

PM Psalm 90

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[0 : 00] A prayer of Moses, the man of God. Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting, you are God. You return man to dust and say, Return, O children of man. For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night. You sweep them away as with a flood.

They are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning. In the morning it flourishes and is renewed. In the evening it fades and withers.

Or even by reason of strength, eighty.

[1 : 30] Yet their span is but toil and trouble. They are soon gone. And we fly away. Who considers the power of your anger and your wrath according to the fear of you?

So teach us to number our days, that we may get a heart of wisdom. Return, O Lord, how long? Have pity on your servants. Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, and for as many years as we have seen evil. Let your work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power to their children.

Let the favour of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us. Yes, establish the work of our hands.

[2 : 43] Amen. The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength, eighty.

Yet their span is but toil and trouble. They are soon gone, and we fly away. Who considers the power of your anger and your wrath according to the fear of you?

So teach us to number our days, that we may get a heart of wisdom. For some reason, perhaps you can put it down to me reaching middle age, but certain words I heard for the first time more than thirty years ago, over recent months have been rolling round in my head.

They're the words of a hymn, written by William James Kirkpatrick, good Scottish name, if you've ever heard one. And they are words that are found in Sankey's Sacred Songs and Solos, a popular 19th century Christian hymn book.

And the words of the first verse of the hymn goes like this. Life at best is very brief, like the falling of a leaf, like the binding of a sheaf, be in time.

[4 : 21] Tempus fugit, said the Romans, which roughly translated means, time flies. And how quickly time flies.

It was Virgil, the first century BC Roman writer, who wrote in his epic poem, The Aeneid, time is flying, never to return.

And for more than two thousand years, human beings, time-bound creatures that we are, have discovered that the years pass with almost supersonic speed.

For me, it was just over a month ago that I met with the board of the Banner of Truth trustees for the first of our two annual board meetings.

But it didn't seem like six months since last we met. Perhaps some of you attend a regular conference. The Scottish Reformed Conference met just last week.

[5 : 32] But it doesn't seem like a year since the clans gathered in Hamilton in 2022. Every year we have certain bills that come in on a certain month.

The car insurance, the house insurance, various other annual deadlines come. And they seem to come so quickly.

We look at the letter and we say, did we not just pay this a couple of months ago? And you discover it was actually 12 months ago. And what about any who happen to be parents?

It was only yesterday or it seems like that that you played games with your children on the living room floor. But now they're up and away.

Some even married and with children of their own. And you say to yourself, where have the years gone? And what about our own parents?

[6 : 44] Yes, we look at our own parents who were once so strong and fit and able. But now they are so frail and in need of constant care.

And then suddenly we do the arithmetic and we realize that it won't be long perhaps 20 maybe 25 and it pushed 30 years before we will be sharing their experience of old age if the Lord spares us. You might have guessed that I come from Northern Ireland. And there's a small town in Northern Ireland called Ballygown and it is situated in County Down about 10 miles southeast of Belfast. When I was a boy my family used to drive through Ballygown on special occasions maybe an Easter Monday or a bank holiday in August as we headed south to the beautiful mountains of Morn that literally do sweep down to the sea.

But in Ballygown there was a very imposing old building that was once an orphanage. It's constructed out of black stone in the middle of the 19th century I think it was built and it dominates the little village.

[8 : 23] And what is remarkable about this old building is there are four words inscribed on the clock tower in letters of gold.

So just I think it's underneath the clock on this big imposing clock tower in the middle of this large black stone building and the words say the time is short.

short. And they are taken for 1 Corinthians chapter 7 verse 29 in the King James version or authorised version of the Bible. The time is short.

And as a child I used to look up at this every time we passed it. The time is short.

And I was one of four children squashed into the back not a child's seat to be found not even a seat belt squashed into the back seat of my father's Vauxhall Viva.

[9 : 26] And I would see these words and they would be such a mystery to me. The time is short.

But for time on what seemed like a never ending car journey at that age appeared to be anything but short.

But here's the thing over time our perspective on the passage of time changes. Doesn't it?

All over a certain age I'm sure you would put your hands up and agree with me. And our thoughts today are more in keeping with the view expressed by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 29 the time is short.

Indeed the older we get the time is very short. And in the grand scheme of things it is not long before the grown up confesses with Job my days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle.

[10 : 51] well since the time is short and our days pass so swiftly what should we do?

The first thing we should do is we should pray the prayer of Moses in Psalm 90. That man of God as the title of that Psalm describes him having acknowledged the brevity of life in the words the years of our life are 70 or even by reason of strength 80 yet their span is but toil and trouble.

They are soon gone and we fly away. Verses 10 then he says in verse 12 so teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

It's the prayer of the man of God. It is the prayer of a man who understands the brevity of life in accordance with the teaching and perspective of scripture.

And it is oh Lord teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom.

[12 : 20] Now we often hear it said that time or life sorry is precious. Life is precious and so it is.

And yet how often is this precious and valuable gift how often does it slip through thoughtless fingers?

if we are to live and when I say live I mean live as our creator intended us to live and not simply just to exist like some animal like some dog or beast that just indulges its appetites.

if we are to live then we need the wisdom that comes from God alone because his wisdom teaches us how to redeem the time.

His wisdom teaches us how to make the best use of the time which is what that phrase redeeming the time really means. Ephesians 5 verse 16 how to use it wisely?

And the wisest use of time is to use it to prepare ourselves to enter into eternity.

[13 : 44] We've missed the point if we feel to use the time that God has given us to prepare ourselves for entering into eternity.

So that is the first thing we must do. So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. Have you prayed that prayer?

And have you really meant it? Have you acknowledged the brevity of life as Moses does? And have you come before the eternal almighty?

God of grace and mercy. The God who is described at the beginning of this psalm as our dwelling place in all generations and who at the end of the psalm is approached by Moses and who is prayed to that he might satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

who comes to God and who says to God oh Lord only you can make us glad.

[15 : 11] Only you can satisfy the deepest needs and longings of our hearts and of our spirits. Nothing in this world can fill us and satisfy us.

It will only leave us with frustration. But you are our dwelling place and you are the Lord who saves and who satisfies.

The second thing that we need to do is to heed the several warnings in the word of God to make the best use of the time that we have. I think we have a natural tendency to laziness and to indolence. that is one of the effects of the fall of man to sin. And I think that is the reason why we need to be told as were the Christians in the church of Rome not to be slothful in business but to be fervent in spirit serving the Lord.

Now is it not true and I'm speaking especially to Christian believers just now that too often we neglect our Christian duties or if we don't neglect them altogether we sluggishly drag ourselves to them with as much enthusiasm as a dog to the bathtub.

[16 : 45] We used to have a dog he was a Scottish terrier and I'm really sorry to say that his name was Jock but when it was bath time when the when the bathtubs were turned off and we shouted Jock time for your bath it was almost as if he was marching behind a funeral cortege it was you could almost hear the music it was comical it was the last thing that this dog wanted was to be put into a bath and to get a good wash and that's like us at least sometimes isn't it when it comes to our Christian duties and responsibilities we may not shirk them we may know and think they're necessary but we've little relish or delight in them how do we overcome that tendency well

God knows and that is why he tells us through his servants in his word that we are to keep the shortness of time the brevity of life before our mind's eye doing that is one of the ways to keep our Christian zeal constantly on the boil which is what Paul means when he speaks about fervent in spirit serving the Lord keeping that spirit like a pot on the boil in your service for the Lord the time is short this brief season that God has given us is not for taking life easy we have to remember what will take place in just a few short years time we're going to be entering if we know the Lord an endless Sabbath of rest and peace that will come soon enough but now is the season for active service we're

Christian soldiers that's how the Bible describes us so as Christian soldiers we need to remember this the good fight of faith is won only by the strenuous zealous striving of men and women of God so let me remind you of some of the words that Paul writes to his young Christian friend and fellow Christian worker Timothy he says but as for you oh man of God flee these things what are these things he's been talking about the love of money which is the root of all kinds of evil he says man of God flee these things pursue righteousness godliness faith love steadfastness gentleness then he says fight the good fight of the faith take hold of the eternal life to which you were called see how vigorous and active those verbs are that he uses those action words flee pursue fight take hold of or to change the metaphor

Solomon the wisest man of the ancient world wrote in Proverbs 10 verse 4 a slack hand causes poverty but the hand of the diligent makes rich and that is a principle that applies right across all aspects of life and godliness a slack hand causes poverty but the hand of the diligent makes rich so let's be up and at it as they say doing with all our might whatever our hand finds to do and all to the glory of God no half measures or half hearted obedience will do for our Lord God must have our whole hearted service be like the apostle Paul who said that he served his saviour with his whole heart in the work of the gospel

Romans 1 verse 9 and then the third thing the shortness of time should also affect the manner of our gospel preaching and personal witnessing to the lost what a privilege it is that the God of heaven has given to us that we should be co-workers fellow workers together with him as we've been thinking through the day Paul plants Apollos waters but God gives the increase God has

deigned to use a Paul he's deigned to use an Apollos they are his co-workers one plants one waters and God with them works with them and gives the increase to the planting and the watering of the seed do we realize my friends that this time of plowing and sowing and reaping will come to an end the time is short the end is near but as I get older and become more aware of the fragility of life as I see friends and colleagues and relatives age and some who are now suffering from the ravages of disease or dementia

[22 : 39] I sometimes ask myself the question how have I prized the privilege of making the gospel known how have I impressed upon others the urgency of receiving and resting upon Christ for salvation for a time for me may come when this tongue will no longer be able to preach the Lord Jesus Christ to others think of the words of the hymn writer happy if with my latest breath I may but gasp his name preach him to all and cry in death behold behold the lamb but it may be because of old age and infirmity and disease and dementia

I may not be able to do that how much more then should I value the opportunities that God gives me in the here and now to make him known to others and to encourage by whatever means possible the unbelieving to close with God's offer of mercy in Christ so since the time is short let us then preach like Richard Baxter the famous 17th century minister of Kitterminster in Worcestershire who said I preached as sure ne'er to preach again and as a dying man to dying men and if we are not preachers we can still draw an application of the point to ourselves David he wasn't a preacher he was a king and yet reflecting on what his response should be to his receiving from God the pardon of his sin said these words then will I teach transgressors thy ways and sinners shall be converted unto thee Psalm 51 verse 13 if we've experienced the pardon of God's grace surely we will want with a sense of urgency because of the shortness and brevity of life to pass that great good news on to others that they too might experience the grace of God in Christ but I notice that the words of 1 Corinthians 7 and verse 29 in the English Standard Version of the Bible speak about an appointed time it says there in the ESV the appointed time has grown very short and that word appointed reminds me of a verse found in the letter to the Hebrews verse which we were taught as children to memorize and which said in the authorised version it is appointed unto men once to die and after this the judgment Hebrews 9 27 and so my fourth and final point is a solemn word of instruction to those who are not yet trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ and if that's you this evening let me say my unbelieving friend though having heard on many occasions the sweet and gracious call of the gospel in this church or some other gospel preaching church and you have not yet responded in repentance and faith well let me say to you most earnestly and solemnly and seriously you have an appointment in your diary which you simply have to keep you can't get out of it it's not like phoning up the dentist surgery and saying can I cancel that appointment and rearrange it for another time it is appointed unto men once to die there is no escaping the appointment and that appointment is closer now than it was last Sunday evening last month last year and though the date of that appointment is unknown to you the date the day the time the hour is known to God and if we were able to look into the books of heaven and open them we would see this red letter day marked in God's calendar I want you to think of the man in the Lord's parable of the rich fool do you remember how he had a fantastic bumper harvest what shall

[28 : 49] I do he says I know what I'll do I'll pull down my barns and build bigger ones and I'll say to myself self soul you have many riches stored up for many years take life easy he went to bed one night with his mind filled with thoughts about his future business prospects and retirement plans but little did he realise that that very night would be his last on this earth because no sooner had he closed his eyes in sleep than he opened his eyes in hell for God said to him you fool this night your soul shall be required of you so I say who but

God knows when a needy soul will hear the gospel and the call to repent and believe in Jesus Christ for the last and final time it may be this will be the last time for someone in this hall this evening and this solemn note is well sounded in that hymn of William Kirkpatrick and Sankey sacred songs that I mentioned earlier I leave its words with you with this little memory from my own past when I was a student at the Irish Baptist College in Belfast sometime around 1984 85 I once heard an old Baptist pastor tell of how the

Lord brought him to saving faith in Jesus Christ and he said it was the fact of the brevity of life that the Holy Spirit used to impress upon him when he was a young man the urgency of embracing the hope held out to him in the gospel of Christ and that was how God drew him to the saviour and in

particular it was the words of this old gospel hymn that conveyed the truth to him my friend because the time is short you need to be in time life at best is very brief like the falling of a leaf like the binding of a sheaf be in time fleeting days are telling fast that the die will soon be cast and the fatal line be past be in time fairest flowers soon decay youth and beauty pass away oh you have not long to stay be in time while

God's spirit bids you come sinner do not longer roam lest you seal your hopeless doom be in time time is gliding swiftly by death and judgment draweth nigh to the arms of Jesus fly be in time oh I pray you count the cost ere the fatal line be crossed and your soul in hell be lost be in time sinner heed heed the warning voice make the Lord your final choice then all heaven will rejoice be in time come from darkness into light come let Jesus make you right come receive his life tonight be in time and the chorus goes like this be in time be in time while the voice of

Jesus calls you be in time if in sin you longer wait you may find no open gate and your cry be just too late be in time could anything be more important to your soul than to hear that call and to respond to it in a timely fashion may God enable us all to do so let us pray oh God our father you have said in your word that all day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people forgive us lord for our obstinacy forgive us lord for running away from you forgive us lord from hiding ourselves from you for you are the

[34 : 45] God who seeks and saves that which was lost and we thank you for sending countless thousands of preachers into the world down through the ages to call sinful people like us to find pardon peace peace and assurance in the gospel of Jesus Christ and even now you are calling oh that we might hear your voice oh that we might heed your voice oh that we might come to Jesus Christ the savior of sinners and find in him life everlasting help us to do so we pray seek the lord while he may be found call upon him while he is near let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts let him turn to the lord and he will have mercy upon him and to our god for he will abundantly pardon we ask these things in Jesus name amen