

The Voice of the Lord

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Preacher: Rev Andrew Coghill

[0 : 00] Now as we look at this Psalm 29, if we could give a title to this Psalm, it would surely be the voice of the Lord.

This is a theme through most of the verses, the voice of the Lord and all the attributes there, or rather some of the attributes. But we have to set the scene first of all, and we see these in the opening verses.

Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty, give unto the Lord glory and strength. Well we cannot in truth of course give glory and strength to the Lord, but he already possesses these attributes to a divine degree.

What can we possibly add to his glory, add to his strength? How can we give him anything? But we can perhaps ascribe glory and strength then.

We can perhaps acknowledge his glory and strength. We can recognise the glory and strength of the Lord, or rather a fraction of it, that portion of which we are made to be aware.

[1 : 02] And in a sense, by recognising and acknowledging it, we are, how we would use our language, we would say that we are given glory and strength. And we are acknowledging the truth of his glory and strength.

And there is a sense, you might say, in which we reverently glorify the Lord by acknowledging the glory that is due to him. For example, if the Queen is going down the mile, and she's going in her carriage or whatever, she's still the Queen, whether one person turns out or half a million people turn out to see her.

Whether they're all waving their flags or whether they're just going about the business and there's almost nobody there to see her, she will still be the Queen. She will still have the same majesty and authority and sovereignty and so on.

But if all that half a million crowd are there, all waving and cheering and praising up the Queen there, then there is a sense in which she is magnified in the sight of the nation.

She is lifted up, she is made almost more glorious by all the adulation of the crowds, although they are very ordinary people like all of us. And she is, in a sense, a sovereign, in one sense, anointed by the Lord.

[2 : 17] We can't really add anything to her royalty, but she is nevertheless enhanced, in a sense, by the adulation and all the praise of the crowd.

And maybe there is a sense in which God's majesty is more clearly seen when his people acknowledge his glory, when they give to him, rather, such power as they have to give glory to him, they give it.

They acknowledge his glory, they ascribe glory to him, they recognise the glory and the strength of the Lord. That is a sense in which I think we should understand this, give unto the Lord glory and strength.

We can't give him anything that he doesn't already possess, but we can, in a sense, acknowledge it. And in that sense, make it more clear, make it more visible to the world, just how glorious he is.

Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name. Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. But perhaps, as we say, there is a sense in which we give whatever we ourselves count most glorious, most precious.

[3 : 29] If we're to give unto the Lord the glory due to his name, we can't give him glory. But what is it that is glorious to us? What is it that is most precious to us? What is worth most in our life?

Or amongst what we possess that we regard as most important? That, whenever it is, we ought to, of course, be ready to lay down at the feet of the Lord.

Whether it be our money, whether it be our years, our career, our possessions, whatever it be. You know, the woman who anointed the feet of Jesus, she had nothing but this box of alabaster ointment, so precious.

It could have been sold for a year's wages. And that's one of the disciples' criticism. Oh, we could have sold this for a year's wages and given it to the poor. But it was all expended on the feet of the head of Jesus.

And it was considered well spent. Not only by the woman, but by the Lord as well. Because that was her most precious possession. And she gave it to the Lord.

[4 : 31] Now, whatever be our most precious possession, or the thing over which we have any control, I would suggest to you that although everything that we have, of course, is a gift from the Lord, one of the most precious commodities, perhaps the most precious commodity we have in our lives, is time.

Time which is, of course, irreplaceable. If you spend time doing one thing, you can't get that time back again. It is irreplaceable. It is short. It is ever-reducing.

You can't make more time. People say, well, I haven't got time to do this. Well, you'll just have to make time. You can't make time. You can only apportion time.

And the things to which you apportion time speak to us and speak to others of how important we regard those things to be. Time is, in a sense, the most precious.

And always reducing commodity to us. And if we have such time as we have a measure of control over, if we are able to give that to the Lord, then we declare his importance to us.

[5 : 44] That over which we have any control, give that to the Lord. Give the Lord time. And you say to the world how important he is to you, just as you do with anybody else.

You know, if you go in to see your boss, whatever, and he barely looks up from his desk and says, yes, yes, what was it? And you say the thing you want to say, okay, okay, I'll deal with it. And he makes a note and then he puts it to one side. He says, was there anything else?

No, no, write them off. But if your boss is to say, come on, come on, sit down. Would you like a cup of tea or something? Like, what was the thing you were concerned about? And he sits in and gives you 10, 15 minutes. He says, okay, now I'll look into the thing that you've done, you're asking about, and I'll follow up on that and I'll get back to you on it.

Now, which says that this employee is important? Which gives the employee the sense of value and worth? Is it when the boss may come up with exactly the same conclusion?

He may have exactly the same physical follow-up, but in the one, he's barely got seconds. He can't even lift his head from the desk to speak to them when they've come to see him.

[6 : 45] But in the other, he makes time for them. And it may be costing only 5, 10 minutes at the most, but he is seen to make time for that person. When we give people time, we see how important they are, how much they matter to us.

And it is the same, although it should be much, much more important to the Lord. We give God time because after all, what is he offering to give us? He's offering to give us eternity.

So, how much ought we to give the Lord time? It is his gift in the first place. It is his due. You know, give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name because he's worth it.

See what it says now? Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. Now, this is only as far as I know mentioned in two places in the Psalms. And it's worth remembering them. If you want to try and remember them, then, if you think 292 and 969.

Now, three little letters, three little numbers each time. 292, Psalm 29, verse 2. 969, Psalm 96 at verse 9. And they are distinguished by the fact they're slightly different in the sense that the 969, Psalm 96 at verse 9 has the O at the beginning.

[7 : 59] O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. Whereas 29, verse 2 is simply worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. But they're both there. And they're wonderful verses because this is how we should worship him.

Wherein does that beauty of holiness consist? Well, I would again suggest to you, there can only be a suggestion, that it would be in the simple, uncluttered presence of the Lord from whence all other distraction has been removed.

I know that some people seek to worship the Lord in the midst of great physical beauty. Some traditions in the Christian church, of course, they feel it necessary to adorn their places of worship with the most beautiful pictures.

And maybe they're depicting scenes from Scripture. And with gold and silver and all the richest furnishings. In one sense, you can see why people want to give the Lord the best of what they have.

And that's not wrong in terms of it. That's the motivation. But there is a danger of the beauty of things coming between us and the beauty of holiness.

[9 : 10] What creates the holiness? The holiness is created by the presence of the Holy One. He who is himself holy, where the Lord is focused upon, where he meets together with his people, where all other distractions are removed, and our focus is upon him.

Then, in the presence of the Holy One, is holiness. Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

Where the Lord is present, all beauty is present and encompassed within him. Where there are no distractions or lesser things to draw away the eye or the thought or the imagination, there's the beauty of holiness.

As we focus upon him in that uncluttered simplicity, the presence of the Lord is the beauty of holiness.

It is he who makes that presence holy. So, we worship him in that purity, in that simplicity, that reverence, which he requires.

[10 : 29] How, you know, for example, when a young couple show their devotion to each other, their love for each other, you know what I mean? Are they able to show love for each other when one is busy playing a video game?

And say, yes, yes, of course I love you. And yes, I'm listening to what you say, but he's really focusing on something else. Or she's busy doing something else while he's trying to talk to her. No. They show their devotion to each other when they are alone together.

When the world is showing up, they're going for a walk under the stars or whatever, and just want to gaze into each other's eyes. As far as they are concerned, the rest of the world just doesn't exist.

There's just the two of them. Such love, such devotion, that is focused upon the beloved. That is the kind of love and devotion I would suggest to you that the Lord desires for those children.

Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. That simplicity, that purity, that uncluttered reverence which he requires.

[11 : 30] But as we say, he's mentioned twice in the Psalms 292-969. Remember them and focus upon these things. Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. And then having set the scene.

And that says, it goes on to speak about the voice of the Lord. And this is the great theme of this comparatively short psalm. The voice of the Lord is upon the waters. The God of glory thundereth.

The Lord is upon many waters. Now, of course, it's no coincidence. I would suggest to you that this is how the portion of it, the voice of the Lord begins. He's upon the waters.

He's sort of speaking to the waters. He's got control over the waters. And then in verse 10, towards the end, the Lord sitteth upon the flood. The Lord sitteth king forever, as though he has complete sovereign control over them.

We'll come to that in a minute. But we see how the Lord is speaking through nature. He thundereth. The voice of the Lord is powerful. It's full of majesty. It breaks the cedars.

[12 : 29] The Lord breaketh the cedars of Lebanon, makes them to skip like a path. Lebanon and Cydian like a young unicorn. The voice of the Lord divideth the flames of fire, shakes the wilderness.

The Lord shaketh the wilderness of Tanish. The voice of the Lord is seen to be powerful in nature. That is the first thing about the voice of the Lord. It is seen to be powerful in nature.

Now, of course, the Lord uses nature to declare his glory. We see, for example, that he appeared to the Israelites in the desert in a pillar of fire and in a pillar of cloud, whatever night or whatever day.

When he spoke upon Mount Sinai, the mountain shook and the blackness of the cloud, and the whole mountain seemed to be on fire now. Blackness of crowds, people have seen.

Fire, people have seen. Earthquakes, people will no doubt have experienced in many parts of the world. But when you have these things combined and focused with the voice of the Lord, the effect, of course, is overwhelming.

[13 : 33] It is powerful. It is, in a sense, terrifying. The voice of the Lord is powerful in nature. It divides the flames of fire.

Even if you think in terms of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, are they in the final furnace? The Lord divides, as it were, the fire, and he walks in the midst of the fire with them. It has no power over them.

He has power over nature, but nature does not have power over God. God can use nature, or he can overcome nature. He can part the Red Sea for the Israelites to go through.

He can close it again over the Egyptians. He can use the laws of nature that he has himself, as it were, written, or he can work against them. As, for example, when the iron axe head in Elisha, they swam and it floated to the surface against all the laws of gravity and of nature.

But the Lord worked against his own laws of nature in order to glorify his own word through the prophet. God is powerful in nature.

[14 : 38] The voice of the Lord is powerful in nature. And we also see, at verse 9, the voice of the Lord maketh the hinds to come.

In other words, it is the Lord's oversight that causes the beasts of the field to bring forth life, indeed man himself to bring forth life, and discovereth the forest.

It's not only he who divides the cedars of Lebanon, but whether it's a moving life that is brought forth by the beasts of a field, or indeed by mankind, or that which we might call static life.

Of course, the trees of the field are not static. They're growing and developing the whole time, but they don't run around in the way that the beasts of the field do. So there's a kind of rooted, dignified strength in the trees and the cedars of Lebanon.

He discovereth the forests. They glorify him just by growing there when they sway in the breeze. And it's, remember how it said in Isaiah 55, it says, all the trees of the field shall clap their hands like the branches smacking together in the breeze and in the wind.

[15 : 47] How it all glorifies the Lord. The bringing forth of buds and blossoms and fruitfulness and so on. All of this by these comparatively static things, these trees, these bushes, they bring forth glory to the Lord.

The voice of the Lord maketh the hinds to come and discovereth the forests. And in his temple doth everyone speak of his glory.

Now, of course, the Psalm of David. David could be referring to the earthly tabernacle, which was all that there was in his day, the Temple of Solomon, but not yet been built. Or he could be thinking in terms of the heavenly temple, the presence of the Lord, that everyone speak of his glory.

So everything that God has made, whether it be in his heavenly temple, whether it be in his earthly sanctuary, whether it be in his, as it were, the temple of creation, glorifies him.

The voice of the Lord is not only powerful in nature, it is praiseful. If we can use that word, I don't even know if it's a proper word. Praiseful in worship. Well, he might say in redemption, but some commentators would suggest redemption for this.

[16 : 58] I'm not sure exactly to what extent we can say that the beasts of the field or the trees of the field really are redeemed. They are under the curse because of man's sin.

And yes, the Lord makes a new heaven and a new earth. And no doubt all these kinds of beings will be in these things when they're created new. But I don't think that you're really talking in terms of redemption of the trees and of the beasts of the field.

But we can talk about praise. Praiseful in worship, because all the works of creation praise the Lord. And in his temple, does everyone speak of his glory.

Everyone who comes into us at one of the presence of the Lord, everyone who comes to genuinely seek to worship the Lord in his sanctuary, cannot help but praise, cannot help but be conscious of his greatness, of his majesty.

The voice of the Lord is powerful in nature. That testifies to his handiwork. But it is praiseful in worship. Sometimes the worship of the Lord, we know ourselves.

[18 : 04] We've had occasions, all of us I'm sure, if we're truly loving and seeking the Lord. We will have occasions that may be sticking our memories. When you can almost set the drenching of the presence and the spirit of the Lord in a particular meeting, or a particular gathering, or somebody's led in prayer, or even during the singing of God's praise, you can set the drenching of the spirit in that presence.

In that presence, that praiseful voice of the Lord in worship. That's what we have here at verse 9. But also, the Lord's ultimate desire, of course, is for relationship with man who he has made male and female in his own image.

And in verses 10 and 11, the concluding verses of this psalm, we read, The Lord sitteth upon the flood, yea, the Lord saith, King forever. The Lord will give strength unto his people, and the Lord will bless his people with peace.

His people, those who are his own, to them he gives peace. The voice of the Lord, then, I would suggest to you in concluding these verses, is peaceful in relationship.

It is powerful in nature. It is praiseful in worship. It is peaceful in relationship. The Lord will give strength to his people.

[19 : 25] The Lord will bless his people with peace. Now, of course, we have here, in these concluding verses, a picture of the supreme control of God over the flood.

We mentioned that a few minutes ago, is how he divides, you know, the flames of fire, how the voice of the Lord is upon the waters, and he's upon many waters, but here we have him sitting supreme upon the flood.

Now, remember that the flood not only was remembered to the Lord's people as that which destroyed the entire face of the earth, and only Noah and his immediate family were spared, but also, the sea, in general, was a frightening thing for most Israelites.

They weren't a seafaring people, and the sea was a symbol of potential death and danger, and of chaos to the average Jewish man.

It's not for nothing that in John's Revelation at the end of the Bible, it says, there was no more sea. But even that sea which there is, the Lord sits king upon the flood.

[20 : 32] He sits king forever. He sits upon it, demonstrating his power, his rule over it, his complete dominance of it, even as, if you think in terms of, like the angel, the day of resurrection in Matthew 28, where the stone is rolled away, and he rolls away the stone, and sat down.

You know, to declare his complete, total control over this symbol of death, the stone that was upon the tomb, upon the mouth of the grave. Let's just read these verses in Matthew 28.

Behold, there was a great earthquake, for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.

His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow, and for fear of him, the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. He sat upon the stone, that which was meant to seal the tomb, and seal the body of our Lord, and he rolled it away, and sat upon it, such as his complete, sovereign control over this symbol of death.

And likewise, the Lord has complete, sovereign control over the flood. The Lord sitteth upon the flood. Yea, the Lord sitteth king forever, totally in control of whatever men find most threatening, whether it is the flood, whether it is the grave, whether it is the enmity of other men, whether it is false gods, or fears, or their own inadequacies, or the sorrow of heartbreak in this life, the Lord sits king over these things.

[22 : 10] Whatsoever it is that causes us most to be afraid, we may feel it, for we have no strength, but the Lord sits supreme over it all.

The Lord will bless his people with peace, remember what Psalm 85 says, verse 8 in the Metrical Version, I'll hear what God the Lord will speak, the voice of the Lord, to his folk he'll speak peace, and to his saints, but let them not return to foolishness.

I hear what God the Lord will speak, to his folk he'll speak peace, and the Lord will bless his people with peace. But there can only be peace where there is strength.

You're like, well, that's not true, isn't it? You can have peace, even in comparative weakness, and everything's just hunky-dory and idyllic and just quiet and peaceful, but if you think about it, a well-armed, well-defended country will know and enjoy peace because those round about recognise its strength.

If you think about King Solomon's reign, in the days of King Solomon, you read about Solomon's reign, how many garrison tanks were staffed by professional soldiers?

[23 : 30] How many chariots and horsemen did he have at his disposal? How many people went off in his navies to bring back gold from abroad? He had a thoroughly well-staffed and trained and positioned armed forces throughout his kingdom.

He was prosperous. The land was at peace. The land was wealthy. The land was blessed and it was strong in the days of Solomon and nobody attacked it all the days of King Solomon.

Contrast that with what we have in the book of Judges, for example, where we have an instance, yes, of peace that is undefended and what happens?

Judges 17, reading at verse 7. Let me just try to read that. Judges 17, at verse 7. Then the five men departed and came to Laish and saw the people that were therein, how they dwelt careless after the man of the Zidonians, quiet and secure.

And there was no magistrate in the land that might put them to shame in anything. They were far from the Zidonians and had no business with any man. And they came unto their brethren, to Zorah and to Eshtiel, and their brethren said unto them, What say ye?

[24 : 49] And they said, Arise, that we may go up against them, for we have seen the land, and behold, it is very good. And are ye still? Be not slothful to go and to enter to possess the land.

When ye go, ye shall come unto a people secure and to a large land, for God hath given it into your hands, a place where there is no want of anything that is in the earth, a land of peace, and yet, a land without strength.

So we read verse 27, They took the things which Michael had made, and the priests which he had, and came unto the ish, unto a people that were at quiet and secure, and they smoked them with the edge of the sword, and burnt the city with fire, and there was no deliverer, because it was far from Zion, and they had no business with any man, and it was in the valley at night by Beth Rehob, and they built a city and dwelt therein.

That's what happens when a place may be a temporary peace, but it has no strength, and we have no strength of our own. They had no strength there in the book of Judges, and so they had no lasting peace.

We may think for a while, oh, we don't need to be a friend, we can manage by ourselves, we just, peace with everybody, just love and peace, and understanding, that's fine, as long as nobody chooses to attack you.

[26 : 07] But if you have no strength, it means you are helpless in the face of any aggression. What do we read here? We read that the Lord will give strength unto his people.

In other words, he gives them strength, he gives them his own protection. The Lord is their protection, and he blesses them with peace, because he is their protection.

What do we read of the Israelites? We read of the Israelites in the Promised Land that when they obeyed the Lord, when they were faithful to the Lord, they were protected. Yes, Solomon had his armies, just like you've said, but it wasn't really the armies of which everyone was afraid, because when Solomon died, all the armies were still there, but the foreigners came in against them, the Egyptians and the Egyptians and the Egyptians and the Babylonians and so on, all the armies that were there, they didn't hold together because the people had departed from the Lord.

Even Solomon had departed from the Lord. The Lord was their protection and their strength. Take away that strength, and they are just as helpless as if they had no defense at all.

But when the Lord gives strength, verse 11, he blesses his people with peace. Now the Hebrew word for peace, of course, doesn't just mean absence of hostilities.

[27 : 29] It is the word, as I'm sure many of you know, shalom. Now that word shalom doesn't just mean absence of war. It encapsulates within it all depth of well-being and blessing and wholeness and goodness and all that is right and good and desirable in life, all that is sung up in that word shalom, which does mean peace, but it means so much more and fuller and deeper than that.

The voice of the Lord then is powerful in nature. The voice of the Lord is praiseful in worship. The voice of the Lord is peaceful in relationship.

The Lord will give strength to his people. the Lord will bless his people with peace because in him at last we have peace.

Isn't that what the human condition, the human soul is searching for? We go through life and there is so much agitation and dis-ease and dis-peace.

There is so much turmoil, there is so much conflict and hostility and lack of fulfilment and lack of peace and no matter how much we try and do it's never enough.

[28 : 49] No matter how much we work, it never makes the work pile go down or go away, there is this dis-peace, this dis-ease, this fallenness.

We are not at peace when we are not in the Lord but in him at last we have this shalom, we have peace. In him at last we have wholeness, we have healing, the healing of our iniquity, of that ultimate primordial breach with the Lord when sin entered in and broke apart that divine human relationship, that which the second Adam came to heal again.

In him we have wholeness, we have healing, we have fulfilment and last in him we have completion of the purpose for which we were designed to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

In him at last you could say in a sense we have come home when we are in Christ. When we are in the Lord we are complete and fulfilled and made right with God.

We have come home and it is the voice of the Lord that calls us there. Let us pray.

[30 : 14] Lord Lord.