

New Year's Realisation

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 December 2024

Preacher: Kirk van der Swaagh

[0 : 00] of his word. Well, here we are, December 29th, 2024. We're almost beginning a new year, yeah? January 1 begins a new year.

And New Year is a good, good time when there's a changing of the calendar, kind of arbitrary that was picked there, but that's it. We've been living by that rhythm of that calendar, and it's opportunity to kind of reflect upon the year that's happened and to anticipate what's maybe coming out in front of us.

And I don't know if you're one of those people who makes resolutions, New Year's resolutions, you know, those commitments you make and then kind of just fade away. But making a resolution is not a bad thing to do.

But there is something that is more pertinent, more appropriate for us to do in the changing of a calendar, and that's what I want us to consider tonight. But at such a time as this, it's a healthy thing to take stock, to sort of ask ourselves some questions about how was this last year, and how might it be different from the year to come?

And I think that sentiment finds some sympathy in Moses' prayer from Psalm 90. Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

[1 : 24] Why should we number our days? What we learn from this Psalm is because we only have so many of them. He says the year of our life, the years of our life are 70, or even by reason of strength, 80.

And that's pretty much what it still is. You know the life expectancy in Scotland is for men 76.5 years, and for women 80.7. You women, you're always winning.

But that's pretty much what Moses says. About 70, by reason of strength, 80. And given that we only have so many days on this earth, this year, instead of a New Year's resolution, what I want to encourage is a New Year's realization.

The realization that we have one year less of our life on earth. A realization that we only have so many days.

And that realization will cause us to pray as Moses prays, that we may get a heart of wisdom as to how we use those days. Wisdom is an important attribute.

[2 : 34] And I've shared this before, I'm sure. For me, the most helpful definition of wisdom is knowledge rightly applied. Knowledge rightly applied.

That is that you know the facts, or you know things about something, and you have to do something with them. So it's that knowledge is rightly applied, appropriately applied, the best way applied. That's wisdom. It's learning from experience, observation. What's the best thing? The soundest thing to do.

One of my sons went to a school in New York City that taught what they called their core curriculum. You had to read a lot of the Western canon of literature. And the president of the university explained that even though you're going into science, you're going into law, you're going into different things, you want to know just how to apply the skills that you have.

I mean, there are things that you can do, but wisdom says whether you ought to do them.

Knowledge rightly applied. And now, in order to do that, then, it requires humility.

[3 : 44] Wisdom requires humility. For to learn from experience, to actually learn from experience requires humility. To be humble allows one to be teachable, and being teachable is a pathway to wisdom.

And nothing promotes a healthy humility more than the acknowledgement of our mortality and our sinfulness, both of which Moses treats in Psalm 90.

There's a pretty negative estimation of human beings in this psalm. God made all the more stark in its contrast to God, that Moses draws between the creator and the creature.

Now, in this psalm, at the very beginning of it, God is addressed as Adonai. You'll see, if you look in the Bible, it's a capital L and then the lowercase O-R-D. And if you're familiar with the, oh, just the practice that has been around for a long time, that the sacred name of God, which we can vocalize as Yahweh, is printed in all capital letters, Lord and sometimes God.

So when you see that, you know that that's the sacred name of God, the name that he revealed about himself. But when he uses Lord, a small case L-O-R-D, as the capital L and then small case O-R-D, that's actually translated in the Hebrew word Adonai, which means, you know, sovereign, ruler, master.

[5 : 08] And so that automatically sets up this relationship that we have in this psalm, that God, Moses is acknowledging that God is the one in charge.

He's the ruler. He's the master. And so he's approaching him with that kind of humility as he begins to build up to the petition that we're going to consider.

He says in the opening two verses, Lord, Adonai, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, wherever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.

He is the sovereign, eternal, self-existent one. He is the source of permanence. The term translated by the ESV for dwelling place is also translated elsewhere by the ESV as refuge.

And that's how it shows up in some translations. You have been our refuge. In Psalm 71, verse 3, it says, Be to me a rock of refuge to which I may continually come.

[6 : 11] So the picture of humanity is not pretty in here, but nonetheless, Moses knows he has access to the master in order to seek what he is looking for, that life will be shaped by the reality of our mortality and our sinfulness.

And we will pray that God will give us a heart of wisdom. But it is because God is that dwelling place, that self-existent one, the one that can always be returned to and returned to as a place of refuge, that Moses prays to him.

And he goes on to graphically portray the impermanence of man. And the basis of his appeal for pity towards the end of this psalm is the permanence and covenant faithfulness of this eternal and unchanging God.

But listen to how Moses describes our condition. So he says, Lord, you've been our dwelling place all generations before the mountains were brought forth, wherever you had formed the earth and the world from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.

And then he says this, you return man to dust and say, return, O children of man. And what's he referring to? Well, I would suggest, and I commentators would agree, is that he's really acknowledging the reality, just the innate reality of our existence, that from dust we came and to dust we returned.

[7 : 36] You remember, that's how Adam was formed. The first man was formed from the dust of the ground. And then after the sinful that caused the fall of man, when God speaks to the man again, he says this, cursed is the ground because of you.

In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life, thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken, for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

Moses, by referencing that, by having an echo of that creation account, acknowledges just the inherent impermanence of human beings.

How different we are from a God who is from everlasting to everlasting, who calls forth mountains, an image of something that is as permanent as permanent can be on this earth. And yet man is just like dust.

You return, children of man, to the dust. We'll talk some more about that as the psalm opens up. But when Moses speaks of the frail and ephemeral nature of our existence, it's just not in contrast to God's eternity.

[8 : 48] It's directly due to our being children of dust. You know, the return, O children of man, that man could be Adam.

It could be the same word that's translated here as man. It could be Adam. So he's directly referencing, very possibly, that you are children.

You and I are all children of Adam. And as that is the case then, we fit what he goes on to say. He says, Return, O children of man, for a thousand years in your sight or as but yesterday when it is past, there's 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, and the evening it fades and withers. These are the days that we live.

Each day we live, Moses describes in the manner that he does. Right? For God, for us, a thousand years, I mean, that would be 1024 A.D.

[9 : 52] Can you imagine what life was like in 1024 A.D. compared to what it is now? But for God, that's like yesterday when it's past. For us, each day has this significance to it.

Each day has this possibility to it. Each day seems like it could be a day when something is going to break, and yet you sweep them away as with a flood. They're like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning.

In the morning it flourishes and renewed. In the evening it fades and withers. That's the nature of our existence compared indeed to God, but also because of who and what we are.

Verse 7, 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 like a sigh. Now this is Moses writing. You know, Moses was the one who led the Israelites wandering in the desert for some 40 years.

[11 : 05] And if you're familiar with the story, you know that didn't have to be. It didn't have to be. They could have gone in much earlier, but there were those who doubted the promises of God, doubted the goodness of God, and they ended up wandering in the desert.

And why were they wandering in this for 40 years until that generation, who would not go into the land, would die off. So every day that Moses led Israel into the wilderness, he was watching the wrath of God unfold.

As one person died, as another person died, as another person died, all our days pass away under your wrath. He had a living, breathing example, the illustration of what the problem was.

James Boyce, theologian, suggests that the background for the psalm is the accumulation of events in Numbers 20, where you have the death of Miriam, you have Aaron's death, and you have that time when Moses strikes the rock and it ends up having him be banned from going into the promised land.

Moses experienced himself the wrath of God. He witnessed it and he experienced it. And so he says, all of our days pass away under your wrath.

[12 : 25] We bring our years to an end like a sigh. See, the result of our sinfulness, the result of our rebellion, our being children of Adam, the result is that our lives are profoundly brief and precarious compared to God.

And so he says, the years of our life are 70, even by strength, 80, but their span is toil and trouble. They're soon gone. And listen, we fly away. The poetry is amazing, isn't it?

The imagery, our life, we get up every day, we breathe every day, we go about it. It seems so substantial. It seems like, well, here I am. You can touch me.

You can see me. I have things to do. I go out and I do them. But yet, at the end, Moses says, it's like we just fly away. Then Moses asks a question, a rhetorical question, which anticipates the answer of no one.

He says in verse 11, who considers the power of your anger and your wrath according to the fear of you. Who considers the power of your anger and your wrath according to the fear of you?

[13 : 40] If you look at different translations, it gets worked out in different ways. But I think what he's driving at is that we are much more comfortable considering the, and reverencing the majesty of God in all that he has made, let's say, versus in his wrath.

So, see, we're far more comfortable contemplating that. If we, for instance, go out to a place where there isn't a lot of ambient light and you stand out and you look up in the heavens and it's a clear sky and you see all the, just the multitudinous stars and you see the Milky Way and you go, oh, that's amazing.

And then you think, you know, it's God who's called all that into being. It's God who upholds the mind. He knows every star. He knows everything. And you look at that and you go, amazing. And

you say, and he knows me. He sent his son to die for me.

And we're just awed by his power, his majesty, and his love. And we just sit there humble before, before the glory of God revealed in all the things that he has made.

But if we take that same God and contemplate his wrath due to his desire for holiness and righteousness among us, it's similarly as majestic, as awe-inspiring, as humbling.

[15 : 06] If we can, if we could take that which we look to the heavens and say, but that's the God's wrath is the same God who made that wrath. If we make that connection, we begin to approach and answer to what Moses is asking.

Who considers the power of your anger and your wrath according to the fear of you, the reverence of you? Not many do. How many? Not many.

But all should. For if we did, we would understand that it is God's unfathomable wrath against sin that shortens our days. And we might just join Moses as he makes his petition in verse 12.

So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. See, Moses deals realistically with our existence. You know, he understands our impermanence, our frailty, and he knows why it is the way it is.

It's because of sin. And though we are, here we are, as I say, we exist, and yet, when our 70 to 80 years are over, he says, it's like we just fly away.

[16 : 21] God remains, but we fly away. That is, our existence is just not as grounded, as deep, as unfathomable as God's own permanent, self-existent reality of who he is.

But if we take it all into account, and we see for who we really are and why we are in the state that we are, then we join with Moses because what he's looking for here is to understand his existence and then how he is to live in the light of all that is revealed about who he is and the nature of his existence.

So he says, teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. Remember, wisdom is knowledge rightly applied. If we understand who God is, we understand who we are, we understand the nature of his existence, we understand the nature of our existence, we understand why it is, our existence is as it is, that's knowledge.

How do we apply it? How do we live our lives wisely given the nature of who we are and why we are? So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

You know, I think what he has in mind when he asks that, when that is his nature of his petition, it's something along the lines of where, when Jesus teaches that in his parables about how it is that, you know, things are entrusted into us and by the end of our life we want to hear that well done, good and faithful servant.

[18 : 04] That's what Moses is getting at. He wants his life at the end, he wants to hear that well done, good and faithful servant. He doesn't want to waste any of the time that he has on this earth.

He has a realization, doesn't he, of just the nature of our existence. And so what he's looking for is that the days that he has left, and he's praying for all of us, but the days that he has left, he wants to know how to live them.

Given what he knows, how to live them. And so, looking for that well done, good and faithful servant, you can see that he's looking for a reward.

He's looking for the reward that comes to faithful living for God. And that notion of stewardship then is in play. I mean, the years that we have been given, these are things granted to us by God.

And how do we use them? Well, stewards. Right? The very life that we have is something that was breathed into, given to us by God, and that he gives us these years, number our days, to be serious about how much time we have on this earth, and then how are we going to use our time wisely?

[19 : 14] Because in the end, what we want to be able to do is hear, well done, good and faithful servant. So there's a stewardship aspect to what Moses is looking at here.

And I think it's important for us to grasp that it's not just the stewardship of our money, but it's also the stewardship of our time, of the years that we have. The days, the weeks, the months, the years that we have.

And as the calendar turns, we have one less year, one less year of our allotted time. So we pray with Moses, teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

The reward is held out to us. But grace upon grace, Moses teaches us that we can pray to God for all that we need in order to receive it.

See, the rest of the psalm is an acknowledgement of our lack of capacity that we have to use our time wisely and how desperately we need the presence and grace of God in our lives.

[20 : 21] Verses 13 through 17. Return, O Lord, how long? Have pity on your servants. See, he knows, he understands that God understands our frailty, right?

God knows we've come from dust and to dust we return. He understands our frame. He knows that we're weak. And so Moses prays from that self-understanding. He says, God, have pity on us. Have pity on your servants. Come, return. Come, make yourself known, your presence. And then he says, satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love. What if we started each day with the knowledge of God's covenant love?

that steadfast love, that chesed love that says, I am with you and I will always be with you. Each morning, each morning, we are awakened to God's steadfast covenant love.

And he says, so that we might rejoice and be glad all of our days. God's covenant love is something that's meant to sustain each day that we have. It's something that we turn to. He is our refuge.

[21 : 23] We go back to it every time. But God, you have promised that you will never leave us nor forsake us. You have made us your people. You have told us that we are your people and nothing can snatch us out of your hand.

So Moses prays, satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love. And then he says, make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us for as many years as we've seen evil.

Again, such an honest understanding of himself, of the nature of humanity. We are afflicted. God does afflict because of sinfulness in human beings.

And yet, what Moses is praying is that there might be a renewal, a turning, that for all the days that we have been afflicted, now God, please, make them ones in which we will be made glad.

Rather than affliction and sadness, we will have his presence and gladness. Verse 16, let your work be shown to your servants with eyes to see.

[22 : 27] And he has this generational view and let your glorious power to their children. And then he says, let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us. It could be translated delight, beauty.

But it's the grace of God upon us to establish the work of our hands, just establish the work of our hands. You see, he prays for wisdom that we would use the days wisely, teach us to number our days and we may gain a heart of wisdom.

But then he looks to God to supply all that he's going to need so he can see that prayer fulfilled in his life. That God would have pity, that his steadfast love would be known each and every day, that he would make us glad each day, that our work would be shown, we would see it, we would see him at work in the world, and that God himself would actually establish the work of our hands.

So here it is, the turning of a calendar. We have one less year to live out our lives, but yet a new year awaits. We have a year that is out there in front of us, and so it is, it's a good time to take stock, a good time to ask ourselves, how did we use this last year, and how might we use this coming year?

May God give us wisdom so that we will use it and use it well. And I would suggest it's a good time then to pray for a sober assessment of our own frailty and fallenness, a good time to pray for God's favor, God's beauty, to establish the work of our hands.

[23 : 56] It's a good time. It's a time for a new year's realization that we have only so many days, but the days that we do have, we want to use them well, use them wisely.

Now, no matter how old you are, and if you have not been, as it were, numbering your days, whatever days you've got left, those are days we want to live out in wisdom.

And so this prayer is appropriate, whether you're young or whether you're old. Moses' prayer is particularly applicable. You know, how much better would it have been if you and I and all of us in our lives very early on said, God, teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom and we live out our life because of that.

I can only, I don't even want to think about how many days I have wasted in my life, how many days have not been marked by wisdom but by absolute foolishness. But God is merciful and I can look to him just as Moses does for God to supply all that I need from this way forward that I would live wisely.

So whether you're young or whether you're old, this prayer is for you. But something else that we need to consider. All our days pass away under your wrath.

[25 : 17] Now, it was true for Moses, it was true for Israel, but it's also true of all the children of Adam. You know, there's a false understanding about God where people like to argue whether it's the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament and the one in the Old Testament who's always angry when the New Testament is such a nice guy.

Well, the reality is that there is a day of judgment coming and all will be judged and Jesus is going to be the one, beautiful, lovely Jesus, my friend, he's going to be the one who will sit on that throne making that judgment saying that some are going to go to eternal torment and some will go into the blessedness of eternal life.

See, that's the reality. All our days are passed under the wrath of God. The old King James translates Psalm 711, God judges the righteous and God is angry with the wicked every day. God is angry with the wicked every day. We saw that same anger manifested in Jesus' life when he was on the earth, when he saw self-righteousness, when he saw cruelty, it made him angry. That's the anger of God. Paul writes in Romans 1, the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

[26 : 39] And Paul is preaching in Athens, the times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.

See, that day is out there. And between now and that day we want to pray that we would get a heart of wisdom of how we are to live because the reality is there is going to be a day of judgment.

If you are not in a place where you are gathered in by God, if you're not in that place where God is your refuge, that's a day to stand in fear of.

It's a day of judgment. And that's why the gospel is so vitally important, brothers and sisters. We need to be faithful to preach the gospel. How does any child of Adam escape God's wrath?

It's only through possessing the righteousness that God is supplied to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We have to consider God's wrath with all due reverence for it is as unfathomable as the heavens.

[27 : 52] One way to think of just how unfathomable is God's wrath. The depth of his wrath is measured by the breadth of his love. The depth of his wrath is measured by the breadth of his love.

And what I mean is that he sent his only son, he sent his only son to propitiate, to turn away his own wrath. And that was the only way in which his righteous anger could be appeased.

How deep is his anger? How unfathomable is it? Well, consider what he had to do in order to deal with it for us.

The breadth of his love that he would give his only son so that whoever would believe in him would not perish but have everlasting life. We have to consider God's wrath with all due reverence.

And if this new year, this turning of the calendar causes a realization that you need to be saved from that wrath and this will be a reason to celebrate. We will celebrate.

[29 : 00] So if it's a day that you are still fearful of because you are not clothed in that righteousness of Christ, you are not numbered among God's people, then come to him.

Today is the day then. The end of this year, moving into the next, will be a transition from death to life. From darkness to light. And it will be your future secure in the knowledge that God has provided a righteousness that will allow you to stand on that day.

A day that will bear underneath his holy scrutiny, his righteous judgment. You'll be able to stand. If that's not yours yet, come, receive it.

God offers it to you in the gospel. Psalm 90 points us to the reality of our existence compared to who God is and the nature of his existence and ours, but not just that comparison, but why.

Why is it that we are so frail? Why is it that we're so impermanent? It has to do with the fact of our sin. And so we need to take that seriously and yet at the same time to recognize that God in his grace and his mercy will actually meet us when we turn to him for the wisdom that we need, the knowledge that we need, the conviction that we need to look to him in order that we might receive all that we need that we might indeed live lives wisely.

[30 : 34] So it's New Year's resolution? Okay. New Year's realization? Yes. That's what we're doing so. Thank you. Doug, new time, that's what I'm doing with theism that we will

Rachelxtonares.

You just want out of the personal status on how this will rise. This is the thing to be to be like, not even the hope of hope or hope for not having the interest of each and getting the interest of these