



# The Voice of the Lord

## Psalm 29

### January 8, 2006

If you were to hear the voice of God, what do you think it would sound like? In the movie “Oh God,” the voice of God was George Burns smoking a cigar and doing stand-up comedy. More recently in another movie, the voice of God to Jim Carrey was Morgan Freeman, helping Carrey to rise above his self-centered life. In the recent TV series “Joan of Arcadia,” God would speak to Joan at her high school or on the street through all kinds of characters, including even a well-to-do socialite.

If the voice of God were to come to you, what would it be like? Or maybe it already has. I remember one time with my Grandfather Parrish when I was in college. I’d come to visit him at his Bryson City farm. We had gone into town, and he introduced me to a friend of his, saying, “This is my grandson Douglas. He’s going to be a preacher, I mean a doctor.” I *had* been thinking about medicine, but Granddad kept slipping up and saying “preacher.” I wondered if that were a Voice I needed to pay attention to. A few years later I think I heard the voice of God again through my granddad. It was at my ordination service. I was kneeling at the front of the sanctuary of my home church as people were laying hands on me and speaking words of encouragement. Then I felt the rough, thick hands of Granddad on me, and heard his voice, “This is your ol’ Granddad...” I think I heard the voice of God again then.

Maybe something like that has happened to you, and you heard the voice of God, maybe from an unlikely place. In the twenty-ninth Psalm, the voice of God comes, not through a person, but through a massive, roaring thunderstorm. Listen to this psalm of God speaking through a Mediterranean thunderstorm, hear it coming from the distance, feel yourself in the midst of its fury, and then hear the calm that follows the storm. (Read Psalm 29).

This is one of the oldest, one of the most vivid and powerful psalms in the book. It comes in three parts. First there is a cosmic call to worship even as the storm gathers in the distance:

*Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings,  
Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.*

It is a call to worship, not to human beings, but to beings of another dimension, perhaps angels, perhaps beings in God’s heavenly court. But it is a call to worship nonetheless, as the thunder grows in the distance:

*The voice of the Lord is over the waters;*

*The God of glory thunders.* Psalm 29:3

I remember one evening in the small (then) town of Wake Forest when the annual Fourth of July fireworks show was just beginning. Even as the first rockets burst in the sky, off in the distance we could hear a low rumble and see distant flashes in the sky. The fireworks show continued, one brilliant rocket after another. But the thunderstorm was coming closer and growing louder and brighter. It was as if God was giving the fireworks a little divine competition. The fireworks operators saw the storm towering over them. They decided the best thing to do was to go ahead and set off everything they had left before the storm overtook them. Thousands of dollars' worth of fireworks went up in the sky in the course of just a couple of minutes. It was a glorious conflagration. But the storm was not to be outdone. For every shell and every starburst, the thunderstorm answered with peals of lightning and blasts of thunder. It was the most magnificent pyrotechnic display we had ever seen. But the thunderstorm was even more magnificent. Score: Fourth of July 1, God 100.

If you can imagine that, then you can imagine the middle part of Psalm 29, at the height of the thunderstorm. Verses 3-9 describe the climax of God's thunderstorm in seven bolts of lightning, which are seven declarations about the voice of God. It's no accident that there are seven, the biblical number for completeness. The seven thunderclaps make a grand statement about the voice of the Lord. We're going to look at each of these thunderclaps, and as we do, I give you permission to help me by adding some sound effects. Each time I announce a bolt of lightning, you're welcome to make a thunderclap with me by clapping your hands or making something like thunder. Ready?

HERE COMES THE VOICE OF GOD IN THE FIRST LIGHTNING in verse 3 (clap):

*The voice of the Lord is over the waters;  
The God of glory thunders,  
The Lord, over mighty waters.*

You can just imagine standing on the shore of Palestine looking westward out across the Mediterranean Sea, watching the thunderstorm rolling in over the ocean toward you. When the psalmist sings, "The Lord, over mighty waters," he is remembering how waters have always been the Hebrew symbol for chaos and danger. But the Lord is OVER the waters. The Lord is more powerful than all the chaos and danger in the world.

NOW HERE COMES THE VOICE OF GOD IN THE SECOND and THIRD BOLTS OF LIGHTNING in verse 4 (clap):

*The voice of the Lord is powerful;  
The voice of the Lord is full of majesty.*

The voice of the Lord is as powerful as any thunderstorm any have ever seen.

NOW HERE COMES THE FOURTH LIGHTNING in verses 5 and 6 (clap):

*The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars;  
The Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon.*

*He makes Lebanon skip like a calf,  
And Sirion like a young wild ox.*

The cedars of Lebanon were legendary for their size and strength. But this storm, this voice of the Lord, blows so hard it breaks them. It even makes the earth shake until the mountains of Lebanon and Sirion look like they are jumping! The voice of the Lord is a powerful thing.

READY FOR THE FIFTH LIGHTNING in verse 7? (clap)

*The voice of the Lord flashes forth flames of fire.*

You can just see the lightning flashing fire. The voice of the Lord is like that, a holy fire.

THE SIXTH LIGHTNING in verse 8 (clap):

*The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness;  
The Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.*

This storm is so massive that it covers the whole of Palestine from the northern border with Lebanon to the southern deserts of Kadesh. No place is safe from the power of the voice of God!

NOW in verse 9 THE VOICE OF GOD IN THE SEVENTH LIGHTNING:

*The voice of the Lord causes the oaks to whirl,  
And strips the forest bare  
And in his temple all say, "Glory!"*

AND JUST AS SUDDENLY AS A LIGHTNING BOLT, COMES THE CALM AFTER THE STORM. And the voice of God comes in the calm too:

*The Lord sits enthroned over the flood;  
The Lord sits enthroned as king forever.  
May the Lord give strength to his people!  
May the Lord bless his people with peace.*

After the thunder recedes off into the distance, the calm contains words of Yahweh God's sovereignty and promise and blessing: strength and peace. The flood, symbolic of chaos and danger, is conquered by God. In the midst of any danger, we can know the strength of God and the peace of God. (By the way, notice that human beings are not even mentioned until this last verse, reminding us that this hymn of praise is not about us.)

Having let this psalm take us to meteorological and spiritual heights, what can we bring down with us into the valley of our day to day lives? Let me propose three things:

FIRST, if we don't get anything else from this psalm-storm, we get this: ALL BOW DOWN BEFORE THE LORD. When this verse was composed, many people were worshipping a false god, a storm god called Ba'al. But this song leaves no doubt that Yahweh God is the only source of power and security. All good things come from the Lord, and from no other. And that is still the point. In the twenty-first century people still seek good things from false gods, as we worship power and wealth and most of all as we worship ourselves. But compared to the thunderous voice of God, all of that and all of us are just little firecrackers in the wind.

A SECOND TRUTH we bring from the psalm-storm into our lives: WE CAN TRUST THAT GOD IS LORD OVER THIS CHAOTIC AND DANGEROUS WORLD. The psalmist pictures God as sovereign over the mighty waters and floods, the symbol of all that is dangerous and threatening. 2006 dawns as a year wrecked by natural disasters, haunted by terrorism, war, and threatened by epidemics of disease. We who have been through thirteen funerals in ten weeks know better than ever how tenuous is the thread by which life hangs. We greet 2006 with a lot of insecurity. But if we think we face danger now, that is nothing compared to how dangerous life was for people who lived centuries ago when this psalm was composed. Chaos and death lurked even closer to the surface of life back then. And yet they sang this psalm with faith that their God Yahweh was sovereign over all this. They believed that above all the chaos and death and natural disaster and human disaster, that God was greater and stronger, and that God would grant them strength, and that God would give them peace. And isn't that why you and I are here this morning? We know life is so fragile. We know that the world is dangerous. But we also know God as the source of every good thing. And so we worship the Lord only and no one else.

ONE LAST POINT from this psalm-storm for us today: if the voice of God is like a thunderstorm that can blow until it changes the landscape, then is not the voice of God powerful enough to change the landscape of your life? When the thunderous voice of God blows into your life, your life will be shaken and twisted, never to be the same again. When the voice of God rumbles through your soul, you receive the strength of God and the peace of God to go on living despite your fears, to go on serving beyond your fears. Last Thursday at Reba Hudson's funeral, we remembered this spiritual discipline she had: when she woke up in the mornings, she would set her feet on the floor and pray, "O Lord, if you would just allow me to help someone today, then I will be all right today." She lived with the voice of God in her life, and that voice gave her the strength and the peace to be focused on others.

In your life, does the voice of God strike and thunder and change you?

*The voice of the Lord causes the oaks to whirl,  
And strips the forest bare;  
And in his temple all say, "Glory!"*

-- Douglas E. Murray