

PSALM 29 (Voice of the Lord)

1. Give unto the LORD, O ye mighty, give unto the LORD glory and strength.

No better way to start this discussion than Hannah's prayer, found at 1 Samuel chapter 2:

2 And Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the LORD, mine horn is exalted in the LORD: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation.

2 There is none holy as the LORD: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God.

3 Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogancy come out of your mouth: for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed.

4 The bows of the mighty men are broken, and they that stumbled are girded with strength.

5 They that were full have hired out themselves for bread; and they that were hungry ceased: so that the barren hath born seven; and she that hath many children is waxed feeble.

6 The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up.

7 The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up.

8 He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and he hath set the world upon them.

9 He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail.

¹⁰ The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the LORD shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed.

Now, I will confess as I started work on this sermon I was looking for an excuse to remind you of Hannah's beautiful prayer; this Psalm in its entirety (not just the opening verse) seemed well-suited for that opportunity.

That aside, the focus of this verse is "ye mighty." Who is that talking about? The answer is probably two-fold: (1) the angels; and (2) the world's governmental and political leaders.

Angels: The Hebrew word used here denotes "ye sons of the mighty"; strong, mighty, a mighty one, a hero. *The allusion is undoubtedly to the angels as being in an eminent sense the sons of God, or of the mighty ones; and they are referred to here under that appellation as being themselves endowed with power or strength.* (Barnes). **Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. (Psalm 103:20). For who in the heaven can be compared unto the Lord? Who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the Lord? (Psalm 89:6).**

Earth's rulers: The admonition contained in this verse can also be deemed as applying to the world's potentates, necessary because (1) they (almost to the man) are apt to forget the true and living God and insolently and shamelessly assume a kind of deity unto themselves (just look at them), and (2) their conviction of the glory and strength of God is sure to have a great, beneficial and powerful influence upon those they rule.

² Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.

The glory due unto his name, i.e. the honor which he deserves; which is to prefer him before all other gods, and to forsake all others, and to own him as the Almighty, and the only true God. (Poole).

Worshiping the Lord in the beauty of holiness surely refers to his sanctuary, his holy and [] beautiful house, where our (spiritual) fathers praised thee (Isaiah 64:11), which is the only place he will receive worship. Another probable interpretation would be a reference to the state of the heart with which we should approach God, with a holy, pure and sincere state of mind.

³ The voice of the LORD is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the LORD is upon many waters.

Here for the first of several times in this Psalm, we are presented with the phrase “the voice of the Lord” – on this occasion in the context of waters. My sermon from a few weeks back discussed the significance of waters when it comes to the Lord’s work. That sermon included:

*The focus is on water and its role in that great work of creation. Almighty God stretched out the earth above the waters (Psalm 136:6), a magnificent notion that the human mind cannot fully grasp. * * * **

Such a marvelous creation standing upon such a relatively weak foundation as water is again beyond our frail abilities to comprehend. But it is beyond cavil that this earth indeed rests upon such a foundation, specifically the fountains of the great deep and the windows of heaven. (Genesis 7:11).

This verse tells us the voice of the Lord is upon those many and various waters; that is to say, when you experience the power and majesty of oceans, great lakes and seas, you hear the Lord's voice. The sound of mighty running waters connotes fury, strong winds, destruction, storm bursts and peals of thunder. In a word, the Lord's voice is awe-inspiring!

Of Ezekiel's four living creatures, it is said **when they went, I heard the noise of their wings like the noise of great waters, as the voice of the Almighty, the voice of speech, as the noise of an host[.]** (Ezekiel 1:24). Another passage says: **The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee; they were afraid: the depths also were troubled. The clouds poured out water: the skies sent out a sound: thine arrows also went abroad. The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world: the earth trembled and shook. Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known.** (Psalm 77:16-19). These and many other Scripture examples give us an idea of the majestic and soul-rattling voice of the Lord.

This passage from the Treasury of David best captures what I am trying to convey here:

[The voice of the Lord upon the waters, like peals of thunder from on high] surpasses all other sounds, it inspires awe, it is entirely independent of man, and has been used on some occasions as the grand accompaniment of God's speech to Adam's sons. There is peculiar terror in a tempest at sea, when deep calleth unto deep, and the raging sea echoes to the angry sky. No sight more alarming than the flash of lightning around the mast of the ship; and no sound more calculated to inspire a reverent awe than the roar of the storm.

⁴The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.

The Lord's voice has its own intrinsic power and majesty.

Power: As we know from life's experiences, some voices are strong and attention-grabbing while others are frail and virtually unnoticeable. But nothing in the human experience compares to the Lord's voice. *Allusion may be made to what seems to be the effect of thunder in prostrating trees, or tearing off their limbs, or it may be merely to the loud sound of the thunder.* (Barnes). When Jesus came to Capernaum, having just escaped being cast down headlong from a high hill by an angry mob, **he taught them on the Sabbath days. And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power.** (Luke 4:31, 32).

Majesty: The Lord's voice is grand, sublime, mighty and overpowering. That wonderful voice is evident proof (Exhibit A) of God's glorious majesty. Speaking of things concerning the king, the Psalmist exclaimed: **Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty. And in thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness[.]** (Psalm 45:3, 4).

⁵The voice of the LORD breaketh the cedars; yea, the LORD breaketh the cedars of Lebanon.

Cedars are mentioned here as the loftiest trees in the forest, remarkable for their size and grandeur. **His legs are as pillars of marble, set upon sockets of fine gold: his countenance is as Lebanon, excellent as the**

cedars. (Song of Solomon 5:15). Those tall and large cedars of Lebanon, famous world round, are shivered and utterly broken by the Lord's voice!

*The voice of the Lord breaketh the cedars,.... Such an effect thunder has upon the tallest, strongest, and largest trees, as to break them into shivers; * * * and to which may be compared proud, haughty, lofty, and stouthearted sinners, who are broken, brought down, and laid low, by the voice of Christ in his Gospel, his power attending it. (Gill).*

⁶ He maketh them also to skip like a calf; Lebanon and Sirion like a young unicorn.

Continuing the theme from verse 5, the Lord makes these massive and impressive cedar trees of Lebanon to skip like calves. **The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs.** (Psalm 114:4). The picture here is of a power so immense that these magnificent trees were uprooted to the point they appeared to be skipping or dancing along.

*[T]he cedars, the branches being broken off, or they torn up by the roots, and tossed about by the wind; which motion is compared to that of a calf that leaps and skips about; * * * This may regard the inward motions of the mind, produced by the Gospel of Christ under a divine influence[.] (Gill).*

Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. (Isaiah 35:5, 6).

7 The voice of the LORD divideth the flames of fire.

This interesting phrase “flames of fire” is likely a reference to flashes of lightning. Flashes of lightning are awe-inspiring and attention-grabbing, in all times and all places. O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? For your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away. Therefore have I hewed them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth: and thy judgments are as the light (lightning) that goeth forth. (Hosea 6:4, 5).

Dividing these flames of fire is an allusion to the phenomenon of clouds appearing to cleave or open up to accommodate sudden flashes of lightning. The voice of the Lord seems *to cleave or open the clouds for the flames of fire to play amidst the tempest.* (Barnes). **He gave them hail for rain, and flaming fire in their land.** (Psalm 105:32).

Gill describes a spiritual application of these words this way: *the giving of the law on Mount Sinai, on which the Lord descended in fire, and from his right hand went a fiery law; (or) this may be applied to the cloven or divided tongues of fire which sat upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost, as an emblem of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit bestowed on them; though it seems best of all, as before, to understand this of the voice of Christ in the Gospel, which cuts and hews down all the goodness of men, and lays them to the ground, and is of a dividing nature, and lays open all the secrets of the heart, and, through the corruption or human nature, is the occasion of dividing one friend from another, and like flames of fire it has both light and heat in it; it is the means of enlightening men's eyes to see their sad estate, and their need of Christ, and salvation by him; and of warming their souls*

with its refreshing truths and promises, and of inflaming their love to God and Christ, and of setting their affections on things above, and of causing their hearts to burn within them.

**⁸The voice of the LORD shaketh the wilderness;
the LORD shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh.**

As we near the end of those verses in this Psalm dealing with the voice of the Lord, a few observations on “voice” would be good. There are four characteristics of a voice: Quality, Pitch, Volume and Pause/Rate. Quality refers to the individual sound of a particular voice. Often one can identify a person just by hearing his voice, even off in the distance. Pitch refers to the relative highness or lowness of the voice, while volume deals with the strength, force or intensity of the voice. Finally, pause/rate refers to the speed at which words are spoken.

Looking a bit closer at “quality”, our voices are as unique as fingerprints, similar on the surface but with endless variations. Although some people might sound quite a bit alike, no two voices are exactly alike. We each have a unique voice because so many factors work together to produce that voice.

Transporting these elementary principles over to our text, two Bible passages stand out:

1. Our original parents, having discovered their sinful nature immediately after their fall (**the eyes of them both were opened**), **heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God**

amongst the trees of the garden. (Genesis 3:7, 8). Note the impact of that powerful, probing voice, and also note that those two original sinners knew and recognized that voice for what it was – the unique voice of the Lord.

2. The iconic pronouncement of Jesus while he was here on this earth: **My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me[.]** (John 10:27). This is limiting language. The Lord's sheep – and only the Lord's sheep – hear the voice of the Lord for what it is.

Returning to this text, we deal with the volume, strength and force of the Lord's voice. That powerful voice literally causes the earth and its wildernesses to tremble and quake. When you see a powerful earthquake, you must think of the Lord's voice. Ditto when great storms cause trees to crash and mud to slide.

⁹The voice of the LORD maketh the hinds to calve, and discovereth the forests: and in his temple doth every one speak of his glory.

This verse deals with the impact of the Lord's voice on his chosen people; they seek and find refuge and safety in the Lord's temple. Discovering the forests is an allusion to the revelation of secrets of the thickets and deep things of God. As Poole writes: *Having showed the terrible effects of God's power in other places, he now shows the blessed privilege of God's people, that are praising and glorifying God, and receiving the comfortable influences of his grace in his temple, when the rest of the world are trembling under the tokens of his displeasure; by which he secretly*

invites and persuades the Gentiles, for their own safety and comfort, to own the true God and to worship him in his sanctuary[.]

¹⁰ The LORD sitteth upon the flood; yea, the LORD sitteth King for ever.

Sitting denotes a posture of passing judgment; judges sit at their bench. The flood references Noah's great deluge, and all lesser included flooding events stemming from the great waters that surround this earth. God is in control of all such; he sits as the King forever, in this context. Floods are not the result of random events or physical science, but under the exclusive control of the almighty ruling King. Violent inundations of water that sometimes fall from clouds upon this earth would do much mischief if God did not prevent it. **And I will establish my covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth. . . . and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh.** (Genesis 9:11, 15).

¹¹ The LORD will give strength unto his people; the LORD will bless his people with peace.

The Lord will provide strength to his jewels in the midst of dreadful storms, tempests, commotions and dangers. He will give them internal peace which is peculiar to them and of which wicked men are strangers. **And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.** (Malachi 3:17).