

PM Psalm 90 & 1 Corinthians 7:25-31 The Time is Short

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Preacher: Rev Jonathan Watson

[0 : 00] Please turn in your Bibles to Psalm 90. We've got two readings this evening. The first is Psalm 90 and then the second is 1 Corinthians 7. Turn to Psalm 90 first of all.

Psalm 90.

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.

[1 : 06] 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, and in the evening it fades and withers.

For we are brought to an end by your anger. By your wrath we are dismayed. You have set our iniquities before you.

Our secret sins in the light of your presence. For all our days pass away under your wrath. We bring our years to an end.

We bring our years to an end, like a sigh. 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?

[2 : 10] So teach us to number our days, that we may get a heart of wisdom. Return, O Lord. How long?

Have pity on your servant. 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. Then our second reading is from 1 Corinthians chapter 7. Going to break into this passage at verse 25.

1 Corinthians chapter 7 and verse 25. And that's on page 1151 of the Pew Bible.

[3 : 21] Now, concerning the betrothed, I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy.

I think that in view of the present distress, or that could simply be the present necessity or compulsion, it is good for a person to remain as he is.

Are you bound to a wife? Do not seek to be free. Are you free from a wife? Do not seek a wife. But if you do marry, you have not sinned.

And if a betrothed woman marries, she has not sinned. Yet those who marry will have worldly troubles, and I would spare you that. This is what I mean, brothers.

The appointed time has grown very short. From now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it.

[4 : 50] For the present form of this world is passing away. And we'll end the reading there at verse 31.

I want to turn your attention to the words that we find in verse 29 of 1 Corinthians 7.

In the English Standard Version, they read, This is what I mean, brothers. The appointed time has grown very short. In the Authorized Version, The time is short.

The time is short. For some reason, perhaps we can put it down to reaching middle age.

Certain words that I heard for the first time almost 40 years ago have been doing the rounds in my mind in recent months.

[6 : 00] The words come from a hymn written by a William James Kirkpatrick, and it's a hymn that's found in Sankey's Sacred Songs and Solos.

And the words go like this, Life, at best, is very brief, like the falling of a leaf, like the binding of a sheaf.

Be in time. Tempus fugit, For those who remember their Latin from school days, that simply translates as, Time flies.

Time flies. Indeed, how quickly time flies. It was Virgil, not the great centre-half of Liverpool Football Club, but Virgil, the Roman writer of the first century BC, who wrote in his epic poem, The Aeneid, Time is flying never to return.

Time is flying never to return. And for more than 2,000 years since those words were written, human beings, who are time-bound creatures, have discovered that the years pass with almost supersonic speed.

[7 : 31] Let me give you a few examples of what I mean. In my own life, in just a few weeks' time, I will meet the trustees of the Banner of Truth that I work for.

And that will be for the second time in this year. We have two annual board meetings a year. But it doesn't seem like six months since I last met with them and gave them my editorial report.

Time flies. These are like two little milestones in my year and they come up so, so quickly. On a different note, I did my calculations last night and I am reliably informed by Google AI that it is only 102 days until Christmas.

Sorry for mentioning it. Can you believe it? It comes round that fast. Perhaps some of you can believe it because you do your weekly shop and the summer has not just ended and there's suddenly appearing in the shelves of Tesco and other supermarkets their own stock of Christmassy items.

It's hard to believe stuff in the shelves related to Christmas. We haven't even had Halloween yet. Or perhaps you attend an annual conference. Think of the Scottish Reform Conference in Hamilton.

[9 : 03] Or let me give you a plug for the Banner Borders Conference in Carlisle in November. And you go to these conferences. Maybe you go regularly to them or similar conferences.

And you see old friends at the conference that you only see once a year. And the first words exchanged are often, well, doesn't seem like a year since last we met.

Or think about your parents if they're still alive. As a parent myself, it only seems like yesterday that we were on the living room floor playing games with our children.

And now they're up and away. They've flown the nest. They have their own homes and families and children of their own. And when we look at our grandchildren, we say, where have the years gone?

Or think of our own parents. We look at our parents, our parents who were once so strong and fit and able, but now old age has caught up with them.

[10 : 22] And they're frail, maybe in need of constant care. And we look at them and then we do the mental arithmetic in our own heads and realize that it won't be that long before we share their experience of old age if the Lord should spare us.

And all these thoughts have been going through my head. And I remember memories from childhood and boys and girls, you might like to listen carefully to this point in the sermon.

Because when I was your age, boys and girls, I used to go with my brothers and sister in my mum and dad's car for a day out to the Mountains of Mourne down in Newcastle in County Down.

Maybe it was Easter Monday or a special holiday and we would travel from my home in Bangor down through the county towards Newcastle where the Mountains of Mourne famously sweep down to the sea.

And on our way, we had to pass through a little town in Northern Ireland called Ballygowan. Ballygowan. It's about 10 miles southeast of Belfast and it's in one of the routes from Bangor down to Newcastle.

[11 : 51] And in Ballygowan, there's a big, imposing, impressive building built out of black stone in the mid-19th century.

I think it was once an orphanage for boys and girls who had no mummy or daddy. As I say, it was constructed of black stone and I remember it so well because as we passed it, it had a big central clock tower with a big clock face on the tower and underneath the clock face in big gold letters were the words from 1 Corinthians 7 verse 29.

The time is short. The time is short. Four words of very short numbers of letters.

So even as a young child just learning to read and write, I could look up and I could see what that said. The time is short.

The time is short. Now to me, who was one of four children squashed into the backseat of my father's car on what seemed to be a never-ending journey, those words seem to be so strange and mysterious because I thought to myself, the time is anything but short.

[13 : 26] When are we going to get to the mountains? When are we going to get to the beach? Are we nearly there yet, dad? The time is short but as a child I thought time was long and never-ending.

but over time our perspective on the passage of time changes, doesn't it?

As we grow older until our thoughts about time fall more closely in line with the view expressed by the Apostle Paul in these words in 1 Corinthians 7 verse 29 the time is short.

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

Well, since the time is short and our days pass so swiftly, how should we think and how should, what should we do?

[14 : 54] Well, the first thing surely we should do is to think about and pray the prayer of Moses in Psalm 90. That man of God as the title of Psalm 90 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. and thinking about that he then prays.

Listen to his prayer. So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom. Verse 12 of Psalm 90.

So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom. Is that a prayer that you offer to God? Is that something that you take and apply to yourself?

And in your prayers you say Lord teach me to number my days that I might apply my heart to wisdom. We often hear it said that life is precious and so it is yet how often is this valuable gift from God squandered?

[16 : 29] The sands of time slip so very easily through thoughtless careless fingers. And if we're to live and I mean really live rather than just exist we need heavenly wisdom.

The wisdom that comes from God alone. His wisdom teaches us in the words of Paul to redeem the time to redeem the time and by that he means to make the most of every opportunity.

How do you use time wisely? it's first of all to prepare for eternity. That is the most important thing we can do.

And looking at Psalm 90 and hearing Moses the man of God pray for wisdom. Having considered the brevity of life to pray for wisdom is the first thing we should do in order to make the best use of the time the Lord gives us here in this world.

The second thing we need to do is to heed the many warnings in the word of God to make the best use of the time we have. Prayer first and then heeding the warnings in the word of God to make the best use of the time we have.

[18 : 02] We have a natural tendency to laziness and sloth. And I think that's why we need to be told as were the Christians in the early church at Rome not to be slothful in business but to be fervent in spirit serving the Lord.

Paul told them that in Romans 12 in verse 11. Not to be slothful in business but to be fervent in spirit serving the Lord.

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 my old dog to the bathtub.

He hated being washed and whenever I ran the bath he would go off and hide in his bed in the kitchen and I would say come on he was a Scottish terrier he was named Jock which was quite appropriate but I'd say Jock come on time for your bath and his ears would go down and his tail would stick between his legs and he he just he needed to be lifted and carried and put in the bath and when he was in the bath he just stood like a statue he just hated being wet and getting his bath and it's a picture of us isn't it so often you know we come if we don't neglect our Christian duties completely we drag ourselves to them rather than give ourselves to them in a zealous and fervent manner now how do we overcome that tendency well God knows how we should overcome that tendency and he explains it he says it in his word and that's 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 the time is short and that's the point of this passage in 1 Corinthians chapter 7 and where the apostle is saying you know you got to think of the necessity the compulsion of living in the light of eternity this is what I mean brothers he says the appointed time the time has grown very short from now on let those who have wives live as though they had none and those who mourn!

[20 : 59] as though they were not mourning and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing and those who buy as though they had no goods and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it for the present form of this world is passing away don't be so completely engrossed in these things whether it's a wife or a husband or a family or a death or a happy event buying and selling dealing with the world put all of these in the context of eternity because this world in its present form is passing away is passing away so the Bible encourages us to think like that to remember that this is only a brief season that God has given to us and this brief season that God has given to us is not for taking life easy we need to remember that there is an everlasting eternal

Sabbath of rest and peace and that's going to come to us soon enough now is the season for active service the Bible describes the Christian as a soldier a Christian soldier well Christian soldiers let's remember this the good fight of faith is won only by strenuous zealous striving remember the words that the apostle Paul wrote to his young friend and fellow Christian worker Timothy but as for you oh man of God now listen to the verbs he uses flee these things what things he's been speaking about the love of money which is the root of all kinds of evil flee these things and then he says pursue righteousness godliness faith love steadfastness gentleness flee pursue fight fight the good fight of the faith take hold of the eternal life to which you were called these are strenuous action words flee pursue fight take hold of this is how the

Christian soldier is to behave or to change the metaphor Solomon wrote a slack hand causes poverty but the hand of the diligent makes rich that's an important principle we get nothing without effort in the Christian life we must flee certain things we must pursue after other things we must fight the good fight we must take hold it's diligent action that God has ordained that we should do he works in us both to will and to do according to his good pleasure and this is his good pleasure to flee to pursue to fight to take hold to be diligent in the use of means so let us be up and at it as we say doing with all our might whatever our hand finds to do and all to the glory of God no half measures no half hearted obedience will do for him who loved us and gave himself for us

God must have our whole hearted service be like the apostle Paul who served his saviour with his whole heart in the work of the gospel and then the third thing we should think about and do the shortness of time should also affect the manner of our gospel preaching and personal witnessing to the lost think of the privilege that God has given to us that we should be fellow workers together with him with him Paul plants Apollos waters but God gives the increase but do we realise that the time of ploughing and sowing and reaping will come to an end the time is short the end is now the day of Christ's return is closer now than when we first believed 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 suffering from the ravages of disease and dementia

I sometimes ask myself the question how have I prized this privilege of making the gospel known how have I impressed upon others the urgency of trusting in Jesus Christ and of receiving and resting upon him alone for salvation and even if I personally am not involved in that kind of ministry have I prayed for those who are have I given generously to the cause of evangelism and mission have I done all that I can to support my brothers who are in this kind of work well for a time is coming we need to remember when in the words of the hymn writer this poor lisping stammering tongue will lie silent in the grave got to remember that the day will soon pass and we will no longer be able to preach him to all and cry in death behold behold the lamb and if we would only remember how short this time is in which we can share in this privilege of making

[27 : 36] Christ known we will be 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 he ministered in the light of eternity he felt as well as knew he felt the truth the power of the truth that the time is short and that's how he ministered and that's the way in which God blessed his ministry in Kitterminster and if we're not preachers ourselves we can still draw the application of the point to ourselves David was not a preacher he was a king and yet reflecting on what his response should be to his receiving the pardon of his sin said in

Psalms 51 verse 13 then will I teach transgressors thy ways and sinners shall be converted unto thee if we've experienced the forgiveness and grace of God if we know what it is to have our sins pardoned and the joy and peace that comes through resting upon Christ alone for salvation we can gossip the gospel we can share something of that experience with our friends and relatives we can teach other transgressors God's ways of mercy and grace in the gospel of Jesus Christ knowing that through that simple means sinners will be converted to God but I notice that the words of 1 Corinthians 7 and verse 29 in the ESV speak about an appointed time the appointed time has grown very short and that word appointed reminds me of a verse found in the letter to the

Hebrews one that we were taught as youngsters to memorize to memorize it's in Hebrews 9 verse 27 in the King James version it says it is appointed unto men once to die and after this the judgment and that leads me to my fourth and final point which is simply this a solemn warning is in this text for all those who are not yet trusting in the Lord Jesus as Savior I wonder if there is someone here in this service this evening though you have heard the sweet and gracious call of the gospel perhaps in this very church perhaps on many occasions and yet you have not responded in repentance and in faith well let me say to you most earnestly and plainly as

I can you and I have an appointment to keep with death which we simply cannot get out of I don't know about you but the dental practices in Bathgate that we belong to a few years ago changed its practice its policy you make an appointment you go to the dentist you get the check up of the treatment then you come down and the more painful bit is to actually pay for what you've just had and then they say your next appointment is six months or it's now a year's time and you get your phone out and you put it on the phone in your diary and you set a reminder the day before the hour before because if you don't turn up you now get fined but a day or two before your appointment you get a text message and they remind you in the text message oh you have an appointment with us in a day or two days time look forward to seeing you and they do that because they have found that sending that text message reduces the number of no-shows and it keeps everything efficient and it also keeps the fees coming in it's possible to make an appointment with the doctor or the dentist and forget about it and not show up and the appointment passes but here's an appointment that you simply have to keep

God will make sure of that there is no getting out of it it is appointed unto men once to die that appointment is coming we will have to keep it and it's closer now than it was last week when you were here in this church last month last year and though the day and the date are unknown to you they are known to God the day is a red letter day in God's calendar think of a man in the Lord's parable of the rich fool this farmer who had such a wonderful harvest given to him he went to bed one night after that bumper harvest with his mind filled with thoughts about his future plans and prospects his pension was all paid up he was about to make a drawdown on his big fat pension fund a long and prosperous and happy retirement beckoned or so he thought but little did he realise that for him there was going to be no tomorrow that very night was to be his last night on this earth for no sooner had his head been laid on his pillow and his eyes closed in sleep than he opened them in hell in hell he opened his eyes because

[34 : 50] God said to him that night thou fool this night thy soul shall be required of thee so I say who but God knows what a needy soul will hear the gospel for the last time who knows it may be that someone here in this service is hearing the gospel for the last time this is why the solemn note sounded in William Kirkpatrick's hymn in Sankey's Sacred Songs I think has come into my own mind these past number of months verses from a hymn that I heard 40 years ago for the first time and all of a sudden it's like a it's like an earworm you know it's just going round and round and round in my mind so I want to leave these words with you and the reason why they came into my mind in the first place 40 years ago or there abouts when I was training for the

Christian ministry at the Irish Baptist College in East Belfast it was in the early to mid 1980s an old Baptist pastor came into the college to address the students when I say old he appeared to be old to me but he probably wasn't that old but I think he was recently retired his name was Charlie Lutton if I remember rightly and he spoke to the students about his own life and ministry and of how the Lord had brought him to saving faith in Jesus Christ and I remember him saying it was the fact the fact the truth of the brevity of life it was this that the Holy Spirit had used to impress upon him as a young man the urgency the urgency of embracing the hope that was held out to him one evening in a gospel service in Belfast that was how God drew

Charlie Lutton to the Saviour and it was the words of the hymn that must have been sung at that service that were impressed upon him that brought him to Christ the words of Kirkpatrick's hymn in Sacred Songs and Solos and it was because the time is short that he knew he had to be in time so the words of the hymn I'm not going to sing it you'll be glad to know but listen to these words 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 passed 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 that fatal line be crossed and your soul in hell be lost be in time sinner 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 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 the time is short the appointed time has grown very short therefore be in time let us pray oh God our father in heaven we thank you that you have spared us to this point in our lives when we have had the privilege of opening your word and considering the gospel we thank you for the call of

Jesus Christ that comes to each and every one of us to turn to him and to look to him and to be saved by him we pray that we would not put this off or to delay it to some other more convenient time but that we might embrace him now that he is here 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 for he will have mercy upon him and to our God for he will abundantly pardon oh God our father move us we pray to seek him until we find him we ask these things in his name and for his glory amen our closing hymn is found on the back of the announcement sheet

[42 : 03] God made me for himself to serve him here with love's pure service and in filial fear to show his praise for his