes to God.

Now to ascribe is not merely to affirm that these things are true of God. To ascribe is something more than that. To ascribe is to say that these things find their source in God.

That without God, the concept of glory just doesn't exist. Because glory is only found in God.

Strength doesn't exist without the God of strength to which the concept points. God defines these things.

[8:04] It's like He's a fountain who's pouring forth from Himself, goodness after goodness after goodness and strength and glory and splendid holiness just pour forth from His being.

And the angels are there witnessing this, trying to sum up in words who God is. that's the picture of verses 1 and 2. And the angels can do it because they are in His presence and they are, without sin, just worshipping God, having His splendour wash over them.

You see, as God reveals Himself, the only possible response from created beings is worship.

You cannot be in God's presence and not worship Him. When you're in God's presence, you completely forget about yourself and you're consumed by Him.

Because that's who God is. And at this point, I begin to be a little bit envious of the angels because that's not my experience of God day to day.

[9:24] My experience of God is constantly coming before Him as a sinner. A forgiven sinner, I know that my salvation is secured in Jesus and yet I am so mindful of the ways that I fail to live in a way that honours God.

That's what it is to be human. And our sin causes us to think far more about ourselves than we do think about God.

To be human is to worry about the future, which is beyond our control anyway, so it means we never actually stop worrying. To be human is to get frustrated with the people who I love the most. To be human is to always be wondering what the people around me are really thinking of me. To be human is to always be wanting a life that is just that little bit better, that little bit more prosperous, that little bit more comfortable, that little bit more glamorous.

But to be human is to constantly be preoccupied with thinking about me. The angels don't have to worry about that. They're completely free of that sinful self-focus as they are consumed with the glory of God.

[10:57] It makes you envious of the angels, doesn't it? Because if you compare the two created beings, humans versus angels, which is more satisfied in their existence?

Which is happier? It's not us. It makes you long to be in God's presence. And God will make a way for us to be in His presence.

But first, in the psalm, comes a warning. You see, God revealing Himself to sinless creatures in heaven is one thing. But in the rest of the psalm, God reveals Himself on earth to sinful creatures our race.

From verse 3, we see the thunder. And it shows us that we should be terrified of being exposed. Have a look at verse 3. It says, the voice of the Lord is over the waters.

The God of glory thunders. The Lord thunders over the mighty waters. The voice of the Lord is powerful. The voice of the Lord is majestic.

[12 : 18] I don't know what your favourite picture of God in the Bible is. Maybe it's, the Lord is my shepherd. That's a good one. That's Psalm 23. Maybe the Lord is my light and my salvation.

another popular one. Psalm 27. Maybe even the Lord is my rock. That's Psalm 28. Your favourite picture or description of God is probably not, the Lord is a thunderstorm.

But that's Psalm 29. In Israel, geography is pretty central to their understanding of the world. and so, as an example of that, in their language, the word for sea, as in ocean, is the same as the word for west because, well, if you live in the land of Israel, the west is the Mediterranean Sea.

So, that's what you call it. You can use the same word for both of those things. And it's this geographic knowledge that makes the middle of the psalm so powerful. You see, God is being depicted as a thunderstorm that brews over the Mediterranean and builds in power and forms over the waters and then breaks free into the land.

So, verse 3, the voice of the Lord is over the waters. The God of glory thunders. You can imagine the storm clouds brewing and building. The Lord thunders over the mighty waters.

[13 : 49] The voice of the Lord is powerful. The voice of the Lord is majestic. And then it breaks free, this thunderstorm, and it brings a wave of destruction from the northwest to the southeast.

Lebanon was a power in the ancient world because people would come from all over the world to purchase their cedar timber. Verse 5, the voice of the Lord breaks the cedars.

The Lord breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon leap like a calf. Syrian, like a young wild ox. Syrian is Mount Hermon, just to the south.

The thunderstorm is moving in that direction. And as the thunderstorm moves, it's scattering nations like animals who are fleeing from the storm. Verse 7, the voice of the Lord strikes with flashes of lightning.

The voice of the Lord shakes the desert. The Lord shakes the desert of Kadesh. and the thunderstorm has reached the south of the land. It's brought this wave of destruction all the way through.

[14 : 57] The voice of the Lord twists the oaks and strips the forests bare. If we're to truly relate to God, we need to understand that God cannot be domesticated.

we can't treat God like a pet that we put in a little wooden house in the backyard and feed a couple of times a day, maybe take him on a walk or put in a bowl in the house and sort of it's just in the background unless guests come around and then we might talk about it.

We can't relegate God to being a part of our life. Worse would be to decide that we don't choose him at all.

Religion isn't for me. It's just ignoring the reality of God in the world. You don't get to decide who God is.

I don't get to decide who God is. God is God. God is the God of glory and strength and splendid holiness. If we do either of those things, either we make him a part of our life, we sort of section him off to the bit we're comfortable with or we sort of decide that we are just going to ignore him, who do we place as number one in our lives?

[16 : 30] Ourselves. And we come back to that unhappy existence that we began with, that fear of being exposed, the fear of being really known, the fear of our true selves being shown to those who currently love us.

Psalm 29 lays out the problem that God cannot be domesticated, he cannot be ignored. The only way to relate to him is as he is and because he's the God of glory and strength and splendid holiness for us as sinners to relate to him is terrifying.

This is the God who causes angels to bow down and worship. Lebanon to this day have a cedar on their flag.

God holds up the pride of nations like Lebanon, as Jack prayed, think about the nations that are warring in the world at the moment and playing games with the lives of millions.

We think about the US, we think about Iran, we think about China, we think about the United Kingdom, think about Australia, we think about Scotland.

[17 : 52] God looks at us, he knows us inside out. He picks us up like a giant with a twig, snaps, and says don't you realise that you're nothing.

God is a ferocious thunderstorm and it is terrifying to be exposed by him. There are two different ways to experience a thunderstorm.

The first is like that, when you are utterly exposed, nothing but the shirt on your back and that is a terrifying existence, because you know that all it takes is for the lightning to strike where you are and you're toast.

The other way to see a thunderstorm is in a beach house behind a big pane of glass and you're looking out over the ocean and you see the thunderstorm building in the distance and you see the flashes of lightning and you see it rolling towards you and you feel its power at the very sort of core of your bones.

But you're not terrified of it because you're not expecting that you're going to be in danger. You can behold the beauty of the storm and the power of the storm.

[19 : 18] What's the difference between the two? Well, whether you have shelter or not. Third point for this evening, the shelter means that we don't have to be terrified of being exposed.

Verse 9. The voice of the Lord twists the oaks and strips the forest bare. We've seen that as the storm rains down. Last line of verse 9.

And in his temple all cry glory. God's people are safe from the thunderstorm.

You see, in Jerusalem, Mount Zion, the highest point in the surrounding hell is the kind of place where lightning would strike. God has placed his temple. It means his people are not destroyed by the thunderstorm as it passes over them.

Because the temple gets battered by the storm. They remain safe and dry in this sort of imagery that runs through the psalm. You think about it, what happens in the temple if you're an Israelite?

[20 : 35] Well, in the temple is the place where you are exposed. You come to God and you confess your sin, confess the ways that you've fallen short. You're fully known before God.

and in the temple is the place where you are forgiven. Sacrifices are made and you know that the wrath of God, the anger of God against sin that is righteous is turned away from you because the sacrifice is there in your place.

you are exposed but forgiven and so for a moment in your life you get a little taste of what it is to be like the angels.

Worshipping the God who loves his people. Worshipping the God who forgives his people.

Worshipping the God of glory and splendid holiness.

The problem is that Israel stopped taking shelter. Israel like us were too consumed by themselves or whatever reason they didn't cherish the temple as they ought to have.

[21 : 51] They didn't seek shelter in it. Eventually judgment came. The temple got destroyed. It seemed like all hope was lost. it proved that humanity actually needed a better temple.

One that would come to them. One that would come and shelter us. Once the shelter appears in the psalm the whole tone of it shifts.

Once the temple has been mentioned it's like there is this peace that happens after a storm. Verse 10 the Lord sits enthroned over the flood.

The Lord is enthroned as king forever. In the midst of the storm as we've thought about the temple there is a king who is enthroned.

One who we can look to one who we can be safe in. One who can ensure there is forgiveness for those who are exposed.

[23 : 15] In John 2 Jesus is in Jerusalem on Mount Zion at the rebuilt temple and he says to the Jewish leaders destroy this temple and I'll raise it again in three days.

Which confused everyone. So John adds this little bit of commentary. But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead his disciples recalled what he had said and then they the disciples believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

! You see in Jesus the perfect temple experience of being exposed but fully forgiven and loved comes to us.

It took Jesus' death and resurrection for the disciples to believe it but now they believe that Jesus was sent by his father and sent by his father to be their shelter.

They discovered what we discover that Jesus' body was battered by the storm that we might take shelter. That the storm would pass over us so that humans like you and me might not be terrified of God but might feel to the depths of our bones.

[24 : 39] that he thunders love and salvation to his own. Before such a love we can allow ourselves to be exposed known completely inside out because we know that we'll be loved.

In that temple in Jesus we can see God rightly and all cry glory. Psalm finishes with this verse, verse 11, the Lord gives strength to his people through the temple, through his king, the Lord gives strength to his people, the Lord blesses his people with peace.

peace. That word peace is the word shalom. It's not just the absence of war, the absence of fighting or the absence of bad, it's the fulfillment and enjoyment of all that is good and right and whole in creation.

Shalom is what the angels experience before the throne of God, where there is no sin to complicate peace and shalom is what we will experience perfectly forever because of Jesus our temple.

Being fully exposed but fully forgiven by our Prince of Peace who shelters us and gives us shalom.

[26 : 28] for eternity. Let's pray. Father, we thank you so much for the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we thank you for your grand plan of salvation. We praise you, Father, for your glory and your might and your splendid holiness, even though it terrifies us.

Father, we can gaze upon it and all cry glory because of your Son. So in him we pray these things. Amen.