

A Prayer for 2015

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[0 : 00] Briefly, let's turn together to Psalm 90, where we read in the book of Psalms, Psalm number 90, looking especially at the last verse of Psalm 90, verse 17.

We can read from verse 16. Let your work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power to their children. Let the favour, or the beauty of the Lord our God, be upon us.

And establish the work of our hands upon us. Yes, establish the work of our hands. Well, as we said in reading the Psalm, it is entitled, A Prayer of Moses, the Man of God.

And as you read through the Psalm, you get the impression that while it's a prayer, undoubtedly, Moses is also meditating on what you find basically in the first three chapters of the Bible.

Genesis chapters 1 to 3. We've been looking quite a bit at Genesis chapters 1 and 2 recently in the prayer meeting. And as you know, Genesis 3 goes on to deal with the fall of man, a man becoming a sinner.

[1 : 09] And God's response to that in terms of his announcement over the creation and over man himself as a consequence of his disobedience against God.

How the curse of God was directed against him and towards him. And here we find these same sort of elements reflecting upon God.

Because the Psalm begins with God, just like Genesis 1 begins with God. It doesn't, as we saw then in beginning our studies in chapter 1 of Genesis, the Bible doesn't begin with an argument to set out to prove the existence of God.

It simply starts in the beginning God created. God was there. God was always there. It doesn't set out anywhere in the Bible to try and prove that God exists.

People have been trying to do that. People have been trying to use different arguments for the existence of God over the course of many centuries. But the Bible doesn't do that. It simply takes it as a fact.

[2 : 17] Because after all, this is God speaking. This is God's word. And here is Moses beginning this prayer or this meditation. Lord, you have been now 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. And this is a Psalm that has given, at many times, meditation to us at the beginning of a new year.

Because of the way that it establishes and expresses the eternity of God. The way that God is not subject to the passing of years. And is not under the restrictions of time.

And is not himself subject to what the Psalm here goes on to speak about. In terms of our transience. The shortness of our life on earth. The uncertainty of it.

The sinfulness that is ours. The way that we come to experience God's reaction, response to our sin. And the wrath of God directed against us. And you may think that's really rather a very sombre, solemn way to begin a new year.

[3 : 29] But then, the Bible makes us realists. Many people have begun this new year without really thinking at all of eternity. Just time. Just a new year.

Something to celebrate. Having a great time. Oblivious to the fact that it's another year nearer to the return of Christ in the judgment day. And Moses is not like that.

As Moses meditates here on Genesis 1-3. He builds into his prayer those things that are realities. That are very real and necessary for human beings to know.

Beginning with God. Moving on to man. And then the fall of man. The sinfulness of man. The transience of human life. How death has entered his experience.

But then the same ends. With God as well. And in a prayer to God. He is seeking that the favor, the beauty of the Lord will be upon us. That God will establish the work of our hands.

[4 : 30] Now this would be very important of course to Israel. As Moses was leading them towards the promised land. This prayer of Moses must have taken place.

We know before Israel entered the promised land. Because God, Moses himself as God revealed to him. Was not going to go into the land of promised, the land of Canaan. But the content of the psalm would be so important to Israel.

As they moved on. Whenever it was that Moses composed the prayer. Whenever this prayer came to be put together by Moses. It is certainly very appropriate for a people that are traveling from year to year.

Without a home in their places of travel. They covered many miles. Went through many places. And yet none of that was home to them. They were on the way home.

They were traveling towards the place. God had destined for them in Canaan. That's how you begin a new year as well. All the steps that we take through time.

[5 : 34] All the places we visit. All the experiences we have. In nothing of that is there a home for us. There's nothing permanent in that. Nothing there that you can say is your residence.

But the psalm here actually brings Israel face to face with their ultimate home. With their refuge. Because it really is pretty much the same thing.

The dwelling place. Lord, you have been our dwelling place. You have been our refuge. Our place of dwelling. The home in which we have security.

You are that for us, Lord. Nothing in the wilderness can actually provide that for us. And not even Canaan itself can ultimately provide that for us.

This is what Moses' emphasis is. But you have been our dwelling place. Deuteronomy 33. You remember that great song of Moses where he goes through the tribes.

[6 : 32] Just prior to their entering the land of promise. As he pronounces blessing over the people in their different tribes. And expresses himself that way. This is how he comes to the end of that great song of blessing.

There is none like unto your God. O Jeshurun, O Israel. The eternal God is your refuge. And underneath are the everlasting arms.

See how similar that is to his prayer here. The prayer of Moses. So he ends in these verses that seek for God to establish the work of our hands.

And that God's own work in verse 16 will be the means by which that is achieved. So two things very briefly. First of all that God has given us a work to do.

God has given us a work to do. Verse 17 there is establish the work of our hands upon us. And it will be all too easy just to think that all Moses is concerned about is the work of God.

[7 : 42] He's concerned to emphasize the work of our hands. And he's applying to God for the establishing of that work of our hands.

But as he's doing so he actually brings out here in the final verse of the prayer. The fact that there is a work for us to do. That God has given us a work to do.

It's futile to expect success from God without our work. Without our doing what God has given us to do. You will find some people who think that practical evangelism.

Going to people and exhorting them to come to church. Or to come to hear the gospel. Or to come to special services. Or going round doors as some do with tax.

Or all that sort of activity. That that is just a waste of time. Some people think the Lord's going to bring in his people anyway. The Lord knows who are his. The Lord's spirit is going to work to bring his elect people in.

[8 : 41] Well nowhere in the Bible do you actually find the idea that yes God is going to do it all. And therefore we can just sit back.

We can look after ourselves. Look after our own well-being. Our own personal development as believers. As Christians. And forget about programs of evangelism and outreach.

And all that sort of stuff. That's not the teaching of the Bible at all. Here is Moses saying. Lord there is such a thing as the work of our hands.

And what we're seeking from you. Is that you will establish it. But God is not going to establish. The work of our hands on his work. Without our work. Without our working.

The work of our hands. The practical labor. That we expend for God. All the way through the Bible. You find that emphasized. And it's important to begin a new year with that.

[9 : 39] After all the Bible's emphasis on serving God. Is very often seen as a labor. A labor of work. A loving labor of work. Which you find.

For example at the end of. That great chapter on the resurrection. 1 Corinthians 15. You know the final verse of the chapter. Verse 58. Therefore my beloved brethren.

Be steadfast. Immovable. Always abounding. In the work of the Lord. By the work of the Lord. He doesn't mean that.

God's work in us or for us. He means our work for the Lord. The work of the gospel. The work of the Lord. The work that God has given us to do. That's how he finishes that great chapter.

And just imagine. Why that is the final verse of that chapter. Why at the end. Of a sustained treatment. Of 57 verses. On the subject of the resurrection.

[10 : 40] The power of Christ's resurrection. And the reality of our own resurrection in him. Why would he finish that chapter. With a text about working. The work of the Lord.

Because that is. In this life. Where. Our power comes from. The work of the Lord. That we're to be abounding in.

Is a work that is. Fed in its energy. In the ability that is given to us. From the resurrection of Christ. Therefore my beloved brethren. Be steadfast.

Be unmovable. Always abounding. In the work of the Lord. In other words. It's not as little as you can. It's as much as you can. Abounding. In the work of the Lord.

For as much as your labor. You see there's another word. That means. Graft. Hard work.

Application. For as much as your labor. is not in vain.

[11 : 40] In the Lord. And that means. Firstly. That in our personal salvation. There is. A work for us to do. One of the verses that's.

Come up in the discipleship explored. Course recently. A number of times. Philippians 2. 13. Work out your own salvation. With fear and trembling.

For it is God who works in you. Both to will and to do of his good pleasure. But. Our salvation is something we work out. We don't. Achieve our salvation. We don't work towards our salvation. In sense of earning it. Or earning God's favor. But as God has saved us. He saved us. Just as he placed man. As we saw last night. In the garden of Eden. To work. To dress it.

To keep it. And how. God. Dignified work. Even manual labor. By that very fact. So in terms of our salvation. Nowhere in the Bible.

[12 : 38] Do you think. Do you find that. The thought that we can be saved. Even if we're lazy about. Our spiritual condition. To be saved.

Means to be set. To work out. Our salvation. With fear and trembling. To apply. Ourselves. To the work. Of God. The work of the gospel.

And that means to work. In our own. Personal development. As well. You find. Another example. Of that. In. Second Peter. Where.

The apostle Peter. There. At the. Very near the beginning. Of his letter. The second letter. Where he begins by. In verse five. There. Saying. For this very reason.

Make every effort. To supplement. Your faith. With virtue. Virtue. With knowledge. Knowledge. With self-control. Self-control. Always dead fastness. And so on.

[13 : 31] All the way through. And therefore. Brothers. Be all the more diligent. To make your calling. And election. Sure. For if you practice. These qualities. You will never. Fall.

For in this way. There will be richly. Provided for you. An entrance. To the kingdom. Of our Lord. And Savior. Jesus Christ. That's not salvation. By works. But that's the works.

Of the saved. It's those who are. Already saved. That have been set. On the path. Of working. Out their salvation.

With fear. And trembling. It applies to our. Personal salvation. God has given us. A work to do. That's why it's sad. Sometimes. When you see people. Slackling. In the working out.

Of their salvation. When. They may go for. Many weeks. Without even attending. A service of worship. There's something wrong. In that person's life. If they're not ill.

[14 : 26] If they're not. Incapacitated. In some way. If they could be there. But are not. And that they're professing. To be Christians. To be saved. Well here is God saying. Work out your salvation.

How am I going to work out salvation? I have to use the means. God has given me. I have to pick up the tools. That he's given me. The spiritual tools. That you have in the gospel. That's how you

work it out.

That's how you become a laborer. A servant. In regard to your own salvation. Secondly. It applies to. The work. That we have as a congregation.

Not just personally. But congregationally as well. Again. When he wrote to the Philippians. Paul was concerned. To hear. Good reports from them.

He was in prison. When he wrote to them. He had been in touch. With them before. But one of the things. He was telling them. Was whether he would be with them. Or absent from them.

[15:22] He wanted to hear this about them. That they were striving. Together. With one mind. For the faith. Of the gospel. That they were standing.

And striving. Together. That they were actually. United in effort. For the faith. Of the gospel.

In the work. Of the gospel. In the activity. That belonged. To the gospel. And Jude. One of. The smallest letters. In the New Testament. Nevertheless.

A very important one. In its own right. Jude. In verse 3. Uses the word. Contend. As a word. That means.

Fight. It's sad. It's sad. It's sad. That. It's sad. That. Islam. Has taken over. The idea. Of contending. By its use of jihad.

[16:17] Or holy war. But you and I. As Christians. Have a contending. To do. Very different. In many ways. To the contending. Of jihad. Which doesn't really. Leave out.

The possibility. Of just putting people. To death. If they're enemies. Of Muhammad. Or of Islam.

The contending. Of the Christian. Is a spiritual warfare. You contend. With sin.

You contend. With the world. You contend. With all that is at odds. With God. You contend.

Because God has given you. The labor. Of contending. The gospel.

Is worth fighting for. God has given us. This deposit. Of his truth. And as we begin. A new year.

He's emphasizing. For us here. By expressing this.

As the work. Of our hands. That it's a work. That involves. Our labor. For Christ. Our being servants. Of Christ. And our being servants. For Christ. And of Christ.

[17:10] Means that. As a congregation. We have collectively. To be striving. And contending. For the work. Of the gospel. And when Paul wrote. To Timothy. In 2nd Timothy.

Chapter 1. Verse 8. The final part. Of the verse. He was concerned. That Timothy. Would not be put off. By difficulties. By. Persecution. And.

What he said was. Or. Even by. Being associated. With Paul. The prisoner. Of the Lord. Don't you. He says. Be ashamed. Of that.

But. Be a partaker. Of the sufferings. Of the gospel. In the works. That we are to share.

To be partakers of. And that makes it more personal. Your own share of the afflictions of the gospel.

It's not just that we are to be partakers of, that we are to share in a general sense in the work of the gospel, in the congregation's work for the gospel, for the Lord.

[18:24] We are to ensure that we take our own slice of that work. That we don't take up less than our share of that work. So as this year unfolds, let me ask myself, and let you ask yourself too, am I taking up my share?

Am I taking up the weight? Am I taking up my share of the weight of the work of the gospel? Is the work of my hands commensurate with what God expects of me in the work of the gospel?

Let's ask ourselves, as this year goes on, can I do something more in the congregation's work for the gospel? Can I help with something that I'm not helping with already?

Can I share in the work of, whether it's parent and toddler, or point to life, or the women's meetings, or whatever else it is? Where the gospel work of the congregation is involved, can I do more for that and in that?

Am I taking up my share of the work of the gospel? It applies to our personal lives and it applies to the work of the congregation.

[19:40] So that's the first thing, that God has given us a work to do. It's futile to expect success from God without our doing our work for Him.

In our personal salvation and in the congregation's work for God. Secondly, only God can establish the work that we do.

Notice the prayer of Moses here is not just regarding the work of our hands and emphasizing that we have a work to do, but he's praying that God will establish the work of our hands upon us.

He's actually redoubling that emphasis. He's saying, yes, establish the work of our hands. And just as it's futile to expect success from God without our work, it's equally futile to expect success from our work without God.

We can have all the work possible for us to engage in. We can have all the planning and all the strategy and all the committees and all the programs and everything else that may very rightly be used in the work of the gospel.

[20 : 53] But if that's what we're relying on, we'll have very little success. What Moses is praying for is, Lord, take the work of our hands and please establish it for us.

You establish the work of our hands is what he's praying for. He's conscious of the fact that as a people, they themselves are not able to establish the work of their hands.

The work of the gospel, the success of gospel work, success in the sense of, you know what I mean by success. It don't mean success in worldly terms. Success in terms of genuine spiritual success, where the gospel comes to bear fruit in people's lives.

That's not due to any ability of ours. That's not at all due to anything that we find primarily in ourselves. Who are we?

Well, you've only got to go to this chapter and read verses 3 to 12 to find out the answer to that.

Who are we? We're frail, human, earthly, transient, unreliable, sinful.

[22 : 10] Creatures. It's not going to be our ability that establishes the work of our hands.

The work of our hands does not establish itself. We appeal to God to do that for us. We mustn't slacken in the work of our hands. But as we engage in it, we must always look to God to establish it for us.

John chapter 15, verses 4 to 5. I think it was raised in prayer at the early morning prayer meeting, or else it was last night. But somebody quoted it recently in prayer. Where you have the vine and the branches.

It's not the branch that sustains the vine. It's not the branch bearing the fruit that feeds the vine. It's the other way about. It's the vine. It's the trunk.

It's from the roots of the vine that the branch gets its supply. And it's the same with our spiritual development with the work of our hands. It's from God himself.

[23 : 16] And as Moses, again, is the author of this prayer, and in his meditation here, you go to Deuteronomy and you find the great speeches of Moses in the book of Deuteronomy, which is really the preparatory of Israel entering the promised land.

Just scanning over their history, how God had dealt with them, the things that had happened in the wilderness, the things that were waiting for them in the promised land when they went in. But one thing he says a lot is this.

Don't forget God. You might think that's surprising. Surely a people who had all of the experiences they had leaving Egypt and through the desert, who had conquered such great kings that were mighty at themselves, Sihon and Og, all these other forces that had come against them that they had overcome.

Surely these people were not going to forget God once they had settled in the land of Canaan. But there is Moses in chapter 8 of Deuteronomy, verses 11 to 18. He says, full well as did Moses.

How easy it is for us to forget where our supply comes from. We're used to getting things just at the tips of our fingers.

[25 : 10] We're used to having things provided for us. We're used to having an abundance of things that previous generations had to live without. It's all too easy, friends, to forget that every good and perfect gift comes down from above.

We don't create them. We don't have the ability to establish the work of our hands. But we appeal to God to do it.

Now what does he mean by establish the work of our hands upon us? Well, to establish here means to make it permanent. To make it secure.

To make it lasting. Because Moses is thinking of the coming generations. Let your work in verse 16 be shown to your servants and your glorious power to their children.

He's got a burden for the succeeding generations. It's not just a matter of these people who are just going to settle shortly in the land of Canaan that he's now speaking to or praying about.

[26 : 17] He's looking forward to the next generation and the next one after that too. And what he's praying for is for the work of their hands to be made secure and lasting and permanent.

Something that will be passed on to the succeeding generations that they will take up that they themselves will then pray over and build upon and take further.

How important that is. in this new year for us. What are we passing on to the young ones rising up? Are we making things more difficult for them than we should?

Are we passing on to them burdens that they will actually carry for the rest of their generation? Is it our concern rather to pass on to them a legacy that will provide them with the means to support the gospel?

Practically, financially, building wise, whatever it might be. We always have to ask the question, what are we handing on to those who are coming after us? What kind of provision are we making for them?

[27 : 37] And here is Moses' burden as it must be ours, thinking of the next generation. Lord, establish the work of our hand. Give us the permanence in the work that we're doing for you so that it will last.

So that it will prove to be of benefit to those coming after us. Establish it, Lord. Make it secure. Don't let it be a flash in the pan.

Don't let it be something that is just here for a moment and then disappears like the vapor in the morning. Establish it, Lord. Establish the work of our hand upon us.

Come down from above and make this something that is really strongly founded and rooted and permanent and ongoing.

See, that's what we want for ourselves and that's what we want for the congregation. That's what we want when we see people turning to the Lord. We want that to last. We want that to be built upon.

[28 : 41] We want that to be something, as Jesus again said to the disciples in John 15. I have sent you that you should bear fruit.

I have ordained you that you should bear fruit. He didn't leave it at that. And that your fruit should remain. That it may go on in its influence.

And what you and I want at the beginning of this new year is that when we are no longer here, when we are gone, when we've left the scene of time, that the work of our hands will have been established by God in our time so that those who are then here will continue the work of the gospel. Lord, establish the work of our hands upon us. And then he comes to use some wonderful words. Verses 16 and 17, if you take 16 into it as well.

Let your work be shown to your servants and your glorious power to their children. Or let your work be known to your servants, shown to your servants, and your glory to their children.

[29 : 56] The word favor there in verse 17 that's tied up with that is it's amazing that the the essence of that word in Hebrew means really something very close to or even including magnificence.

It's a word in Hebrew that takes in things that have to do with splendor, with majesty, with magnificence. And here it's talking about God.

What a prayer that is. And what a wonderful privilege that you can begin a new year with that prayer for yourself and with this prayer for ourselves as a congregation.

Lord, let your magnificence be upon us. What a thought that is. What happens when God comes to bless his gospel?

What happens when God comes to show the glory of his power to his children? What happens when God comes in power more than at previous times?

[31 : 05] It is, as one commentator puts it, he is showing us the bright side of his glory. You know, God's glory has a dark side as well.

The dark side is the way that he deals with sin. The way that he judges in his wrath. That's part of the psalm. We are brought to an end by your anger.

By your wrath, we are dismayed. You have set our iniquity before you, our secret sins, in the light of your presence. God is glorified in everything he does, including the judgment of sin and of the wicked.

His justice is exalted. His name is vindicated. The bright side of his glory, as this commentator put it, the bright side of his glory is shown forth in the work of his salvation, in the establishing of the work of our hands, in blessing us abundantly with his salvation.

Lord, let your magnificence be upon us. What a year this would be. If we can say at the end of it, if we see through to the end of it, what a year that was when the magnificence of God, the magnificence of God and his blessing in the gospel came to rest upon us to establish the work of our hands.

[32 : 42] That's revival. That's God showing his glory, the bright side of his glory. What a great prayer he's given for you and for me to take into each day of this new year for ourselves as a congregation.

Let the magnificence of the Lord be upon us. And the implications of that are many, but I'm just going to mention three in closing.

First of all, dependence. That we have to be utterly dependent on God even though we have to labor with the work of our hands as much as possible.

I think it was Matthew Henry or Philip Henry perhaps his father who put it this way. This was in regard to our salvation, but it also includes I'm sure the practical work in which we're involved in the gospel.

Be as active in it as if you were to be saved by your own efforts. and yet depend as much on God as if no effort at all was required of you.

[33 : 58] Be as active in it as if your salvation depended on your own efforts and yet be as dependent on God as if no effort at all was required of you.

Maximum application and maximum dependence at the same time. That's what Moses is teaching us. That's one of the implications of what his prayer here is.

Second implication is that of prayer. it's highly significant that we've been beginning New Year for a number of years now with a prayer meeting in the early morning.

Significant for many reasons but it's significant for this reason that we want to begin a new year confessing our dependence upon God and seeking from God in that expression of our dependence the power by which alone we will see the work of our hand established.

It's not a thing to take pride in. It's not something by which we would want to say that as a congregation we're above other congregations other congregations I'm sure did this as well today.

[35 : 23] But for us it's important because prayer is the avenue the channel through which we give to God and receive from God.

Establish the work of our hand. This friends is the prayer of Moses. It's an application to God for all that he and the people need for the work of their hands to be established.

We will not do it without prayer. We will not have success with minimum prayer. So that's the second thing.

The third thing is thankfulness. Dependence prayer thankfulness. Maybe the magnificence of the Lord will not come upon us the way we would desire the way we pray for.

That's at God's hands. God's hands. But for every glimpse of his glory for every life changed for every Christian nourished strengthened encouraged for every step of teaching of new understanding give thanks to God express your thanks to him take it into each day of this new year not to be over anxious about anything but in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God that passes all understanding will garrison your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus may we be engaged fully in the work that God has given us to do and may we know and act upon the fact that only

[37 : 30] God can establish the work that we do for him Lord we thank you that you have given us a work to do on your behalf that we are your servants and you have given us the honour of serving you of being a people who work in your name and for your name's sake and we pray Lord as you emphasise for us in your word so often the way in which your people are given that spiritual practical labour in the gospel we pray that you would establish the work of our hands we pray that everything we do in your name that is in accordance with your truth Lord that they might indeed be established by you and we pray that you would exceed our very asking you are the God of miracles you are the God who is able to do exceeding abundantly above what we ask or think and as we know of your servant

Moses through this prayer through many other aspects of your words teaching about him Lord we know especially how familiar he was with your glory and yet how it was the burden of his heart that you would show him your glory we pray that you would show us your glory bring us onwards through this year we pray with your glory shown to us in the brightness of it in your salvation for our

good and for your praise hear us now we pray for Jesus sake Amen