

Eternal

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- [0 : 0 0] This is the one Psalm of the 150 that was written by Moses. Moses, the man of God. So Psalm 90, I'm on page 599. Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations.
- Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting, you are God. You turn men back to dust, saying, Return to dust, O sons of men.
- For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night. You sweep men away in the sleep of death. They are like the new grass of the morning.
- Though in the morning it springs up new, by evening it is dry and withered. We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation. You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence.
- [1 : 1 0] All our days pass away under your wrath. We finish our years with a moan. The length of our days is seventy years or eighty if we have the strength.
- Yet their span is but trouble and sorrow. For they quickly pass and we fly away. Who knows the power of your anger? For your wrath is as great as the fear that is due to you.
- Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. Relent, O Lord, how long will it be? Have compassion on your servants.
- Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble.
- May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their children. May the favour of the Lord our God rest upon us. Establish the work of our hands for us.
- [2 : 1 4] Yes, establish the work of our hands. So this evening, this is what we're thinking about, that God is eternal. We're thinking about the God of infinite days.
- And as we begin, I think it's helpful for us to take just a few minutes to think about our own relationship with time. Because in large measure, we are defined in relation to time.
- We have a new niece as of yesterday. So she is defined, a nephew. What am I talking about? A nephew. And straight away, I'm not going to buy any of the presents. Straight away, they are defined, little Flynn is defined in terms of this is the day of his birth.
- And we're all like that. We have calendars that we are then connected to. Tables of events. Things that we need to do. Sometimes we find ourselves slaves to our diaries.
- We have all of these commitments in time. We're moving from one thing to the next. We are defined in relation to time in that way. But also in the sense that we are products of our generation.
- [3 : 2 2] We live, we occupy this space in time. So we struggle to understand sort of bygone eras. Even if we study history, we're always kind of looking at a distance and trying to figure it out.

We have no idea what's coming in the future. So our understanding is always limited by time. We understand that time is a resource, especially, I guess, in the West.

We're used to thinking about time as a really precious resource. Of course, we can waste it. We can procrastinate. We can be distracted. But we talk about our culture as being time poor.

That many of us live with endless pressures and one deadline after another. That sense of never having enough time in the day to get everything done to meet all our responsibilities.

So time limits us. It limits our opportunities. If I go to this place, then obviously I cannot also go to this place. It limits our ability to build and maintain relationships.

[4 : 27] If you move from one city to another or one country to another, there are people that you say goodbye to and with the best will in the world, you just don't have time to keep up with them. We are limited by time in terms of our perspectives.

That we look at the world as people today in the 21st century. So our view on life is very different to, for example, the way that people of biblical times looked at the world.

And so one of the challenges for us of living well is to then have a right attitude to time. That was one of the things I found most helpful about Jen Wilkins' chapter this week. She was talking about not being sort of tied to your past, always sort of feeling, sort of having the past being brought up or always being anxious about the future, anticipating what's still to come.

She talked about being fully present in the present. And that's really hard for us to do sometimes, especially if we feel pressure. We're sitting down maybe at home and we're thinking, I've got this to do, that to do.

Our mind can go elsewhere. The challenge to be fully present in the present is a real one. So having a right attitude to time is important and having a right attitude to the God who sits outside of and over time, a right attitude to the eternal God is crucially important for us to live well.

[5 : 48] So to help us to reflect on this topic, we are hearing in Psalm 90 a mature reflection from Moses, the man of God.

If there is anyone who is qualified to speak about the eternal God and people's relationship to the eternal God, then it's Moses. Because he is somebody who God spoke to face to face as a man talks with his friend.

We're told that in Exodus 33. So here is Moses reflecting on us in time and the God of eternity. Now one question before we get into it, what's the likely timing of the writing of Psalm 90?

So some commentators have got their suggestions. The one that makes the most sense to me, and it's just a suggestion, is that it probably follows the events of Numbers 20.

When you read Numbers 20, you discover that there Moses' sister dies, the sister Miriam, his brother Aaron dies. And Numbers 20 is also that point where he has forbidden entry into the promised land.

[7 : 01] He was told to bring water from the rock and instead of speaking, he hits it with a stick. And because of that, he's forbidden entry. Why do I think this is the most likely time period for writing?

Because as you look at Psalm 90, you see this theme of the brevity of life coming through. You also see the connection between sin and death being highlighted for us.

And the idea at verse 1 of God being a home, God as home for the homeless, is also present there. So that being the case, how does Moses guide us to think about the eternal God?

Well, the key, the most basic observation for us is just that simple reminder that God is eternal. So verse 1 and 2 again, Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations before the mountains were born, while you brought forth the earth and the world from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.

So Moses picks the biggest, most permanent, most enduring part of our world, the mountains. And then he goes wider than that. He says, even before you brought the earth and the world, you are God.

[8 : 17] From everlasting to everlasting, you are God. Before there was anything that we can see, it was God. After there is everything, there will be God. Moses is teaching here the same message of Genesis chapter 1.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. So God is, he exists before he creates. So he creates a world that is marked by time.

There are days and there are seasons and there are years, but God is not within that. God is timeless. He is everlasting. So he is outside of time.

And this is one of those things that is, I would suggest, it's almost impossible for us to get our minds around. It's one of those biblical mysteries. We were talking about it in the car, on the drive up.

How do you imagine, how can you begin to imagine a God who has always been? Because we are so used to stuff having a beginning and an ending. We think in terms of time, in terms of duration.

[9 : 23] We cannot imagine that anything will last forever. And that's part of the mystery of God. It's part of how he differs from us, that he stands apart from us, unique to us, because he is eternal.

And because he is eternal, he has a different perspective on time than we do. So in verse four, for a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.

So because God stands above time, he's able to see history in a single moment. He's not bound by our limited perspective.

You know, what do we know about the past and the present? Depending on how many books we've read or how many conversations we've had, we may have some grasp of the past, and we've got some understanding of our experience of the present, but it's still tiny compared to all that's going on around the world.

And it's important for us to recognize that and to see that our place within God's story is tiny as well. That we are important, we're valued by God, but our place is small.

[10 : 42] So if the whole of human history is God's great musical concerto, perhaps we're a single note. Or if history is God's epic cinematic masterpiece, then we are extras with a small walk on part.

That to look on us does not give a whole sense of time and history, but God can see the whole. God sees the whole story. He sees our place within time and history in ways that we can't.

The truth that God is eternal, it is intended to do at least two things within us. First of all, it's intended to give us a proper sense of humility, to understand that we're not always going to grasp what God is doing, why He does it.

We're not always going to understand what perfect timing means for God. We have an idea of what perfect timing should be. When we pray, we expect God to answer at such and such a time.

God doesn't always do that. So there is to be a humility as a result of that, but also a sense of hope that we can trust this God to work all things together for good, even if that leaves unresolved mystery for us.

[12 : 10] Even if we cannot see how God can possibly use this or that difficult circumstance or mess in our lives, we can trust the eternal God to bring good, to redeem that.

We can trust the message of Ecclesiastes, that God makes everything beautiful in His own time, not always in our time. that we're invited to have faith that His story of salvation comes together as He intends it to.

And so we're invited to this humble, hopeful attitude that says to God, my times are in your hands and that's not a message that tends towards despair, but it allows us to humbly trust because we know our eternal God.

So that's one of the dominant pictures of Psalm 90, that God is eternal. Another key observation that Moses makes for us at this very basic level is that by contrast, we are temporal and we are time bound.

So in verse 3, He says, you turn men back to dust, saying, return to dust, O sons of men.

[13 : 35] So the Bible teaches that God is sovereign over all the days of our lives, from our beginning, and then He sustains all the days of our lives and He decides the day of our death.

In verse 5, you sweep men away in the sleep of death. They're like the new grass of the morning, though in the morning it springs up new. By evening, it is dry and withered.

Compared to God, our life is brief and fragile, like the desert grass that springs up in the morning and then by the evening is scorched and gone.

We are here today and gone tomorrow, relatively speaking. Now it's important for us to recognize that that was not how things were, in the beginning.

So in verse 3, he uses that return to dust language and that, I think, is deliberately picking up the language of Genesis chapter 3. Moses was the writer of Genesis.

[14 : 37] And in Genesis 3, we have the language of dust to dust. Following the sinful pride and rebellion of Adam and Eve, Adam and then all people subsequent find themselves under God's curse.

That Adam is told quite clearly that sin leads to death and as a consequence of their sin, death comes into the world. Why do we suffer in time in our lives and why do we die?

Because, as the Bible says, the wages of sin is death. That's the reason why I think in verses 7 to 10, there is such a strong connection between the themes of judgment and death.

Moses is trying to remind us in very stark terms that our short lives, part of the brevity of life, reminds us that God is justly angry against sin.

That death came into the world as a consequence consequence of sin and we are all implicated in that which is why the we and the our language comes through again and again in verses 7 to 9.

[15 : 51] So we are consumed by your anger. You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. All of humanity together in our sin leading to the death leading to death and the displeasure of God.

So Moses is not just pointing out the great contrast that is in terms of God is eternal and we are temporal. Part of that contrast is showing the great crisis that as people we all face.

How can we properly relate to this eternal God if we stand as sinners deserving the judgment of God? And so the question that we want to turn our attention to now is, is there any good news for us here does Moses the man of faith have anything gospel to say to us?

Is there hope for us in this psalm? And the answer is yes, there is as we listen to his words. The first lesson I think that Moses would have us to learn is that we should ask God to help us live wisely in time.

And we'll think about what that looks like. but maybe we can read together in verses 11 and 12. Verse 11, Who knows the power of your anger?

[17 : 16] For your wrath is as great as the fear that is due to you. And then he says, Teach us to number our days aright that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

What would it look like for God to teach us to number our days right? What is wisdom in how we approach time and eternity?

Moses has got a lot of valuable stuff to teach us. So we just read verse 11 and they are part of the wisdom that he's teaching us is to understand that sin is serious and God is holy.

Take time to observe and reflect that reality. Sometimes we're so busy with life that we can ignore the great crisis that there is between us and God and we can ignore God's solution to that crisis the sending of his one and only son Jesus to be our savior and rescuer.

And so this psalm is pushing us to understand that sin is serious and that God is holy and to understand that there is a direct connection between sin and death.

[18 : 35] Again, it is wisdom to recognize that so while we have time to discover for ourselves God's way of forgiveness.

We don't like to think about life and death and judgment but it's wisdom for us when we reflect on the fact that death comes to us all and we need to be ready for that and God and Jesus has given us the way to be ready because he's given us the way where if we trust in Jesus then we know that we'll be accepted by God and we'll enjoy eternal life from him.

I think in verse 4 we're encouraged to remember and to understand and to understand that God's timetable is different to ours and so we're invited to be trusting in God in the days that he gives to us.

That we are to understand that life is temporary so we don't invest all our energy in now we live for eternity.

In Luke chapter 12 Jesus taught the parable that we maybe know as the parable of the rich fool. There was a man who had a great harvest and so he's got this question well what should I do with my great crop and he decides well I know what I'll do I'll tear down my small barns and I'll build bigger ones and then once all the crop is in I'll eat and I'll drink and I'll be merry and in the night God comes to him and says you fool tonight your life will be asked of you and Jesus is saying it's foolish to be rich in human terms now and to be poor in terms of not having a relationship with the God who made us the God who made us so that we might know him and so one of the things that Moses is pushing us to think about is if there is an eternal God then and if God has made us for relationship then we need in order that we might enjoy the eternal life promised by Jesus so the first lesson that Moses gives us in this psalm is to ask

[20 : 55] God to help us to live wisely and the second thing and Moses came to learn this in his own experience make your home in God picking up that language of verse one Lord you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations so here is personal testimony from Moses the man of faith this is Moses also speaking on behalf of the generations of faith that came before him that God is a home God is a refuge God is a safe place for his people perhaps we can think about the example of Abraham Abraham was promised by God I will give you the land of Canaan but that land would only come to Abraham's descendants 430 years later so Abraham spent a good portion of his life wandering around from place to place with no home to speak of except that his home his place of security his place of belonging was in

God and so Moses too understood that as the people wandered in the wilderness for 40 years again without a home Moses and the faithful in Israel found their home found their safe place in God when trouble when challenges came was God that Moses turned to home is a place of belonging when John Calvin commentated on this psalm he said that this dwelling place language is adoption language we have a home because God is father and we are his children we are children of the eternal God and so it makes sense for us to find our rest and our security and our hope with our father God and so again there's this contrast so Moses is saying on the one hand you know life is full of trial and sorrow and it's short but he's also saying with the eternal

God there is a sense of being rooted there is a sense of permanence there so that while there is this trial and while there is this sorrow for the people of God for example in verse 14 we can say satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days and again we can remember Jesus' words in John chapter 14 as Jesus spoke to his troubled disciples the night before he would go to the cross Jesus said this to them this is beginning of John chapter 14 do not let your hearts be troubled trust in God trust also in me in my father's house are many rooms if it were not so I would have told you I am going there to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you

I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am so here is gospel hope connected to this idea of a home Jesus is saying I have come to save you in order that one day I will take you to be with me in perfection forever and the picture there is of God having plenty of space for all those who would trust in Jesus to enjoy the joy of heaven the third lesson that I think that we can learn from Moses about how to live wisely it comes from verse 17 and the idea of investing in eternity if we're right in thinking this is Moses writing this psalm towards the end of his life then when he says may the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us establish the work of our hands for us yes establish the work of our hands it's natural to hear this as Moses asking for a legacy of faith let my life mean something in spiritual terms let the life of the people of Israel mean something in spiritual terms here is an encouraging principle here is

Moses a man who is bound by time speaking to the eternal God and he's acknowledging that the eternal God can establish lasting eternal results from our small efforts in time if God establishes our work then they will have lasting value and significance it's like Jesus in Matthew chapter 6 when he called us to store up for ourselves treasures in heaven to invest our time and our energy and our resources in those things that are eternal so a reminder to invest in relationships and people ahead of money and stuff to share our resources to care for others in Jesus name asking that God's love might be felt in the lives of others and they may be drawn to trust in

[27 : 00] Jesus for themselves it certainly reminds us of the importance of sharing the gospel of sharing our faith with others in our homes in our church in the groups that we belong to on our streets because God can take our small efforts and he can establish them in such a way that it has eternal significance so Moses here is seeking to act as our guide as we think about the eternal God and how we relate to him in Jen Wilkins book she asks a helpful question when she asks how aware are you that your days are numbered it's wisdom to see that every day of our life is a gift of God's grace it's wisdom to acknowledge that we are fragile and that the eternal

God is our only lasting hope and home and it is truly wise to trust in Jesus the eternal son of God who have love for us entered into time entered into human history in order to go to the cross to save us in order to promise us the eternal life that our hearts long for not have you have no help