

Psalm 90: God's Love, God's Wrath

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- [0 : 0 0] Techno, techies are doing their thing. Reading this over again last night, I want to begin with a sort of disjointed introduction that leads into a kind of free-floating...
- What can I call it? What I happen to think about as I was reading Psalm 90 over and over and over again.
- So that's what you... Disjointed introduction leading to sort of a free-floating open commentary on Psalm 90. I've come to love Psalm 90.
- I want to start just by a little bit off Psalm 90. One of the last really good archbishops of Canterbury lived about a thousand years ago. Famous Saint Anselm.
- He's in many a stained-glass window, I'm sure. His church is named after him. He's famous for a great argument for God's existence called the ontological argument.
- [1 : 0 4] I don't want to talk about that today. He had this outline for me the other day in reading by Thomas Torrance, a great Edinburgh Scottish theologian.
- He loves Anselm, Torrance, and so do I. I think a lot of people do. Anselm just says something very simple to you. Or at least it's simple enough.
- And I'll make reference to this during the talk about Psalm 90. I wish I could write this, but I'm not good at writing Psalm. Anselm says there's three levels of Christian knowledge.
- Three levels of knowledge. The first level, he strangely calls it the grammatical level. I think roughly what he means is, and roughly is good enough for us today, when you speak, when you write, there's a kind of truth in one's being coherent, making a kind of sense to your conversation partner.
- There's the truth. He calls it a grammar. That's fair enough. That's elemental. Then the second level is what your speech has reference to.
- [2 : 1 0] And this, he broadens it out to everything. The whole world. The world of being. Everything. Angels. Maybe not angels right off the bat, but the whole created order.
- But then he says there's a third level of knowledge. And that third level of knowledge has reference to the transcendent order. The order of the mystery of God.
- So there's the level of grammar, the level of our speech about being, and that which is almost beyond being, beyond anything our senses could ever relate to.
- Something so hard to talk about, the transcendent, invisible order. One and two, and this is common sense. There's nothing mysterious about this. One and two, the first two levels, may be reasonably complete.
- And we may reasonably feel that we possess a kind of, reasonably enough, a kind of mastery about our speech and about those things that we're referring to. But three, of course, is quite different.
- [3 : 1 4] It is a kind, you might call it a kind of open knowledge. That's my language, not Torrance or Anselm. It's a kind of open knowledge. We may know real truth about our Creator, but this knowledge, and I don't think any Christian would disagree, but it's worth, it seems to me, remembering.

This knowledge must be humble, and if you will, open to its future. I was sharing the other day, we forget too easily, it seems to me, don't we?

Paul's great word to the Corinthians. Now, we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face. That when we think about God now, it's like seeing through a vapor sometimes.

Seeing shifting forms. Paul isn't afraid to say that to the Corinthians. There's things to be certain about in the Christian life, but we must remember that there is much room for humility.

Now we see through a glass darkly, but then, in the future, we will see God face to face. God knows God fully, Anselm would tell you.

[4 : 28] It seems so obvious, but we forget it. God knows God perfectly. No creature, ever, no archangel, no angel, no cherubim or seraphim, may ever know God the way God knows God.

So there's always an openness, a kind of, I think the right word is reserve. Forget this, and we are easily deceived in Christian knowledge.

I'm sure, I think you'll agree with me when I say that kind of thing. There's a kind of certainty and a reserve at the same time in Christian knowledge. I think that's true.

And when you're around Christians who forget that, I'm sure I do, the tone gets wrong sometimes. Just the tone of the discussion. Too much easy, brittle certainty floating around in the discussion.

Here's a piece of Christian knowledge. We're still in this open-ended introduction. Here's a piece of Christian knowledge that you'll agree with. The underlying logic, and this begins to speak to Psalm 90.

[5 : 36] The underlying logic of the Old Testament, Christians believe, is Jesus Christ. The underlying logic of the Old Testament is Jesus.

It's an open book, the Old Testament. It's a book of expectation. It seems to present someone. It lacks clarity.

But then Jesus comes on the scene and we see the underlying logic. It's Jesus. Jesus is our prophet, our priest, our king. As king, of course, he rules.

He rules all things. He rules his church. As priest, he mediates. And for this morning, it's good to emphasize, is it not, that as prophet, Jesus teaches and instructs his church.

And he gives wisdom. And therefore, is it too strong a thing to say, as this introduction draws to a close, that Psalm 90 is Jesus preaching to us today.

[6 : 39] We're going to hear from the church's prophet today. Not me. Not anybody else other than Jesus. He's the teacher of the church.

He never stops teaching his church. His word is living and active. So we're going to search for the presence of Jesus as we look at Psalm 90.

The word of God is perfect and radiant and worthy of all our attention. I'm sure you'll agree. So let me say this prayer.

This prayer for us this morning as we begin to look at Psalm 90. May the Lord grant us a deep attention. A deep and thorough and believing attention to his word.

For the living word Jesus preaches in his word. And to that we say, Amen. So, Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations, Psalm 90 begins.

[7 : 50] 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. 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.

[8 : 50] 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 your wrath according to the fear of you? Oh, really? You have that straight in your mind.

Take this away and finish the psalm. I'm bad at this. Oh, no. There. And so the psalmist moves towards the end of this psalmist.

Moses is the superscription of this psalm. I think Moses wrote it. So he continues. So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

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 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.

[9 : 56] Let your work be shown to your servants and your glorious power 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. Psalm 90. Do we want to put the first one back then?

Thank you. I'm sorry. Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.

Just obviously, this is Israel confessing life in God's presence, isn't it? But it speaks as well, surely, and I think the rest of the psalm confirms this.

It speaks to humanity's life in God's presence. You might recall Paul quoting a Gentile as Paul preaches to Gentiles.

[11 : 05] In him we live and move and have our being. Saying in somewhat more prosaic language the same thing. Our dwelling place.

Why don't you stay there? You have been our dwelling place. Space. We're in space right now. We're breathing air.

They are necessary things, aren't they? We are inconceivable without them. They are what you might call background facts about us.

We're in space. That's always true about us. It's a background fact. We forget background facts at our peril. Great philosophical revolutions happen when some philosopher apparently, by just sheer din of thought, finds something that we're all assuming that no one's been aware that we've been assuming all this time.

They are sometimes hard to detect, these things called background facts, but they are certainly there. They constitute our dwelling place.

[12 : 16] Dr. Hill was talking about this a few weeks back. We can ask this question. We can ask this question. Do we live in a necessary, a given, an unescapable background, moral space?

We call it a moral space. Psalm 90, correct me if I'm wrong in the discussion time, Psalm 90 assumes and asserts that the answer to that question is, yes, we certainly do.

God is our dwelling place. As surely as space is our dwelling place. As certain as the one is the other.

Thinking about moral space, unescapable or otherwise, goes by the label, and before noon, I know you shouldn't use this kind of language, but I will.

It goes by the label moral ontology. Charles Taylor wonders at the absence of a moral ontology in our culture.

[13 : 24] That's where I get that fancy language from. We have, he notes, we have fierce, and isn't this the case, we have fierce moral disputes in our world, but there is no agreement, to put it mildly surely, there is no agreement as to what makes such disputes finally meaningful.

We just have them, but no one can figure out why, or what they finally mean. We yell at one another over abortion, and 10,000 other issues, but we don't know why, really.

Taylor notes, there's no moral ontology. We don't know what the moral space is, if there is a moral space, that we all share. It's a very strange fact about our world.

A moral ontology, supposedly, gives an answer to that big question. Why is moral pondering, why are moral disputes meaningful finally?

Or are they just people yelling one another about their current prejudices? Which is the way it sounds in our culture periodically. Moses supplies an answer.

[14 : 36] He says, Lord, and he means by this surely the righteous Lord, the righteous Lord, we'll see this later from the Psalter, you are our great background fact, he's in fact saying.

Moses, this psalm is attributed to Moses, I'm going to assume it's by Moses. It is by Moses. Lord, Lord, you are our great background fact. You are our moral ontology, Lord.

You are our dwelling place. In you, we live. You are unescapable. You are just there. You are the dwelling place of every human being.

Whether they like it or not, you're just there. You are our dwelling place. Just in passing, some people are interested in this kind of thing and others are not.

I think it's interesting to note, and this is by way of, I'm giving you a little book, a little book plug here. Plato, Plato, you know Plato, he was the other great supplier in our civilization, or one of them at least, of an attempt at understanding this most elemental issue.

[15 : 41] He was obsessed with questions like, what is the good? Plato. Do we, do we yearn, do we not yearn for it, whatever it is?

Is not a life spent in its pursuit, the only life worth pursuing? It's what Plato really had on his heart, his whole life, at his best. The current James Packer, professor of theology at Regent College, you'll know that institution and that man.

He's currently, that chair is currently held by a gentleman, Hans Boersma. He calls for a recovery in our, in the church, for what he calls the Christian Platonic synthesis.

He wants to get Plato back into the consciousness of Christians, if they're interested. We need, we need to understand that the world is not a thing, it is rather an open, it's an open space where a moral mystery constantly impinges upon human beings.

You'll read about this in, re-weaving the tapestry by Hans Boersma, a book about the sacraments and Christian thought, just that end of the book plug.

[16 : 58] I don't get any money for this, I just thought I'd get in Jim's name and Regent College. Do we recognize this moral space, this good, this as Moses calls it, this dwelling place?

Or, do we join with, and perhaps I'm being unfair here, but I would call them the heirs of the enlightenment, who have decided that we are our own moral dwelling place, and we refuse recognition of any other moral dwelling place, and we become creators of our own dwelling place.

That's one of the options that's living for us in our culture. There is a huge difference, isn't it? Perhaps an eternal difference, I think it is an eternal difference, between recognizing something and creating it for yourself.

The Christian believes that the self, don't we, ourselves are given. Lord, you have been our dwelling place. Lord, you give us our existence.

The Christian believes this, the self is given. Our identity, and isn't it so important in a culture like ours, to remember this, to find a way to say it to yourself.

[18 : 12] Our identity is exocentric. That is to say that it's in another, that we find our identity. Don't go looking for your identity.

Who am I? Don't ask that question. Who is Jesus Christ? He's who you are. The Christian believes. It's in Christ that we live. In Christ specifically.

To be a self outside of Christ, Christians believe, is an eternal impossibility. God's not going to allow it. The only human being he really likes is his son Jesus, and those who are in him.

You can't be a human outside of Jesus Christ. In him we were created, the apostles teach us. So the infinite one created, we finite ones.

I'd like to hammer home this point one more time. John Webster, a great theologian of our time, I think he's very wise to say that the Christian in principle does not bear the anxiety of self-realization.

[19 : 12] Thank goodness. Our contemporaries are all doing it. I need to be real. I need to find out who I am and be who I am. Be creative. Get over it, Webster says.

If you're a Christian, put it aside. Don't bear that anxiety for one more minute. No. Another has given us our existence. We are a gift. We are a gift.

Our existence is a gift. And we live just to realize this. My identity is given to me in Christ. My existence is given to me by my Creator.

This recognition almost, I would think, equals salvation itself at the intellectual level to realize this and to believe it is to be saved. That's what salvation is.

So there it is. Again, Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Lord, you have been.

[20 : 10] What an amazing thing for the psalmist to say, for Moses to say. As I said this psalm over and over and over again the last few weeks, I keep stopping at the first verse.

It's so rich. It says so much. You just want to weave it. Speaking of weaving, weave this into my psyche. Weave it into your heart.

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Who is this Lord? This Lord is, the psalmist tells us, he is infinite mystery.

He says that, you see at the end of verse 2, to sum it up, from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.

There is a recognition for you. I am a creature and I have a creator and this creator is from everlasting to everlasting.

[21 : 13] Again, there is recognition. I, on the other hand, on the other hand, says this psalm, I am not from forever. I am in fact the creature of a day.

Verse 3, you could go to various places to hammer home this point to you as you read this psalm. You return, man, to dust and say, return, O children of man.

Return to dust. The everlasting, well imagine, one person in the psalm is from everlasting to everlasting. The other hand, I, the reader of the psalm, am made of dust and I am going to go back to it apparently.

It is rather somber, isn't it? There you go. I am the creature of a day. You turn, man, back to dust. Recall Sir Walter Elliot, you literary people, I know you know these people.

Sir Walter Elliot is the father of the heroine, Anne Elliot, in Jane Austen's magnificent novel, Persuasion. About him, about this Sir Walter Elliot, Jane Austen writes one of her, you know her, I know, one of her effortless, perfect sentences.

[22 : 33] That's all the woman ever wrote. I think she said these sentences in her sleep. What a genius. She says this about Sir Walter Elliot, vanity was the beginning and the end.

This is why it came to my mind when I read this psalm. Vanity! Jane Austen would have heard Psalm 90 read to her at her parish church where her father read the Psalter I'm sure all the time. Vanity, get to the sentence, Harvey.

Vanity, vanity was the beginning and the end of Sir Walter Elliot's character, semicolon, perfect for Jane, vanity of person and of situation.

That's Jane Austen. Just after reading the sentence like that, why am I talking? Pathetic. Vanity, our life, our life, and Jane Austen knows this, our life is a vanity.

Has this been said, has this been said of late at Learner's Exchange? I forget if I've said it here, but I think it's, it's very much worth repetition. Forgive me for this repetition. What does God, God, in this case, think of it as God with a small g?

[23 : 38] What does the word God mean? I must, I heard Dr. Walt, he say this in the summer, I sat in his class on the Psalter just one day, took it in for a friend.

He was unfolding, if you've ever got a chance to listen to Dr. Walt, he do. One of my fellow classmates was there. He suddenly will just turn to you and make some point.

He makes very scholarly points, which I don't understand, but my friend here does. He says, what does the word God mean? In serious engagement with this word, God means that which confers upon us two things.

If you believe in a God, this God will give you your identity and he will give you security. That's what the word God means, Dr. Walt, he says. I think that's simple and just brilliant.

There are many gods, Paul says, doesn't he? What is a God? And our God too. We know the real one. He gives you your identity and he gives you security.

[24 : 42] That's what God's all about. He didn't create you to throw you into a void, to throw you into nothing. He wants to give you an identity and security. Sir Walter Eliot's identity derives from his status as a baronet, if I'm pronouncing that title accurately.

That's what he was apparently. And his security comes from his county mansion, which I believe is called Downton. No, I'm being silly. It's not Downton. It's Kellnitch Hall, I believe.

Kellnitch Hall. Which is your identity and security? Where does it reside today? I ask myself that. It sometimes is a bit spooky when you zero in on the answer, where my heart really is.

God wants to give me my identity. It's esocentric. He gives it to me. I don't self-realize. He gives me security. He gives me my existence. It's past.

It's now. And whatever is coming in the future, which includes, apparently, turning me into dust. God's a strange God. A silly question here, but if it is, I don't think it is, where does God get his identity and security?

[25 : 50] This psalm has already told us, hasn't it? Where does God get his identity from and his security? There's a theologian in the room, so he'll tell me, oh, you're so wrong with that, that I'd be in the discussion time.

He gets it from himself, God. But you know that. God gets that from himself, his identity and his security. He is from everlasting to everlasting.

It is breathtaking just to think of it. Spend your life thinking about that. I think that's called a C-A-T-Y, A-S-E-I-T-Y. If you want to be learned about it. I don't know if you pronounce that that way.

God is self-defining. He is self-sustaining. From everlasting to everlasting, you are God. We are not. We are almost the opposite as we've already seen.

You turn man back to the dust. The burial, I told you this was sort of ad hoc. What do I think about as I read Psalm 90? The burial service in the prayer book is profound. In the midst of life, it says, we are in death from dust to dust.

[26 : 53] It tells us. Reflecting Psalm 90 very wisely. If you go to an Anglican burial service led by a believer, you'll hear, from dust to dust, from dust we are taken, and to dust we return.

Forgive here, and a sigh too, but I need to get it off my chest. I don't know if back in the fall, no, no, back in the spring of last year, you saw Jack Layton's funeral on TV.

I took it in, and I regretted it almost as I watched it. I thought it was horrible. A secular, godless, with a lot of religious people around, with a secular, godless, religious people, putting Jack Layton, saying goodbye to him.

No dust to dust was mentioned. No mention really of death. And certainly, there was no mention of wrath at his funeral. No way.

We'll mention wrath in a moment. This psalm does when it comes to death and turning back into dust. It was, as we say in our culture, I think so glibly, it was a celebration of his life.

[28 : 01] He was sitting there dead. He couldn't celebrate at all, it appeared. But everyone was celebrating. There's a place for that, of course, but there was no days, ere, there was no choir singing judgment, sin, righteousness, and judgment, and pray for his soul.

You know, no, no way. No, no, you turn man back to the dust. I don't want to be trite about that. I pray that eternal light will shine upon him.

But his funeral was not anywhere within a light year of the Christian religion. It was just pathetic. Maybe I missed something, but there it is.

End of aside. This psalm, Lord, you have been our dwelling place, as noted. First, again, refers to the mystery of elect Israel called to be God's people.

But again, as I said, has this larger reference to all of humanity's life in God's strange presence. All of us are dust. All of us are going to die.

[29 : 07] We bring to Psalm 90 this background belief. We never read in a vacuum, do we?

We know that this is about us somehow. It reminds us. I think that's why I love it. It reminds me of things that I'm always forgetting. Whenever I read Psalm 90, I feel as if it's new. It's remarkable.

I find it very powerful. But we also bring as Christians this background belief, don't we, to Psalm 90. Here is where, is it not, where the New Testament puts a stamp of profundity on the Hebrew scriptures.

Again, our Lord is the hidden logic behind all of the Hebrew scriptures. The idea that we Christians carry around in our heads, the idea that God would in some manner draw near to us and even draw near to, is that an understatement?

He would, our God would draw near to death. Did Moses ever imagine this? That God would himself draw near to death. God, we know as Christians, again, it's a background belief that sort of hovers in our minds as we read something like Psalm 90, is it not?

[30 : 29] God emptied himself in the second person to be Trinitarian about it. What else can we be about it? And he became obedient, the second person of the Trinity became obedient unto death.

That God is not a stranger to this wrath of death. He's not far from it. If death, I think it is, if death is God's wrath, God has received his own wrath into himself somehow.

So, the New Testament reveals. Think of passages like Philippians 2. The wrath of the Lamb that we hear about in Scripture is just unutterable surely, isn't it?

How did God himself take upon himself his own wrath? the Lamb. The Lamb is the wrathful one taking the wrath of judgment, dealing with the wrath of judgment for God.

There's so much, and I just want to encourage you to make Psalm 90 part of your life. And I want to jump right now to 13 to 17. Arnott, did you find as we read through the Psalm, don't you find this ending to the Psalm, I do, I find all of 12, especially starting at 13, I find this little passage to end Psalm 90 completely surprising.

[32 : 08] Do you find it surprising? Scripture can be so surprising. After all this talk about God is our dwelling place, God is from everlasting to everlasting, we are dust, we have a life of maybe 70 or 80 years and it's all toil and trouble.

Then the psalmist suddenly goes turns and says things like, return, oh Lord, how long? Have pity on your servants. You, the one, you're going to turn me into dust.

Okay, I got it. Well, how about if you satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, you dust maker, you, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

Just before I get turned into dust, give me some happiness. I really, it's so surprising. Make us glad for as many days as you've afflicted us. We do know about this troubled life, Lord, but give us some good days.

And for as many years as we have seen evil, let your work be shown to your servants, your glorious power to their children. Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us. establish the work of our hands upon us.

[33 : 21] Yes, establish now the work of our hands. Who would have anticipated that these words have come into this song at this point?

I find it strange. I am under wrath, I am going to die, so, well, in the midst of this, please give me some good days. That is so unexpected, I find.

That is not what I expect when I read this, try to grapple with it in good reading. We have known wrath, but now give us some days to match those dark days.

This writer, do you see what is going on here? This is surprising, isn't it? This writer, it is Moses, it is Moses who wrote this song, he still believes in the final goodness of God.

Even though God is from everlasting to everlasting, we are creatures of a day and we are headed towards dust. Moses still believes in the goodness of God.

[34 : 28] Isn't that strange? Isn't that strange? This psalm, again, makes me ruminate. I love that word, ruminate. Ponder it, see what it's saying, read it, mark, learn, inwardly digest it, find out what's surprising about it.

The psalm makes me do that, to think over what's going on in this psalm and in the Bible as a whole. Since all die, after all, why not turn away from God in protest?

It seems to me that's a very honest question. The new atheists, most of us are now overly aware of these chaps, the new atheists, as they are called.

They're not necessarily new about them, but there they are. They're called the new atheists. They invite us to do a pondering about these kind of things. When Christopher Hitchens, you remember Christopher Hitchens, he passed away this past spring too, didn't he?

The much noted novelist, the friend of his, Ian McEwen, I don't know if anybody in the room has read McEwen's novels, they're highly praised. He wrote about his friend, he and Christopher Hitchens apparently were buddies, he wrote about him, he says that Christopher, his friend, died at a medical complex, I believe it was in Houston, I'm doing some of this from memory, but I think it was in Houston, and he mentions in Passy McEwen that there's a very tall building there which cares for children struggling with cancer, and Mr.

[36 : 04] McEwen said in the article, I found this very pungent, I think it was in the Times or somewhere, he said, ah yes, the big, he called it a monument, he's saying this to honor his friend, I take it, Christopher Hitchens, he called that part of the medical complex a monument to the fact that there is no God, done deal, as far as he's concerned, big tower in Houston, part of a medical complex, in that tower, they take care of children, many of whom, I take it, are dying of cancer, now there is a monument, says McEwen, to the fact there's no God, just as my friend, Mr.

Hitchens, has been telling us for many years, there is a monument to no God, if ever there was one, that's what Mr. McEwen wants to say to us, he doesn't, he doesn't note the passing of human beings in toil and trouble, and then say, oh God, give me some good days, he protests, he says, you're not their God, the people who say you are, are just not thoughtful, there it is, how do we respond to that kind of pungent one liner from, I take it, a thoughtful man like Mr.

McEwen, how does scripture respond? Well, how does all of scripture respond? How does all of the Christian tradition respond? Which is a witness to the church's reading of scripture, that's what the Christian tradition is, it responds, it seems to me, I want to say this to the 30th Sunday, the topic of evil comes up, it responds with the whole sensibility it seems to me of Psalm 90, I think, Psalm 90 it seems to me is endlessly profound, I've said that again, it also responds, I would submit my words to the judgment of the saints here, it responds very much, correct me if I'm wrong in the discussion time, remembering what our friend St.

Anselm says about Christian knowledge, here we talk about the mystery of suffering and evil, what Paul calls, doesn't he, the mystery of iniquity, again, remembering St.

Anselm's advice to us, his very good words of wisdom, I'm sure, about this topic, we must think with humility and that word again, I think it's reserve, it's interesting, isn't it, that we share, do we not, we share the anger of the novelist at disease killing children, we share that anger, the atheist who's angry about children dying of cancer is good to be angry about it, it's good to be angry about such a thing, our Lord we remember was very angry in the presence of evil, specifically, he was so angry at the grave of Lazarus, this is often pointed out, he apparently, according to the language of that text, he was as angry as a war horse yearning to enter into battle, when he wept he was angry, he was angry at death, angry that it had taken away his friend

[39 : 31] Lazarus, he raised him from the dead, but he wasn't, our Lord never did a miracle cheaply, oh no, no, don't be angry, no problems, I can snap my fingers, our Lord was never like that, he must have wrestled with death there, and he overcame it, on behalf of Lazarus, our Lord could be angry, and he confronted disease, and healed it frequently, the Gospels are filled with this, aren't they, with power, so in the last few years, I don't know about you, but I've really begun to love the Gospels more and more, and love the fact that our Lord did things like that, just I love it, our Lord is so great, that people just touched him, and they were healed, the Gospels tell us that he stood there, and they came, and they reached out for his robes, that is so beautiful, so our God both uses evil, and he hates it, this is what

I think, I'm trying to get at why Moses moves in this direction, as he ponders the mystery of God's eternity, our destiny apparently as dust, God's wrath, but Moses doesn't protest, he says, God, you can still give us some good days, is that not true, again, in the discussion time, I want you to correct me and deepen this, our God uses evil, and he hates it, he even used death to destroy death, we find out, in the Gospels, and again, I say to myself at this point, I want to say another thank you to Saint Anselm, for his sane description of knowledge, I want to affirm this mystery that God uses death to overcome death, but I don't want to sound as if I understand it, you know, I don't understand how that could be, and any theologian or Christian sort of is at home with that truth, is fooling themselves, we don't understand how that could be, but God used death to overcome it, he emptied himself, took upon himself the form of a servant, was obedient unto death, even death on the cross, therefore,

God overcame it that way, I affirm this, but I affirm it from afar, I wait to see this truth when the Lord of glory returns, I say amen, that's what God has done, but I want to wait upon this knowledge to grow in me, that God will give me further understanding of it, it's that level three of St.

Anselm's description of Christian knowledge, I don't have a snappy mastery of it, it's too deep for that, it's too wondrous for that, there it is, if you like this kind of thing stated formally, and sometimes I think it's very good to have it stated for you formally, I've never heard it better stated than by the chap who wrote the book about Narnia, Mr.

Ward, a Church of England clergyman who wrote Planet Narnia is the book, and this is from memory, but it goes like this, this answer to the atheist accusing God of you can't really be there, or you're not as advertised if there are towers in Houston filled with children who have cancer.

[43 : 09] Well, the answer to that, the best answer I've come across as a Christian is that if there is no unimpeachable goodness, that's what Mr.

McEwen denies, if there is no unimpeachable goodness, we believe our God is unimpeachable goodness. If there is no such unimpeachable goodness, then there is no ground for our complaint against evil.

See, that's the problem with the atheist position, and the Christians, we Christians can learn how to say that to our angry atheist friends. I'm told Dr. Hill has all sorts of them where he works.

Or at least for the sanity of your own Christian mind, know the best Christian answer. There's no ground for anyone's complaint against evil unless there is an unimpeachable goodness, upon which ground we stand to complain against evil.

I think that's the best answer we can give. Hence, if we hold on to our complaint about evil, then we are really affirming that there is an unimpeachable goodness.

[44 : 27] If you think that language is just a bit weird, and is it really part of our faith, I'd say it certainly is. What does John mean when he says God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all.

There's nothing in God that's responsible, morally responsible, for children in medical facilities in Houston. We say to Mr.

McHuman, my God is light, in him is no darkness at all, my God is morally unimpeachable. Your complaint against God is wrong.

And you will see it on the day of judgment. When you see our God, you will say, my complaints were totally groundless. I was trying to hide from that God by my complaining.

As valid as it is in a sense, Jesus was angry at evil. He was angry at disease. He cured it. But it's no ground for impeaching our God's character.

- [45 : 36] God is light. in him there is no darkness at all. I'm going to go back one more time to my psalm teacher in the last summer, Bruce Waltke.
- Before Psalm 90, as I draw to a close, you'll be happy to know, before Psalm 90, there are 89 earlier psalms. That's why you come to Learn and Exchange, get updated on these things.
- I'm good at arithmetic. The psalter begins with Psalm 1 for a reason. The psalter is a world of prayer, of course. For Jesus, it was his world of prayer.
- Psalm 1 says roughly this. This is from memory again, but I've found this so helpful again in the summer to have this sort of thing expanded upon by Dr. Waltke.
- Psalm 1 says that there is a God and that you may approach this God and see, it tells you how you may approach God. Think about it.
- [46 : 40] The way you approach God according to the psalter and according to the whole Bible is this. The law of the Lord has been given to us and is a revelation of the character of God.
- We approach God by delighting in his character. Again, as the New Testament puts it, God is light.
- God is light. There it is. God is light. I have coffee about once every couple of months with a really nice woman who's very interested in religion.
- She's a Buddhist. She's always approaching God. She's always telling me how. Or she's approaching her understanding of transcendence. And it's through profound meditation techniques.
- She's traveled to Asia to visit temples to learn more about them. That's how she does it. Psalm 1 says, no, you approach God by loving his holiness and imitating it.
- [47 : 41] There is no other way to approach God. God will never allow you to approach him because I've learned a prayer technique. No, you approach God through holiness.
- No other way. It is very challenging to absorb scripture at this point, isn't it? We delight in the revealed character of God.
- But, do we delight, this is what Psalm 90 keeps bringing me back to finally, amongst all sorts of other things. Am I to delight in an understanding of God's wrath?
- Am I to do that? God? Or, at just this kind of theological wondering, I have to again remember my friend Anselm.
- Sometimes psalmists will express deep resentment, and more than deep resentment at evil, and will call for, you've noticed it, expect, even demand, a revealing of heaven's wrath.
- [48 : 52] The psalms deal with wrath. Like the atheists, these new atheists referred to earlier, they see evil sometimes, and they desperately want it to be addressed by God.
- This desire for God to show his wrath is sometimes in the sensibility of the psalmists. You recall again how scripture speaks the scripture.
- James and John, the New Testament knows this issue so well, doesn't it? Do you recall when they asked the Lord, if there's some people who are not responding to the message appropriately, and even opposing the message, and they suggest, Lord, how about a little bit of fire from heaven just to burn them up?
- That would be a great way to deal with this. James and John, sons of thunder they're called, for a reason. Jesus says, you don't know what spirit's in you, do you?
- He says, no, I won't do that. Don't forget, they receive fire from heaven on Pentecost, and they learn how to preach forgiveness and love from that fire.

[50 : 00] God's love and his wrath, I think, are very close together. Call down fire from heaven. Okay, I'll give you the spirit. Much better, much better.

This psalm, again, I promise you I'm going to a close. This psalm just speaks for itself, but it does invite, do you agree, I hope you agree, a deep attention.

I can't get enough of Psalm 90. It asks us to be thoughtful, it asks us to ponder, it asks us, you thought that I had skipped this, didn't you? It asks us to number our days.

The assumption of Psalm 90 is that the reader knows, or should know, that a growth and wisdom is needed in our lives and is possible.

There's a great promise in this psalm, isn't there? If you'll just wake up to reality, Psalm 90 says, you'll start to grow in wisdom. Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

[51 : 03] That's another surprising thing. Give someone a calendar and say, pay attention to this, it'll make you wise. Apparently so. Just pay attention to the passing of life, be serious about it, give it your deep attention, and you'll grow in wisdom.

I'm a passing thing, I'm going to turn into dust someday. It'll make us wise if we do that. Psalm 90, standing alone, I find is quite moving. I find it so moving.

It possesses a kind of drama, does it not? It is coherent. It possesses Anselm's number one rule for good knowledge.

It's just coherent. It makes a kind of sense at the readerly level. It holds together, and on its surface at least, it's quite graspable.

It's true. It feels true. That's the way life is. It refers to real things about the real world quite reasonably. We do live short lives, then we die, but we yearn, do we not, for just in the midst of this, okay, that's what life's all about, but I do yearn for a reasonable happiness, Moses says.

[52 : 16] I'd like that from you, Lord. At level two, it's true by Anselm's reckoning of how you do Christian knowledge. Level three is what most interest I take at the serious inquiry, however.

What about love? This psalm makes you wonder about this, and what about wrath? This knowledge, I take it, we want to grow in, knowing that here is a divine issue, one of those ones that Anselm says you must grow in, you must wait upon, you must approach with reserve, calling out to God for understanding.

There is something about God's wrath and His love which is worthy of our attention with a lowly spirit, and if we do it, and if we number our days, we'll grow in wisdom.

So finally, I'll just put it like this, the Lord is here addressed, isn't He, back on page one, the Lord, Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations, and once again, this is more Dr.

Waltke, this is rich stuff, this Lord is the I Am, who Moses met in the desert. This is I Am, who liberated Israel, who made promises, who told this little tribe that through them His name would be made known to the nations, His name would become known throughout the whole earth.

[53 : 53] And I always like to note this to you, Christians, we're a bunch of those folks, all of us, I'll bet, most of us are Gentiles. What God said to Moses and Abraham and through the prophets, it's come true.

We're in Vancouver, we're a bunch of Gentiles, we're paying attention to something that guy named Moses wrote, his God we've heard about. God said He's going to do this. We're a proof that God keeps His promises.

As sure as you're going to turn to dust someday, unless the Lord comes first, the Lord keeps His promises. He's going to keep His promises. We are called to believe greatly, finally.

There are, of course, there's one more insistent background belief just waiting to speak to us out of Psalm 90. Remember, it presupposes Jesus, the whole of the Old Testament.

This Moses, did he not meet Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration? The Gospel writers say he did. I checked it again this morning.

[55 : 01] In Luke's Gospel, especially, that's what happens during sermons, you look something up in the Bible. And there, on the Mount of Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah and Jesus spoke about the exodus of Jesus, about His passing over into death and then into life.

The Lord was to die and rise and ascend. And this is the exodus of the whole creation into freedom. God said, God said, Jesus was really an anticipation of the greatest exodus story of them all.

The Son of God was going to do the exodus of the whole creation out of slavery into eternal glorious life. Moses found out the meaning of the whole story.

It's as if I asked you to believe greatly today. God said, thanks for asking for my favor. I'm going to give you a favor, Moses, eternal life. I'll give you eternal life.

I don't want you to be dust. It's no fun having a relationship with dust. I'm going to bring you to eternal life. And He did. Moses was right there at the center of the action on the Mount of Transfiguration.

[56 : 22] Did He think about Psalm 90? Lord, you really answered my prayer. Give me a few good days. You said, I'm going to give you eternal days. Good deal. There it is.

Psalm 90. I don't know what else to say. In Christ, Psalm 90 is both true and may I put it like this? It's a bit dated. Its fulfillment stretches way beyond what you'd expect to get from it.

It turns out that these good days that Moses asked for is going to be eternal. Amazing. In Christ, Moses has been raised up, will be raised up out of death. And so will we all.

No more this dust talk. God wants to have a relationship with real people. Psalm 90. It's just sitting there in the middle of Scripture waiting to go off in all directions.

I just love it. I bored you with it. It's wonderful. If nothing else, you should read some Jane Austin, maybe some St. Anselm, a couple of good Anglicans, both of you, and read Moses.

[57 : 27] I'm not sure if Moses was an Anglican. It's wonderful, wonderful stuff. I wish I could memorize all of the Psalms. There's a brother in the room here I know who took all of the Psalm course with Dr.

Mulde. By now, he's got them all memorized a bit. Working on it. It's just so wonderful. These Psalms are just burgeoning with wisdom and light.

So, anyway, I've gone on too long. I want to say a closing prayer and then we can have some conversation about it. Lord, we thank you for your word. It is richer and richer and richer than we can ever imagine.

Help us to be open to it, to know it has much more to teach us always, and may we just rejoice in it always, because it is the word of life. And we pray in the name of Jesus, who is life.

Amen. Amen.

[58 : 29] Yes? Yes? Do we know?

The king, the king. I have no idea. No, Moses. Moses wrote this? Yeah. The superscription says of Moses the man of God.

Okay. So, it strikes me as being the song of an old man. Partly because, you know, although when we're young, we understand that we're going to die, but it's an idea out there, kind of external to our soul.

Yeah. But by the time we get old, we usually sustain the number of losses that make our own mortality more of an internal reality to us. And I think this poem is full of that, you know, that comparing us with grass, referring to...

the dust factor. The dust, I mean. Well, yeah. I like, I think it's Ecclesiastes a little better because it does mention the part of us that does not turn to dust.

[59 : 40] When we turn to dust, the Spirit will return to God who made it. And I think that that hope of everlasting life doesn't appear here, and it does appear in that other verse of Scripture.

But I also see in the very last line, or the last verse, the desire of the human being to place a value of some kind on what our temporary existence in this world has meant.

Yes. Because it's all about what God does, His everlastingness, His work, and here we are going to be returned to dust. And the last line, establish the work of our hands upon us.

Tell us that our being here has meant something. Yes, yes. And I think that's a very human feeling. Yes. Yeah, I think there's so much in this psalm to ponder.

I think that's true. Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love.

[60 : 51] Almost has the suggestion, the unconscious suggestion of resurrection to me. you know, satisfy us in the morning.

It does, this issue has always been perplexing, even for the, at least, the ones you'd think to be the faithful in Israel.

The Lord had those strange conversations with the Sadducees. He had to say to them, now, God calls Himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

And then the Lord does His commentary on that word of Scripture and says, now, would God want to be the God of dead people? So, He rebuts their unbelief in resurrection with that logic, that internal logic of Scripture.

God would not want to be the God of dead people, our Lord says to them. Which is, is that a tight logic? I think it's a, it's kind of a relationship.

[62 : 04] See, it's got, the logic of relationship is powerful. God wants to be related to people, living people. But He turns them to dust, this psalm says, in His wrath.

He's, I must get rid of you in this creation because things are wrong between us. That's, well, isn't this the answer to Mr. McEwen's problem about the tower and the children?

Yes. We lost the perfect world in however you want to describe the metaphor of Eden. We lost the perfect world. We are living in an imperfect world.

And yet, Mr. McEwen wants God to be the genie in the bottle that comes and makes these kids well. Well, yeah. Well, it doesn't work that way. Well, would you agree? I can say to Mr. McEwen though that, no, as a Christian, I appreciate your anger at evil, afflicting children.

Yeah. And the God, I believe in, is anger, but just your time is wrong about what my God is going to do. So, we can at least get on some common ground there. But I guess he'd say, no, God of wrath just isn't in the cards.

[63 : 12] Thank you very much. I just don't love, you know. I've never heard a Christian in public talk about God's wrath in these disputes, not once.

And they often get, you know, religious leaders get asked about, after 9-11, they're interviewed all religious leaders. Remember, oh, why does God allow this? No. I've never heard anyone just say bluntly, oh, maybe God's just wrathful against the world and he lets his wrath show this way sometimes.

Maybe, that'd be shocking. No, no. That's not the God of the crystal cathedral who is just nice at all times. Never gets, yes, sir. Well, I disagree a little there, Harvey, in the sense that I've heard that formulation, the story about the hospital, fresh many times, in what you just said, how could a good God allow so many bad things to happen in the world?

And I disagree that comes from people I know would be Christians and people I know would be anything but that's a fundamental challenge to the pain of the world that way.

It's one of core questions is that. Oh, sure, sure. Do you agree with Lewis's or the formulation of Mr. Ward over Mr. Lewis's that if there is no unimpeachable goodness, then what is the ground of our complaint?

[64 : 45] There's some power to that, at least for those who deal with these things at that kind of, what it's worth, analytic level. The scriptures give a various witness here, don't they?

That's why Anselm, I think, helps me. He says, now wait upon this. Don't give quick answers here. There's subtleties here.

There's some waiting to be done here, some reserve. Evil is a mystery. We can't pretend we've got our minds around it. Sometimes there's glib answers.

I'm sure I've given them myself. something. Yes. Oh, yes, please. Yes. Please.

I just have your comment now, backing up to the first page. I'm afraid I don't have my mind. There's a verse on the wrath.

[65 : 42] We're starting to God. I wonder if you can do it. For we are brought to an end by your anger. Verse 7. 7 has it. Okay, I'm thinking of 11. Yeah, 7 and 11.

11 and continue. Well, maybe I'm being glib here, but at one level, it's God gets rid of us. And I think this psalm reads it as that's God's wrath on us.

So that's the refining fire in the way. Yes. Yes. I remember Harry, I think it's a good gloss on these kind of verses, the ones you point out towards 7 and 11.

Who considers the power of your anger and your wrath? Harry used to say, the cross shows us just how really bad things are between us and God. Things are really bad between us and God.

We want to kill him. And he has to die for us. We're not friends to God. We're really angry at him.

[66 : 46] And he has his divine anger on us. We've got a big problem here. So I think this psalm glances off of that by just saying it's there.

It doesn't explain it, but it says it's there. God's anger. However you understand it, it's a trembling thing to think about God's anger. It's not like my anger, I'm sure. I just get angry and say something insulting or throw something or whatever I do when I'm angry.

God's anger is majestic and even beautiful and consistent with his love somehow. It's what he should do to a sinner.

man. Yes. Yes. Yes. I'm always challenged by the people who say, you know, why does God let these people do bad things or why does I would like to follow through to what is their alternative?

Right? So if God didn't allow, so God didn't allow people to do bad things, so we would walk down the street in fear of being sapped by likeness who did something bad or so nobody's allowed to do evil, like what is their scenario then?

- [68 : 04] Nobody could hit anybody else from fear of the great whole part of the company. I don't understand, like you say, bad things shouldn't happen, children shouldn't get sick, so people shouldn't die, so we should all live forever in real hell.
- I don't understand, like what the alternative is. Well, how about a world in which there was no possibility of evil, that God should have done that?
- The angry atheist who's somewhat articulate will say something like that. God should have made us free but unable to sin at the same time. So, that would have been better.
- So, Milton puts it, you know, about Adam and Eve, happy in the garden, happy, but for so happy, ill-secured. That's Milton describing Adam and Eve before the fall.
- So, the atheist says, he shouldn't have made them ill-secured. He should have made them just holding on to goodness and not plunging this world of ours into that misery.
- [69 : 13] So, they hold God, in a certain sense, responsible. They want to accuse him. He's not unimpeachable. He shouldn't have done that. That's their charge. No, they think, no, well, I'm trying to defend them.
- I don't take their position. They'll say, well, what about in heaven? Will it still be possible for people to sin? And the Christian tradition says, no, as I understand it. No, the perfection of freedom is that you're unable to sin.
- So, I want to, remembering Anselm, I want to take little steps towards the atheists and grant them their anger at some measure. this.
- I'm giving you an inadequate answer, I know. No, they do. Atheists can be a pain. They don't often listen to answers, do they? You get the impression they're just repeating their mantras over and over again.
- Do we still refer to us about our funeral service? You mentioned the day of wrath. Well, the Catholic mass always comes to my mind.
- [70 : 32] They have some very severe ways of putting you away, don't they? Well, it's one of the four last things. Yeah, yeah. Well, dust to dust, ashes to ashes, that whole thing implies God's wrath is why we're saying goodbye in a sense.
- I'm content with that, maybe I shouldn't be, but it's because of God's wrath that this scene is like this. Then I hear the prayer book talks about I am the resurrection and the life.
- It puts our Lord over all the wrath. the paradox being there as it is in this psalm, it seems to me. Phil, you're going to? A hard question for me is how to reconcile the faith and the prayer, worship, and even the joy that's in this psalm with the evident belief, which I assume is the doctrine of the day, that death means annihilation.
- Well, it's just a historical question that maybe Dr.
- Packer could clear up, but was there belief that it might mean annihilation, what we would say an existential belief, that all of our sensibility cannot see any hope beyond the grave, although then beyond our sense, sheer dogged hope may have said maybe, there was a maybe, but so the sense of that it meant annihilation was purely existential, it seems like a black finality.
- [72 : 22] I'm just guessing there. But Moses was raised in a culture that believed in the life after death, in Egypt. Yeah, I know.
- Not our life after death, but a four-month living. So he had that background as well. Jim, I think the Old Testament is ambiguous about life after death.
- Is that an unfair observation? Well, ambiguous is an ambiguous word. Yeah, yeah. You are a professor, aren't you?
- What the Old Testament is clear on is that death means leaving this world. There's phraseology that recurs again and again.

People join or sleep with their fathers, their ancestors. And there are some passages in which the, well, sometimes it's the psalmist, or sometimes it's people that the prophets refer to, who are still, they're still there in the sense that they are personal selves, with awareness and thoughts.

[73 : 55] But everything, how can I say it, solid, good, enjoyable, with, how can I say, the prospect or the hope built into it, all of that is gone.

I mean, it's a dark, the Bible doesn't say dark, it simply says it's a shadowy, powerless, ineffective, deeply frustrating self-awareness beyond this world.

the hope of glory simply isn't revealed except in one or two places where it's there, it flashes like a light, like, say, lightning flashing in the middle of a thunderstorm and then the light goes out.

And you wonder, well, what are we to make of that that you don't really know. But that's what I'm thinking of the passages like Psalm 16, when I awake I shall be satisfied with your likeness.

But what does that mean? It's a wonderful thing to say. But it isn't until the New Testament that we are shown that it means. But annihilation is quite simply nothingness.

[75 : 28] That isn't the way of the Old Testament. anticipates the future. Will you return round to dust?

Verse 3. Okay, that means you leave this world. Out of dust we were given our embodiment and what is the body for?

I keep telling people in my classes that the body is for experience and enjoyment. and if you haven't got a body, well, all the experience and enjoyment that in this life comes to us through the body, all of that is a thing of the past.

It's gone. It doesn't, it doesn't, it wouldn't come back unless there's re-embodiment to the Old Testament and that's right at the end of Daniel 12.

Saints are promised something like it. Again, it's a lightning flash. It doesn't explain the detail. But again, that isn't annihilation.

[76 : 43] No. Not in the way in which people talk about annihilation in service. Not in the way in which Buddhists spoke for annihilation in violence.

Right here in your blood of spirit and everything else called on that. No. No. If you think that life is terribly painful, you can look forward to annihilation simply as a condition in which the pain has stopped and I have stopped with it.

I mean, I'm no longer experiencing anything. She especially wants to get away from Christmas. Sorry. Christmas celebrations. I'm being facetious.

I mean, yeah, I'm trying to think what her hope is, Jim. It's not much, it seems. Well, no, but the people just get irritated by the fact that other people are around them have something to rejoice in.

Well, I felt that, Jim, on occasion. It's a sort of arrogant, anti-God egoism. You want to squelch everybody's hope. Hope.

[77 : 58] You haven't got any hope. They have no right then to hope. I would like to squelch everybody's hope. I think that's, that is about it.

But that, that is a real heartbeat with many deeply pessimistic people. Life has given me a raw deal, now it's all painful and miserable, and here are these people rejoicing.

They don't know what it's all about. I would like to abolish their joy or their happiness. I hope, yeah. Their hopefulness or whatever.

Yes. I hope she didn't, I don't think she'd go that far. My friend, but that's okay. She wants to get rid of Frank Sinatra's carols. Okay. I'm never in a way.

No, it's fine. This was starting. That was a good question. word annihilation is going to simply go. Speaking about bringing things to an end, Bill Chandler is standing up now.

[79 : 04] So, Bill, that's the end. So, thank you very much for your chasing. There's still some coffee here and there's still some food here.

There's still some conversation. How do you trim that off? Do you throw that against the wall or something? Maybe it puts the off button.

Is that the top? I don't go. I can't mine or my glasses.