

Psalm 29

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[0:00] I want to invite you this morning to open up in your Bibles to the book of Psalms, to Psalm 29.

We are for the next few weeks through the month of January. We're going to be walking through Psalms 29 through 33. And really we're just picking up on where we've left off before.

Most of you are probably not aware of the fact that we have been sort of slowly here and there walking our way through the book of Psalms. Just a few of them every year, anywhere from 2 to 5 or 6 each year we cover.

And so we have now arrived, after several years of doing this, we've arrived at Psalm 29. And before we return to our series in 1 Corinthians in February, we're just going to take the beginning of this year to focus upon these songs of Israel that we know ultimately are songs of the Messiah and point to Christ.

So that we can begin our year, no matter how we've ended 2022, we can begin our year in praise to God. And so if you found Psalm 29, then I want to invite you to stand to your feet.

[1:12] And we're going to read through the whole Psalm. It's not long, just 11 verses long. Now you'll notice as we go through in our English versions, you'll see many times the word Lord in all capital letters.

And when we see that in our English translations, that means that the word being translated is not actually the Hebrew word for Lord, but it's actually God's covenant name, Yahweh.

And so as we read through, just so you can feel the force of how frequently His name is mentioned in here, I'm going to read Yahweh instead of Lord as we walk through. Psalm 29, a Psalm of David.

Ascribe to Yahweh, O heavenly beings. Ascribe to Yahweh glory and strength. Ascribe to Yahweh the glory due His name. Worship Yahweh in the splendor of holiness.

The voice of Yahweh is over the waters. The God of glory thunders. Yahweh over many waters. The voice of Yahweh is powerful.

[2:14] The voice of Yahweh is full of majesty. The voice of Yahweh breaks the cedars. Yahweh breaks the cedars of Lebanon. He makes Lebanon to skip like a calf and Syrian like a young wild ox.

The voice of Yahweh flashes forth flames of fire. The voice of Yahweh shakes the wilderness. Yahweh shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. The voice of Yahweh makes the deer give birth and strips the forests bare.

And in His temple all cry glory. Yahweh sits enthroned over the flood. Yahweh sits enthroned as king forever.

May Yahweh give strength to His people. May Yahweh bless His people with peace. God we thank you for this word. Speak to us now.

We pray in Christ's name. Amen. You guys take a seat. Most of you guys know that we have two dogs. Scout and Charlie. Charlie's the little one.

[3:19] If you've ever been to our house. He's the little one. And Charlie has issues. His main issue right now is that he's virtually blind. I know he can see light and things like that.

But he's practically blind. Which for me is kind of funny. Because he's constantly running into things. I've seen him run just straight into the wall. I've seen him.

I've opened the door for him. And he doesn't know where the door is. And he runs into the wall next to the door. I've seen him run into the door before I open the door. He's run into pieces of furniture. Chairs.

The couch. He runs into my legs constantly as I'm walking through the house. I mean he runs into all sorts of things. But he has over time kind of memorized. He knows where everything is.

When it's where it's supposed to be. He knows where the couch is. He knows the general layout of all the different rooms. And so every morning when I let the two dogs out of their kennel.

[4:13] It's kind of a routine I have. I get up first. I go. I turn off the alarm. I let them out of their kennel. And I walk to the back door and open it. And he just makes his way. He darts through where he needs to go.

And he goes straight out the door. And everything is perfectly fine. And he does that every time we let them out of the kennel. Whether it's in the morning or in the evening or whenever it is. Well, so last night we got home. And we're sort of in the middle right now of packing up our Christmas stuff.

Some of you guys like pack it up immediately. We take time. Okay. So we're sort of in the middle of packing up our Christmas stuff. Which means that there are boxes all over the living room. And so we got home last night.

And I let him out. And he started to go across. And he ran into something. And he realized, uh-oh, there's something in the way. And so he slowed down. And he started to kind of, he sticks his nose out everywhere he goes.

Just to make sure that there's nothing there. And then he got to what he thought was the safe zone. Because the doors open in front of him. And he decides to take off. But there's a box. And he just runs right into the plastic bin.

[5:12] It was fantastic. It was really great. Right? But I've noticed that when he doesn't, when he's not sure of what's in front of him. When he's not sure of the layout of the room. When he realizes there are things in the way.

He has that tendency to do that. He doesn't run anywhere. I mean, he walks just in case he steps on anything. He's sticking out his nose. He's trying to figure out if there's anything in his way.

Because everything to him is just darkness. He can't see. He can't tell what's going on in front of him. And I thought about that. That's a good picture of how we often approach the future.

Because to us, the future is really in darkness. We don't know what lies around the corner. We didn't know at the beginning of last year what 2022 would hold.

And given the two years previous to that, most of us kind of came in like nosing our way around. Right? Feeling around. Trying to make sure, figure out what's going on. Not jumping into anything too quickly.

[6:04] Really moving slowly. Just navigating our way. Unsure of what was in front of us. Out there in the darkness of the future. And a lot of us will approach this year that way.

Some of you are approaching 2023. Just kind of hesitant. Not sure of what's out there in the darkness. Others of you, at this point, just don't care if you run into a wall or you fall off a cliff.

You've just decided, I'm just going to take off because I'm tired of it. And you're just ready to run into the year. But whatever the case may be, the truth of the matter is we don't know what lies ahead of us.

We don't yet know whether 2023 is going to be a year of incredible blessing and good things that come into our lives. Or whether for some of us it's going to be a year that's difficult.

And that's filled with all sorts of obstacles and things that would get in our way. And derail us in our lives, in our goals. Prevent us from achieving all the things that we want to achieve.

[7:00] Or prevent us from receiving the things that we would like to receive. We don't know what's out in front of us. And so the question becomes, what do we do? When we're unsure of the future, which is virtually all the time.

When we're not sure what God is planning for us because he doesn't reveal to us all of his plans for us. How are we supposed to think about that? How are we supposed to have the courage to take another step when we're not sure if there's an obstacle in our way.

Or if there's a pothole that we might step into and twist our ankle. How do we have the courage when we're walking into a world that to us is blank and dark that we can't see?

How can we move ahead? And I think that at least one of the answers to that question is, we look backward. Because when we look backward, we can begin to see things in the light of what God has done in the past.

Maybe in our own past, in our immediate past. Or maybe just throughout our lives, we can look back and see the signs of his faithfulness. Even in the midst of trials and struggles and tribulations.

[8:09] We can see God's hand at work when we look backward because we have light to see. Or, even better, we look back and we look in God's word. We look in scripture.

And we see stories of God's faithfulness. We see stories of God rescuing his people. We see stories of God's presence when his people are going through dark and difficult days.

That he's there with them. These stories are helpful for us. They remind us of God's presence continually. And of God's sovereign, providential hand.

Governing and guiding everything that happens in the world. They are reminders to us. And they give us courage to begin, however hesitantly, however carefully, to begin to take the next step.

One step after another. That's exactly what David is doing in this psalm. In Psalm 29, David is looking backwards.

[9:10] He is reflecting upon earlier scripture. In fact, specifically, he's reflecting upon the book of Genesis. That may not be obvious to you at first, but as you read this psalm over and over, you begin to pick up on key words and themes that bring you back to the early pages of Genesis.

In fact, many times as you read through the psalms, you will find that the psalmist, whether it's David or someone else, oftentimes they are interpreting earlier passages from the Old Testament, from the law, that they would have been familiar with.

David would have known Genesis and Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. He would have known the law, the Torah, backwards and forwards. David would have been very familiar with all the stories from the earliest chapters of Genesis.

So that when we see him using key terms that come out of those passages, we should think he's doing that on purpose. He's pointing us back to those stories.

And we see those things happening in this psalm. Let me show you what I mean. And David does it in a way that is, that sets us up at the beginning of the psalm to see a reference to creation, to Genesis chapter 1.

[10:28] But it's, in a sense, it's a setup because there's a twist, almost like a mystery novel. There's a twist that happens in the middle of the psalm that's confusing, almost disorienting.

And then as you come to the end of the psalm, things are clarified. And you go, oh, I see, it wasn't Genesis 1 all along. It was another part of the book of Genesis.

But let me show you, first of all, what I mean by this. When you look at the opening verses here, we're told, first of all, it's a psalm of David. That is important. But then David goes on to write.

And the first two verses are a call, a call to worship. He says, This is a call to worship.

And it is directed at what the English Standard Version, the version I'm reading from this morning, what they translate as heavenly beings. Ascribe to Yahweh, oh, heavenly beings.

[11:38] Which is an interesting way to translate that phrase because literally the phrase is sons of God. Ascribe to the Lord or ascribe to Yahweh, oh, sons of God.

Now, there is another place where this exact phrase, sons of God, the exact words are used in the psalms to help us to understand what might have been going on in David's mind.

What might he have thought his readers would think of when they saw this at the very beginning of the psalm? It's in Psalm 89. I just want you to listen here. And you'll hear some creation type language, Genesis 1 type language.

Psalm 89, verse 5. Let the heavens praise your wonders, oh, Yahweh, your faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones. So that's a parallel phrase with the sons of God, the holy ones.

For who in the skies can be compared to Yahweh? Who among the heavenly beings, there it is, that's the phrase, that's the term, the sons of God.

[12:45] Who among the sons of God is like Yahweh, a God greatly to be feared in the council of the holy ones and awesome above all who are around him. The portrait here is of God, a God whom the heavens themselves praise and declare his glory and his wonder.

The skies tell of God's greatness and his glory. And even the holy ones or the sons of God are called to recognize that. So that as you begin to read, you begin to think, okay, he's calling upon these sons of God, these heavenly beings, to ascribe to God the glory that is due to his name.

All of this is associated with creation type ideas. But it becomes more clear in Psalm 29, verse 3. Verse 3 begins with the first of seven instances, seven references to the voice of the Lord.

Verse 3, the voice of Yahweh is over the waters, and the God of glory thunders Yahweh over many waters. This verse itself draws the reader's mind.

If you know the Old Testament well, like David did, like he expects his readers to know it, and you read this about God being over the waters, your mind should immediately be drawn to Genesis chapter 1, verse 2, where we see the Spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters.

[14:21] There in the creation account, God is over the waters, exercising his sovereignty over these waters. Now, in Genesis chapter 1, when you read that reference, we're also told that the earth was formless and void, which is a way of saying that it's not suitable for human habitation.

In the ancient world, when they thought about the waters, or the depths, or the deep, they thought of it as a place that's not fit for human habitation. It's not a place where human beings can live.

We can sail upon the ocean, even though it's dangerous, especially in the ancient world, but it's not where we belong. And so, what we see in Genesis chapter 1 is God exercising sovereign rule over the world that he's made, but he's not finished with it yet, because he's not yet made the world suitable for his image bearers to live upon.

And the days of creation, as they unfold, God, throughout the creation story, is preparing the world for humanity. He causes there to be light. He speaks, and there's light.

He speaks, and there is a separation of the waters in the sky from the waters below. He speaks, and land comes up. He speaks, and he creates birds, and fish, and animals. He creates all of these things.

[15:40] He makes the world suitable for human beings to live upon it. And he does all of that on each day of creation. He does it all through speaking, so that when you hear this repeated reference to the voice of the Lord in Psalm 29, and the Lord being over the waters, your mind is immediately drawn to Genesis chapter 1.

And you began to think, I see. I see what's happening here. This psalm is a call for these angelic beings to worship God as the creator of all things.

I think David is intentionally setting us up to think that. To look back all the way to Genesis 1, and almost revel in God's creative power.

But then all of a sudden, there's a turn, and it shows you the artistry of David. We know that David is a poet, but he shows himself to be a brilliant poet as he turns the corner here in Psalm 29.

He says, in verse 5, the voice of Yahweh breaks the cedars. Yahweh, he says, shatters or breaks the cedars of Lebanon.

[17:01] Now, Lebanon, at the time of David's reign, Lebanon is on the northern border of David's kingdom of Israel.

It's the nation just to the north of them. And what Lebanon was most well known for in that time was their massive forests, with these huge cedar trees.

In fact, when you read later on, you read about Solomon building the temple. He got the wood, he got the timber for the building of the temple from these massive cedar trees in Lebanon. He had them imported down to Jerusalem so that he could build the temple.

Lebanon was famous for its massive trees, and its forests that covered so much area. It was well known for that. Israel is not known for that, of course.

Israel is not known for its forests. It's a fertile land, but it's not a land of forests, and that sort of greenery and these tall, massive trees. It's not known for that. But to the north, on the northern edge of David's kingdom, there's another nation with these massive trees.

[18:08] Not only massive trees, but a fairly good-sized mountain range. Verse 6, Now what's going on here?

What does he mean by all of this? Breaking trees and making Lebanon skip like a calf? The mountains like a young wild ox? What is he describing here?

All of this is language describing the violent destruction of the lands to the north. It's a picture of these waters that he presides over.

These waters coming in with such force and in such magnitude and in such quantity that they flow over the mountains, moving and shaking the mountains themselves, and breaking and smashing the trees to pieces.

Now we've seen a little bit of that, haven't we? I mean, we've seen large floods come through, floods that are big enough to uproot trees and break trees. We've seen tornadoes that can come through an area and rip a tree in half.

[19:20] We've seen a little bit of that. But David is describing things on a scale much larger than anything that you or I have ever seen. He's describing floodwaters that are able to cover mountain ranges and shake the foundations of the mountains themselves and to break the massive trees of this forest.

This, it turns out, is not a picture of a serene creation. This is a picture of judgment. He turns the corner quickly on us there.

But he goes on. Verse 7. The voice of Yahweh flashes forth flames of fire. Probably a reference to lightning. The voice of Yahweh shakes the wilderness.

Yahweh shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. So now, in this verse, we are moving from the northern border of Israel down to the southern border of Israel, the wilderness of Kadesh.

That's the southern border of David's kingdom. So those to the north, there's a great judgment, flood judgment, that sweeps over them. Now, down in the south, there's a great flood judgment that sweeps over them.

[20:28] God shatters the wilderness. He shakes up Kadesh. Verse 9. The voice of the Lord makes the deer to give birth and strips the forest bare.

And in his temple all cry glory. In other words, the only right response of God's people to this judgment that they see is to stand back in reverence and fear and glorify the Lord.

What began as a seeming reference back to creation has turned into a violent picture of God's judgment.

And if it's not clear yet, it becomes very clear in verse 10, where we read, The Lord, Yahweh, sits enthroned over the flood.

Now, that word flood is used 13 times in the entire Old Testament. 13 times. 12 times. 12 times. It is used in the account of the flood of Noah in Genesis 6 through 9.

[21:45] This is the only time, this word for flood, the only time that it is used outside of the story of the flood in Genesis chapter 6.

Which means that what David has been doing is he has been sort of stealthily turning and moving our attention to one of the greatest acts of judgment that God ever brought upon the world.

He begins by pointing our eyes back to Genesis, and we think that we're focused on Genesis chapter 1, but the reality is David is describing the events of Genesis chapter 6, 7, 8, and 9.

The flood of Noah. God's judgment come upon a world that is full of sin, that is broken. And that even causes us, as we get to verse 10, that makes us go back and re-read, and re-understand, re-interpret the opening of this passage.

Because Genesis chapter 6 also contains a reference to the sons of God. The sons of God, we're told in Genesis chapter 6, saw that the daughters of men were attractive, and they came and they took them as their wives.

[23:01] And that's one aspect, that's one thing that begins to trigger God's judgment upon the world. It's not the only thing. The primary thing is the sinfulness of mankind. But all of these things are wrapped together in Genesis chapter 6, and they bring God's judgment into the world.

Which means that in the opening verses, once we read the beginning of Psalm 29, in light of the end of Psalm 29, we recognize that David is not calling upon these beautiful angelic messengers to praise God.

That's not what he's doing. He's commanding rebellious, disobedient, fallen angelic beings to ascribe to the Lord the glory that's due to his name.

He's commanding those who lie eternally under God's judgment to give him praise. Now, on a side note, this is not, I don't think, the point of the passage, but on a side note, what this reveals to us is that God's commands do not imply the ability of those commanded to obey those commands.

It may seem like a small thing, but I want you to ponder that for a moment. When God commands someone to do something, His command does not automatically mean that they have the ability on their own to obey that command.

[24 : 28] That matters. That matters because there are commands that are given in Scripture, and later on we learn that those who were commanded those things were unable. They didn't have the right kind of heart in order to be able to obey those commands.

It means that even though we are commanded to tell everyone everywhere to repent and believe in the gospel, not everyone will be able to do that. In fact, no one is able to do that unless God does something in their hearts.

So a command can be issued, even directed at these fallen angelic beings with no expectation that they can actually obey. It's just the recognition that they owe God.

They owe God glory. And that they ought to ascribe to Him and give to Him the glory that's due to His name.

What initially seems to be a calm glance back at the creation account turns out to be a look back at one of the most significant events of God's judgment entering into the world.

[25 : 45] David expects the people of Israel to be able to navigate the future in the light of God's past judgment of the world.

That's where he's moving in verses 10 and 11. That's where he's headed in verses 10 and 11. We haven't gotten there yet, but I want you to understand that. That in order for us to have the courage and the strength to move forward, in order for us to be able to take the next step, even when we don't know what's coming next, we don't just look back.

We don't just search through the scriptures for inspiring little phrases, for stories that make us feel better. We don't just look back there. When we long for healing, we don't only look back at the places where Jesus healed people.

We have to also look back, for instance, when He heals one lame man at a pool in Jerusalem and not everybody else. Or we have to look back that though the apostles healed many people, we look back and we recognize Paul is in anguish over the illness of one of his coworkers, apparently unable to just pronounce healing upon him.

Paul himself endures his thorn in the flesh and that's not removed by God. We have to look back upon the hard passages, the passages that show us God's not coming in and immediately rescuing everybody all the time.

[27 : 13] We have to look back even at those and even those stories cast light ahead for us and help us to begin to take steps. How do they do that though?

How could it be that David would change, switch, direct our attention toward the flood, toward this destructive event and then expect that to somehow be an encouragement to us?

Well, let's look here at the end of this passage so that we can see a little bit more clearly so that we can understand what's happening. verse 10, Yahweh sits enthroned over the flood and Yahweh sits enthroned as king forever.

So let me offer a slightly different translation to that that might help us. I think it might be better. Intense is a hard thing.

English is a tense language like we have time in all of our verbs. So it's really hard though when you're translating Hebrew into English to always know what tense to put it in in English.

[28:23] It's just a different kind. It's a different language. The verbs work a little differently. Which means that there's some, there's a little bit of malleability there in terms of how we translate things and what tense we put them in.

I think in order to rightly understand David, probably the way that we ought to read this is, Yahweh sat, past tense, enthroned over the flood.

Since we're talking about Genesis 6 through 9. He sat enthroned over the flood. He didn't lose control of the world. In fact, he was exerting his sovereign rule over the world in the flood.

The flood is not just a sign of man's sinfulness. It is also a sign of God's sovereign rule over all of his creation. That's what the flood shows us.

God remains in control. Even in the face of the rebellion of these angelic beings. Even in the face of incredible, mounting, increasing wickedness among humanity. God is still in control.

[29:25] And when he decides no more, he floods the earth. God was on his throne at the time of the flood. He sat enthroned over the flood. And moreover, in the present, he sits enthroned as king forever.

The display of God's power in past judgments is a reminder that he still retains that same sovereignty and power even now.

And therein lies the encouragement for God's people. Verse 11, This God who sat enthroned over the flood, who reigns currently as king forever, may he, may Yahweh, give strength to his people.

The one who has all strength and all power, whom even these fallen heavenly beings are called to ascribe and acknowledge his strength and power. This one, may he give strength to his people.

And may he bless his people with peace. Isn't that what we want more than anything else?

[30:44] To navigate a broken, fallen world, isn't what we want more than anything else to have peace in the midst of that world? When I look at the year ahead, yes, I imagine all the good things that can happen, all the great things that can happen, but I'm aware of all the bad things that could happen.

I'm not an anxious person. That's just not my nature. I don't sit around and worry about those things. I don't sit around and speculate about what bad things might happen, but I'm aware of them so that I don't skip into the new year blindly, unaware that there might be a steep drop-off in front of me.

I know that those things are out there, and so what I need if I'm going to move forward in this world, I need peace. But I need a kind of peace that only comes from God himself.

I need the kind of peace that Noah and his family had. As they sat boarded up in the ark while the rest of the world was deluged by the flood.

Can you imagine? It's just you and your family and all of these animals and the rest of the world is underwater. The treetops covered.

[32:05] The mountaintops covered. It's just you and a storm and you're navigating and just trying to hang on in the midst of all of this. But you have a promise.

You have a promise that God will deliver you and your family from this flood. That's peace. That's the kind of peace that we need to have.

That's the kind of peace that David calls upon God to give to his people. The reality is that this kind of peace, like it came to Noah and his family almost always comes in the midst of God's hand of judgment around us.

Which means that God works in such a way that he brings out of a dark, difficult, dangerous world upon which he has pronounced his judgment.

He brings out of that the very means of our salvation that bring us peace. In fact, one biblical theologian sums up the story of the Bible.

[33:19] He says that the central theme of the Bible is the glory of God in salvation through judgment. And the point that he's making there is that God always saves people through his judgment.

He saved Noah and Noah's family through the judgment of the flood, didn't he? This is how God works. This is how God rescues his people. God rescues Israel over and over in the book of Judges.

He rescues them even as he judges their enemies, enemies. This is how God works. God saves us and rescues us through by means of his judgment.

The problem for us is that if we're really honest we will admit that we don't deserve entry into the ark.

We deserve to be left out in the fields and on the sides of the mountains as the flood waters come and rage. If we're really honest all of us have to admit that we've broken God's law.

[34:37] Over and over we've broken God's law. We've coveted. We've taken things that don't belong to us. Or as Jesus says we have lusted and therefore committed adultery in our hearts.

Or we have hated our brothers without cause and therefore committed murder in our hearts. We have all of us are law breakers to varying degrees of course but all of us are law breakers.

Therefore all of us deserve to be on the outside of the ark. We deserve the flood to come and sweep us away. So how are we to have access to this salvation that comes through God's judgment if we deserve God's judgment?

judgment. That's where the good news of the gospel comes into play. Because God does indeed always save through judgment.

But listen to this Galatians 3:13 Christ redeemed us rescued us bought us out of slavery.

[35:44] He redeemed us from the curse of the law. The judgment that belongs to us because of our law breaking. He redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.

As it is written cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree. God brings salvation to people who deserve judgment through the judgment of his own son.

And that's the gospel. And that's the good news. The good news is not that you're okay. You're a decent person and God loves you and so everything's going to be okay for you.

That's not the good news. That's not honest. And when you hear that, you may on the surface like that, but you know deep in your heart, you know if it's based upon, if your deliverance is based upon some speck of goodness in you, you know that leaves you without hope.

You know it deep down. But it doesn't. Christ bore the judgment that we deserve so that we could receive the salvation that he earned.

[36 : 54] And the glory of God is put on display in salvation through judgment. It's a beautiful picture of what God actually does to rescue his people.

David lays before the eyes of his readers the dangers of the floodwaters all around Israel.

And if they reach the heights of the mountains of Lebanon, what would keep them from sweeping through the nation? Nothing. Save the Lord himself who sits enthroned over the floodwaters, who sits enthroned as king, and who will give strength to his people and bless his people with peace.

You can take a step forward into an unknown future. You can. Even if the last year has been incredibly disappointing.

Not what you thought it would be, not what you hoped it would be, not the turnaround that you wanted from the previous two years. you didn't get all the things you asked for, that you pled for, even if, you can take a step forward.

[38 : 18] You can. And not because God guarantees that this will be the year of the turnaround for you. No. But because God himself was sovereign over the flood.

And he is sovereign over everything in our lives and over the dark future in front of us that we don't know whether it holds blessing or it holds pitfalls. We don't know.

He is sovereign over all of it and in the midst of it, regardless, without regard for what lies in front of us, he will grant us strength and peace if we are among his people.

If your faith and trust is in Jesus and his blood has indeed taken upon him the judgment that you deserve, if he has absorbed and paid with his blood the price for your sins, you can take a step.

I'm not promising that you can run arms wide open embracing with unbounded joy whatever lies ahead. No, I'm not promising you that.

[39 : 27] What I'm saying to you is you can have the strength to take a step ahead. And even you step and that first step oof, that was a difficult one.

I stumbled there. You can have peace. You can have peace when the road ahead is falling apart. You can be filled with peace if you are among his people.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Thank you.