

“CRY, GLORY!”

Psalm 29

There are some things, aren't there, which need to be read in a certain atmosphere. You read your horror stories on a dark night with the wind howling around outside, your love poems sitting in the wild heather with your loved one, your William Wordsworth wandering around the Lake District (with a repressed sister in tow for real authenticity). Some of the Psalms can be read like that – *Psalm 8* under the moon and stars, gazing into the vast reaches of the universe: *Psalm 19* sitting on a hillside as the rays of the rising sun begin to illuminate the broad sweep of creation. And *Psalm 29* at this time of year as the summer storm blows and bellows around you. As Spurgeon wrote, this needs to be read “*beneath the black wing of tempest, by the glare of the lightning, or amid that dubious dusk which heralds the war of the elements.*” This Psalm is raw power, naked energy throbbing through the created order from the heights of heaven to the depth of the earthly valleys. If you've got a Bible with you, you might like to follow as we work our way through it.

We begin in heaven, calling forth praise from the heavenly beings. The “*mighty ones,*” “*the sons of the gods*”, the angels who crowd ceaselessly around the throne of the One True God, Yahweh, God of the Universe, Creator of the rolling spheres, ineffably sublime. They don't normally need any encouragement at all to praise God – that's their job, their pleasure, their only reason for existence. But wait! Something special is going to happen, something that will leave even them agog with wonder and awe. Yahweh is going to demonstrate his glory, to let rip the power and strength of his being. His holiness will be disclosed for all to see – the splendour of himself and his works, the awesome wonder of his mighty presence.

Out over the sea things are beginning to stir. The swell is growing, the waves lapping higher and higher. And with the growing noise of the waters heaving around the rocks, crashing on to the shore, comes the long, low grumble of the voice of God. The clouds boil up over the horizon and scud in across the heaving expanse of foam and spray. The sun is darkened, the odd rays which pierce the dark clouds grow fewer and fewer. And as the great swirls of blackness tumble over the beach and the cliffs, as the wind picks up and magnifies the roaring of the ocean, so the voice of God begins to bellow in the crescendo of the approaching thunder.

Those who are caught outside in it stand there, listening, feeling the storm. It's terrifying in its power and noise. But it's so majestic, so thrilling, that they just don't want to move away. There's a kind of magnetism which holds everyone spell-bound. There's a majesty that can be described only as God-like. Nothing, no-one can imitate this display of pyrotechnics and pulse-quickening danger. There are louder noises in creation, there are stronger forces, there are ways of explaining it all away in the theories and equations of science. But this is beyond all that – the voice of Yahweh is powerful and majestic. It speaks not to the

ears, not to the mind, but to the very heart of those who witness it. To borrow the language of the ancient divines, it “*stirs the bowels*”, it hits you in the gut.

Overhead the storm passes, the voice of God rumbling for all to hear and feel. It sucks behind it the cold air of the sea, and pushes ahead the warm, electric air of the summer afternoon – pushes it relentlessly across the foreshore and the sand dunes, over the fields and gardens, on into the woods and forests. And as the first rush of the mighty wind hits the trees, as the booming voice of Yahweh cries out in majesty and power, the trees begin to bend. They flap back and forth, the tops of the branches down almost to the ground, the cracking and groaning of the branches under this terrible pressure seeming to argue with the thundering sound of God’s roaring. And as the pace and power builds to a force that seems totally insuperable, the cedars begin to snap.

Such is the power of the wind, such is the force of the thunder, that even those great cedars, with their wide trunks and buttressed branches cannot withstand it. Firstly the needles and the small twigs are torn off, then the larger branches and boughs are ripped from each other, crashing into the other trees, swirling upwards in the twisting winds. These cedars of Lebanon, these princely members of the forest community, so stately and so beautiful that their wood is used to glorify God in the Temple, are unable to cope with the power of Yahweh’s voice.

Up and over the forests blows the storm, the black clouds pouring deafeningly into the holes blown in the sky by the lightning. And with each crash of thunder, with each syllable of God’s mighty voice, the whole landscape shakes. Looking across the countryside, it seems as though the whole area is skipping about as the little stones and rocks jump to the rhythm of the thunder. Away in the distance, Mount Hermon, which the locals call “*Sirion*”, shimmers and shakes in the heat and the dust like a great bull cavorting in the field. The voice of Yahweh is moving the very mountains: even the landscape is responding to the call of Almighty God.

And in the middle of this great display of meteorological marvels, as the voice of Yahweh calls all creation to dance to his song, the sky is sliced by a huge flash of lightning. The air crackles and ripples in anticipation of the next great bellow from the heavens. The whole earth seems to be illuminated by the light of heaven: the splendour of God’s presence briefly invades the world of gloom and oppression. It’s a flash that rends the sky from one end to the other so that the voice of God can cry from the very heart of heaven to the heart of earth, the Creator calling to his creation through the torn veil of clouds and dust.

That flash kick-starts the progress of the storm once again, and the clouds and rain and wild, wild wind flap away across the desert – down from Lebanon, over Hermon, down to the south and east across the sandy

waves of the desert, sucking up the dust, rattling the stones, all across Kadesh and out into the lands towards Persia. It tears across the middle of the barren waste and rips around the edges. Great and ancient oaks are twisted like rag dolls, the wild animals are so terrified that they give birth prematurely, the leaves are torn from the trees as if a swarm of locusts has swept in from the north. This is awesome stuff! Almighty God shouts to all who cower in shelter, to all who stand amazed at the ferocity of the storm, to human and animal, to tree and rock, to leafless forest and wind-raked dunes.

And all who stand in the Temple of his creation cry “*Glory!*” Like the spontaneous applause at the end of a magnificent concert, or of a great sporting endeavour, or a powerful fireworks display, with one voice, those who witness it cry “*Glory!*” There is no other response. This is God – Almighty God visiting his creation, touching his earth with the raw power of his finger, reminding those who try to live their lives without acknowledging him that he is there – and he is not silent! The God of peace and tranquillity is also to be found in the whirlwind and the thunderstorm. The God of grace and compassion is also to be experienced in the energy of his own creativity. The still, small voice can also be heard as the magnificent shout of triumph!

His voice is heard in the storm, but he sits above it. He sits above the outpouring of the heavens, the thundering of the elements – just as he did when Noah’s ark of safety was tossed across the waters of the flood. He sits *there* because he’s always there – King for ever, King of kings, Lord of lords, the eternal and unchangeable God. Those who have neglected to honour him as king now have no excuse – he has spoken and all creation has heard.

And those who recognise him as Lord, as Almighty, as the One and Only True God - his own people - draw their strength from him. The awesome power demonstrated in the storm, the magnificent display of his might, the thundering voice heard above the waters – that belongs to your God and mine. That’s the God we worship, that’s the God who delights to hear our little choruses and our faltering prayers, the God who looks down on our pitiful attempts to ascribe glory and strength to him, who watches us struggling to worship him with our limited vocabulary and our hackneyed tunes and our flawed but well-meant attempts to live our lives for him – the God who, from time to time bursts out of heaven and leaves us gasping “*Glory! Glory!*” for we can do no other. “*The God who ‘spoke’ Nature into existence still speaks with immeasurable might through Nature.*” (R E O White) There are those who worship nature itself, and those who worship nothing but their own feeble attempts to explain it all away. As those who worship God, let us hear his voice whenever and however he speaks – and let us not be embarrassed when all we can reply is “*Glory! Glory to God in the highest!*”

For reflection and discussion

- 1) Spend some time sharing ways in which you have experienced God's glory – in creation, maybe, or at particular times in your own life. How has that affected your view of God?
- 2) We often speak of God's activity in the everyday things of life, but we tend not to talk about as much about his glory. Why do you think that is?
- 3) What emotions does this Psalm stir in you? Why?
- 4) How would a greater vision of God's glory affect our Christian lives?
- 5) What could you do to give yourself more opportunity to experience God's glory in your own situation?