

A psalm for tough times

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[0:00] Hello and welcome to the morning service of Calvary Evangelical Church in the heart of Brighton, Sussex, on Sunday 10th May.

! If you happen to come across the Calvary Church service for the first time this morning via YouTube or the Church's website, you're particularly welcome. Please make contact with us via the Church's website, details of which will be given at the end of the service.

My name is Chris Fry. I'm one of the elders of the Church alongside Philip Wells and Ben Alltimes. In this service we'll be doing what Christians all over the world do.

We'll pray to God because God loves to receive our praise and will reply to our requests. We'll read a section of the Bible because this is where God supremely reveals himself to us and shows us what we are like.

This helps us to grow closer to him. We'll sing because to be a Christian is to be deeply moved in our hearts in a way that needs to express itself in song.

[1:10] And we'll hear a message from the Bible when I hope to explain a passage in a way that's understandable, helpful, hopefully challenging and maybe both a warning and encouragement.

Let's pray. Our Father, we thank you for the privilege which is ours to come to you in prayer. We know that we have no right to come before you because you are holy and eternal and we are sinful and finite.

But we thank you that we can meet with you now because of your grace revealed to us, especially in the giving of your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to this world.

We thank you for your eternal purpose to bring sinful people like us back to yourself. We thank you for your eternal plan to send your own Son to achieve this by his perfect life, his sacrificial death and his resurrection, ascension and enthronement at your right hand.

We thank you for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We thank you that you have so worked in our lives by the Holy Spirit that we have realized our need to be reconciled to you and recognize that Jesus is the Savior we need and the Lord we must submit to.

[2:33] We thank you for your grace to repent of our sin and to rely on Jesus Christ alone to be our Savior now and forever.

We thank you that you keep us and hold us fast through all our lives. Today we repeat our sorrow for sin.

Please forgive us again. We repeat our trust in Jesus alone. And we ask for the infilling of your Holy Spirit in our lives. We pray that you will be with us today and with all your people who meet on this day.

That whatever our life circumstance, feelings and concerns, we may be given help to offer praise, confession of sin, thanksgiving and intercession.

We pray that we may humbly receive your word and that our lives will be changed accordingly. And we ask that we may be changed more and more into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

[3:36] In Jesus name. Amen. We'll sing a song with the following opening line. It's well known. Praise to the Lord, the almighty, the King of creation.

Praise to the Lord, the almighty, the King of creation.

Praise to the Lord, the almighty, the King of creation.

Oh, my soul, praise him for he is your health and salvation.

Come all who hear, brothers and sisters drawn near. Praise him in glad adoration.

[4:48] Praise to the Lord, among all things so mightily reigning.

Keeping us safe at his side and so gently sustaining.
Have you not seen? All you have needed has been, Met by his gracious ordaining.
Praise to the Lord who shall prosper our world and defend us.
Surely His goodness and mercy shall daily attend us.
[5:53] Ponder anew what the Almighty can do. Who with His love will befriend us.

Praise to the Lord who when darkness and sin are abounding.
Who when the godless are rampant for goodness confounding.
Breaks forth as light scatters the terrors of night. Saints with His mercy surrounding.
Praise to the Lord who let all that is in me adore Him.
[7:01] All that has life and breath come now with praises before Him.

Let the Amen sound from His people again.
Gladly we praise and adore Him. I'd like to lead you now in an intercessory prayer.
The opening prayer we made expressed our deep thankfulness to God for all that He is and what He means to us in so many others. He is a Father to us.
So like children in His family, it's good and right that we ask Him about and for things that we're concerned about. Knowing that He cares about such things even more than we do.
[8:05] So we pray. Our Father.

Our Father. We have mental and emotional distress. There is so much unknown. And we can say that even the most gifted politicians, the cleverest scientists, the bravest and most skilful of frontline workers and the best of friends can only help to a point.
we're not able to handle these things in our own strength we need you to come near and help us you have the ability and the wisdom to do this even more we know that you're willing to do help us because as the bible says you have compassion on all that you have made every person all of creation you've made us and you love us but we have to come to you humbly speaking of our need and asking that you will please help us we can see that many people don't understand their need to come to you and will try any other ways except you please show this world this nation our city our neighborhood and our own households that we need you and help us to pray prayers of dependence such prayers as we may not have ever prayed before we need you please show yourself how mighty wise and loving you are that we may honor respect and love you in Jesus name amen our next song celebrates the greatness of God behold our God who has held the oceans in his hands who has numbered every grain of sand kings and nations kings and nations tremble at his voice all creation rises to rejoice kings and nations kings and kings and kings and kings and kings O God, seated on His throne, come let us adore Him.
Behold our King, nothing can come play, come let us adore Him.

[11:15] Who has given counsel to the Lord? Who can question any of His words?

Who can teach the one who knows all things? Who can fathom all His wondrous seeds?

Behold our King, seated on His throne, come let us adore Him.

Behold our King, nothing can come play, come let us adore Him.

Who has felt the land upon His hands, bearing over guilt of sinful men?

[12:21] Behold our King, nothing can come play, come let us adore Him.

Behold our King, nothing can come play, come let us adore Him.

Behold our King, seated on His throne, come let us adore Him.

Behold our King, nothing can come play, come let us adore Him.

Behold our King, behold our King, behold our King. Behold our King, seated on His throne, come let us adore Him.

Behold our King, nothing can come play, come let us adore Him.

[13:24] Behold our King, seated on His throne, come let us adore Him.

Before we look at a Bible passage, we need to ask for God's help to understand and be changed by what we hear.

O God, please help us as we hear Your Word today. We cannot understand and we cannot obey Your Word unless You help us by Your Holy Spirit.

Help me to speak rightly of You, and may the Holy Spirit take what is offered in weakness, and make it mighty in every life for the glory of Your Son, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

The message this morning is titled, A Prayer for Tough Times. I don't need to express the toughness of these times for everybody.

Of course our life circumstances are individual and different, but what is common is that all our lives have been changed quite suddenly. Change is difficult for all of us, sudden change even more so. [14:31] Also, we don't know the ending of this, nor how our lives may be if, as and when we come to some kind of closure. This is disturbing and unsettling for all of us, affecting us mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually.

Although it is sad but unsurprising in our secular culture that little or nothing is being expressed about the spiritual, even though we are in the middle of the biggest crisis that any of us have ever experienced.

Well, it is our business and focus this morning in the belief that if the spiritual is in the right place, mental and emotional well-being will follow.

On the other hand, if the spiritual in our lives is not in the right place, we will be at the mercy of mental disorder and emotional breakdown. And when I say spiritual, I don't mean any kind of the so-called spirituality that might be experienced by something like meditation or mindfulness, nor a spirituality that's sustained by personal morality or good deeds.

These kinds of spiritualities tend to look inward for supply and strength. Christian spirituality is quite different. It looks out, not in.

[15:51] And that look is towards the one true living God who has revealed himself in the Bible. It is in these tough times that Christians need to get their strength, focus and assurance, not from the government's daily briefings, or the latest, the often conflicting scientific advice, nor the strident noises from the newspapers and other media, or from the kindness of neighbours and the volunteer army, but God bless them.

At best, such help is limited, fragile and fails to address major questions about life and death. No, where does our true, deep and substantial help come from?

Well, the Psalms in the Bible are a good place to start. They are like a personal prayer and song book, which is also intended for use by everyone. It's universal.

Here's Psalm 121 and verse 1. Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.

Now, when you begin to see things expressed in that way, it's so sensible, logical and appropriate that we should think in this way. Where do we find help?

[17:09] That's the question. Answer. In the God who made heaven and earth. He did it all. Everything. The entire cosmos. Everything that we can see.

With the most brilliant of telescopes. And with the most astonishing spacecraft. But we only see the half of it. Probably one percent of it.

Probably less than that. No, he did everything. He did it by himself. And he is still the same. With the same power. The same reach and ability.

However great our trouble appears to be. God can help us. Because he is the same God who made everything. And knows everything. And keeps everything.

He has the power to do so. And not only so. There is no one else that can help us in the way that God can. And I want to say something else.

[18:05] More than that. He wants to provide help. Isn't that an astonishing thought? The maker of heaven and earth. He wants to help us. He wants to help us individually.

Just like the case of the person who wrote Psalm 121. My help comes from the Lord. It's personal. The writer has experienced God's help.

So he can write freely about this. And recommend that others find God's help as well. God also wants to help us as churches. As gatherings of his people.

So says Psalm 46. God is our refuge and strength. And ever present help in trouble. It's a difficult time for the gatherings of God's people.

Everything seems as though dislocated. And of course we are not gathering. At least not face to face. We should ponder this point. Where do we go for help?

[19:03] The government will be of no use. Nor the scientists or sociologists. They have made some rather small bit part. But who is going to help us?

When it looks like the world is falling apart. Just as if mountains were to fall into the sea. As Psalm 46 goes on to say. Have you seen footage of the cliff falls in East Anglia.

Or quite recently a Cookmere Haven just along the coast. As the result of sea erosion. Frightening. Frightening. What if the entire mountain was to fall into the sea? What if the entire mountain was to fall into the sea?

Think of Mount Snowdon moving and falling into the Irish sea. If you could imagine that.

Cataclysmic. This is where God is the only true source of help. Because he made Cookmere Haven and he made Mount Snowdon.

Mount Snowden. This is not a problem for him. So we find refuge and security in this God. God will help, says the writer. The Lord Almighty is with us. Now this is the marvellous thing, that this God will help us. We can call upon him and he will help us. Even more, he looks after us even when we're so overwhelmed that we don't know what to do or how to think. That's the nature of the living God. But we are in a much better place when we stop fretting, stop panicking, stop making our own plans for recovery that are almost bound to be wrong, ill-timed and inadequate and begin to do what God tells us to do which is this. And again Psalm 46 says, be still and know that I am God. It's when we stop feeding our sense of discouragement and come deliberately and quietly to him, when we're still, then we can begin to appreciate more deeply and satisfyingly how sufficient God is for any situation that we ourselves or our church is in.

[21:09] So, these are such helpful psalms for us to read, tailor-made for these days it seems. And it's interesting to see how Christians in these times have been led by the Holy Spirit to these passages of God's Word. These are the words we need to hear. And I always feel like lingering longer in these two psalms because they offer so much to us and in such a timely manner.

The psalms are to be shared. They're not a private diary. You know the sort? There used to be private diaries with a little clasp and a key. No one else allowed to read apart from the writer, put in very small letters or even code language. No, the psalms are to be shared. They're to be appreciated. They're to be absorbed. They're to be shouted out loud. Let me urge each and one, everyone who's listening to this, to ask God for his help. I'm sure you need help, perhaps as never before in your life. You've tried other helpers and maybe they've done their best, but it's limited. They don't have the resources you need, but God is bigger than any crisis you're facing and I urge you to simply go to him in prayer. Who knows where that will lead you? So, there are God's word in two psalms. But I've been drawn to another psalm. It's Psalm 90.

I hope you have a Bible. Go find the place and keep it open at that page for this message. Psalm 90. The heading says, A Prayer of Moses, the Man of God.

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.

[23:16] You turned 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're 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 set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence.

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 you.

[24:20] 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 splendour to their children. May the favour of the Lord our God rest upon us. Establish the work of our hands for us.

Yes, establish the work of our hands. Now let me first suggest the context of this psalm.

Some of the psalms have headings in smaller type, and this is one of those psalms. These headings aren't inspired by God, but they have a heavy weight of tradition behind them, so we can take them seriously.

[25:26] And the heading of this psalm is *A Prayer of Moses, the Man of God*. There's been some debate about whether this really is something that Moses, the leader of the Israelites as they left Egypt and headed for the Promised Land, actually wrote.

There are a lot of sensible reasons for saying yes, it is. And one of the most powerful reasons is that the content of the psalm fits so well with the experience of Moses and the Israelites as they wandered, and they did wander, in the desert after leaving Egypt for, as it turned out, 40 years. It was a tough time. Tough because of their human frailty, but even tougher because of their sinfulness and God's resulting judgments. You can sense in this psalm how keenly Moses feels all this.

It's not just a piece of factual history. It's deeply personal. I think we can go further and suggest two particularly tough times when this psalm might have been written.

The first would be in the early period of their journeying, perhaps two to three years after their exodus from Egypt. They've reached the southern edges of the Promised Land, the land that God has given to them.

[26:47] And it's decided that 12 spies should go into the land and report what it was like. They'd never been before. They didn't know what to expect. The land was inhabited.

They didn't know what problems they might face. So it was a good thing. Well, it seemed like a good thing. They sent the 12 spies. But the report, the report back of these spies was discouraging. Well, to be clear, ten of them were discouraging, but two were positive. But the majority were listened to by the people.

And the people came discouraged to the extent that they refused to enter the land. They completely forgot the purpose, power and presence of God and relied instead on the feelings of ten men.

It was an important decision. This wasn't the first time that people had rejected God's ways. The Bible speaks of their constant wailing, complaining and grumbling.

[27:56] In one place, the people are described as a rabble. After this last incident, God's anger was such that he told them that there and then that everyone over the age of 20 who had left Egypt would never enter the land.

Well, that was a mighty judgment. A whole generation would die in the desert. This was hundreds of thousands of people and the judgment would be slowly but completely worked out over another 37 years.

What a terrible sentence. Now, one could imagine Moses writing this psalm after that disastrous moment. But another candidate for a time would be the moment 37 or so years later when there was a succession of sad happenings in close proximity and interestingly these happened at the very same location where the people had rejected the law's ways 37 years before.

Moses' brother Aaron died. He'd been like his right-hand man. His sister Miriam died and then Moses in a fit of anger or frustration displeased God by trying to do the very thing that God alone could do get water miraculously from a rock.

Moses was told by God that as a result of this sin he wouldn't enter the promised land himself. What a sad and sobering moment for him and as it turned out for all the people.

[29:32] It could be either occasion or sometime else. Perhaps a third option is a time before the Israelites escaped Egypt and were effectively slaves in the land.

But I incline to the first option the early years of the time in the desert as it seems to fit best with the content of the psalm. So think of Moses here.

It's a time of discouragement and disappointment. a massive setback. They're not going to enter the land for another 37 years. Well they didn't know it was going to be exactly 37 years but they knew it was going to be time enough for a whole generation everyone over the age of 20 to die in the desert.

Well that changes things. How does he react? Well we get a clue from the heading and that heading said this Moses is called the man of God.

Not just the leader but the man of God. He's called that in other places in the Bible. There are other prominent people in the Bible like Elijah who are given the same description but it's relatively rare.

[30:50] It sets these people apart and it's clear from the Bible record that Moses was a special person. He had a special relationship with God a special closeness.

There's so much history between them. At this stage he's over 80 years old and despite his failings and they were mainly failings he was a man of God.

He was the man of God. Not just a man of God but the man of God. This is God's own description. God who searches all hearts gives him this title.

And this psalm is his prayer. Look at the heading A Prayer of Moses the Man of God. I love to hear the prayers of those who are clearly walking close to God. And Moses' prayers to God must have been deeply encouraging to whoever heard them just as this is.

You see he knew God. He knew the character of God sufficient to make prayers that were utterly appropriate to the God he was coming to and the situation he was in.

[31:59] It may not appear that all of this psalm is a prayer but we should regard it in that way. Words uttered in the presence of and in the reverent fear of God the God who he'd known for most of those 80 plus years of life.

Now if there's one thing that we can be absolutely sure of about this tough time is that like Moses in his tough time we need to be praying but not any sort of prayer but the very prayer which by the help of the Holy Spirit of God is suited to our situation.

In these days I'm listening carefully to the prayers that Christians are praying and relishing those that seem to have touched the hot spot as it were that are reflecting the very things that God is concerned about and wants us to bring to him in prayer.

Because that's the point prayer comes from God he speaks to us he puts his desires in our hearts there are desires as well and we come back to him with those desires in prayer.

So as we come to pray we must be careful to ask God what do you want me to pray? This is true for us individually and as a church and churches. What do you want us to pray?

[33:21] There's a place in the book of Acts in the Bible where Peter and John have returned from a tense confrontation with the religious authorities which ended in dark threats.

It's a tough time for Peter and John but also for the whole church. What do they do? Acts chapter 4 verse 24 says that when the church heard what had happened to Peter and John they raised their voices together in prayer to God.

That was their instinctive and immediate reaction. Something big is happening. Something difficult is going on. We've got to pray. And they all wanted to do that.

That's good. But even better to hear how they prayed. What would you have prayed in that tough time? Please keep us safe.

Please protect us. Please remove these threats. Now that would be very understandable. And it's the kind of prayers that people can pray in a difficult time like this pandemic.

[34:27] But what they actually prayed was to ask God to enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. To speak Bible truth with great boldness.

This was no time to lock down on the message but to put their collective heads above the parapet as it were so that the message might be released with greater intensity and power. They were able by the help of the Holy Spirit to see things from God's not man's perspective and purpose.

They saw that this was precisely God's time. They remembered God's prophetic words to confront the sinfulness in unbelief by bold gospel speaking accompanied by the power of the Holy Spirit. Let's read the whole of the psalm and then we'll think about the general features the tone and texture of this psalm and why it's so helpful for us at this time. And as we try to get under the skin if you like of these 17 verses the first thing to notice in this prayer is Moses' utter respect for God. The instinctive human reaction to God's judgment of death for an entire generation might be anger or frustrated bewilderment. Moses faced many apparent suspects in his life when God's purposes seemed so unclear or contradictory to the current circumstances.

[35:54] He wasn't initially a patient man. In the Bible it says that he killed an Egyptian and even in his last years there was intemperate behaviour.

But the characteristic of his life and what came to be known for about him was his meekness. Just like the saviour that he would never see in the flesh the saviour who was to come he was meek. And you see that in his prayer. This is a good example for us. And secondly is a definite bold prayer with definite bold petitions especially towards the end of it.

Some praying is so indefinite it's rather unclear what the prayer is specifically asking for probably because we're not sure ourselves. but Moses listened to God and he knew what he needed to pray. Particularly verses 12 to 17 there's a series of big broad and bold requests of God. Moses knew something of the character and promises of God and so he was able to come to God with confidence.

[37:05] John Newton the hymn writer of the 18th century put it this way
Thou art coming to a king large petitions with thee bring for his grace
and power as such none could ever ask too much.

That's amazing isn't it? None could ever ask too much. So Moses respected God and you see that in the opening verses he's thoughtful but he's also bold and you see that in the closing verses and we might think these two things are incompatible to so respect God that we're utterly timid before him or to ask with an arrogant boldness that doesn't respect the holiness and eternal nature of God how different he is to us but because of Jesus Christ's work and person we're able to do the seemingly impossible and both utterly respect and be in awe of God whilst boldly asking of him and the answer to this mystery lies in the fact that God is both utterly holy and other and at the same time our father in Jesus Christ we need to have that knowledge in its proper balance in these tough times the other thing

I'd like you to notice is the similarity between the tough times that Moses was going through and the tough times that we're going through ourselves it's an amazing similarity now these are just headings and we'll tease some of these points out later one the reality of death and dying two the suddenness of death and dying three the fragility and limitations of our lives four the fact the death is not just a biological happening but the judgment of God upon sin the wages of sin is death fifthly the reality of sin in the lives of God's people hindering the progress of God's kingdom and bringing God's discipline upon them and sixthly the absence of God's deeds and the establishment of the work of God's people for Moses there were times when he must have felt that what was going on in the desert wanderings for forty years was just a cause of derision amongst the surrounding settled nations the progress of the work of the kingdom of Jesus Christ in this land appears to us snail-like and to many our look is irrelevant there are so many and more similarities so that encourages us to look very carefully that God gave Moses the words to pray there's also a structure to the psalm that's helpful to notice the key to that understanding is to compare verses 1 and verse 13 and in particular the word for God that is used in those two verses look at these two verses in your bible and you'll see that the way the name of God is presented is different the word Lord is used in both cases but in verse 1 only the first letter is a capital whereas in verse 13 all the letters of the word Lord are capitalised superficially it looks like a very small thing is this a mistake does it matter no it's not a mistake and it does matter in verse 1 the word for Lord in the original the Hebrew is Adonai sovereign Lord it's a strong and respectful word it's a word that could be used of God universally by all peoples but it's not the same word as appears in verse 13 in verse 13 the word is Yahweh the covenant God the God who has taken a people for himself at that time the Israelites they had a unique relationship with God because of the way he had committed himself to them to love deliver and protect them this is the word that God describes his relationship with his people by so why the difference in the first section of the psalm verses 1 to 12 Moses is identifying himself

with the whole of mankind Jew and Gentile as it would later be expressed but in his day the heathen the pagan the idolatrous nations just over the horizon just behind the mountains the people who the Bible calls the Ammonites the Moabites the Hittites the Jebusites and many other nations in many psalms a very big distinction is made between the people of God and the nations and Israelites were called to be a different people with a difference that could only be explained by the fact that they belonged not to feeble idols but to the only living God many of the psalms noted emphasised that difference but here rather remarkably

Moses starts his prayer by identifying the Israelites the people of whom he was the earthly leader with the other nations the rest of mankind and here are four marks of identification the fact of death and dying that's the first one the fact of death and dying we all come from the seed of Adam and lie under the judgment of Adam's sin and the sobering words spoken in the garden of Eden to Adam and Eve for dust you are and to dust you will return that's Genesis chapter 3 verse 19 and this thought this phraseology is mirrored in verse 3 of Psalm 90 where we hear the voice of God saying day after day return to dust O sons of men so how are God's people identifying with the people of the world in this matter well it's because the people of God doesn't remove us from the experience of physical death which is the constant mark of God's judgment of sin we die they die all of us die verses 8 and 9 are true for everyone

[43:59] Hebrews 9 27 expresses it starkly man is destined to die once and after that to face judgment we share a common lot with everyone else Christians are dying of Covid-19 and if not of Covid-19 of strokes heart attacks and cancer or car accidents fires stabbings and muggings they're dying on the streets they're dying in hospitals they're dying in care homes they're dying in their beds there's not one cause of death that is unique to any people group nor do we live any longer than anyone else we're altogether humbled in the parcel of life Moses who has now passed the 70 or given strength 80 years of age expressed in verse 10 just states the fact of it secondly the brevity and fragility of life that's shown in verses 5 6 and 10 we not only die but death comes soon and often without warning sometimes pathetically so in the psalm verse 5 our lives are likened to a single day you sweep men away in the sleep of death they're like the new grass of the morning and though in the morning it springs up new by evening it is dry and withered in fact not even a day it's just 12 hours in the grand scheme of things that's how tiny and unsubstantial our lives appear again

Moses speaking of the common lot of mankind thirdly the ever present reality of God's wrath against sin verses 7 to 9 death is a solemn marker of God's anger against sin but God's anger against sin is an ever present reality in the everyday life and it's as much so for the Christian as for the unbeliever you might find that a rather shocking statement isn't the Christian in the blissful place of forgiveness yes but we're still sinners and God is as angry about adultery in a Christian as he is about adultery in a non-Christian or lying or bitterness and theft and greed and we ignore that truth to our great peril additionally we're as much affected by God's judgment of sin at the fall as everyone else is we toil by the sweat of our brow childbirth is as painful for the Christian as for the non-Christian well the Israelites certainly knew a lot about that they'd been in Egypt for 400 years but they were a rabble and in fact they became slaves they toiled to build the pyramids and the great monuments that the Egyptian pharaohs wanted it was hard work and it felt like God's judgment of sin in the Garden of Eden by the sweat of their brow and as they bore children it was as painful for them as for the Egyptians well we're affected we're all affected by the despoiling of the planet today the whole of creation is groaning under the burden of God's judgment and we're in that mix we all groan with it fourthly the eternity of God verses one tune four 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 verse four for a thousand years in your sight are like a day that's just gone by or like a watch in the night our pygmy lives are set against the eternity of

God outside of time before creation before the most impressively solid and unchangeable things that we can see there was the eternal God without beginning and there is no change or end from

everlasting to everlasting you are God this is the truth which is for all mankind to grasp and be humbled by the people of God are in one sense not separated from the world around us we share in the pain and sorrow God could take any and all of his people out of this groaning and decaying sin sick world but he set us here and for this time no accident why well one powerful reason is that we are the body of Christ on earth but Christ our head is in heaven and we're called to reflect and exemplify his incarnational ministry on earth what do

[50:03] I mean by incarnational I mean that he the son of God chose willingly chose to take on human flesh to come to this earth he was incarnated God became man he didn't shy away from the pain and suffering of this world he threw himself into the appointed task he was truly a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief!

yes that was his daily experience and he embraced that calling and it's important to remember this and be sustained by the thought of the privilege that is ours as we share lockdown social distancing homeschooling shopping queues hospitals and care homes maybe we're in the front line and if so that's like Christ one other thing that we might find rather surprising is that all mankind is offered a refuge in God verse 1 speaks of God being a dwelling place but the word might also be translated refuge from Abraham to Moses the people of God knew this truth intimately but Moses in verse 1 suggests that God offers himself as a refuge to everyone anyone just as we saw that he offers himself as a help to anyone I think of someone like

Hagar in the book of Genesis she isn't an Israelite there's a long storyline but she becomes pregnant by Abraham she's not an Israelite and her son will not be the special son that God has promised Abraham she's banished from Abraham's household and finds herself pregnant homeless needy and alone too many people in this land and throughout the world are in that place today who's going to help her well all alone in that desert place it's God who comes to her and helps her in this time of great need and I think of another Bible person Ruth she's not an Israelite by birth but a mother bite one of those surrounding nations who sought and found refuge under the protection of an Israelite but more significantly the protection of the

God of the Israelites and she prayed this prayer and made this vow your people will be my people and your God my God here's what another psalm says about God it's psalm 9 verse 9 and I'll read it to you the Lord is a refuge for the oppressed a stronghold in times of trouble even in ancient times the boundaries between God's people and the nations were porous and now today there is nothing standing in the way so we do not stand aside in aloof at this time but presenting the God who is our refuge and helper so that others might find him to be a refuge and helper as well God will help often through people or changed circumstances sometimes in such marvellous ways that we cannot say anything except that this is the work of God now what should be the response of all mankind to the great and solemn truths of verses 1 to 10 verse 11 says that we should recognise the greatness of God's wrath against sin let's look at that again who knows the power of your anger for your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you God's wrath his anger against sin should lead us to fear this is always the case but especially so in tough times every day of the tough times is another opportunity to learn to recognise God's wrath God's judgement it's a reminder of sin and we need to repent of our sin against him this is a necessary message for every person on the planet but do we see such fear in this world largely speaking even in this time of pandemic when death stalks the land the brevity of life is laid bare and we are or should be humbled by our utter weakness in the face of a tiny microbe where is the fear of

[54:49] God's wrath against sin oh there is fear but not a fear that leads to sin awareness and repentance that note is missing in Moses tough times the people learnt to repent in our tough times we don't see this such is the hardness of hearts the blindness of eyes to the things which God is showing us the deafness of our ears to what God is saying if you're not a Christian may God give you the grace of a soft heart a vision to see what you couldn't see before and hearing to receive and accept God's word and verse 12 tells us another lesson of tough times is to so understand the brevity the limitations and end of our lives that we learn how to live wisely teach us to number our days aright that we may gain a heart of wisdom this isn't automatic even for

Christians in fact I think it fair to say there are very few people who think of their lives in a way that acknowledges the shortness of life and the death the end of it all well for the Christian of course it's not the end of it all but we need to be ready for that end day that death time so Moses rightly asks the question and he's praying teach us this please God please teach us this how are we to do this speak persuasively to us remind us prompt us we're so full and understandably so of the world around us it absorbs our thoughts our emotions our energies but we need this other dimension because only when we recognise the shortness of life will we properly live each day here's the irony we know how to measure almost everything from the invisible to naked eye virus to the extent of our universe but we don't know how to measure our own lives you might say well how can I I don't know how long I'll live but that's not the task that God is calling us to not to try to apply actual actuarial algorithms to determine the day of your dying plus a few hours no rather to have such a sense that life is fragile that every day God gives us no bigger measure than a day or even the watch of the night every day will be ordered so that if we should die we should be as ready for it because we have done and kept doing relational business with God living wholeheartedly for his glory and with a clear conscience this is the wisdom we all need to cultivate and set before us are we ready to meet the king someone said let us be anxious to live well rather than to live long we need these solemn truths to be teaching us in the book of ecclesiastes in the bible verses 2 and 3 says it is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting for death is the destiny of every man the living should take this to heart sorrow is better than laughter oh say that again sorrow is better than laughter that's what the bible says appropriate sadness is no bad thing in these times irony of ironies we can neither go to a house of mourning or to a house of feasting but we can open a bible and accept god's truth these are solemn truths these are serious truths they're truths that we might want to shy away from but god says don't do that this is a very good time to be still to listen to what he says to realise the brevity the seriousness of life is going to come to an end and we need to be ready for it every day but we mustn't stop at this point

Moses prayer didn't stop at this point and our response to the message would be incomplete if we didn't receive and be refreshed by verses 13 to 17 it's as if Moses in his thinking and praying has put himself in a right place to bring petition to god that's right i think he's been respectful before god he's realised god's greatness in his smallness he's put himself into a place where he says i really need you god and so that makes his petitions bolder and remembering the character of god makes his petitions more hopeful yes i'm done with having hope in men i've done with having hope in the schemes of people i'm done with having hope in myself i really need to come to god he asked verse 13 that the days of god's disciplining will be changed to one of knowing god's compassion in verse 14 that god will once again satisfy his people what a lovely expression satisfy us with your unfailing love that his people may be glad and sing forever do you remember at the beginning of the service i said god's people are a singing people well not only so and not always so but we can sing mournfully!

and we can certainly sing gladly and we can sing forever he prays that god's goodness in verse 15 may more than match the past days of misery and in verse 16 god's deeds may be shown again to his people and their children that in verse 17 his favour will rest on his people and all they undertake wow what a big bold prayer what a lot of content there is there was mooses being unrealistic forgetting the miserable failures of god's people and the seeming inevitability of judgement upon judgement was he just putting a brave face on the situation and hoping that god might do something was he just talking to himself psyching himself up to be in a positive frame of mind no none of those things oh no he knows what he's like he's utterly realistic he's already looked at all the humbling and hard facts of human frailty and sin in the opening of his prayer and also and in mighty contrast god's unchanging presence and power and yet yet abandoning all confidence in human ability he appeals to the character and purposes of the unchanging covenant god who reveals himself to his people and meets his people in and by grace undeserved we don't deserve it we never deserve it but the god who shows himself to us wants to come near to us in grace and mercy and so mooses here his heart attitude is this oh god you can do this please do this may it be clear bright and shining that you are the living god god gives good answers in fact we can see that in contrast to the people's refusal to enter the promised land some 37 years before well they behaved impeccably when god through

[63:14] Joshua tells them that it's time to cross the river Jordan and enter the promised land situation of the people of the land hasn't changed the risks and dangers the upcoming battles none of this has

changed but what had changed was their focus so that 37 years on 37 years on rather relying on their own wisdom and strength they knew they had to submit to god and obey him and as they crossed the river Jordan they did it's a rather encouraging thing and you can read about it in the bible just how they crossed the mighty river Jordan well they'd crossed from Egypt into the desert by a miracle and they crossed the river Jordan by another miracle and they did it in obedience to god now this gives us joyful permission to pray similarly bold prayers in these dark days these tough times we need to do the hard leg work of humbling ourselves before god confessing our sins reordering our lives so that we live wisely and with thoughts of eternity always nudging us but then we must be bold into cedars embracing the character the purposes and promises of god and laying these hopefully before him and saying in wrath remember mercy our final song is titled immortal honours rest on

Jesus head immortal honours rest rest on Jesus name my god my portion and my living bread in him I live upon him past my care he saves from death destruction and and his despair he is my refuge in each deep distress the lord my strength and glorious righteousness to floods and flames he leads me safely on and daily makes his sovereign goodness known by every need he richly will supply!

no will his mercy ever let me die in him there dwells a treasure all divine and matchless grace has made that treasure mine oh that my soul could love and praise in all his beauties trace his majesty adore live near his heart rest in his love each day hear his dear voice that all his will obey obey these are the contact points for us the church's website let me lead you in a closing prayer oh god we thank you that you are the god who has revealed yourself to us we thank you that you have shown enough of yourself that we might know you that we may come close to you that we may live our lives in cheerful glad obedience to you we thank you that you have given us all this understanding in the bible and we thank you for this particular passage of the bible and we thank you for how relevant it seems to us today and we pray father that you would help us to absorb its truth not to run away from it but to take it to heart and may it be powerful in our lives to change us in ways that we may never have expected so that this tough time will also be for us a healthy time a good time a necessary time a time of repentance and sorrow but a time of assurance and gladness as we recognise that because we've been saved from our sin that we can come to you and we can ask bold things of you because you have become our heavenly father so please help each of us today whoever is listening today may they hear the word of God and be changed by the power of the spirit now we ask this for the glory of your name in Jesus Christ Amen Amen