

A Presumptuous Prayer

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: 20 September 2020

Preacher: Geoff Hall

[0 : 0 0] Well, what are you expecting for your plans, from your plans, your study plans, your family plans, your work, your wedding, your retirement?

It was nice to hear what a few of you have been up to in lockdown from Renee and Jan. Turns out Jan's been doing something similar to Tiff and me. We've been watching lots of grand designs.

I've got a slide for you to look at. Grand Designs follows a family who are building a confusingly ambitious house. And it's fun because the family always bite off way more than they can chew.

And every time it costs more and it takes way longer time than they expected. And the drama that develops in each episode is, will they finish?

Will they run out of money? Will their relationship weather the storm? And you begin to feel during the story just how important completion is.

[1 : 1 0] Not just because they need a place to live, but because they've poured their heart and soul into this project. It hasn't only cost money, but emotional and relational stress.

It has even, sounds strange, but become part of their identity. It means growth and development of character. Their life can only continue once it's done.

And I realize that they have huge expectations of their house. They've poured their hopes and dreams into it.

Only a complete house as planned will satisfy. They have presumed upon this house to make their life complete.

In this psalm, Psalm 90, the author, like the builders, presumes upon God with enormous expectations.

[2 : 1 5] And while you might say that God is far more likely to live up to expectations than a house, the question that will come out as we read and look at it together is, why would he?

The Psalms are a fascinating book. They're almost like another little Bible within the Bible. Many authors composed over many years with many audiences, styles and genres.

They all have two things in common in particular, two parties that is, a kingly figure in Israel and God. And they praise, they pray, they sing, they lament to God.

What makes this psalm particularly interesting is that it's attributed to Moses. Moses, who many of you will know, lived a long time before the establishment of Israelite nation and king.

But whoever wrote Psalm 90, I don't think matters too much. What we'll see as we read is that the author knows God very well and so prays with great expectations.

[3 : 3 2] Let's look. Bible's ready. The psalm begins with grand praise, point one.

Just like you might expect in a psalm. Have a look at verse one. It says, Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born, or you brought forth the whole world from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.

You get a real sense of the author's deep understanding of the character and nature of God. Lord, you are God. Our dwelling place, creator, eternal.

What this language says to me about God is magnitude. God is big. It reminds me of a song I sang in church as a kid.

You can sing along if you know it. Our God is so big, so strong and so mighty. There's nothing my God cannot do.

[4 : 44] God is big. And don't we love big? Big always carries a sense of awe, doesn't it?

Big screen, big car, big house. There's a subreddit I really like looking at called Human for Scale. It shows some massive object whose size you might only guess because it's a photo like this pyramid on the slide.

Looks big, but you can't really tell how big it is. Excuse me. And then you see the person standing next to it on the next slide.

And the scale of the person compared to the object helps you see just how big it is. In verse 1 and 2, we don't yet have the human for scale, but even without them, the picture of God is still very big.

God is from everlasting to everlasting. This isn't from this time to this time. No, it's from always to always. How's that for an incomprehensible idea?

[6 : 00] God is not old. He exists now and never began. Wow. In the next part of the psalm, we see the human for scale.

We've seen the big God. Now we see the little person. And you'll notice as we read it that like God, the picture reveals less about mass and more about time.

Have a look from verse 3. He says, The tone has changed somewhat, hasn't it?

It's still praise. It's still addressed to God. You turn. You sweep. Your sight. It still presents the power of God, doesn't it?

Though I can't imagine seeing it in kids' church. Can you? You make people dust. You make people dust a thousand years in your sight and our lives wither away.

[7 : 25] It lacks the comfort that we find in the big, strong God. God. So why praise or pray to God in this way?

Because the human for scale helps us to lift our eyes and look again on God with new and sharp perspective.

How? Well, because we know the size of a person, like when we saw that person in front of the pyramid. And when we put ourselves in their shoes, we get a renewed appreciation for its size, for God's size.

In this case, well, we understand our experience of time. We know that at times life can feel very slow, very long, especially when we're young.

But in comparison to God, our life passes in a moment. Just listen again to verse 3.

[8 : 34] You turn people back to dust, saying, return to dust, you mortals. It sounds very much like God is commanding our death.

Die, mortal. Go back to dust. Dust. It reminds me of Buffy the vampire slayer. Some of you might know Buffy. When she staked a vampire, it exploded into a pile of dust and it was over in a moment.

Now, the language in the psalm is not literal, is it? But imagery language. It's painting a picture of the eternal God compared to the minuscule human.

We know it's not literal because though I can't see you, I assume with pretty good evidence that none of you have disintegrated in the last few minutes.

That's just not what happens, is it? We live for 70 or 80 years. And while we might say about them, gee, that went fast. We experience time at the speed of time and see and do and accomplish lots.

[9 : 45] You might be able to say, remember 10 years ago? Oh, that was 20 years ago, 30 years ago, 50 years ago. A long time.

Lots happened. I changed. I grew. I can't even remember it anymore. It was so long ago. Do you see what this language is saying about God and about us?

It gives us perspective on our long and important lives. It helps us see and understand that in the eyes and life of God who made us, our lives pass by in just a moment.

Just imagine, I think I'm looking at a new camera now. Just imagine this piece of thread is our life.

And this flame is God putting us through time. I was born.

[10 : 54] I went to school. I moved to Melbourne. I met some people. I built a house. It was over very quickly, wasn't it?

It puts life in perspective, doesn't it? My approaching exams, my job opportunity, my troublesome relationships, my failing health.

And with this perspective in mind, a question begins to arise. For me, at least.

Why does this huge eternal creator have any regard for this wisp of smoke that disappears in a moment?

Do you wonder that? Why does he relate to them? Why is he theirs? Is there something special about them? Do they have an inherent treasure?

[11 : 57] Well, verses 7 and 12 make me think, no, they don't. Not at all. Have a look. They say, Not only does the author reiterate our brief life, but he adds, The best of them are but trouble and sorrow.

All our sin is known to you, God. Your anger consumes us. This helps me grasp Paul's sentiment when he says, Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought.

Not only is our life but a breath, but God has justifiable reason to end us. How much more do you raise an eyebrow about the relationship that exists between God and these people from generation to generation?

This psalm gives me new appreciation for God's power and sovereignty and election. Romans 9, which is on the slide, teaches us, Who can say to God, why did you make me like this?

Because who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? This psalm shushes the proud, doesn't it? It shushes the person who says, How dare you, God?

[13 : 50] Have you heard people say this? How dare God interfere with my life? But Psalm 90 teaches us, What does God owe us?

What should God give us? Good life? Good health? Good job? Good friends? Comfort? Happiness?

Peace? Love? No. It should be, How dare we speak to God?

How dare anyone presume upon God? But this author does. Why?

Well, because the big, powerful, eternal God favours his servants. Point three. Just listen to how this bold little speck speaks to the eternal God in verse 13.

[15 : 01] He says, Relent, Lord. How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants. When was the last time you so boldly spoke to your superior?

And he goes on in verse 14. Satisfy us with your unfailing love. 15. Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have had trouble.

May your deeds be shown to your servants. It's a surprising change of tone, isn't it? From the big, eternal God who consumes the mortals in anger to expecting satisfaction from God.

Love. Gladness. Favor. Why? Why? How? Well, because he is merciful and loving to those who presume to ask.

Every episode of Grand Designs finishes with a big reveal.

[16 : 15] And there's always a satisfying conclusion, even from those you'd never expect to be finished. There's a few breathtaking shots of the new house, and it's always impressive and nearly always way too big.

And of course there's Kevin MacLeod, waxing lyrical about architecture and victory and the lessons we all learnt along the way. Great expectations met.

But the more I watch, the more I notice this uncomfortable feeling arising in my gut. At the end of each episode, Kevin asks the family, was it worth it?

Two years, three years, ten years. And the response is nearly always, it was really hard, but we're so happy. We're so happy with what we've got.

It's as though the house and all the trials that produced for the family has relented. It's done. They are satisfied. Now they'll be glad for even more years than they had trouble.

[17 : 33] And as I hear this, my gut begins to churn. And I think, how sad. Why?

Because as nice as a new house would be, it is a house. Yes, it is a grand design. And it looks wonderful.

A great place to live. But it's still a house. And whether they do the build in their 20s or their 60s, the perspective of this psalm reminds us that their source of joy, their dwelling place, is fleeting, just like their life.

And while this house may meet their expectations, their thread is quickly burning. And if they never presume upon God and his mercy, their satisfaction and their life will return to dust.

So whatever your plans are, whatever you're invested in, whatever you're waiting for, hoping for, dreaming about, house, course, family, retirement, health, large indoor gatherings.

[19 : 10] Pray presumptuously to the eternal, loving, merciful God. Because like we heard in Romans 9, he chooses to show mercy and favor to his servants.

And when we would be consumed by his anger, when we would have died under his wrath, his son came into our time to stand and suffer and die in our place.

Despite what we are, he made his glory known to these dusty mortals who deserved wrath. And he made them children of God.

what a great God. So what does this mean for us today, tomorrow, this week?

Two key things I think we should do in response to this psalm. Firstly, remember who God is and remember who you are.

[20 : 21] Keep in mind the perspective this psalm reveals. Remember that God is God and we are withering dust. But remember that our big God is near and that he hears our prayers for compassion and relief.

And while he may not give you your dream house or heal your body, which I'm sure you desire, he has a far grander design for us who presume to ask.

He has a way better home and a way better body awaiting us. One that satisfies eternally. Remember.

The other response, live wisely. Yes, our life is short. Yes, its length and achievements are like nothing compared to God.

But our experience of time is still in minutes and hours and days and years. The author prays in verse 12, teach us to number our days that we might gain a heart of wisdom.

[21 : 36] In other words, live your life aware of your short time that you may live wisely. What does living wisely mean? I think it probably doesn't mean never buy or build a house, never enjoy yourself, never have any earthly satisfaction.

What it very likely means is, unsurprisingly, remember the true God. Remember that your days, however enjoyable and satisfying, whatever your plans are, are not much more than 70 or 80 years with trouble and sorrow to boot.

don't let yours pass you by without presuming upon this loving, merciful God who graciously invites you into his family.

Yes, even you, the dusty speck, the withering grass, the troubled sinner. live wisely today.

Start living wisely today. Pray to God presumptuously. Relent, Lord. Have compassion. Satisfy us with your unfailing love.

[22 : 58] and he will favour his servants eternally. But I pray to finish.

Our great, big, strong, heavenly Father, we thank you that you are merciful. We thank you that you are loving.

We thank you that you favour your servants. We thank you particularly that you have come near to us in the Lord Jesus to save us from wrath and sin and death.

Father, many of us are suffering at the moment, not just in Melbourne, but particularly. Will you relent?

Will you have compassion? Will you end our pain? Will you bring us back together? Will you give us what we desire? Yet all the while, Father, will you help us to desire what truly lasts?

[24 : 08] Our life and our home in heaven. Amen.