

# AM Psalm 102 The things that pass and the things that are permanent

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[ 0 : 00 ] We're going to look at this passage that we read in Psalm 102. And we're going to look at the last few verses from verse 23.

And we'll not read these again because we'll be referring to them as we go along. But you know the gist of this passage already because I've talked to you, I've mentioned it.

As we read this passage, here's a psalm that speaks very much of contrasts. There is the frailty and the suffering and the poverty of human beings.

And there is the eternal nature of a gracious good God. And these two ideas are set side by side in the opening part of the psalm.

Verses 1 to 11 tell about human suffering. And verses 12 to 22 tell about the nature of God. And where verses 11 and 12 come together, you get that contrast seen in its clearest way.

[ 1 : 06 ] My days are like an evening shadow. I wither away like grass. But you, O Lord, are enthroned forever. You'll remember throughout all generations.

That's the essential contrast we've got here. Now, I think something could be said for the view that if the psalm had ended in verse 22, you might have thought that it was complete.

And you might well ask, what are verses 23 onwards doing here? And the answer is, I think, this. Here is the psalmist saying, look, this is the gist of what I've been saying.

This is the big point. This is the main thing I want you to catch hold of. And this is what you've got to concentrate. And so he's focusing attention. Using, again, contrast.

Human life and God's nature. And bringing them into the sharpest possible contrast. To hammer home the point. To focus attention. And say, this is the big thing.

[ 2 : 05 ] There are things that are passing. And there are things that are permanent. And that's what we're going to look at this morning. Things that are passing.

And things that are permanent. And he's doing it, of course, so that folks will have better awareness of what's going on in life. So that they can assess the meaning of life.

So they can understand their situation better. So that they can prioritize. And understand the nature of things. And I hope that we will be able to do that also.

As we look at this passage in this way this morning. There are things that are passing. And there are things that are permanent. There are two things that are passing.

And there are two things that are permanent. That human life is passing. And this natural world is passing. God is permanent.

[ 3 : 05 ] And his purposes of grace are permanent also. Just let me see. When I say human life is passing. I'm referring to human life in this world.

So that's something you have to remember when I use that phrase. I'm not denying that man is immortal. That human beings are immortal. I'm just talking about human life in this world.

And I'll call it human life. And that's what you have to understand by that. Human life is passing. There's a couple of things we could point out here. In support of that idea.

Or in elucidation of that idea. He has broken my strength in midcourse. He has shortened my days. Now look at that.

There's frailty connected with human life. Because there's a set time beyond which they cannot go. There has been a span of life allotted to them.

[ 4 : 03 ] That's the basic thinking of this verse. His days have been allotted to them. There's a span of years that is natural to human life. And that's it.

Okay. You may go a wee bit beyond that. But not much. There is a span of days more or less fixed and stable. And that implies of course the frailty of human beings.

They don't go on forever. Life doesn't last from century to century. And although our years may seem long from one perspective.

Especially when we're young. Nonetheless. When we think about it in a broader perspective.

There's the frailty of man. Their days are limited.

That's what he's saying first of all. But then you see he's doing something else. He's showing that within that frailty. There's also another frailty we might see. And that is.

[ 5 : 03 ] That before these years have been lived. He may be cut off. And his days therefore will be shortened. And that's very much what he says in verse 24.

Oh my God. He says. Take me not away in the midst of my days. And you see his concern that he's got. That he's not even going to be allowed to live out the 70 or 80 years.

That are normal for human existence. And that he's going to experience a curtailed life. And he's going to be cut off before he's reached maturity.

Or something of that nature. So it's not only that human beings are frail with an allotted time span.

It's also that within that frailty they can be cut off before they reach their prime.

And that's the concern that he's got here. And the display that we've got here of the passing nature of human life. Now that's something of course that the Bible speaks of.

[ 6 : 05 ] A span of life. It's something that's quite often indicated in the Bible. Psalm 90 speaks of this. The years of our life are 70. Or even by reason of strength 80.

So there was a normal span of life in those days. Nowadays the average life of a person. Average years of a person living in Scotland. Is a bit longer than 70.

And I did a quick check. Last year most people in Scotland lived to be 80. There were more people died over 80 than under 80 in Scotland last year.

As I could figure it from the figures. But there's our lifespan. We don't go up to 120, 150, 200. We don't. We may live to be 80.

Most people do now live to be 80 in our environment. But still there's a limitation. And we all know it.

That's human frailty. And as for the other thing. We can acknowledge how frail life is within that frailty as we might say.

[ 7 : 14 ] And this of course is something that we can see. Especially with Covid. With what's this doing to our average lifespan. Probably lessening it. But especially.

It's telling us of the uncertainty of it all. It's telling us of the frailty of it all. How our plans have been disrupted. We would say a couple of years ago.

I'm going to do this. I'm going to go do that. I'm going to go on my holiday to Cyprus. I'm going to do that business deal. And travel to the States to do it. Or whatever. Can we say that realistically now? Even in the light of just Covid. We might have to say. Well I'm not sure if I can. Life is uncertain. Life is not secure. And if we think of other things. We can quite plainly see.

That not only is there a limitation to the years that we live in this world. But these years are frail. I think of a missionary I met in South America.

[ 8 : 11 ] In Peru. He was probably in his early 30s. He died in a road accident. The very day he was going to go on further to the United States. I think on a student in my year in Edinburgh University doing geography.

He was killed at 19. Climbing in the grandparents. I think of a boy at school. A teenager. I don't know what was wrong with him. He died just in his 14th or 15th year.

I think of a 10 week old sister. Who died at that age. You can all do the same. The frailty of human life. So that's one thing that's passing.

And it's as well that we keep it in mind. Now this has got a downside to it. It may seem that we're trying to be a wee bit pessimistic about things.

But let's make sure that we take it in the overall context of what we're thinking of here. If we are impressed with our frailty.

[ 9 : 14 ] And at times we're disturbed by it. And if we are anxious and troubled over the frailty that we see around us. As well we might be.

We've not just got to think about that. We've got to keep it in perspective. This is something that is change is passing. But there is something that is permanent.

And that's the big message. When you see things that are passing. Remember there are things that are permanent. When you see the passing nature of human life. Remember there's a God who is permanent.

So that's the first thing that is passing. Human life. The second thing that is passing is the natural world. Verse 25.

Of old you laid the foundation of the earth. And the heavens are the work of your hands. And then they will perish. They will all wear out.

[10:17] You will change them like a robe. And there you see is that the natural world is also perishing. It's also passing. Human life was generally acknowledged to have a normal span of years.

But not so the natural world. Comparatively speaking it seems ageless. And so from the human perspective it is. Generations pass.

But the hills remain the same. The sun rises. The sun sets. The stars still form the same recognisable pattern. There is the apparently everlasting nature of the world in which we live.

The universe in which we live. And even the Bible speaks in that fashion. The blessings of Joseph described in Genesis. The blessings of the Bible. The finest produce of the ancient hills.

And the abundance of the everlasting mountains. And there you see. Okay this is poetry. Not to be taken literally. But that's the popular way of looking at things.

[11:25] If you're from a certain part of the country. And interested in your family history. You may well go back to the place where your granny was brought up. Or something like that. And look around you and see.

Well there she was. And she's gone. And my father's gone as well. But people are gone. But the hills are the same. Generations before looked at these hills.

And these generations have gone. But the hills are still the same. That's the way we look at life. And there's something to be said. In the sense that it's natural to look at that. Hills have always been there we may think.

And always will be there. But that's not the way the Bible sees it. That's not the way the psalmist saw it. He saw these things as passing as well. Notice the language that they use is.

They will perish. They will all wear out like a garment. You will change them like a robe. Three ways of expressing this. The first two really are much the same idea.

[12:24] Wearing out and growing and perishing. That's what we've got in these verses here. And you see the picture is of a garment.

Or clothes for example. Somebody's gone off abroad for a long time. And they've stored some things carefully as they thought. And they come back and they discover that some of the garments are moth-eaten.

Or get into them. And they're not worth wearing any longer. That's what happens to clothing. If it's not looked after properly. Here's a favourite piece of wear.

That I wear day and day out. If I can. And that's the nature of clothing. And that's the nature of clothing. That's the nature of clothing. And that is the sort of picture that's applied to the universe.

To the world in which we live. That's the nature of it. According to God's perspective. From God's perspective. It's not everlasting at all. It's like an old piece of cloth.

[13:22] That soon wears out. And has to be dispensed with. So there's that deterioration and decay in the natural world. That is going to lead to its destruction.

That's the sort of thing that this is speaking about. And then there's this idea of changing. And that is interesting you see. Because that does suggest.

If you push the illustration just a wee bit. That it does suggest something positive. Yes. This old worn cloth.

Piece of clothing. Is no longer fit for purpose. And I put it away. But away of something else instead. And that's certainly this idea here.

They will change. You will change them like a robe. You take off one robe. And you put on another. You take away this world. And you put another in this place. And I do think there is at least a hint here.

[14:20] Of something greater that is going to emerge. And that of course is the idea that is contained in the New Testament. Of a new heavens and a new earth. So we put away the old garments.

That is soiled by use. And we put on a new fresh one. And so God puts away this old world. That is spoiled by the curse of sin.

And the ravages of disorder. And death that sin has brought. And he makes a new world. Where there is the home of righteousness.

That is implied here. But the main thing implied here of course. Is the passing nature of the world. No. That is not so easy to reflect on.

Although I must say. In this generation. It is easier to reflect on it. Than it was when some of us were young. I reflect on a time when I was young. I heard the minister say.

[15:17] When nuclear weapons were just coming into the fore. That this could destroy the whole world. I didn't think science was exactly right. But the general idea was. We now had a means by which the world could be destroyed.

Something that probably we couldn't conceive of before. Or in this modern age. We've got ecological forces. That are coming to the fore. And we're told the world is going to destroy itself. Unless we do something about it. And then we've got Covid on top of that. And we wonder about the future of the world. Yes. It's maybe not quite as secure.

As we used to think it was. But nonetheless. People in general. If they don't give too much thought to it. Don't think that the world is going to come to an end. It's a pretty permanent thing in their thinking.

And some people that have a simplistic view of evolution. For example. Say well it's an upward spiral that we're on. Evolution. Natural selection.

[16:16] Weeds out the bad mutations in our genes. And keeps the good ones. So we're in an upward spiral all the time. That's the way that they think about things. The world is getting better.

That's the way we thought about it. The world is getting richer. That's the way we experienced it. Life span is getting longer. We're in an upward spiral. And it's difficult in those circumstances to remember.

That that's not the way that it is. I'm not a scientist. In case you think I'm making protections. But I haven't got a good Google. And the second law of thermodynamics means this.

Put simply. Hot things always cool unless you do something to stop them. Which doesn't mean very much to us. But this expresses a fundamental and simple truth about the universe.

That disorder always increases. That's a law of the environment of the universe. Part of its constitution. As it now exists by the purpose of God.

[17:19] Disorder always increases. Disorder always increases. We're not in an upward spiral. We're in a downward spiral. And one day this disorder is going to come to a fitting climax.

And God's going to change this world. And he's going to cause it to perish. And weave out like an old garment. And that's the way we've got to see things.

Now it's a pretty sad picture you might think. If you think about this. Here is our human life. It's passing. Here is this world. And it's passing as well.

Who would have thought the everlasting hills were going to pass? But that's the way it is. Now what are we going to do with that idea? And I must say I do have difficulties in applying this.

Because this isn't the only thing that the Bible says about human life. And it's not the only thing it says about the world. So we've got to remember that this is part of the picture.

[18:24] And there are other things that balance things out. But in this context what are we meant to do about it? And we might well think that what's in mind is this. What Paul said.

Set your mind on things above. Not on things that are in earth. And of course I'm not going to say that that's bad advice. When you think about the frailty of human life.

Or even the frailty of the world in which we live. Set your mind on things above. But more specifically. What he's saying this here for.

Is not to downgrade work for example. Or the proper use of the environment. Or the pleasures and enjoyments that we get from the material world that God has made.

He's not denying any of that. But he is putting in the word of warning. In the midst of your use of the resources of this world. In the midst of your enjoyment of all the good gifts that God gives you in the material realm.

[19:22] Do remember that it's passing. And there are things that are permanent. And that's the big thing we have to do. It's not that we're going to be full of gloom because we're passing.

It's not that we're going to be distraught because the world is passing and perishing. This is meant to turn our thoughts away from ourselves and our frailty.

Into the things that are permanent. And that's the big lesson that we've got to take out of this. When we look at our lives. When we look at the world. When we look at our lives in the world.

Then this is what we have to remember. This is all passing. But there is something permanent. And that's what we're going to look at briefly now. Well the first item of course.

There are two things. Is the eternal God. God is the one that is permanent. They will perish in verse 26. But you will remain.

[ 20 : 21 ] And previously in verse 24. You whose years endure throughout all generations. So there we've got the nature of God. He's an eternal God.

He is the one that is everlasting. When the hills aren't. He's the creator. He laid the foundation of the earth. And the heavens are the work of his hands. He's the planner and the originator of all things.

The future is in his hands. He's the one that's going to change it. It's not going to be. That we're going to blow the world to bits. On our own initiative. Or that we're going to treat it so badly.

Human race is going to come to an end. Because of an ecological disaster. That these may be elements or not. Ultimately it's God that does it. He's in control. He's the eternal God.

Who made everything. Who controls everything. And who will change the world in due course.

That's the nature of what he's like. You're the same. And your years have no end.

[ 21 : 22 ] So we turn from the frailty of human life. Which is but a span. Often interrupted by other things. And we see there's one that knows no frailty of that nature.

Whose years are not limited. Whose power is not. Whose wisdom. Whose goodness is not limited in any way. There's the one to whom we can look. His years do not end.

The everlasting God. It's not just that. That there is everlasting. It's also that his purpose of grace. Is everlasting. And this is there in the last verse of the chapter.

The children of your servants shall dwell secure. Their offspring shall be established before you. Now the big thing that's in mind here.

Is simply what I said. The purpose of God's grace will not fail. It will go on. It will endure. You can count on it. But the particular case that he uses.

[ 22 : 24 ] To express this. Is what I want to reflect on for a moment. In view of what we're doing this morning. But once we've looked at that. We've got to remember that that's not the main thing.

That the writer is saying here. The main thing that is purpose of grace. Do not fail. But the illustration that he uses. The particular case that he uses is this.

The children of your servants shall dwell secure. Their offspring shall be established before you.

The children of believers are in a privileged position.

And they will be established before God. By his grace. That's the sort of thing that is being spoken about here. And to my mind it's not at all surprising.

That the psalmist can express this idea. That he's got of the everlasting purpose of God. That he expresses it in such specific terms.

[ 23 : 24 ] Because this was written into their way of thinking. In the scriptures. I will be your God. And the God of your descendants after you. Is what was given to Abraham.

And he had the assurance then. That his children would dwell secure. And that his offspring should be established before him. On what basis? On the basis of his own genetic inheritance being passed on to them.

Not at all. On the basis of the promise of God. I will be your God. And the God of your descendants after you. We were singing it about in Psalm 103.

The loving kindness of Jehovah. Is from everlasting to everlasting. Upon then them fear him. And his righteousness unto children's children.

Those that trust in the Lord. Are made righteous. Accepted as righteous. In New Testament terms. Accepted as righteous. On the basis of the merits of our Lord.

[ 24 : 24 ] God. But his righteousness will be to children's children. A reiteration of that basic thought. God's grace is given. To families.

I will be your God. And the God of your descendants after you. Now you may not take this aboard at first thought. And I'm not worried if you don't.

But I have noticed that there is a translation. Of the second commandment. That brings in this very idea. Now I have to acknowledge that not all translations do deal with it in that way.

But to me it did seem to make sense. You may know it. I hope you know it. He visits the iniquity of the fathers on the children. To the third and fourth generation of those that hate him. But he shows mercy to a thousand generations of those who love him. And keep his commandments. To a thousand generations. That's the translation here. And they put in that word generations.

[ 25 : 23 ] Because that's in the previous section. The third and fourth generation of those that hate him. And the thousand generations of those that love him. So God's anger rests upon wicked people.

And comes upon their children and children as well. And his grace comes to those that know him. And to their children and children as well. That's the idea that that translation suggests.

And it's in keeping with the thinking of Old Testament passages. And indeed with New Testament passages as well. It used to puzzle me. But on the day of Pentecost.

Peter said. The promise of salvation in Christ. Is to you and to your children. And I thought. Why did he say that? Well. He's a Jew. He knows the Old Testament.

He knows how the Old Testament principles work. This was what he said to Abraham. The promise is to you and to your children. I will be your God. And the God of your descendants after you. Peter there in the day of Pentecost.

[ 26 : 22 ] Is reiterating the Old Testament way of looking at things. Salvation is for you and your children. And then he adds. And for those that are far off. And you may say.

Ah yeah. That's different now. But those that are far off are the Gentiles. So they've been brought into these privileges. That formerly the Jewish people only enjoyed. So this is a regular principle throughout the scriptures.

And in that basis we can see. The children of your servants shall dwell securely. And their offspring shall be established before you. Because God's grace comes from parents to children.

By his sovereign appointment and grace. And that of course is why. Maybe I shouldn't say of course if you don't understand our position. But that is why.

One of the reasons why we baptize children of believing parents. Because we believe that this promise is for them. God says to us still.

[ 27 : 20 ] The children of your servants who are going to stand at the front. And make promises and commitments. The children of your servants shall dwell securely. The offspring shall be established before you.

That's what we're claiming this morning. In the act of baptism. It's very difficult this. Because you see. I think the best argument against infant baptism.

Is the way that many churches celebrate it. And it brings it such a bad name. That most people. And many people. Don't want to have anything to do with it.

So we've got to see. That there's an awful lot of nonsense. And superstition. Attached to the way. That baptism is done. In certain circles. And we repudiate these things entirely.

There's a way of speaking in Scotland. I don't know if you'd all be acquainted with it. But I can imagine. A couple that have had a baby. And they say. We went to church.

[ 28 : 20 ] To get the wean done. And they're talking about baptism. Getting the wean done. That's a very colloquial way of speaking perhaps. But that's all that they think about. It's a custom.

They don't know what's happening. They're doing it in complete ignorance. It's meaningless. It's an abomination to God. And there are certain places.

In which baptism might be used. Like a magical charm. A lucky charm. If you're baptised you're safe. And you're in the path to salvation.

Because of baptism. Now none of that. None of that. It's not even a matter of. Here are parents bringing their children. Dedicating them to the Lord. It's not them saying.

Here's my child. Would you please take him. It's God saying to them. I've made a promise. Are you taking that promise? That's what's happening here. So we put aside all these mistaken truths.

[ 29 : 16 ] About what's happening in baptism. And for myself. This is the big thing. And the thing that matters. Are these parents. Believing parents. Have they known the Lord as their saviour.

Are they following him as his master. Do they accept this way of doing things. I will be your God. And the God of your descendants. After you. That's the thing that matters. It isn't that grace descends through the genes.

As it were. So that you might inherit your father's blue eyes. And you inherit his grace as well. It's not like that at all. It's the sovereign purpose of God. This is the way he decided to do things. And that's why you can see here. The children of your servants. Shall dwell secure. And that's the basis of what we're doing this morning. But this is just a case.

That he's making out. For the steadfast nature of the purpose of God. God's purpose does not fail. God's purpose will endure. The mountains can go.

[ 30 : 17 ] But God's faithfulness will remain. Human life can pass. But the promises made remain firm. That's the nature of God's purpose of grace.

He has sent his son to redeem his people from their sins. And that work of redemption has been accomplished. And is irresistible. And it will achieve all that was intended to achieve.

The hills may pass away. But God's people stand secure. Because his love has been set upon them. Because Christ has died for them. Because the Holy Spirit has been given to them.

How is it possible that they should fall away or fail. When God has been at work in this way. All that the Father has given me shall come to me. Says Jesus.

No one shall pluck them out of my Father's hand. And there's many other passages that can speak in a similar way. And we think of the great day.

[ 31 : 18 ] When he will present us faultless before his presence with great joy. And that's an illustration of how his purpose will never fail. And we've got an awful lot more that we could go into.

But we won't in the New Testament in that connection. The nature of God's grace. You can count in it. Whatever happens you can count in it. And that's a big lesson. It's just one simple lesson I want to take out of this.

And it's simply this. We turn from the frailty of human life. And indeed from the frailty of the universe in which we live. And we see these things are passing.

But one thing that is passing. That is not passing. Is the character of the eternal God. And his gracious purpose. You can always count on that.

And the psalmist elsewhere says. My flesh and heart may faint and fail. And when we look around us. We can see how that might happen.

[ 32 : 21 ] In difficulties. We feel like that. When we see our weaknesses. Even at a spiritual level. We feel like that. And sometimes these things can get on top of us.

And we enter into the spirit of the psalmist who said. My flesh and heart may faint and fail. But the thing is. He didn't stop there. He said. But God will fail me.

Never. And that's the point that we're making. If your heart is fainting and failing. You turn to God and see. He'll not fail me.

I can count on him. If you're a sinner. Burdened with guilt. Then turn to the Savior. And lay your guilt on him. Because he died for sinners. And you see.

He'll not fail me. I can count on him. In time of difficulty. Look to the Lord. And see. He's the unchanging God. His purpose endures from generation to generation.

[ 33 : 21 ] He'll never fail me. And that's what I hope we'll all be able to see. As a result of our sermon this morning. My flesh and heart may faint and fail.

But God will fail me. Never. May God bless to us his word. Amen. Please stand.

And take us home. Amen. So that's Pat. So that's Pat.

So that's Pat. So that's Pat. So they all live there in their eyes.

So that's Pat. So that's Pat. So that's Pat.

[ 35 : 01 ] So that's Pat. So that's Pat.

So Pat. So that's Pat.