

Main Idea: God's glory serves to strengthen His people and the result of strength should be peace.

Those of us who have been in the South for a while know a little bit about thunderstorms. I think we understand them. While they may form quickly, often in a flash, there really aren't many times we they catch off guards. What I mean is that while they may suddenly appear, we know when the conditions are right for it. When that air is thick and warm and that cold front approaches you can almost feel the atmosphere becoming unstable. It is that collision of two forces that create such spectacular storms. We

Because I like and spend a lot of my leisure time outdoors, I respect a good thunderstorm, but I don't fear it and many times welcome it. A year or two ago, I was night fishing Lake Logan Martin by myself. I had put the boat in late afternoon and ran around a little looking for places to fish. It was summer and it was hot and humid, and you could tell it couldn't last. I have taken a small narrow underpass that went under HWY 231, into a little cove and was intrigued by it. The little causeway some a little depth on it, I knew it would have some stuff on the bottom from where that had built up the road. So I started fishing it a little to see if it might hold some fish. I was thinking that if it were a productive area, I could come back here in a tournament and get away from the boat traffic and maybe have it to myself because there was nothing else back there. There was one house and pier, but nothing else.

I hadn't been fishing long, but I could feel the atmospheric tension. Do you know what I mean, you knew that it was about to break. I was hot and sticky, so the wind that started howling, felt kind of good, but I knew that I had to get out of there. The underpass was really narrow and you had to take your time getting through it. I stayed as long as I thought I could, but finally I pulled up the trolling motor and idled my way back into the main creek, once there I fired the boat up, just at the rain started. I rounded a point, looking for a place to take shelter. I find an open boat slip, and pull into just as the thunder clapped and the heavens poured down rain. Another boat of crappie fishermen pulls in there with me, and we both tie up to the slip while a thunderstorm shoots across the lake. The rain poured, pelting the wooden roof above our heads, the wind formed wakes of water that would spray us as the wakes crashed against our

vessels, our boats rocked back and forth, while lightning lit up the sky and the thunder rolled across the lake.

We talked a little, made some obligatory comments about the storm and waited. We had both been there before. We knew thunderstorms. We knew enough to respect them but not fear them. We knew that soon the thunderstorm with all its ferocity would be gone. Give it thirty minutes or so.

And that is how it worked. After 15 minutes the wind died down, after 20 minutes the volume of rain lessened, lightning still flashed, but the thunder kind of growled across the skies rather than pop. After 25 minutes, the rain has turned to a sprinkle and I have untied the boat and made my way out of my borrowed shelter. 30 minutes and the rain was gone, the waves subsiding, the wind now turned breeze. The hot mugginess now made tolerable. I make my way back to my little causeway in the night, where I soon afterward I would catch a 4 ½ spotted bass.

While I love the fish part of the story, I remember that night so well because of the stark difference in before and after. The storm made the difference. From oppressive conditions to ideal. From muggy to comfortable, from volatile to peaceful. It was the storm that changed everything. The strength of the storm brought peace and relief to me.

The Psalter understood thunderstorms just as we do. That twenty ninth Psalm is one of power and ferocity and glory. It is exceptional in many ways, but we declaring God's glory, he chose to use the imagery of a thunderstorm. Readers would relate. In Palestine, they have a rainy season that comes in autumn and breaks the drought. When they recited the Psalm, they could visualize the storm forming across the Mediterranean waters and moving ominously and graciously toward land. And when you read the text, you get a sense of that movement.

In fact, listen as I read it again. And as you listen, just picture in your mind this storm moving across the lake toward the shore, striking the land and trees and then moving inward toward the mountains.

*Read Psalm 29*

Could you visualize it? It is quite powerful in its imagery, but how does that resonate within our lives here at Fellowship of the Valley, with you in your workspace or family life. What can we take away from riding out this storm in Psalm 29?

Because I am poetically challenged, I have always loved the Psalms beauty but struggled with some of its application. I struggle preaching from the Psalms. Give me a prophet any day and I can whip out a sermon, give me a psalm and I will look at you with bewildered blankness on my face. But our task today is to see how God's power is represented in this text, so the way I approached this, was to just make a list of things that I know, things that I can draw from the text after some reflection. Make I can crack this poetic imagery if I just make a list, was my thinking.

The first thing that was pretty apparent to me was this psalm had a liturgical usage. Among the 150 psalms that we have in scripture, we see different genres or types if you will. For instance there are royal psalm and psalms of lament. Well, Psalm 29 is a psalm of praise, and like most psalms of praise, this particular psalm has all the usual components. It has a call to worship (v. 1-2), it has a content or body section (v. 3-9) and it closes with a prayer (v. 10-11). These are typical components of a psalm of praise. So this is helpful, I understand generally how psalms of praise are used. They have a liturgical usage, used in a public worship setting and we can see that from its opening verses.

Look at verses one and two, *Ascribe to the Lord...* opens the psalm and those same words repeat in verse two. This is a standard call to worship. I understand calls to worship. I experience each week in my worship setting. Now this call to worship is a little unusual in that it is a call to a heavenly court, but I will get that in a minute (perhaps). But we imagine, this psalm being used to open a worship gathering. Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength, worship the Lord in the splendor of his glory! You hear that you are reminded that we are here to worship God; you are reminded of who God is.

Now this is something that I can use, something that I can relate to, something I understand and need. I need to reminded of the importance of worship and more importantly who I worship. I worship the God of Glory! This is a needed reminder, because too often, we get caught up in the (pardon the cheesy pun) storms of life. We are often overwhelmed at the challenges of life. What worship does is put us into our place. It reminds us that we serve God and God is powerful, full of splendor and glory.

This theme of glory literally thunders throughout all eleven verses of our text. While we can not fathom God as God, we do understand the power of a thunderstorm and it is that power

that we rely on in this life. We serve a God of glory and power, no matter how difficult it may seem. So I think what is happening here, happens all the time in worship. We are reminded of who God is and the need to consistently come into God's presence for worship is necessary. Ascribe, ascribe, ascribe unless we forget. God is god! All powerful and mighty! This psalm is calling us to worship and remembrance. Now that is something I can handle, something I need, something I can understand.

So I continue making my list of things I know or have noticed in the psalm having figured out that the liturgical nature of the psalm is imperative for me. As we read the text, we don't have to be a poet or understand poetry to know that this psalm is drawing heavily, almost exclusively on a natural metaphor, the metaphor of a thunderstorm. It is full of imagery and like we spoke about before, we can understand where the Psalter got his inspiration, of those storms coming off the Mediterranean inaugurating the rainy season.

While all that makes sense to us, what is surprising is that the natural metaphor is quite rare in scripture. Even this psalm is careful in wording. You see, Israel was very different from other people of the time. Most gods of their day were associated with nature in some way. There were gods for everything, gods for fertility, gods for the harvest, and most of these gods had some type of nature connotation. Israel's god stood in stark contrast with these nature gods, because the god of Israel, the God of the Old Testament, the God we worship, was not a mere natural phenomena, he was a historical God. The story of the Old Testament is a story of God engaging in history, selecting and working in and through a people historically. He was the God Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, historical people.

The writers of the Old Testament take great care, to distinguish this historical God from the nature gods. Even in the New Testament, we see this same care for the historical significance and nature of God. Paul constantly spoke of the crucified Christ, John was careful even in his natural miracles to disclose that those were only signs of God's kingdom at work in history.

Now this is very important for us and I can start to get my head around this, I can start to understand what this psalm is saying. I worship a God of glory who is rooted in history.

My guess is that most of us have heard someone say something like this, particularly if they are outdoorsy type of people. They maybe watching a sunset, or catching a view from a

mountain or looking up at the spectacular night sky, and they may say something, "I don't know how anyone can see something so beautiful as this and not believe in a God." Ever heard or said something to that affect? I have.

While I may agree with that sentiment, we have to be careful to downgrade God to some natural beauty. In fact, if God is reduced to nature, we can end up having problems. What happens when nature is as ferocious as it is beautiful? We have certainly seen that of recent haven't we? With tsunamis, Hurricane Katrina, the earthquake in Indonesia and the wildfires in the southwest right now. If God is nothing more than a natural phenomenon, we have some difficulties. But while this psalm surprisingly employs natural language it is careful to point out that nature is not God, but points to God. Nature is never a full revelation of God, but unfortunately that is the only revelation that some people are receiving.

The story of the Bible is the story of God acting in history doing whatever it takes to offer salvation to its people. We cannot domesticate God into natural phenomena, but embrace the history acting, history making God. Jesus Christ crucified, Jesus raised up, Jesus Christ coming back at some historical point in the future. So this psalm is liturgical in nature, reminding us of the necessity of worship, it is reminding us of a historical God in language that we can relate to, but not take literally. Despite its poetry, I am starting to get a handle on how this impacts me today. But there is one other thing that is extraordinary in this psalm and radical in its implication.

In addition to the historical nature of God in the Old Testament, and the liturgical call for all of us to worship this glorious God there is also a cosmological function to this Psalm. Like us, the Old Testament people had a particular cosmology that affected their understanding of everything. Cosmology, of course, is how we view the universe in its totality and its implications are enormous.

Look with me at verse 10, *The Lord sits enthroned over the flood, the Lord is enthroned as King forever.* Now that appears to us to be a little unusual doesn't it, the Lord sits over the flood. Of course, our cosmology is different but for the folks of the Old Testament, they would readily understand. Before there is anything there was God, right? The Bible describes pre-

creation as a watery nothingness.<sup>1</sup> It was chaos and the Bible tells us that from that chaos (creatio ex nihilo) God created everything. So God was above this watery flood. So this verse is describing a heavenly court, which is where we are reminded of those called to worship in verse one. The heavenly court, situated around God's throne is called to ascribe glory to God, who is King over everything.

God is not the storm, he is above the storm, above the flood, above the water. In other words, God is God, he is King of everything. Worship, embrace Him, and rely on Him because there is none greater. God's power is the only power!

That cosmological understanding was fundamental to the people of the Old Testament and it should be fundamental to our outlook as well. Because of that cosmological understanding they enter into a prayer to share in that strength (v. II) and the result of that strength is peace.

Too often, we in the church want to wield power and strength but it rarely results in peace. The power and glory of God brings peace. Peace to know that no matter what powers in the world I may come up against, my King is enthroned above.

He is power and glory. I am encouraged to pay my allegiance to His kingdom and glory because ultimately that is the only Kingdom. You see what the Psalter realized is that when we see God in his rightful, glorious, fearful place, we are strengthened. When we engage in the liturgy of worship, embrace His historical act of redemption, when we begin to see the world and its principalities and powers as inferior to God's glory and power, then and only then we will derive that strength from God. Then and only then can we experience peace here in our own storms, because I know that God is over all the storms. Above the flood that I too often feel like I am drowning in.

I don't always understand poetry, but we do understand thunderstorms, may we as church seek to find the strength that precedes and outlast the storms of life. May our lives be filled with peace.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Genesis 1:2