

The Beauty of His Holiness

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Psalm 29 Give unto the LORD, O you mighty ones, Give unto the LORD glory and strength. ² Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name; Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness. ³ The voice of the LORD *is* over the waters; The God of glory thunders; The LORD *is* over many waters. ⁴ The voice of the LORD *is* powerful; The voice of the LORD *is* full of majesty. ⁵ The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars, Yes, the LORD splinters the cedars of Lebanon. ⁶ He makes them also skip like a calf, Lebanon and Sirion like a young wild ox. ⁷ The voice of the LORD divides the flames of fire. ⁸ The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; The LORD shakes the Wilderness of Kadesh. ⁹ The voice of the LORD makes the deer give birth, And strips the forests bare; And in His temple everyone says, "Glory!" ¹⁰ The LORD sat *enthroned* at the Flood, And the LORD sits as King forever. ¹¹ The LORD will give strength to His people; The LORD will bless His people with peace.

Psalm 29 - Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.

We desire that which is beautiful. We desire to be beautiful, and we desire to have beautiful things. In our Psalm, David reminds us that which is truly beautiful is that which is holy. This holiness is not the pompous holiness of those who think themselves better than others. It is not the stingy holiness of those who want to make sure everyone else is following every rule to the letter. That type of holiness is not beautiful. This is the true holiness which Paul describes in Galatians 5:22.

Galatians 5:22 "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control."

We when see someone exhibiting these characteristics, we understand what a rare and beautiful thing that is. In fact, we often even lie to make ourselves seem like such people. The same way that we often try to cover up our physical imperfections to make ourselves look more beautiful, so too we often lie to try to make our souls look more beautiful. We probably don't call it lying. We use words like "stretching the truth" or "exaggerating." In this dissemination we confess if only to ourselves that we lack this type of righteousness.

This is the beauty which we desire but which lack ourselves. However, the true beauty of holiness is seen in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We saw it in our gospel reading as Jesus describes God's love and patience with this sinful world. We saw it in how he himself would be lifted up like the serpent and given into death for sinners. This is what David is talking about

when he says, "the beauty of holiness." This is what David goes on to describe in this Psalm.

This is a beauty that we often find is greatly lacking in ourselves but which we find in Jesus.

Give unto the LORD, O you mighty ones, Give unto the LORD glory and strength.

The term mighty one, is the Hebrew word Elohim, which is the same word which in most context is translated God. It means the mighty one or the powerful one. Here it is clearly not being used of God, but of those who ought to give praise to Yahweh, the Lord God. It could be referring to kings, but in the context, it probably should be translated "gods" referring to the false gods of the Canaanites and the Philistines. Not that David believes that those gods are real but that those false gods should give way to the one true God.

This sets the stage for the psalm because in Psalm 29 David is contrasting Yahweh the Lord God, with the false idol of the Canaanites Baal. He does that by using both the imagery and the poetic style that is commonly found in the Canaanite and Phoenician mythologic poems to Baal. In short David takes the forms usually applied to Baal and shows how Yahweh, the Lord is greater.

Remember that Baal was supposedly the god of rain, storms, and fertility. These are the themes that David brings up in this Psalm, water, lightning, and the deer giving birth. He shows how Yahweh is greater than Baal in all these areas, how the waters and the fire/lightening and the birth of the deer are the works of God not Baal.

However, he also ties these images back to the history of Yahweh among his people. In this way he brings out not just God's strength and greatness but also that beauty of holiness, which is seen not in God's strength but in God's love for his people. Even as he describes the Lord's power, he is also reminding God's people of all those things that God has done for them in the past.

Thus, Yahweh is the God who dwells among his people and shepherds them, this is the beauty of his holiness. This is also what Jesus describes in our gospel reading.

John 3:16 God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.

This is what David describes in this Psalm the God that is all powerful, more powerful than Baal, but does not remain on high. God comes down among his people to give aid. This is the beauty of holiness.

As Moses reminded the Israelites:

Deuteronomy 4:7 "For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him?"

3 The voice of the LORD is over the waters; The God of glory thunders; The LORD is over many waters.

It is God who rules over the waters not Baal. But what does he do with those waters?

The same phrase that David uses here "the Lord is over the waters" immediately calls to mind: creation, the flood, and the exodus out of Egypt. In Daniel's vision he sees the man of God, "above the river." And In Revelation God's throne is before the sea.

Water is a source of cleansing and of life. Thus, in scripture water is a picture of God cleansing us from our sin and giving us life. On the first day of creation the Spirit of the Lord hovered over the face of the waters to give life to the unformed earth. The Lord cleansed Naaman through the waters of the Jordan. The children of Israel were brought out of Egypt through the waters of the red sea. That water gave them life.

Even the flood which we usually think of as a demonstration of God's judgement is described by Peter not as God's judgement but as God salvation. He saved Noah from the wickedness of that ancient world through the waters of the flood. Not only did

he save Noah, but he saved the world itself and he saved the promise of the Messiah. The waters of the flood washed away the evil of that ancient world so that righteousness could grow once again and so that God could bring forth his Son our savior.

Thus, Jesus also tells Nicodemus again in our gospel reading:

John 3:5 unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.

Thus, it is the Lord who has power over sea and storms and rain, but he is over the waters and in the waters to give life to his people. This is the beauty of the Lord's holiness that through the waters of the red sea he saved his people from Egypt and through the waters of baptism he gives to us life and salvation.

7 The voice of the LORD divides the flames of fire. 8 The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness; The LORD shakes the Wilderness of Kadesh.

These verses describe the storm, the lightning and the thunder and fire. This is a description of the Lord's power but again also a reminder of his grace and mercy. He divides the flames of fire and from it comes the voice of the Lord. The Lord spoke to Moses from the fire of the burning bush. The Lord appeared to

the Israelites as column of fire. Later he spoke to them from that cloud and fire.

Deuteronomy 5:22-23 22 "These words the LORD spoke to all your assembly, in the mountain from the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a loud voice; . . . 23 "So it was, when you heard the voice from the midst of the darkness, while the mountain was burning with fire, that you came near to me,

Again, he is above and over the fire, yet he comes through the fire to dwell with his people. This is also the beauty of holiness.

9 . . . And in His temple, everyone says, "Glory!" 10 The LORD sat enthroned at the Flood, And the LORD sits as King forever. 11 The LORD will give strength to His people; The LORD will bless His people with peace.

There is a sudden switch at the end of verse 9. The Psalmist is done using the Canaanite expressions. Now we are going to see the Lord in his true temple where his true people rejoice in holiness. It is the Lord alone who is true God. He showed his power that he is God in the flood, and he remains true God forever, but the true God who in his temple dwells with his people.

“The Lord is in his temple” that phrase when you stop to think about it, is quite a remarkable one. On the one hand it gives the impression of power and might and majesty and glory. The hymn reminds us “The Lord is in his temple, let all within keep silence, prostrate lie.” At the same time the Lord has come to his temple means that he is there to dwell with his people. The temple is an earthly construct where God's people gather. He comes in his majesty, but he comes to meet his people.

Revelation 21:3 Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people.

God is in his temple. That is to say yes, he is the God of the heavens, yes, he is the God above the waters, yes he is the God who created all things, but that does not mean that he is aloft and separate from his people. He dwells in his temple which is to say he dwells with his people.

This is a major theme of the whole Psalm. He is the God of thunder, but he divides that fire to speak to his people. He is the God who sits above the storms but through the waters he cleanses his people and gives them life. We see this same seeming contradiction in our gospel reading, that God is above and apart from sinners and yet dwells with them.

Jesus told Nicodemus **"No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven."** John 3:13

He is both the one who is separate from sinners and the one who came down to dwell with sinners. He can be both because although we are sinners our sins are forgiven through Jesus Christ who died and rose again. Having washed away the sins of his people he can now dwell with us while remaining separate from sin.

This is the beauty of God's holiness that he is both holy and merciful and that he gives to us that holiness through Jesus Christ. Amen