

"How to Worship Like a Christian" Psalm 29

Introduction

- In the spring of 1992, my college friend Erik Veerman and I came in from a thunderstorm one evening and witnessed the most amazing lightning show I've ever seen in my life. Outside the tornado sirens were screaming, there's this ominously blackened sky. We wanted to see what might happen so we grabbed a couple of seats in the first-floor lounge of Traber Dorm—in front of a series of, maybe five or six, large West facing picture windows (which looking back now was really stupid). And for 30 minutes we gazed and gawked at this branching tree-like lightning horizontally blazing across our entire field of vision. I remember feeling small and insignificant compared to the brilliance of those bolts—hopelessly powerless compared to the power unleashed by that storm.
- Thunderstorms are one of the most powerful and spectacular forces on Earth. Most of us have one or two thunderstorm stories of our own. At any given moment, there are about 1,800 bellowing towers of cumulonimbus clouds happening around the world. Let me remind you how powerful thunderstorms are.
 - The wind. It is not uncommon for thunderstorms to produce 120 mph downbursts of wind. In fact, downbursts up to 150 mph have been recorded. We all have seen what winds of this speed can do.
 - The amount of water in a thunderstorm is staggering. One inch of rainfall over an acre of land weighs 226,000 pounds. If that same storm occurs uniformly over a ten by ten mile area, a relatively modest size for a thunderstorm, you're talking about 7.2 million tons of rain water. Now think about this. The record 24 hour rainfall for the U.S. happened in Alvin, TX. 45 inches in 24 hours.
 - How about lightning. Lightening produced by a thunderstorm can heat the air to roughly 50,000 degrees Fahrenheit. That's about five times hotter than the surface of the sun. The electric power of lightning is equivalent to 100 million light bulbs shining in your face.
 - This is the most humbling thing. Think about this power. In an average thunderstorm, the energy released amounts to about 10 million kilowatt-hours, which is equivalent to a 20-kiloton nuclear warhead. The average thunderstorm carries the energy of twenty thousand tons of TNT. A large, severe thunderstorm might be 10 to 100 times more energetic. In other words, a large thunderstorm, in one day, releases enough energy to power the entire United States for six months.
- This morning, we continue our series through the Psalms called *The Songs of Life*. One of the chief purposes of the psalms is to teach us how to emote, how to feel emotion in a god-glorifying way. So far we've looked at how to **gripe** like a Christian; how to **doubt** like a Christian; how to take **revenge** like a Christian; how to **regret** like a Christian; and now, this

morning, how to **worship** like a Christian. You and I have been crafted by God to worship. We all worship something—even if it isn't the God who created us.

- The problem is that too frequently our worship of God—even if it's biblical—is small, frail, feeble, powerless and boring. Do you realize the generation my age and younger is bored with the god evangelicalism has worshiped the last 25 years? He's no longer enthralling. He's become blasé. The reason this psalm is so critical is because it reminds us that our view of God is too small. The smaller the god the more impoverished the worship. The greater the god, the more worship is supercharged. And no god is as great as Yahweh, the God of the Bible.

Transition

The reason we are looking at Psalm 29 today as we think about how to worship like a Christian is because this psalm teaches us that...

Proposition

- **An exhilarating and exalted view of God produces exalted, exhilarating worship**

Transition

The picture of God in Psalm 29 is one of the most awe inspiring—one of the most exhilarating pictures there is of Yahweh, the God of the Bible. Psalm 29 is often referred to as the song of the thunderstorm, where God is likened to this huge, immense, unfolding thunderstorm.¹ By this image of a thunderstorm we're reminded that Yahweh is no small, weak God. He is the supreme sovereign ruler. He is the God of "bright excess, overwhelming largeness, and the far reaches of his being exceed all human understanding."² He is not a god who politely and demurely asks us to worship him; in this psalm he towers above like a thunderstorm in all his majesty and glory and summons us to bow and worship him with exhilaration and awe. This is a god truly worthy of our worship.

- Let me just pause for a second and talk for a second about how our view of God has shrunk—how our view of God has become so unlike Yahweh of Psalm 29. Have you ever wondered how we can be living during a period in church history where there is an explosion of worship taking place all over the world and yet that explosion of so-called worship is not producing changed lives in proportion? I want to talk for a second about how small our view of God really is and how that has diluted our worship.
- To help paint a picture of the current landscape I want to draw from a book by [David Wells](#) called God in the Wasteland. He writes, "It is one of the remarkable features of contemporary church life that so many are attempting to heal the church by tinkering with its structures, its services, its public face. This is clear evidence that modernity [modernity is his way of describing the wealthy, consumer oriented America we live in] has successfully palmed off one of its great deceits on us, convincing us that God himself is secondary to organization and image, that the church's health lies in its flow charts, its convenience, and its [programs] rather than in its inner life, its spiritual authenticity, the toughness of its moral intentions, its understanding of what it means to have God's Word in this world. Those who

¹ DBI, p. 869.

² Wells, p. 122.

do not see this are out of touch with the deep realities of life, mistaking changes on the surface for changes in the deep waters that flow beneath. An inspired group of marketers might find a way of reviving a flagging business by modifying its image and [programs], but the matters of the heart, the matters of God, are not susceptible to such cosmetic alteration. The world's business and God's business are two different things. The fundamental problem in the evangelical world today is not inadequate technique, insufficient organization, or antiquated music, and those who want to squander the church's resources bandaging these scratches will do nothing to stanch the flow of blood that is spilling from its true wounds. The fundamental problem in the evangelical world today is that God rests too inconsequentially upon the church. His truth is too distant, his grace is too ordinary, his judgment is too benign, his gospel is too easy, and his Christ is too common."³

- He goes on to explain that because the culture of modernity so powerfully permeates every aspect of our lives our view of God has even been affected. He says, "We have turned to a God that we can use rather than to a God we must obey; we have turned to a God who will fulfill our needs rather than to a God before whom we must surrender our rights to ourselves. He is a God *for* us, for our satisfaction—not because we have learned to think of him in this way through Christ but because we have learned to think of him this way through the marketplace. In the marketplace, everything is for us, for our pleasure, for our satisfaction, and we have come to assume that it must be so in the church as well. And so we transform the God of mercy into a God who is at our mercy."⁴
- Because we've transformed God into something that sells and is convenient God has lost his weightiness, his significance. Again I quote, "Indeed, our generation is rapidly growing deaf to the summons of the external God. He has been so internalized, so tamed by the needs of religious commerce, so submerged beneath the traffic of modern psychological need that he has almost completely disappeared. All too often, he now leans weakly on the church, a passive bystander, a co-conspirator in the effort to dismantle two thousand years of Christian thought about God and what he has declared himself to be. That is to say, God has become weightless. The church continues its business of satisfying the needs of self—needs defined by the individual—and God, who is himself viewed and marketed as a product, becomes powerless to change the definition of that need or to prescribe the means by which it might be satisfied. When the consumer is sovereign the product (in this case God himself) must be subservient."⁵
- And the results of doing church of this way are dire. Again Wells writes, "For a God who has thus lost weight is no longer the God of biblical faith or classical Christianity. A God with whom we are on such easy terms and whose reality is little different from our own—a God who is merely there to satisfy our needs—has no real authority to compel and will soon begin to bore us. This is not the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is scarcely even the God of the philosophers, and certainly not the God of Jesus Christ."⁶ I think this is why there are so few changed lives as a result of our worship services. We worship a diminished God

³ David Wells, God in the Wasteland, p. 30.

⁴ Wells, p. 114.

⁵ Wells, p. 101.

⁶ Wells, p. 93.

and so his capacity to call for change has likewise diminished. Does this not describe the current state of affairs in the church? With much shame I ask you, isn't this our Christianity?

- Let's do a little exercise to see if your view of God has shriveled. Without answering out loud or raising your hand answer this question. Is God your friend? If you answered that God is your friend, your view of God may be diminished. In John 15:14 Jesus says *You are my friends if you do what I command*. The one and only prerequisite for friendship with God in scripture is obedience. But this friendship is not reciprocal—its one way. In other words, it doesn't cut both ways. Jesus' friendship with us is based on obedience but in no way can we turn it around and say that Jesus will be our friend if he does what we say. In fact, nowhere in the Bible does it say that God or Jesus is a 'friend' of anyone.⁷ God may call Abraham and Moses friends. Jesus may call Lazarus friends. And he may call us his friends. But we cannot call him our friend without demeaning Him.⁸ He is God. His greatness is unsearchable.⁹ He is sovereign over all creation.¹⁰ He is robed in majesty. His throne was established long ago. He is from all eternity.¹¹ And he should fall before him in reverent worship.

Transition

A.W. Tozer said that in order for the church "to regain her lost power [it] must see heaven opened and have a transforming vision of God."¹² And that's what Psalm 29 gives us—heaven opened in the form of a thunderstorm and an exhilarating and exalted transforming vision of God that produces exalted, exhilarating worship. Not just exalted, exhilarating worship services but lives of worship in which we as God's servants offer our bodies as living sacrifices to Him.

Background

- Now I want you to keep in mind that this psalm parodies Baal the god of the ancient Canaanites. The Canaanites believed Baal was the lord of the storms. But in Psalm 29, Yahweh is superior in every way. This huge thunderstorm named Yahweh starts out in the Mediterranean Sea, or *over the mighty waters* as it says in verse 3. He moves eastward toward the coastal region of Palestine and makes landfall right over Lebanon. Baal is nowhere to be found. It is Yahweh who thunders and flashes and rumbles over the entire region of Palestine, then over the mountains that flank the eastern region and then into the wilderness and the desert beyond. And everywhere this storm goes, nothing can stand in its way. Yahweh is supreme.
- There are three sections to this psalm. First there is an invitation or call to worship in verses 1-2. These verses acknowledge the supremacy of God and call all people to glorify him. The second section is verses 3-9. Here we find God likened to a thunderstorm. The key feature of these verses is the sevenfold refrain *the voice of the LORD*. God's voice, like seven peals of thunder, rings from heaven for all to hear. And lastly, there is the response in verses 10-11. He is supreme. He rules. He alone is worthy of worship.

⁷ Carson, p. 522.

⁸ Carson, p. 522.

⁹ Psalm 145:3

¹⁰ Isaiah 40:12-14

¹¹ Psalm 93:1-2

¹² Tozer, A. W. *The Knowledge of the Holy*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1961, p. 114.

Transition

Let's look at [verses 1-2](#).

- Listen again. *Ascribe to the LORD, O mighty ones, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. 2 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.* What God deserves, what we are to give him is glory, strength, and worship because of his name and holiness. This is not a picture of an inconsequential God. He is not weightless in this psalm. He is not common. He's incomparable. Instead, God is adorned in the splendor of his holiness. His clothing is holiness. He is set apart. There is no sin in him. He has something to say. And He is able to stand in judgment of sin because he stands beyond, outside of sin. The picture of God here in verses 1-2 is the picture of a God whose very name, the essence of his character is the heavy weight of glory. Everything about him is glory, glory, glory. He is the most glorious being that ever was and is and is to come. He is the beatific vision. He is the One Isaiah saw and then cried "*Woe to me!*" I cried. "*I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.*"¹³ And as we shall see in a second, how awesome are his deeds. So great is his power that all the earth bows down to him.¹⁴ It is hard to put into words what Yahweh is really like. Who is this king of glory?

Transition

Maybe verses 3-9 will help. Look at [verses 3-9](#).

- Again, picture a thunderhead forming over the Mediterranean Sea. *The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD thunders over the mighty waters. 4 The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is majestic. 5 The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars; the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. 6 He makes Lebanon skip like a calf, Sirion like a young wild ox. 7 The voice of the LORD strikes with flashes of lightning. 8 The voice of the LORD shakes the desert; the LORD shakes the Desert of Kadesh. 9 The voice of the LORD twists the oaks and strips the forests bare. And in his temple all cry, "Glory!"* None can challenge God's supremacy. He's as swift and powerful as 120 mph downbursts. He pounds the sea with 7.2 million tons of water and stirs the sea to froth. His glory flashes and blazes five times hotter than the sun. All in his path are rendered impotent. The cedars splinter. The oaks of the forest are twisted and stripped when he speaks. His presence is electric and his power is humbling. He shakes the desert like twenty thousand tons of TNT. He thunders majestically from heaven and summons all on earth to fall before him and worship. His awesome ferocity transcends even the most magnificent of storms. He is not safe. And the only appropriate response in light of his character is to cry Glory!
- If you want to worship like a Christian, this is where it starts. This must be your view of God. Because if you start anywhere less than this not only does God himself become weightless and inconsequential but his commands become weightless, his love becomes weightless, his judgments becomes weightless, his grace becomes weightless, Christ becomes weightless—worship becomes weightless and inconsequential. Boring. Blasé. When we fail to view God as he really is, when we make him into whatever it is we need to

¹³ Isaiah 6:5

¹⁴ Psalm 66:2-3

meet our needs or the needs of the religious consumer we strip him of the very thing that makes him who he is—his god-ness. He becomes like us. Fortunately, He is not a diminished, shrunken, weak, small god. The Lord alone is God, his name is Yahweh, there is no other. What we need more than anything is an enthralling, exhilarating, exalted view of God that produces exalted, exhilarating worship.

Transition

That brings us to [verses 10-11](#).

Conclusion

- This psalm ends with a proper exalted perspective of who God really is. He's king. He rules. He's supreme. *The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD is enthroned as King forever. 11 The LORD gives strength to his people; the LORD blesses his people with peace.* To me, the amazing thing about these two verses is that in spite of this huge storm that has just thundered through, the psalm ends on a note of peace. Isn't that kind of surprising? *The LORD blesses his people with peace.* And he gives them strength. *The LORD gives strength to his people.* The storm thunders on the outside but to those on the inside, to those who recognize God's true character, for them it's like being in the eye of the storm—they're sheltered. Complete calm. In the eye of the storm we see that God is not simply raw naked power. In the eye of the storm we see that his incomparably great power is for a purpose. It's for our salvation. The chief purpose of God's display of power is that we might realize that compared to him we are nothing and we deeply need a savior. *The gospel...is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.*¹⁵ The trick for us is to see the whole thunderstorm. Not just the display of power from the outside, that exalting exhilarating transcendent picture of God's power which is sure to supercharge our worship. But to see his power from the inside, from the eye, where God powerfully works to bring us peace through Jesus Christ. Because it's completely possible to see the power of the storm, to see and understand how great God is and remain outside the eye, outside of his peace—stuck in the chaos of the storm. Where are you in relation to the eye? The way into the eye, the way to peace, the way out of the path of the storm is through the good news of the gospel which is about Jesus; that he died for our sins and rose from the grave. Will you come out of the rain, out of the storm, will you step away from your sin, your smallness, your insignificance and will you step into his grace? *I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, 20 which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, 21 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.*¹⁶ Pray with me.

¹⁵ Romans 1:16

¹⁶ Ephesians 1:18-21