

Dr. Bruce Waltke, Psalms, Session 8, Hymn's Theology Psalm 29 20-min. Podcast Audio Overview

BiblicaleLearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Hey everyone, and welcome back for another Deep Dive. Today we're going to be looking at something a little different. We're going to be looking at hymns.

Hymns. Yeah, hymns. Those songs we sing in church, you know.

But we're not just talking about the music. We're going to be exploring how those hymns can actually teach us some pretty deep truths about God. Oh, okay.

I'm interested. Yeah. And to help us out, we've got some incredible material from a scholar named Dr. Bruce Waltke.

This guy knows his stuff, especially when it comes to the psalms. The psalms. Those are pretty poetic.

Very poetic. And you know what's really interesting? Dr. Waltke points out how some of those psalms, those hymns, actually connect back to ancient myths. Wait, myths? Like those stories about gods and goddesses? Exactly.

And we might be surprised to find out that those myths actually play a role in how the Bible talks about God's power. Okay. Now my curiosity has really piqued.

Yeah. It's pretty fascinating stuff. So I guess the first question is: how can we even learn theology from hymns? Right, right.

Well, the thing about hymns is that they give us this unique perspective on God. It's not like we're getting a direct lecture from a prophet or a wise sage. Instead, we're kind of like eavesdropping on someone's personal conversation with God.

Oh, I like that. Like we're listening in on their love letter to God. Exactly.

And through their words, their praises, their struggles, we start to get a glimpse of who God is. It's like these hymns create this doxological context for understanding him. We're learning about God through the praises of his people.

That makes a lot of sense. So it's not just about what the words say directly, but the whole context of praise and worship that surrounds those words. Right.

And what's even cooler is that these hymns, these expressions of praise from God's people, they actually become part of God's word to us. You mean they're considered inspired scripture? Exactly. They're not just nice songs.

They're part of the Bible, the same way the prophets' words or the apostles' letters are. Wow. I never really thought about it that way.

Yeah, it's pretty amazing. And when we start to dig into those hymns, we find all sorts of deep theological truths. But I think it helps to start with the basics.

God's attributes. Attributes like his characteristics. Exactly.

Like, what kind of God is he? What are his qualities? And the thing is, there are two main types of attributes. Those that are completely unique to God, that we humans can't even fully grasp. And then those that we share with him, but in a limited way.

So, like, God is all-powerful, all-knowing. That's not something we can claim. But love, well, we can experience and express love, even though God's love is on a whole other level.

You got it. Now, one of those unique-to-God attributes is called aseity. Aseity, that's a mouthful.

I know, right? But it basically means that God is self-existent. He just is. He doesn't depend on anything or anyone else for his existence.

Everything else, the whole universe, comes from him. Well, OK. So if God is self-existent and everything comes from him, does that mean we're totally dependent on him? Absolutely.

I mean, think about it. Our very existence, even the air we breathe, it all traces back to God. It's like we're connected to him in this really fundamental way.

Yeah, exactly. We're completely reliant on him for everything. It's a pretty humbling thought, isn't it? Yeah.

To realize just how much we owe to God. It really is. Dr. Waltke actually mentioned this beautiful ritual he shares with his wife every morning.

They give thanks to God, you know, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Oh, yeah. Yeah.

And they acknowledge that God always was, is now, and always will be. That's so powerful. It's like they're saying, God, you're the source of everything, and we recognize that every single day.

Exactly. And that really contrasts with the idea that matter is, you know, like, that's all there is to it. The Bible tells us that God created everything.

Even the laws of physics, the way the universe works, all reflect a creator behind it. It's not just random chance. It's like there's this incredible order, this design to the universe that points back to a designer.

Right. Dr. Waltke even brought up a quote from Einstein, who, you know, was an atheist. Yeah, I remember that.

But even Einstein, looking at the universe, was awestruck by its beauty and order. It's like he recognized that there had to be something more than just random chance at work. So even someone who didn't believe in God could see that there was something incredible going on.

Exactly. Okay, so we've talked about those unique to God attributes, but what about the ones we share, like love, mercy, justice? We see those play out in some really powerful ways in the Bible. Yeah, like that whole incident with the golden calf.

Right. God's people messed up big time. Big time.

But even in his anger, even in his righteous judgment, God still showed incredible mercy to his people. He didn't completely abandon them. It's reassuring to know that even when we mess up, God's grace can outweigh our mistakes.

And of course, we see that grace most perfectly in Jesus's sacrifice on the cross. Absolutely. That's the ultimate expression of God's love and mercy, which brings us to another important concept: God's incomparability.

Incomparability- what do you mean by that? Well, it means that God is totally unique. There's no one and nothing like him. He's the ultimate in holiness, power, love, everything.

Okay, but I've always wondered about this. The Bible sometimes refers to God as the king of kings or the God of gods. Doesn't that imply that there are other gods out there? That's where things get a little tricky.

You have to separate theological statements from what's happening in the real world. Theologically, there's only one true God. Yeah.

But in reality, yeah, people worship all sorts of things that aren't God at all. It's like what John Calvin said, right? Our minds are idle factories. We're constantly making something else to worship, something that takes God's place.

Exactly. It might not be a literal golden calf anymore, but anything that takes priority over God in our lives becomes our idol. And when we start worshiping those idols, we lose sight of the one true God.

That's a good reminder for all of us to check our hearts and make sure we're not putting anything before God. So we've talked about God's attributes, his incomparability. Now, when we start picturing God's dwelling place, heaven, things can get a bit tricky.

Yeah, because God is spirit, right? So how do we even begin to picture that? What does it even mean for God to have a dwelling place? Right. Well, the ancient people who wrote the Bible, they had this idea of the three-part universe. You had heaven, earth, and then the waters under the earth.

So, like a layered universe. Yeah, kind of. Okay.

And when they talked about God's dwelling, they were working within that framework. So when they say God is in heaven, they're using language and imagery that made sense to them. So it's more about conveying this concept that God is above and beyond us, rather than like a literal address in the sky.

Exactly. It's like trying to explain light and air to a baby who's still in the womb. You know, they only know darkness and the feeling of being surrounded by water.

Yeah, you'd have to use language and imagery that they could grasp. Right. It's the same with us trying to understand God's dwelling place.

We have to use the language and concepts we have, but we always have to remember that God is so much bigger than anything we can imagine. I remember Dr. Waltke mentioning someone mocking the idea of God being in heaven because they couldn't see him with a rocket. It's a good reminder not to take those descriptions too literally.

Totally. It's about recognizing that the language is figurative, but it's still pointing to something real and true. It helps us understand that God's power and knowledge are beyond anything we can comprehend.

He sees all. He knows all. And that's pretty awe-inspiring when you think about it.

Absolutely. And you know, speaking of awe, hymns often celebrate God as both the creator and the sustainer of everything. Yeah, they really capture that sense of wonder, don't they? They do.

Dr. Waltke made this great point that every new event, every sunrise, every breath we take is like a new creation. God is constantly involved in his world, keeping everything going. It's like in Psalm 104.

That's one of my favorite psalms. You've got these beautiful images of God providing food for every living creature, breathing life into us. Yeah.

And then when he withdraws his breath, we return to dust. But then he sends his spirit out again, renewing the earth. It's this beautiful cycle of life and death and rebirth, all orchestrated by God.

The poet uses such powerful metaphors too, like light being God's coat, clouds being his chariot, and wind and flame his messengers. It paints such a breathtaking picture of God's power and presence in the world. And it really drives home the point that God's dominion, his rule, extends over everything.

From the smallest creatures to the vastness of the universe, it's all under his control. And it's not just about power, is it? It's also about his incredible love and faithfulness. Right.

It's a fascinating balance, isn't it? God's power is absolute, but his love and faithfulness prevent him from being a tyrant. That's where the concept of *hesed* comes in, right? You got it. *Hesed* is this incredible Hebrew word that's often translated as unfailing love, or steadfast love, but it goes so much deeper than just a feeling.

Oh yeah. In what way? Well, it's about action. It's about commitment.

It's a stronger party choosing to help a weaker party, not because they have to, but because they want to. It's about love and action. Think about Joseph, when he asked his brothers to show him *hesed* by burying him in his father's land.

Oh wow. Yeah. He was completely at their mercy.

It's like he was saying, even though you guys have wronged me, I'm trusting in your love to do right by me. Exactly. And then there's the story of Ruth, her hesed towards her deceased husband's family.

She could have easily gone back to her own people, but she chose to stay and care for Naomi. And her loyalty ended up putting Boaz right in the line of King David, and ultimately Jesus. It's amazing how those acts of hesed can have these ripple effects that we might not even realize.

It's like those acts of love and faithfulness create these echoes that resonate throughout history. Think about it this way. We are here today because of God's hesed, his faithfulness to his promises, even when his people messed up.

It's the very foundation of our faith. Wow. Okay.

That's a lot to take in. And I have to admit, this next part is throwing me for a bit of a loop. Dr. Wolke talks about how these hymns, these songs of praise, sometimes use imagery from ancient myths, like those stories about other gods and goddesses.

Yeah. It could be kind of a head-scratcher at first. I mean, why would the Bible draw on those pagan myths? Right.

It's not like they're endorsing those myths. Not at all. It's important to approach this with an open mind, but with discernment.

It's not about the Bible copying from pagan sources. It's about understanding the context. Okay.

So what's the context then? Well, for example, the Babylonians had this creation myth called Enuma Elish. It's all about this battle between Tiamat, this goddess of chaos, and Marduk, who represents order. And Marduk wins.

And from that victory, he creates the world. Okay. So how does that relate to the Bible? Well, the Bible also talks about God bringing order out of chaos and creation.

So you see the writers, especially the poets, they were using these familiar images from the myths, not because they believed in those myths, but to make a point about Yahweh, the true God. It's like they were saying, "We know you're familiar with these stories, but our God is the one who's really in control." Exactly.

They weren't endorsing those Babylonian gods, but they were using imagery that people would understand to make a powerful statement about Yahweh's power and authority. Okay. That makes more sense.

It's kind of like when artists reinterpret old myths or religious symbols; they're not necessarily endorsing the original beliefs, but they're engaging with them in a new way to say something different. That's a great analogy. It's about taking something familiar and breathing new life into it, giving it a deeper meaning.

So in the case of the hymns, they're taking these images of chaos and order and using them to declare the power and majesty of Yahweh in a way that would resonate with the people of that time. Exactly. You see this, for example, in Psalms 74 and 89, where there are these images of God battling sea monsters like Leviathan and Rahab.

These figures came from those ancient myths. So it's not about literal monsters. Right.

It's about God overcoming chaos and evil to establish his order. He's the one who's ultimately in control, not these other gods. I see.

So they're saying, yeah, we know your myths, but our God is the real deal. He's the one who truly controls the chaos. Exactly.

It's a powerful way of asserting Yahweh's supremacy over all those other gods. And it's not just about power. It's about his holiness, his righteousness.

He's the only true God, and he alone deserves our worship. Wow. This is getting really interesting.

Tell me more about how this connection between creation and kingship played out in the ancient world. Well, in many ancient cultures, you had this idea that the God who defeated chaos, who brought order to the world, earned the right to be king. So, like a cosmic power play, whoever could handle the chaos got to be in charge.

Exactly. And they would build temples to honor this king God, to show their gratitude and acknowledge his authority. It was all tied together: creation, kingship, temple.

And how does that tie into the Bible? Well, you see this idea reflected in the Bible as well, but with a significant difference. Take Psalm 93, for example: God's victory over the chaotic sea, which was seen as a threat to creation. It affirms his kingship and the holiness of his temple.

So it's not just about brute force. It's tied to God's inherent holiness and righteousness. Exactly.

It's saying that our God is the true king, not because he won some cosmic battle, but because he is holy and righteous. That's what makes him worthy of our worship. That emphasis on holiness really sets the God of the Bible apart from those pagan gods, doesn't it? It's not just about power.

It's about purity and moral perfection. Exactly. And that holiness isn't just something God possesses.

It's something he actively demonstrates. We see it in his creation. We see it in how he delivers his people and how he establishes a covenant with them.

It's amazing how these hymns manage to weave together so many profound theological ideas in such a beautiful and poetic way. I know, right? They really are masterpieces of religious expression. They capture the awe and wonder of encountering the divine.

And they challenge us to move beyond just a surface-level understanding of God and really wrestle with the deeper mysteries of his character and his actions. Which brings us to another fascinating example that Dr. Waltke discusses: Psalm 29. The one that scholars think might have been adapted from a hymn originally dedicated to Baal.

That's the one. It's an incredible example of how the biblical writers could take a familiar cultural form and infuse it with completely new meaning. Okay, I'm all ears.

Tell me more about how this Psalm subverts the worship of Baal. Well, the Psalm uses this incredibly vivid imagery to describe a powerful storm. It starts over the Mediterranean Sea, then moves inland over Lebanon, which was a center of Baal worship, and finally dies out in the desert.

It's as if the psalmist is tracing the path of this storm as a way of demonstrating Yahweh's power over Baal's own domain. So it's like a symbolic victory march showing that Yahweh is the true God of the storm, not Baal. Exactly.

And the Psalm's description of the storm is breathtaking. It talks about the voice of the Lord thundering over the waters, breaking the cedars of Lebanon, shaking the desert, stripping the forest bare. It's this raw, untamed power.

But it's all attributed to Yahweh, not Baal. It's almost as if the psalmist is saying, look, you think Baal is powerful? Well, take a look at what our God can do. You got it.

It's a subtle but effective way of challenging the prevailing pagan beliefs. And it's all done through this incredibly evocative poetry that would have resonated deeply with the people of that time. I can just imagine them hearing the Psalm and being struck by the contrast between the empty promises of Baal and the awesome power of Yahweh.

It must have been mind-blowing. Absolutely. It's a powerful example of how hymns could be used to shape people's understanding of God and to challenge the idols of their culture.

And it reminds us that even today, our expressions of faith can be shaped by the cultural narratives and beliefs that surround us. We have to be discerning. We have to be critical and make sure that our worship is directed towards the true God, not the idols of our time.

That is such a profound insight. It's a reminder that authentic faith isn't passive. It's an active engagement with the world around us, a constant process of discerning truth from falsehood and proclaiming the goodness and glory of God in a way that makes sense in our context.

Man, this deep dive has been such a rich exploration. I feel like I've gained a whole new appreciation for the depth and complexity of hymns. Me too.

And we're just getting started. There's so much more to uncover in these ancient songs of praise. They offer us this incredible window into the hearts and minds of our ancestors in faith, and they invite us to join them in their awe and wonder at the majesty of God.

I can't wait to keep exploring. But before we get too carried away, let's take a moment to recap some of the key insights we've gleaned so far. That's a great idea.

Let's pause here and reflect on what we've learned about hymns and the theology of praise. So we've covered a lot of ground in part one. It really makes you realize how much depth there is to these hymns, doesn't it? Totally.

It's like we're peeling back layers and discovering all these hidden meanings. Like we talked about those attributes of God, the ones that are unique to him and the ones we share. Right.

Like love and mercy. And there's this whole idea of God's unfailing love that we're talking about. It's like the cornerstone of our faith.

And how can we forget that mind-blowing connection with ancient myths and how the Bible talks about God's power, especially in creation? Yeah, that one could really throw people for a loop. It's easy to think, wait, is the Bible just borrowing from pagan stories? Right. Dr. Waltke even mentioned how some scholars misinterpret that, saying the Bible is just borrowing from those pagan sources.

But that completely misses the point. The biblical writers, especially those poets, weren't saying, hey, those myths are true. They were using that familiar imagery to make a statement about Yahweh's power and authority.

So it's all about understanding the intent, the context. Like they knew those myths were out there, and they were using them in a subversive kind of way to say, our God is the one who's really in control. Exactly.

It's like they're saying, yeah, we know your stories, but our God is greater. It's almost as if they're reclaiming those narratives, infusing them with a new and truer meaning. Like taking something that's been twisted or distorted and setting it right, showing the real power behind it.

It reminds me of how artists sometimes reinterpret old myths or religious symbols. Like they're not endorsing those beliefs, but engaging with them in a fresh way. I love that analogy.

It's about taking something familiar and breathing new life into it, giving it a deeper meaning. And in the case of the hymns, it's about declaring the power and majesty of Yahweh in a way that really hits home for the people of that time. It's like meeting people where they are, using language and images they understand, but then flipping the script to point towards the true God.

You got it. It's a brilliant example of what we call contextualization. Like making the message accessible, but still challenging those old ways of thinking.

Man, this whole conversation is making me want to go back and really dig into the psalms. I feel like I've been missing out on so much. You totally should.

You'll be amazed at the richness and complexity you find when you start paying attention to all those nuances and connections. Okay, so we've talked about all those different attributes of God, his incomparability, his rule over creation and humanity, and even how hymns use

those ancient myths. But there's one more point that Dr. Waltke makes that I'm dying to unpack.

You're talking about how creation, kingship, and temple are all linked, right? How they were all woven together in the ancient world. Yes. That whole concept just fascinates me.

Well, remember how in so many cultures, the God who defeated chaos and created order was seen as the rightful king. Yeah. Like it was this ultimate cosmic power struggle.

Whoever tamed the chaos got to call the shots. Exactly. And you know, they would build temples to honor that king.

Yeah. Right. To show their gratitude and acknowledge his authority.

It was all connected. Creation, kingship, temple. Okay.

So how does that fit in with the Bible? Well, you see this idea echoed in the Bible, but there's a twist. Like in Psalm 93, for instance, God's victory over that chaotic sea, which was a symbol of disorder and threat. It affirms his kingship and the holiness of his temple.

So it's not just about raw power then. It's tied to God's inherent holiness and righteousness. You got it.

It's like the Bible is saying, our God is the true king, not because he won some epic battle, but because he is holy and righteous. That concept of holiness is really what sets Yahweh apart from all those pagan gods, isn't it? It's not just brute force. It's about moral perfection, purity.

Absolutely. And that holiness isn't just something God possesses. It's something he actively shows.

We see it in how he created the world, how he rescues his people, how he makes covenants with them. It's crazy how those hymns can pack so much theological depth into poetic language. They're really something else.

I know, right? They capture that awe and wonder that you feel when you encounter God. And they push us to dig deeper, to go beyond those surface-level understandings of God and grapple with the mysteries of his character and his actions. And speaking of grappling with those mysteries, Dr. Waltke talks about Psalm 29.

Oh yeah. The one scholars believe could be adapted from a hymn to Baal, that Canaanite storm God. That's the one.

It's an amazing example of how the biblical writers could take something from their culture and completely transform its meaning. Seriously, the Bible takes a hymn to Baal and makes it a Psalm. Okay.

Tell me more. So the Psalm uses this incredibly vivid imagery to describe a massive storm. It begins over the Mediterranean Sea, then moves inland over Lebanon, which was like Baal's central hub, you know, and then fades out in the desert.

It's like the Psalmist is tracing the path of the storm to show Yahweh's power over Baal's own turf. It's like a divine SmackDown, Yahweh saying, " You think bowels controls the storms? Think again. Exactly.

And the description of the storm is always incredible. It talks about the voice of the Lord thundering over the waters, snapping those cedars of Lebanon, shaking the wool, and stripping the forest bare. It's this raw, uncontrolled power, but it's all given to Yahweh, not Baal.

It's like the Psalmist is saying, yeah, you think Baal is strong. Look what our God can do. Exactly.

Subtle, but it's so effective for challenging those old beliefs about Baal. And it's all done through poetry that really resonated with people back then. I bet.

Can you imagine hearing that Psalm and being blown away by the difference between those empty promises of Baal and the raw power of Yahweh? Totally. It's an amazing example of how hymns were used to reshape how people saw God and to challenge those false idols. It makes you think about how even today, what we believe is shaped by all the things around us, right? We have to be so careful about what we're worshiping.

Absolutely. It's a call to be really engaged with our faith, to look at what we believe and make sure it's the real deal and not just some idol we've created. This deep dive has seriously changed how I think about hymns.

I never realized how powerful and deep they really are. Me neither. And we've only just touched the surface.

There's so much more to discover in these songs. They show us how our ancestors in faith wrestled with life's big questions and experienced God. Okay, hold on.

Before we get ahead of ourselves, let's step back and recap some of the things we've learned. What stands out to you as the biggest takeaway from diving into these hymns and their theology? Wow. Yeah, this has been quite a journey.

So many amazing insights from just looking at hymns. My whole perspective has shifted. I know.

It's incredible how these ancient songs can speak to us so powerfully today, right? It makes you wonder why we don't pay more attention to them. I know. So where should we start with this recap? Well, for me, the biggest takeaway is that hymns aren't just songs; they're these theological treasures.

Right. Like little time capsules filled with the faith of our ancestors. And they're overflowing with these profound truths about God, his character, and all that he's done.

We talked about his attributes, right? Those things that make him, the ones that only he has, like being self-existent, and then those that we kind of share with him. Like love and mercy. We see those reflected in us.

But God's love and mercy, that's a whole other level. Absolutely. And we dove deep into that idea of his, God's unfailing love, the kind that sticks with us no matter what we do.

The foundation of our relationship with God. And then there's that whole mind-blowing thing, that connection between ancient myths and how the Bible describes God's power. Ooh, yeah.

That one can really trip people up. They hear myth, and they think, oh, so the Bible's just ripping off those pagan stories. But that's not it at all.

It's more nuanced than that, isn't it? Way more. Yeah. We've got to remember that the Bible writers, especially those poets, weren't saying those myths were true.

They were using familiar images to emphasize Yahweh's power. Like they were reclaiming those stories and saying, nope, our God is the one in control here. Exactly.

And think about that whole creation, kingship, temple connection. In those old myths, the God who conquered chaos got to be the top dog. Right.

And got a temple built for them. But the Bible flips that whole narrative on its head. Yeah.

Like in Psalm 93, God's victory over the sea, that symbol of chaos. It's not about brute strength. It's because he is holy and righteous.

That's what makes him the true king. And then there's Psalm 29, the one that might have come from a hymn to Baal, the Canaanite storm God. Yeah.

I love how they took an image everyone associated with Baal, this powerful storm, and used it to show Yahweh's authority over all creation. It's like they were saying, yeah, you think Baal controls the weather. Watch what our God can do.

I can just imagine hearing that for the first time. It's such a powerful way to challenge those old beliefs. And it reminds us that hymns aren't just passive praise songs.

They can completely transform how people understand God and challenge those cultural idols, calling people back to the real deal. Which is something we still need today, right? It's so easy to get caught up in the idols of our own time. Money, success, technology, whatever.

These hymns call us back to what really matters. Preach. They remind us to check ourselves, you know, and make sure that we're giving our worship to the one true God.

This deep dive has honestly opened my eyes to the power of hymns. They're more than just pretty melodies, you know. They're these incredible expressions of faith that still have something to say to us today.

Absolutely. And we've only just scratched the surface. Think of all the other hymns out there just waiting to be explored, each one giving us a glimpse into God's heart.

It makes you wonder, doesn't it? If hymns can use ancient myths to help us understand God's power, what other surprising places might reveal his truth? What else is out there waiting to be discovered? That's the beauty of faith, right? It's an amazing journey of discovery. Always seeking, always learning, always finding new ways to experience God's love and grace. Well said.

And on that note, we're going to wrap up this incredible deep dive. But the conversation doesn't have to end here. Keep exploring those hymns, friends.

Keep asking questions. Keep seeking. And you never know what amazing truths you might uncover.