

Teach Us to Number Our Days

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[0 : 00] Good morning. The scripture for this morning is taken from Psalms chapter 90. And it's titled, From Everlasting to Everlasting. 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, 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 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 the wrath according to the fear of You? So teach us to number our days, that we may get a heart of wisdom.

[2 : 06] 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 in 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 let Your glorious power be to their children.

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

Thank you very much, Faye. Well, I decided that I would approach this morning's sermon making an assumption. And that assumption is that most of you have come hoping or desiring that I would say something that would be useful for you as you prepare for a new year, as you look towards 2024. And so that is what I plan to do, and that is what I hope I actually do in this sermon.

And what I plan to do and share is wrapped up in this question, how should we live? How should we live? But this question is not just relevant for a new year, this question is relevant for every day of every year.

[3 : 56] It's relevant for how we move moment from moment in the days of the Lord allots to us. And by God's grace, I hope to answer that question from Psalm 90.

But first, let's pray. Father, we pause in this moment to look to you as we stand on the threshold of leaving one year to enter into another.

Lord, we ask that you would speak to us this morning. I pray, Lord, that you would awaken our hearts to hear what you would say to us.

Father, I pray that you would grant me grace to be faithful, to proclaim your word from this passage of Scripture. And I pray that you would give us all attentive and obedient hearts to respond to it.

And Lord, most of all, we pray that your name will be exalted through the preaching of your word. We ask these things in Jesus' name.

[5 : 17] Amen. The title of this psalm is A Prayer of Moses, the Man of God. And from this title, we're able to see that it was written by Moses, and since it was written by Moses, it works out to be the oldest dateable psalm that we have in the Bible.

And the heart of this psalm, the burden of this prayer that Moses prays in Psalm 90 is found in verse 12, where he prays these words, Lord, teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

And here's how I would summarize this prayer that Moses prays. God has numbered our days, and we need his help to live each day with that reality in view.

It's a very, very sober thought to take in. Our days are numbered. God numbered them.

And we need to live day by day with that awareness. My days are numbered, and I need God's help to remind myself of that as I go through my day as I do the various things that I do.

[6 : 55] Moses prayed this because it's not something we can do on our own. We cannot live in such a way with the wisdom that we need unless God grants that.

And so I pray this morning that we would see this truth as we consider Psalm 90. And since it is a prayer, I think it can be naturally subdivided into three parts, and they are number one, adoration, which we see in verses 1 and 2, confession, which we see in verses 3 to 11, and then petition, which we see in verses 12 to 17.

So let's begin first with adoration. We don't know the occasion on which Moses wrote Psalm 90, but we know it's a psalm of lament.

It's a psalm of sorrow. It's not a high psalm. It's a low psalm. It's a psalm of the valley. It's a psalm of despair, as many of the psalms are, but this one is a psalm of lament.

And the context seems to be one of community sin. God's judging for that sin. And as we think of Israel's 40 years in the wilderness as they journeyed from Egypt to the promised land, there were several occasions where they sinned grievously and the Lord brought judgment upon them.

[8 : 35] One occasion, some 24,000 persons were killed one time because of God's judgment on community sin. And so Moses begins this prayer to God adoring him.

His people had sinned, God had judged them, but Moses begins by adoring God. And he starts out saying that God, acknowledging God as the dwelling place of his people in all generations.

Another word for dwelling place is refuge. Moses adores the Lord because he has been a refuge for his people in all generations, in all of life's circumstances and calamities and difficulties, God has been a refuge for his people from generation to generation.

And brothers and sisters, that doesn't change with our generation. That same mercy and grace that God gives even when we sin that he gave to Moses and the children of Israel, he gives to his people today.

In verse 2, Moses tells us why God is able to be a refuge for his people in all the generations and that is because he is the eternal God. He is from everlasting to everlasting.

[10 : 06] He is the God who was God before the mountains were made and he formed the earth and everything in them. That's the God to whom Moses prays.

That's the God whom Moses adores. He is the everlasting God he is the maker of heaven and earth. And the point that we should not miss is that God is, was, and always will be.

It's from everlasting to everlasting. That's what from everlasting to everlasting means. No beginning, no end. God is self-existent. God is self-sustaining. God needs nothing.

God needs no one. God needs no one. God needs no one. God needs no one. He's the creator of everything and everyone. Generations come and generations go but the Lord remains unchanged. And he's a refuge for his people. And thank God that he is. Thank God that the same refuge that he was to a nation that was in circumstances of sin and his judgment that he can be that refuge for us today in similar circumstances as well.

[11 : 36] In verse 3, Moses transitions from God's eternity for which he adores God to man's mortality around which he confesses sin.

And verses 3 through 11 can best be described as confession which is my second point. In verses 3 to 7, Moses underscores our mortality in lights of God's eternity.

He builds his confession, he begins his confession with the entrance of sin into the world. Look again what he says in verse 3. You return man to dust and say, return, O children of man.

What Moses does in verse 3 is he echoes the words of God that he spoke to Adam in the garden when the Lord said to Adam, from dust you have come and unto dust you will return.

But what Moses does is he takes what the Lord said to Adam singularly and he applies it to all people collectively, all of mankind.

[12 : 54] Again, look at what he says in verse 3. You return man or mankind to dust and you say return O children of man.

speaks to all of Adam's fallen race. One day God will return all of us to the dust.

And it reminds us that we're not eternal, we are mortal. God is eternal but we are mortal. And so it doesn't matter if a person lives a thousand years. Moses tells us a thousand years to God is like a day and or a watch in the night.

And so even a thousand years is really nothing in terms of time. In verses 5 and 6 he likens our existence to a dream, something that's just passing, fading, and to grass that flourishes in the morning and fades in the evening.

And this is true no matter how long we live on this earth. And why is this the case for Adam's race? Why is it that Adam's race is under a sentence of death?

[14 : 15] It is because we have sinned. In Adam we have sinned. Adam our head has sinned and plunged the entire world into sin.

But notice again in verses 8 to 10 how Moses expresses this reality of sin and God's judgment of it. 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. 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. This is true of all mankind. We are all under the sentence of death.

All of us. It matters not how healthy we may feel this morning. It matters not how young we may be and the prospect of life that we see in front of us all of us.

[15 : 25] The youngest of us is under this sentence of death. But this wasn't God's plan. God's plan was expressed through the tree of life that he planted in the midst of the garden and Adam and Eve could have partaken of that tree which would have been in obedience to what God wanted but they decided to partake of the tree of death which was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and as a result sin came into the world and death because of sin.

In verse 11 which marks the end of this section on confession Moses asks a very sobering question. Look at the question he asks again.

Who considers the power of your anger and your wrath according to the fair view? Moses is asking a question but really he's making a statement.

There's a statement that he's making behind the question that he is asking. And what he's really saying is that human beings in general have not considered the power of God's anger and his wrath against sin because if and when we do it will result in the fear of the Lord.

That's a statement that Moses is making behind this question. Who considers the power of your anger and your wrath according to the fear of you? In general rebellious men and women do not consider it and therefore they don't live in the fear of God.

[17 : 11] They don't live in the fear of the all-powerful God. If I may put it another way what Moses is saying is that despite the fact that we see God's wrath and anger against sin sinners don't accordingly fear the Lord.

They continue their rebellion and sin against them and what this does is it points to the need of sinners for Christ who alone is able to transform their hearts and lives and enable them to live in reverential fear of the Lord.

And this really is because it is only when Christ has transformed their hearts when Christ has given us new birth and we have been transferred out of the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's own Son do we have an understanding of the seriousness of sin because we see how God deals with it on the back of his own Son on the cross where he poured out his wrath for sin and upon sin on the Lord Jesus Christ.

God was not dramatizing or acting out or being a drama king as some may say. He was responding to sin the way sin justly deserved to be responded to.

And that wasn't just sin in a vacuum. That was your sin and my sin. And when we come to Christ we get a view of God's wrath upon sin that helps us to see how we need to live in reverence before him and in a holy fear of who he is.

[19 : 10] But it's important for us to see that the ultimate punishment for sin is not the sentence of death that we live under. It is not all the troublesome things that we encounter in this life because of sin.

No, again, the ultimate punishment of sin was poured out on Jesus Christ on the cross. And for those of us who have put our trust in Jesus, here's what we know.

We know that that ultimate punishment for sin will never be meted out on us. Will never be meted out on us. Because God poured it out on his son and he will not require it both of his son and of us because we put our trust in him.

But for those who have not put their trust in Jesus, by not doing so, what you are saying is I will bear my own sin. I will bear the consequences and the punishment for my own sin.

And God being just must pour out his full wrath and fury upon your sin if it is not put on Jesus Christ.

[20 : 24] See, when we come to Jesus, what we're doing is this. We are saying, Lord Jesus, you died for me. you went to the cross as my substitute.

You bore my sins. All of them. All of them. Jesus Christ has borne in full all the sins of those who put their trust in him.

Their past sins, present sins, and even future sins. And thank God because if he didn't bear even our future sins, what would we do with them?

In verses 12 to 17, we have come to the final part of the prayer, which is petition. And in this prayer, in this part of the prayer, Moses lifts up several petitions to the Lord.

and the first one is in verse 12. I've already mentioned this. This is the burden of his prayer. This is the heart of everything that he is praying towards.

[21 : 40] And he petitions the Lord on behalf of all of God's people, and he says, teach us. He doesn't say, teach me. The psalmist doesn't make this a personal psalm.

He prays this on behalf of all of God's people. He says, teach us to number our days that we might get a heart of wisdom. This petition admits that all of us need divine help in order to number our days that we might get a heart of wisdom.

And what does it mean to number our days? It clearly doesn't mean that there is some way for us to know exactly how long we are going to live and we can kind of number our days in that way.

That's not what Moses is praying that the Lord would do for us at all. Our days are numbered. God has numbered them sovereignly.

The span of our time, from the moment of birth until the moment of death, God is sovereignly determined. But Moses is not praying that we try to figure out, do I have a long life or a short life or somewhat in between life.

[22 : 59] Instead, what Moses is praying is that we would come to the realization that our days on this earth, however long they are, are brief and few.

They are few and they are fleeting. That is what Moses is praying, that God would help us to recognize that we are on this earth for a brief period of time.

And he says it is in realizing this that we will apply our hearts to wisdom. Have you ever noticed how when we have an awareness of constraints that are upon us, we tend to be more disciplined with what we are doing, especially if we are trying to maybe meet a deadline.

When you realize that I have a limited amount of time to do this, we tend to harness our focus and we tend to try to be very efficient with how we use our time.

But when we think we have all day long, we think we have a lot of time, we tend not to have the kind of restraint to apply our lives to wisdom. And this is what Moses is getting at.

[24 : 22] He's saying to us that when we realize that our day is really a few, and we realize that our day is really a fleeting, and that at the end of them we are answerable to God, we will live wisely.

In Proverbs 9 and 10, we read that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

And this is the aim of Moses' prayer, that we will live our brief lives on this earth in the fear of the Lord, seeking to please Him in everything that we do.

I read one estimate that said that approximately 15,000 adults died.

Each year, the children of Israel journeyed through the wilderness. Approximately 15,000 deaths per year in that community. And that works out to be about 1,250 deaths per month, and about 40 deaths per day.

[25 : 36] And so this community was surrounded by death. Moses saw deaths like you just would not be able to imagine. They had funerals all the time.

They were stopping and they were burying people all the time. And some people, I mean, it was hard to be in that community and not be touched by death in a regular way.

And this doesn't include infants. This is just, this estimate just covers adults. And what's amazing when you take all that in to realize how surrounded by death the children of Israel were, still, they did not have an appreciation for what Moses prayed about.

If they truly were living mindful that their days were brief and fleeting, and if they truly were living with wisdom towards the Lord, Moses would not have needed to pray this prayer.

And what it helps us to see is that death alone will not wake us up. Death alone will not cause us to be mindful of our own mortality in a way that will cause us to apply our hearts to wisdom.

[26 : 58] We can experience death every single day, multiple times a day, and that's not enough. We need God's help. You know, the moment someone dies and then maybe we have a passing thought about something, but it doesn't last.

We need God's help to teach us to realize day by day that the days that we have on this earth are few and they are fleeting, and therefore we will apply our hearts to wisdom, and the only wise way to live is to live in service to God.

And when I say service to God, I don't mean that all we do is we just think about work in the church. Certainly that's a part of it. But it's all of life.

God has given us all of life. He has called us to care for our families, and that means that we work. He has given us things to enjoy, and so yes, we can enjoy the good gifts that God has given to us in this life.

But as we engage all those things, we are to do it with the fear of the Lord. We are to do it with wisdom towards God. We are to do it in service to God.

[28 : 16] 1 Corinthians 10.31 says, whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do it all for the glory of God.

And what that tells us is that we can live this life doing whatever we do, the most mundane thing, and we can do it towards the Lord. We can do it seeking to glorify God.

We can do it with the humility of remembering my days on this earth are few and fleeting, and so I want to live wisely before my maker. And the truth is that death comes to us at inconvenient times. If it were possible to interview people in the grave, it's possible, not possible, but let's just say that it were possible.

I believe that most people will tell us that they thought they would have lived longer. You'll get the few who would say, oh, the doctor told me I only had six months to live and I end up living three years or six years.

[29 : 25] you'll get those. But far more will say, death came to me sooner than I thought. Death came to me sooner than I wanted.

And so brothers and sisters, we need God's help. We're no different from the community of Israel. If Moses had to pray for them, asking God to help them to number their days, to teach them to number it, teach them to live with wisdom, remembering that their days are few and fleeting, even so, we need that as well.

But this is God's word to all of God's people. So when Moses prayed, he was not just praying for the community of Israel, he was praying for the community of all of God's people.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 1, verse 30, the Apostle Paul tells us, that God has made Christ to be our wisdom, our righteousness, and our sanctification.

And this is how we number our days. The way we number our days is by having Christ as the Lord of our lives.

[30 : 48] This is the way we number our days, this is the way we live wisely, we do it by having Christ as the Lord of our lives. If we don't do that, we will live presumptuously, we will assume upon the future, and we will think that we have longer than we in reality do have.

And we will also live in accordance with the wisdom of this world, which is passing away. I've really had to just think more recently about death more than I have in quite some time.

And one of the things I've concluded is that we really should not desire to live a long life. And I don't think that's a wise desire to have.

I don't think we should just desire to live a long life. One of the realities about living a long life is if you live long, you're going to see a lot of suffering. If you live long, for example, if you are the longest living person in your family, it means that you will experience the death of all your loved ones.

You'll experience the death of friends and other family members and neighbors and you'll just see a whole lot of death. Instead, what we need to just settle and say, Lord, whatever my days are, whatever the length of them are, would you help me to live wisely, live with the awareness that my days are few and fleeting, even if I end up living long compared to other people.

[32 : 41] live 100. It's still short in the grand scheme of things. But we need to be praying, Lord, would you teach me day by day to live recognizing my mortality and in light of that, that I would live wisely before you.

and when we live wisely, it's reflected in our priorities, it's reflected in our affections, it's reflected in how we handle our resources, and everything in between.

Moses prayed this prayer once that we have recorded in scripture, but as long as we live on this earth, we will pray this prayer regularly. That's the first petition that Moses lifts up to the Lord.

Let's quickly look at the other ones. In verse 13, he petitions the Lord to return to them and have pity or mercy upon them.

And here Moses is praying to God in light of a community sin that has brought the displeasure of God, brought the judgment of God, and he is asking the Lord to return to them and to have mercy on them.

[34 : 07] And he's able to do this because he knows God is merciful. You know, there's some people, when we have wronged them, you know, we keep our distance from them because we know, boy, it may only make the situation worse.

Not so with the Lord. Not so with the Lord. He is tenderhearted towards his children. His anger will not last forever. And Moses recognizes, and so he petitions God, and he prays that the Lord would return to them, and the Lord would have mercy on them.

He would pity them. In verses 14 and 15, Moses petitions the Lord to give them gladness all of their days.

He asked the Lord to satisfy them in the morning with his steadfast love that they may rejoice and be glad all of their days.

He asked the Lord to cause them to receive joy and gladness for as many days that they had been afflicted and they had experienced evil. Again, we don't know the circumstances that brought this about, but it is interesting what Moses is praying.

[35 : 28] Moses is praying for something out of this world. Moses was not praying in the reality of a fallen world and accepting that he was longing for something more, he was praying for something more, and in so doing, what Moses was doing was Moses was longing for that which only Christ can bring.

He was praying for something that was impossible in a fallen world, but very much possible in the world to come, which Christ alone will bring to his people.

He's longing for a day that is not marked by sin and sorrow and grief and death, but a day that's marked by righteousness and gladness, and one day Christ will usher in that new day.

God's work. In verse 16, he petitions the Lord to show his servants his work and his glorious power to their children.

And this is a reminder to us that it is not automatic that we see God's work. It is not automatic that our children will see the glorious power of God.

[36 : 54] it is something that we need to be crying out for. God, open our eyes to see it. Lord, may our children experience your glorious power. And all of this is connected to living our brief days on this earth with wisdom.

These are the things that we need to be crying out for. This needs to be part of our prayers, of petitions, not Lord, give me this and give me that and do this for me, but oh Lord, would you show me your work?

Oh Lord, would you reveal your glorious power to our children? In verse 17, Moses prays for God's favor upon his people and that he would establish the work of their hands.

And here, the fall is in view again. Because of the fall, our labors are impeded. Because of the fall, we don't get the fullness of the fruit of our labors.

The ground rings for thorns and thistles. And again, Moses is praying that God would do something and cause us to experience the fruitfulness of our hands, that he would establish it.

[38 : 09] Because anything that God has really not established, is not without, doesn't have any lasting value. And so brothers and sisters, as we are at the end of a new year, at an old year, at the

verge of a new year, I pray that Psalm 90 would truly be a prayer, and in particular, verse 12, that will be regularly on our hearts, asking the Lord.

Lord, help me to live with awareness that my days are numbered, that my days are few and my days are fleeting, and therefore I want to live wisely.

I want to apply my heart to wisdom. And may the Lord help us to see what that looks like in our lives, with the time that he has allotted to us, with the opportunities that he has given to us, with the resources that he has entrusted to us.

And behind this prayer is an acknowledgement that we need to be dependent on the Lord. And this is what a life surrendered to Christ looks like.

It's a life that's lived in humility, it's a life that lives in independence, it is a life that lives looking to God for wisdom that only he can bring.

[39 : 36] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, would you do that for all of us this morning? Would you give us an awareness that our days on this earth have been fixed by you?

And whatever they are, even if they end up being long compared to the average lifespan, they are but few and they are fleeting.

And we ask, Lord, that you would help us to live our allotted days with wisdom and reverence towards you. Would you do this, Lord, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen. Let's stand for our closing song, Be Thou My vision. vision.