

The Voice of the Lord

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[0:00] Well, please, would you turn with me in your Bibles back to the Old Testament, to the book of Psalms, to Psalm 29. Psalm of David, ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength, ascribe to the Lord the glory due to his name, worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness.

Now, let's bow our heads just briefly in prayer before we come to the word. Heavenly Father, bless us this night with being able to hear the voice of the Lord.

That's what the Psalm is about, and we thank you that you are a God who speaks into our world, speaks into our lives. We pray that tonight we would be given the ears to hear what the Lord is saying, and give to us an awareness of the Holy Spirit's work in us, opening us up to the gospel, to that good news of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Help us to see how that theme flows so clearly through the Psalm as we look for that hope that is in Christ, and that we know the gospel is in these words.

We ask and pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. There is in our lives a fine line between awe and terror.

[1:27] It is a fine line that is often marked by sheer stupidity. It certainly has been in my life on a number of occasions. I've done profoundly stupid things, like sitting on top of a hill watching a thunderstorm, and thinking, wow, this is pretty cool.

Not thinking, oh man, I'm on the top of a hill, and it's a thunderstorm. Sometimes we see things in our lives that ought to put us on our heels, give us pause, make us stop in our tracks, and realize that what is happening before us is either awe-inspiring or utterly terrifying.

And actually, tonight is one of these times. Every Sunday, as you gather for worship, it is one of these times where something so awe-inspiring is taking place.

Something is being transacted here that you dare not sleep through, that you dare not pay no attention to, but ought to realize this is a thunderstorm.

This psalm is a psalm about the voice of the Lord. It's a psalm about God speaking to people.

[2:47] And the background to this is probably a number of occasions that David would be well aware of. He was a child, a young man who had been, in some way, mentored by Samuel.

And you have the beginning of Samuel's story, one where the voice of the Lord had called to Samuel quietly in the night. Samuel? Samuel? Not realizing what it was, eventually he clicks, or Eli clicks, and says, it's the Lord speaking to you.

Go and listen. Go and listen. For David, it's a language that's steeped in the language of the book of Exodus, where at Mount Sinai, the voice of the Lord had spoken directly to the people, not through an intermediary like Moses, but directly.

At Mount Sinai, when the Ten Commandments are given, it is the Lord speaking from the mountain to the people. So terrifying, in fact, was that situation, that at the end of it, the people said to Moses, we never want to be in that situation again.

In future, you go up the mountain, you speak to God, hear what he has to say, and come and tell us. Because listening to the voice of the Lord is a terrifying thing.

[4:05] You have the voice of the Lord calling out to Adam and Eve in the garden after they had sinned. Adam, where are you? A searching question.

Not a booming voice, not a thunderous voice speaking from the mountain, but a searching question nonetheless, and one which Adam found terrifying. And so he hid in the garden.

You have the power of the voice of the Lord as well. In the very beginning, the first verses of the Bible, there was darkness over the face of the deep. And the voice of the Lord spoke and said, let there be light.

And there was light. It's an authoritative voice. The same voice that speaks in the New Testament in the words of Jesus, where he commands evil spirits to come out of people, where he commands the storm to be still.

There is an authority in the voice of God as he speaks. And that authority makes the voice of the Lord a terrifying thing. Because if God is speaking, it demands a response.

[5:17] It is a voice that calls for action on our part. So I want tonight to look at this psalm, considering the voice of the Lord. But we need to note, first of all, the first thing, in fact, that we need to see is that hearing the voice of the Lord occurs in the context of worship.

It's interesting that the psalm actually begins this way. It's not just a reflection on the voice of the Lord. It's a psalm that's meant to be sung corporately for the people of God to rejoice in a God who speaks.

And so that's why at the end of the service tonight, we'll sing this psalm in its fullness. Ian was a bit intimidated earlier because it says the Scottish Psalter version, and it's like 50 verses or something. I don't know. It's not. There's only six stanzas in the St. Psalms version, and that's what we'll sing. But we're going to sing this psalm and reflect and glorify God that he is a God who speaks to us in life-changing ways. And we know it's meant for corporate worship, not only because it's in the book of Psalms, but because it begins with a call to worship.

Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to his name. Worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness.

[6:26] So that is an invitation to these people, the heavenly beings, to come into this place of worship before the Lord, to ascribe to the Lord the glory and strength that is due to his name.

The heavenly beings are the angelic host, the sons of God, the court of Yahweh and glory. And so really, by extension, what David means is everyone who is conscious and who can worship God. Both the mighty angels who are before the Lord continuously in his presence, some of them, the seraphim, the burning ones, reflecting his glory radiantly themselves.

Others, winged creatures that cover their faces and their feet before the presence of God because they are in the presence of the holiness of God himself. These heavenly beings, along with us, ought to go before him in a posture of worship.

That is the purpose, in fact, of humankind. That is why we exist. We exist to worship the living God. God created us as worshipers.

[7:42] And that worship, it's expressed in our lives in all sorts of different ways. But chiefly, it is expressed in us ascribing to the Lord glory and strength, recognizing his divine majesty and his absolute sovereign power.

That tonight, as we've gathered together for worship, that's what we've been drawn into. We've been drawn into the activity tonight of recognizing the sovereignty and the power of God over us. I wonder, did you think about that tonight as you came to worship? Tonight, did you come just out of routine, thinking, this is what I do on a Sunday night? I have to confess, sometimes in our house, getting to church can be a bit chaotic.

You've got kids to kind of marshal and you're trying to make sure everything lines up in terms of getting the car into it, getting the keys, making sure you've got everything you need out the door. It can be hectic, can't it?

Or sometimes it can be, you know, rushed. Sometimes it can be just routine. But ultimately, we are here tonight to worship God.

[8:55] And everything we do is about ascribing glory to him. Everything we do tonight is about recognizing the beauty of the holiness of the living God, of seeing his splendor and saying, this is who we tonight love.

This is who we worship. And chiefly, it's not just because he is the God who has created us, and who has created all things, but because he is the Lord who has entered into a covenant with us.

We know that because the language that David uses is the language of covenant. Ascribe to Yahweh, ascribe to the Lord, this glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord, ascribe to the Savior, the one who came to Abraham and called him out of the Chaldeans and said, I will bring you to a promised land and you will have an inheritance.

And part of that inheritance will be the one who will deliver my people in Jesus. The seed that is promised all the way back to the woman. The promise of the gospel in Jesus.

It's that God that we are worshipping tonight. It's that making much of Jesus that is most important.

[10:25] I might wonder this week when our king went to Rome to pray with the Pope, we might wonder about that question and say, well, are they praying even to the same God?

What are they doing praying together? The key question is, are they making much of Jesus? Is Jesus the highest of their object of worship alone?

A glory shared with none other. Not with Mary, not with the saints, but Christ alone. And that question is crucial to you and I tonight.

Because that tonight is where the rubber meets the road and our experience. We tonight are people who must meet with the living God in the person of Jesus.

And that tonight is why the call to worship in this psalm is not just a call to worship the Lord, but it's also a call of how we should worship the Lord. It says, worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness.

[11:29] That's an interesting expression, but what it's driving at is the way you come to God is just as important as the God you come to. And so tonight you might be saying, I'm going to church to worship the living God.

I'm going to church to worship the God who sent Jesus into the world. I'm going to sing praises to him. Fine, good, well done. But are you coming in the splendor of holiness?

Jesus mentions this in that passage in Matthew 22 that we read in the parable of the wedding feast. There are many people invited to the wedding feast and they all come. But the king, as he's going around the wedding feast, he spots somebody who's dressed inappropriately.

He's not dressed in the clothing of the wedding. He's dressed in his own gear. Now he may have thought his own clothes were fine. He may have thought his own clothes were quite lovely, that they were pretty top notch.

But they were not appropriate for the wedding because they were not the clothing that the king had appointed. And tonight, I would urge you to consider how you have come to worship.

[12:38] Have you come in a sense of pride? I am coming to worship tonight. This is about me. Have you come in a sense of laziness?

It's just the routineness of what I do. And I would ask you, is that really coming in the splendor of holiness? Are you therefore tonight able to stand before the living God in worship and hold up a pair of hands that are clean, that are unstained by the world?

Can you do that tonight? Can you say, I've come with a pure heart to worship the Lord? And I would say to you that tonight, the answer to that question for each and every one of us is probably no, except by one root.

And that is, if we have come to the one who will give us holiness, if we have come to the one who clothes us in righteousness because he shares his righteousness with us.

I mean, this psalm is actually about the doctrine of justification. It's saying that worship belongs to the justified. Worship is the activity of those who have been cleansed in and through the blood of Jesus.

[14:03] Those who have had their sins taken away through what Jesus has done. And that is where true worship begins. That is where true worship originates from.

It originates from hearts that have been cleansed through the blood of Jesus. And so I'm saying to you tonight, not only who have you come to worship, I hope you have not just come to have a nice hour pass by, but that you've come to worship the living God.

I hope that's true. But I hope also that you're recognizing that to come and worship the living God, you need to come to Jesus. that you need to find Christ, that you need to receive his gospel in order for your worship to be acceptable.

Because the only way to come and worship God is in the splendor of holiness. The book of Hebrews says it's impossible to please God without faith, without actually trusting in Christ, without making Christ your righteousness.

It is impossible. to come to worship. So that is how we should come. And that is why we should come. The psalm goes on though, the central section of the psalm is a psalm about this thing, the voice of the Lord.

[15:22] And it's a phrase that's repeated, it's almost every line in fact of the psalm. 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 and makes Lebanon skip like a calf and Syrian like a young wild ox. So Lebanon is up in the north. You know the geography of the Holy Land of Israel. Lebanon is to the northwest of Israel.

And the picture that David is painting here is of a storm sweeping through from the north and it passes actually Jerusalem because at one point the temple is in mind. All those in the temple in verse 9 cry glory.

But then the storm recedes away off down into the southern desert, down to the wilderness of Kadesh. And so the storm just recedes into the distance away from them. And there's some people looking at this psalm and they would say ah well, now what's going on there is this thing, this piece of philosophy that we would call the God of the gaps.

And maybe you've heard of this, that people would say well in the past people didn't understand how thunder works. And so David here is saying I don't really understand how thunder works but I think that's God speaking. And so when you hear, see something in the natural world that you don't understand you say that's God.

[16:38] And people are quite dismissive of biblical Christianity because they say oh, biblical Christianity is full of that. It's full of things that we don't understand in the past we now do understand. We didn't understand where life came from before.

So now we think well, there's evolution. Life's originated from millions and millions of years of slow gradual steps of development. We don't need the story of creation anymore. We don't need God to fill in the gaps.

But that is not what's happening in this psalm. David's not saying that thunderstorm that's sweeping through the land is God speaking to us because David knew full well what God's speaking looks like.

When God speaks it's audible. When God speaks it's discernible. When God speaks it's with clarity. And he knows that because of all the times he's heard about it.

He's heard about it from Samuel. When God spoke to Samuel he gave him specific messages. Samuel wasn't looking at a thunderstorm and thinking I think that's what God means. There might be some confusion about it but I'm pretty sure. It's not when God spoke at Mount Sinai the people weren't trembling and thinking that's a thunderstorm that's out of control.

[17:42] They were trembling because the holiness of God was presented to them in the Ten Commandments and they said we are not worthy to stand before this God. His holiness is too much for us.

There is no mistake in it. There's no ambiguity about what God has to say. When God spoke in creation there's no confusion over it. When God's in the garden speaking to Adam and Eve it's not a gentle breeze passing through the garden and they think oh maybe God's there in the gentle breeze.

God said Adam where are you? And that tonight is something that we need to be sure about. When God speaks there is no doubt about what he is saying.

And what he is saying is dramatic and life changing. So David's using the thunderstorm almost in fact as a metaphor.

It's a picture. When the thunderstorm sweeps through the land the land is shaken by it. The cedars of Lebanon were considered to be the strongest timbers you could imagine.

[18:42] They are shaken. So terrifying is the storm as it wreaks chaos through the land that the deer are prematurely giving birth in fright.

They go into labor early. So terrifying is this experience that the world is changed by it. The cedars of Lebanon are stripped of their leaves.

The world is changed when God speaks. Is your life changed when God speaks? I mean that's the question of this psalm.

Okay you've come to worship you're hearing the voice of the Lord in the context of Christian worship every Sunday. Is your life changed by it? Is there a transformation in your experience? Do you look at your life and you say there are things here that are wrong that need to be taken away? Do you look at Christ and you say there is someone who I must worship? Do you look at the work of the Holy Spirit and you think that is something I need to long for?

[19:46] Do you look at the love of God and you think that is something I need to emulate and reflect in how I live and how I care and love for others? Do you look at the marvel of what God is saying in Scripture and fall down before Him in awe or perhaps in terror?

Because when God speaks there ought to be a reaction when God speaks nothing is the same when God speaks the world is transformed and tonight that's maybe the biggest question for us it's not just have we come to worship and are we coming in the right way but are our ears open to the life-changing message that God speaks with?

Are you hearing Him? The picture is one of awe and marvel and basically there are two reactions that emerge for some it's one of absolute terror the voice of the Lord speaks and people are freaked out they're in dismay people are distraught it is a picture of of just trembling folk but when the storm comes to the temple in the temple the response is different in the temple the response to the voice of the Lord is this word glory glory the word glory in association with the temple there reminds us that this is probably talking about the place of the radiance of God's presence

Solomon's temple certainly when it was erected the glory of God resided in the temple it's probably there in the tabernacle as well and certainly when David brings the ark of the covenant and erects a tabernacle in Jerusalem there's a sense there that the glory of God is present in that place a point of infinite perfection that resides between the cherubim the angelic beings that are molded onto the lid of the ark of the covenant the mercy seat and the radiance of God resides among his people in that place and as the voice of the Lord is heard those who love the temple those who love what the temple is about and what the temple represents they recognize that when the voice of the Lord speaks to them it is a!

glorious thing it is a wonderful thing because of what the temple is all about the temple is the place where God and humankind were reconciled it's a place where reconciliation would take place so if you've sinned against God the temple was where you went with your sacrifice to make things right if the harvest had come you wanted to give thanks to God the temple was the place you would go with your thank offerings to give glory to God because of his great bounty towards you you recognize the Lord's goodness in your life and countless other things if there's impurity in your life if there's illness if there's leprosy there's a temple the tabernacle that you go to in order to be cleansed and to recognize that cleansing that has come and so for the for the Israelites the temple is a place where God is present bringing reconciliation to them and when the voice of the

[23:59] Lord is heard those who recognize that God wants reconciliation with his people those who realize the temple is the place where that reconciliation happens when they hear the voice of the Lord they are not dismayed they are in awe and they worship the Lord by crying out glory the holiness of God does not intimidate them in the same way it doesn't terrify them and if we can think about this in terms of the New Testament as we ought we have to understand that this is talking about Jesus because the temple for us is not this building the temple for us is not a place in Jerusalem that we have to go to the temple for us is the place where God is reconciled to mankind and that is through Jesus who at his cross took his sin upon himself and took our guilt rather upon himself our sin and took that away and who offers to us his righteousness his cleansing who at his resurrection conquered death and invites us now to follow him in that hope of the resurrection it's through

Jesus that man and God are now reconciled rebels come and find reconciliation with this sovereign God whom they have wronged and rebelled against it is there that hope is found for us and so for

us who know Jesus for us who reside as it were in the temple for those of us who in fact are the temple of God as Paul says in the New Testament that's one of the most wonderful things that can happen in the life of a Christian you're sitting in church you're sitting at home you've got your Bible open in front of you you're reading it you're hearing the word of God preached you're hearing the gospel and you say amen Lord I love what I'm hearing the wonder of the gospel of Jesus Christ it's a mark of real assurance me and we know the voice of

Jesus and we are thrilled when we hear it we rejoice because into our lives into the chaos and darkness of our lives light comes through the gospel the good news of Jesus comes to us and we rejoice in that hope we're battling through our own sin we read the Bible the gospel that assures us of the promise of forgiveness for God's children that will be forgiven and our hearts thrill we're in the darkness of despair and depression we read something like Psalm 42 or Psalm 43 and I will reflect and remember that I will once again come before God in his holy place and there's the invitation of God that says you can come to me we're in the mire of sorrow of the death of loved ones who have departed before us we come to the passages of scripture that talk about the resurrection the death cannot hold them because there is power in the blood of

Jesus to conquer death and our hearts are lifted and we say glory glory because the Lord is speaking because the Lord is announcing his presence amongst us and we are taken from the sorrow of this world and lifted up into the clouds with Christ and we say glory we recognize our God and so tonight that is my challenge to you what are you hearing when you hear the voice of the Lord what do you hear do you hear something that terrifies you or do you hear something that brings hope and delight into your experience the psalm then it moves on into its conclusion and our time is nearly done so we'll finish on this the Lord sits enthroned over the flood the last two verses they serve as a sort of book end of the psalm and they reflect some of the language of the beginning of the psalm as well so the metaphor is no longer in play now

David is talking literal truth the Lord sits enthroned over the flood he says the Lord sits enthroned as king forever may the Lord give strength to his people may the Lord bless his people with peace with shalom the picture is no longer there it's now truth something infirm that we need to lay hold of the God who speaks is the God who is enthroned and where he is enthroned matters earlier on in the psalm we've seen the voice of the Lord is over the waters and now the voice of the Lord sits enthroned over the flood the flood in David's world it's called a chiasm it's like when you've got two ideas the same at both ends of a piece of text they act like bookends and they're trying to point out something really important and what's really important here is that the idea of the word the flood is really telling in the

[29:48] Old Testament the flood goes back to both the days of Noah and even further back to the very beginning of creation so before God begins the work of creation the way over the face of the earth and it's into this that God says let there be light and then God separates the earth from the sea and God creates the sky and so on there's that sense that before God began the work of creation there is just chaos everywhere and that same chaos is what engulfs the world in the flood of Noah that the human race is almost exterminated in fact because of the flood that comes and wipes everything out it's utterly terrifying and the Lord sits enthroned over all of this that tonight that's something we need to lay hold of as Christians that this God who's speaking to us this God whose voice we love he is enthroned over everything that is happening in our lives so tonight you might be here really in turmoil you might tonight be facing the turmoil of

I don't know a recent cancer diagnosis I don't know the turmoil of a recent bereavement in your family circle perhaps the turmoil of an impending bereavement in your family circle you might be facing a marriage that's chaotic and messy maybe relationships that you don't know about unemployment looming perhaps school not going well perhaps prospects before you seem utterly empty and you don't know what's going on and the point is if there's a God at all who speaks and if there's a God whose voice we can hear he sits enthroned over all of that he sits enthroned in fact as king forever the whole of human history stretching back to the beginning the whole of the human future before us stretching to the return of

Christ and beyond in the story of humanity in the new heavens and the new earth whatever that will be like he is enthroned over all of this he is king and this psalm is saying to us we need to be settled in that truth we need to be at peace with that truth the God who speaks is the God who rules and he rules over everything and so tonight we can come to that God and we can request of him strength for his people and the blessing of peace because that's what he wants to give us that's what he wants to share with us he actually shares with us his own divine nature he shares with us the reality of the power the risen power of Jesus and he makes us his children he gives us that power as children of God to rest in the fullness of what

Jesus has done for us to be the ones who can now hold up clean hands to him and receive the strength that he gives a strength that Paul tells us so clearly is made perfect in our weakness in our absolute dependence on hearing the one who will speak to us and he will take away from us any sense of war any sense of conflict because the blessings come through Jesus who is described in the New Testament his title in fact even in the Old Testament his title is Prince of Peace the one who is enthroned is our God the triune God the Father Son and Holy Spirit and the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne is the Prince of Peace the God of Peace is the one who establishes our peace in all that we are going through ultimately stemming in fact from peace with himself because we have come to the temple because we have come to Jesus to that place of reconciliation where peace is had and so tonight that's what he's offering that's the invitation that's the gospel the good news come to

Jesus you'll hear the words that are most commonly on the lips of Jesus in the New Testament follow me an invitation to enjoy his peace which is found in his way now tonight is where I would leave you the free offer of Christ come to me and you will know peace let's pray heavenly father we thank you that you are indeed a God who speaks and we pray that tonight therefore we would come continually to worship you in the right way that we would come clothed in the righteousness of Christ that we would be able to come in the splendor of holiness before you we pray father tonight that you would help us to see your glory that when you speak that we would see the wonder of Jesus and what you are saying and the wonder of the gospel and that we would know therefore peace because of it and that we would know the blessing of God and that we would be settled in the identity of this

[36:12] God who is speaking to us help us to hear your voice clearly then both tonight and always and to receive by faith the peace that is promised not just peace in this world and with other people but a peace ultimately with God himself peace that passes all understanding we ask these things in the name of Jesus Amen We're going to sing that psalm now to God's praise sing psalms page 34 we're going to sing the whole of this psalm to God's praise you mighty ones give to the Lord as is right ascribe to the

Lord God both glory and might to the Lord's name due glory and honor accord in beauty of holiness worship the Lord through to the end of the psalm the Lord over floods sits as monarch alone the Lord sits forever as king on his throne the Lord makes the strength of his people increase the Lord gives his people the blessing of peace I often think you know wherever we read that word the Lord in scripture we can rightly substitute the name of Jesus it's proper for us to do this the covenant name of God at which every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus himself is Lord Jesus is the one who gives us these great things and we rejoice in the gospel of Christ because of it you mighty once give to the Lord as is right a In beauty of holiness worship the Lord.

The Lord's voice is over the waters abroad, And thunder proceeds from the glorious God.

Above all the waters God's thunder is heard, A powerful voice is the voice of the Lord.

The voice of the Lord is majestic and bright, By the voice of the Lord the great cedars are found.

[39:34] Yes, even the cedars of heaven and all, The Lord breaks in pieces and shatters them all.

Like the leap of a calf, each egg's level and trot, And Syrian's kept life has startled my loss.

The voice of the Lord causes lightning to flash, The voice of the Lord makes the wilderness crash.

The Lord makes the desert of Caddish to shake, The Lord causes ox of the forest to quake, The trees of the forest he slips off their knees, And he in his temple great glory receives.

The Lord overflows, sits as monarch alone, The Lord sits forever as king on his throne, The Lord makes the strength of his children increase.

[41:26] The Lord gives his people the blessing of peace. Now the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, The love of God the Father, And the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit, Be with each one of us now and always.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.