

Everlasting Favour

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[0:00] Good evening. My name is Jeff. I'm one of the pastors here. If you'd like to flip in your Bibles back to Psalm 90.

! And you will have received an outline on the way in. It's inside this handout. I'm going to refer to that as we go.

How about I pray? Gracious Father, we thank you that we can sit together as brothers and sisters and friends and hear your word.

May the words that I say be true and faithful to your word and may you use them for our mutual encouragement. Amen.

Well, what are your hopes and dreams? This year or at all? Health? Happiness? Housing? Marriage? Success?

[1:14] Yes. I wonder if you've seen Grand Designs. Any Grand Designs watchers out there? Maybe a couple?

If you haven't seen it, it's a show that follows a family chasing their dreams by building an often overly ambitious house.

And there's drama every episode because they always bite off more than they can chew. They very often go over budget. It takes way longer than they expect.

And it eventually starts causing all kinds of relationship challenges. And as it goes along, the tensions rise and I begin to wonder, not only if they'll finish, but will the house end up giving them the good life that they so desperately deserve, sorry, desire?

In the Psalms we've been looking at, we've heard many laments from God's people suffering under his hand.

[2:26] In this Psalm, God's people are again feeling his wrath and while they don't deserve anything from God, they're still desperate for relief.

This Psalm is attributed to Moses, the only Psalm that is. And I think it makes sense considering the way that he speaks to God. Let's take a look. Point one.

The Psalm begins, much like 89, that's last week, with grand praise. Praise that lifts up God for who he is and what he's done. Take a look. Verse one. 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 Psalmist's deep knowledge of God's character and nature.

You, Lord, are God. Our dwelling place. Eternal creator. What this language says to me about God is that he is big.

[3:36] It reminds me of a song that I sang in church as a kid. You might know it. You can sing along if you want. Our God is so big, so strong and so mighty.

There's nothing my God cannot do. God is big. And don't we love big?

Big carries a sense of awe, doesn't it? Big house, big car, big screen. There's a small portion of the internet called Human for Scale.

And it shows massive objects whose size is hard to appreciate in the photo, like this pyramid, for instance. It's large looking, but then when you see the person standing next to it, can you see them down there hanging their legs off half a brick?

The scale of the tiny person compared to the pyramid helps you appreciate just how big it is. At this point in the psalm, we don't have the human for scale, but even without them, the picture of God is still very big.

[4 : 59] God is from everlasting from everlasting, which isn't from that time to this time. It's from always to always, which doesn't really make sense.

This is a bigness that is hard to comprehend, isn't it? Think about the way that God is often portrayed as an old man, especially in cartoons.

But God isn't old, is he? He can't be old because he never began. And so he can't age.

He exists now and he always was, is, and will be. The next part of the psalm shows the human for scale.

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

[6 : 10] Have a look from verse three. You turn people back to dust saying, return to dust, you mortals. A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has gone by or like a watch in the night.

Yet you sweep people away in the sleep of death. They are like new grass of the morning. In the morning it springs up, but by evening it is dry and withered.

The tone has changed a bit, hasn't it? It's still praise. It's still what only God is and what he does by his power.

You turn people back. You sweep people away. Although it's a bit harder to imagine singing that in kids' church, isn't it?

You make people dust. A thousand years in your sight. And our lives wither away. Lacks the comfort we find in the big strong God, though still true.

[7 : 18] And when we praise or pray to God in this way, the human for scale helps us lift our eyes and look again on God with a sharpened perspective because we know the size of a person, don't we?

And when we consider our humanness, our lives, our strength, our frailty, we can see again and appreciate God's size and power.

In this case, in particular, we can better understand our experience of time compared to God.

You and I know that at times, life can feel very long and very slow. But to God, our whole lives, over in a moment, you turn people back to dust, saying, return to dust, you mortals.

A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by. And doesn't it sound very much like God is commanding our death?

[8 : 33] You say, return to dust, you mortals. Makes me think if God was a mortal combat character, can you imagine what his fatality might be?

He'd just say, be dust. It's good to remember when we think about and read this, that the Psalms are poetry.

It's not literal. Certainly, God has the power to do this, but he doesn't tend to make people dust in real time. Rather, it's what the Psalmist observes as he understands the eternal God next to and in relationship with finite humans.

He is forever, whereas they have a brief life. We may live 70 or 80, maybe 100 years.

And that's a long time, isn't it? 100 years. But when you compare eternity to even a long time, it's as though it's over in a moment.

[9 : 47] Just imagine that this thread here, which you can hardly see, is me or my life.

And let's say that this flame is the passage of time which God has placed me in at birth. I was born, I finished school, I moved to Melbourne.

Dust. It gives life a bit of perspective, doesn't it? Especially when you think about all kinds of things that we have going on.

My approaching exams, my job opportunity or promotion, my unmet relationship desires, my dream home, my fitness and my strength, the perfect body.

And with this perspective in mind, it raises a question. Why are we even on God's radar? Why does this huge eternal creator have any regard for a wisp of smoke that disappears in a moment?

[11 : 12] Do you wonder that? Why does he relate to them? Why does he consider them? What is man that he is mindful of them?

Is there something special about them? Do they have some inherent quality? Well, let's look at verse 7.

We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation. You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence.

All our days pass under your wrath. We finish our years with a moan. Is this a picture of inherent human quality?

Hardly. It's pretty much the opposite. Not only is our life just a breath, but God has a justifiable reason to command our death.

[12 : 15] This psalm really shushes the proud, doesn't it? Even more those who accuse him and say, how dare you, God?

Have you heard this from people? I've heard this. How dare you interfere? How dare you tell me what to do?

Who are you? But really, we have no ground to ask, who are you? How dare you do we?

Romans 9 says, but who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, why did you make me like this?

Who can ask anything of God, especially considering that he not only made us, but we treat the life he gave us with contempt?

[13 : 20] Instead, he should say, how dare you? He should say, how dare you even speak to me?

How dare you expect anything from me? Any good? Any help? Any happiness?

Any relief? Any comfort? Right? But the author of the psalm does.

He asks much of God and almost in a demanding tone. How? because the big, powerful, eternal God favours his people.

Point three. Just listen to how this bold little speck speaks to the eternal God. Verse 13. Relent, Lord. How long will it be?

[14 : 22] Have compassion on your servants. When was the last time you spoke to a superior or God like this? He goes on, verse 14.

Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love. Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us. For as many years as we have seen trouble.

May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendour to their children. It's a surprising change of tone, isn't it? From consumed by the big God, the eternal God wiping away mortals in anger to expecting satisfaction from a good God.

And he finishes with verse 17 saying, may the favour of the Lord our God rest on us. Establish the work of our hands. Yes, establish the work of our hands.

So why would God answer this? Why would he give them or us anything? Because he is our God.

[15:34] We may not deserve anything from God but he has chosen to make himself known to his people. This is where the psalmist opens the psalm, isn't it?

Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. The Lord is their God. They are his people whom he favours.

They live with him in his presence. He has brought them near even despite their sins. And though they are mortal and are like a breath according to, sorry, a breath compared to our eternal powerful God.

Even though we have no right to say why have you made me like this? Why have you given or not given such and such? Even though they only deserve wrath and judgment.

He is gracious. He is merciful. He is loving. Every episode of Grand Designs finishes with a big reveal.

[16:51] Though often a few months or sometimes a year late. There's a few breathtaking shots of the house and it's always very impressive and very often far too big.

And of course the host is there, Kevin MacLeod, waxing lyrical about architecture, victory and the lessons that we learned along the way.

But if you've seen the show, you might have noticed this sense of unease whether the producers intended it or not. The question that inevitably comes after how much over budget is are you happy?

Was it worth it? And they'll say it was hard and we were tested or some such but they'll always end up saying how happy they are finally in their dream home.

And while their future may not be the same as the man in the parable that we heard earlier whose life was taken from him just as he made plans for a long and happy life, who knows what's in store for their future?

[18:09] Even if they live a hundred years, God will end their brief mortal lives in dust consumed by his anger and the best of them will be trouble and sorrow.

And what's more, what of their relationship with God? Jesus says about the rich fool, this is how it will be for anyone who is not rich toward God.

And what I don't think this means is that those who are rich toward God will never lose their lives too soon, nor that those who aren't rich toward God will always have their lives cut short.

I don't think. But I do think it challenges us to consider what treasures am I storing up? What am I investing in?

What are my hopes and dreams? What do I want God to bring me? A house? A better job?

[19:21] A kid or a grandkid? Marriage? Success in uni or work? Strength? Happiness? Healing? These things are good.

They're good things. But we ought to be cautious in our desires. Our lives are short. We're born. We live.

We die. And we along with our houses and achievements will return to dust and be forgotten. And what's more, our lives are filled with secret sins.

Sins which are an affront to our God who put us here. What sins are you hiding in your heart while expecting God to give you your desires.

[20 : 25] But at the same time, we ought to be bold like Moses. Ask and expect a great deal from God who has been so gracious, who has brought us into relationship with him because despite what we deserve, he has given us life good life.

He has given us lots of good things for our comfort and our pleasure and our enjoyment. And though we ought to be consumed by his wrath, though we ought to lose our short lives in pain, his grace and mercy and favour extended far beyond what we would have ever asked or imagined when his son stood in our place, taking on the full power of his anger that was due to fall on us.

What a great God. God. So what does this mean for us today, tomorrow, this week? Two key things I think to respond to in the psalm.

Firstly, remember, remember who God is, remember who we are. Keep in mind the perspective the psalm reveals, remember that God is our everlasting God and that we are returning to dust.

But remember that our big God is near. He hears our prayers for compassion and relief. And while he may not give you your dream house or your dream body or the comforts that you deeply desire, he has a far grander design for those he favours, for those who put their trust in him.

[22 : 24] and he has a far better home and body awaiting us that satisfies eternally. So remember, secondly, live wisely.

Our life is short and its length and achievements are nothing compared to God. time. But our experience of time is still in minutes and hours, days and years.

The psalmist says in verse 12, teach us to number our days that we might gain a heart of wisdom, that we might live wisely, meaning live aware of your short time.

I don't think this means never buy or build a house, never enjoy yourself, never have earthly satisfaction. More likely it means live understanding the life that God has given you, understanding that both this life and the life to come are given and offered by God.

and understand that however enjoyable or satisfying your 50 to 100 years might be, whether it's less or more, God has given it.

[23 : 51] We don't deserve it. Don't let it pass without boldly asking for mercy and compassion and grace from the God who is willing to give it.

Even you, dusty speck, withering grass, secret and sometimes public sinner. Live wisely, live in relationship with God, celebrate His presence, be rich toward Him, invest in Him, invest in His life, invest in His love.

And pray boldly to Him who favors you. Relent, Lord. Have compassion, Lord. Satisfy us with Your unfailing love.

And may the favor of the Lord our God rest on us. May He establish the work of our hands for us. Yes, may He establish the work of our hands.

Let me pray that He would do that. 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.

[25:21] Gracious Father, even though our lives are nothing compared to You, You extend mercy, grace and love because You are a good and loving God.

As we live often troubled and sorrowful lives, would You have compassion on Your servants that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.

We pray this knowing that You love to give us far more than we ask or imagine. In Jesus' name. Amen.