

God of Thunder / God of Peace  
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It is hard for me to imagine the awesome devastation of a powerful storm. In recent days and years, there have been a number of storms that have caused great damage and significant loss of life.

It is hard to fully grasp the fact that over 20,000 people died in the recent Myanmar cyclone.

Looking at picture on the television and hearing the statistics, while incredibly tragic, fail to give us a sense of what it must be like to actually experience such a storm.

I recently went to the Imax on Hurricane Katrina and gained a greater appreciation for the huge amount of damage done by that storm, but even so watching a documentary is nothing like actually being in the storm.

I have spent my entire life on the west coast of British Columbia, and most of my time has been spent on Vancouver Island. And while we certainly get our share of stormy weather, we do not get a lot of truly impressive or dangerous weather. Many of you have probably experienced more extreme weather than I have. But it is interesting, how our minds become permanently etched with the memories of impressive weather. When we truly experience it, we do not forget it.

I remember once watching a storm from a distance. I was out on the beach up island in Comox, looking out across at distant mountains watching forked lightning cut through the sky. I had never really seen lightning bolts before. The infrequent lightning storms I had experienced were of sheet lightning. It was an insignificant moment in an insignificant day, but the memory is cut into my mind just as the lightning cut through the sky.

My closest and most vulnerable experience with thunder came last summer, while we were tenting up at Gordon bay on lake Cowichan. Perhaps it was more impressive, because I was under a thin layer of nylon and not indoors, but the power of that thunder felt like a bomb exploding beside me.

Psalm 29 tells us that when we really experience the power of a storm, we gain an appreciation for the power of God.

Psalm 29 compares the voice of God, with the power of a storm. Thunder and lightning become a metaphor for the glory and power of God.

Ascribe to the LORD, O mighty ones,  
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.

<sup>2</sup>Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;  
worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.

<sup>3</sup>The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders,  
the LORD thunders over the mighty waters.

<sup>4</sup>The voice of the LORD is powerful;  
the voice of the LORD is majestic.

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

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

<sup>7</sup>The voice of the LORD strikes with flashes of lightning.

<sup>8</sup>The voice of the LORD shakes the desert;  
the LORD shakes the Desert of Kadesh.

<sup>9</sup>The voice of the LORD twists the oaks and strips the forests bare.  
And in his temple all cry, "Glory!"

<sup>10</sup>The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;  
the LORD is enthroned as King forever.

<sup>11</sup>The LORD gives strength to his people;  
the LORD blesses his people with peace.

The core of this psalm is the association of God's voice with thunder and lightning.

Imagine a storm building over the ocean

<sup>3</sup>The voice of the LORD is over the waters;

Imagine a tree split in half by a lightning bolt.

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

Envision a windstorm pulling branches off the trees.

<sup>9</sup>The voice of the LORD twists the oaks and strips the forests bare.

The mere voice of God is like a powerful storm.

<sup>3</sup>the God of glory thunders,

<sup>7</sup>The voice of the LORD strikes with flashes of lightning.

It is important for us to understand that the psalmist is not saying that thunder and lightning are really and truly God's voice. As if storms were supernatural activity and God is speaking in every peal of thunder.

Verse 10 describes God rather as one enthroned above creation sovereign over it.

<sup>10</sup>The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD is enthroned as King forever.

He ruled over the greatest storm of all history, the great flood, where it rained for forty days and everything was destroyed. And he remains enthroned as king forever. The meteorological phenomena are not divine manifestations, but rather as awesome and powerful as they are, God sits enthroned above them.

Interestingly, the pagan deities of the ancient near east were often associated with impressive natural things like thunder or the sun. Baal, the most common pagan deity of the time was considered to be the God of thunder and thunder was literally considered to be his voice. Storm activity was considered divine activity. This psalm is a critique of Baal in that Yahweh, the true God sits enthroned above all things.

The psalmist compares the glory of God to the majesty of a thunderstorm, but does not equate it with the thunderstorm itself. You cannot go out in a storm to hear God speak to you. But as you are humbled by the incredible power of weather, you ought to see that this is but an echo of God's power.

Why the voice of God? Why does the psalmist key in on God's voice as being powerful. We are certainly familiar with the idea that the word of God is powerful. God spoke things into existence in Genesis 1. Jesus Christ,

the perfect revelation of God is referred to as the Word. When Christ returns in Revelation 19 he defeats his enemies with the sword coming out of his mouth, representing his word. As God is a God who reveals himself, we recognize the power of his word. God speaks into our lives with power. His voice is all he needs.

So while it is less common to speak of God's voice than God's word, the psalmist is pointing to God's power and comparing it to the power of the storm.

How should this affect us? As we remember the power of God what is our response?

The first thing is that this should lead us to worship.

This is where the psalm begins.

Ascribe to the LORD, O mighty ones,  
 ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.  
<sup>2</sup>Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;  
 worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.

The psalm begins as a call to worship. Calling the mighty ones, probably the angels to ascribe glory and strength to the Lord.

What does it mean to ascribe. It means to attribute, to credit. To ascribe strength and glory to God is to declare that he is strong, to say that he is glorious. As we ascribe strength and glory to God, we say that these qualities belong to him.

This is what the psalm itself does. After calling forth worship, inviting others to ascribe to God the glory and strength that rightfully belong to him, it does just that.

All these statements, comparing God's voice to the storm are ascribing God glory and strength. We need to remember and declare that God is powerful beyond our imagination.

Sometimes I get down of God's power. I walk down the street and see people lost in difficult circumstances and I am tempted to doubt that God is capable. I want to see his power in people's lives and I forget that the God I love is enthroned above all things. I fail to recognize that the evidence of God's power is everywhere.

May we never forget the glory that is due his name. May we never forget the splendour of his holiness.

That is why this psalm has spoken to me lately. It is a picture of God that I am tempted to forget. I am tempted to work as if it depended on me, I am tempted to doubt because God does not work according to my plan and schedule. I want the powerful voice of God to speak up.

A psalm like this helps me gain perspective. That even if God does not manifest his power at my will, he is powerful none the less.

<sup>4</sup>The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is majestic.

God can accomplish more with his voice in one second than I can with a whole lifetime of sermons. One word from him can split cedars and pierce hearts.

But the thing that caused me to first notice this psalm was the last verse.

<sup>11</sup>The LORD gives strength to his people;  
the LORD blesses his people with peace.

What caught my attention was the contrast with the core of the psalm. This God, whose voice breaks trees and shakes the desert, this God, whose voice is powerful and majestic. This God who resplendent in holiness. Is a God who gives strength and peace.

This picture of God could be unsettling, and perhaps it should be if you have rejected him. But this last verse says to me that this God enthroned above the storms does not have a stormy disposition. This God whose voice thunders is not angry with his people.

This God who breaks, shakes and twists is not doing that to me.

For me, his child, by faith in Christ, his voice is strength and peace. Strength to carry on when I feel the road is long. Strength to overcome when the battle is hard. Strength to know that God is able to change hearts and transform lives. Peace to rest in hope of glory. Peace to know that I am loved. Peace to know that the God who thunders is the God who loves.

This is your God. Whose voice is as powerful as a storm yet blessing his people with peace.

As I reflected on my story about tenting in the thunder storm. The best part of the story is how my boys reacted. We were together in that tent, separated from the elements by a sheet of nylon. Together when that thunder blasted like an explosion just outside our tent. Julia and I were awake in an instant. You can imagine how sacred a couple of young boys would be, but the best part of the story is that they didn't even wake up. They slept through the whole thing.

In the midst of the power of the storm they had peace.

Is that your relationship with God?

Can you ascribe to him glory and strength and receive from strength and peace.

Do you know that your God is enthroned above the elements and that his voice is like thunder.

Do you also know his peace.

The glorious blessing of knowing Christ is that we can be comforted by the voice that breaks trees. The God who thunders is our God of peace.