

Psalm 90

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[0 : 00] We're going to look at a psalm today as announced. Psalms, they're so wonderful.

The psalter is called collectively. I guess we can call it a high priority for the church and the Christian. We have an apostle saying, Sing psalms or singing psalms in Colossians, isn't it? That's an apostle of Christ speaking. And so these psalms, they're not really an option. Of course, we might ask why, just by way of introduction, of course.

I was at the 730 service. I always get that in, just to show you how long I've been up today. The psalms, and we read a psalm, of course.

They're old, the psalms, set as they are in a very different setting than our own, to put it mildly. It's interesting to note, isn't it, that this was so for first century Christians, as well as ourselves.

[1 : 04] You mentioned a Gentile in Corinth, or Athens, or Ephesus, or Rome, finds herself, himself, reading prayers, sat in or shaped by what we would call today a desert Semitic spirituality.

Or the prayer, apparently, of a Hebrew, an ancient Hebrew warrior king named David. And much more, these prayers, they're so various, they don't always feel relevant or appropriate at a given time in one's life.

Prayer, there are prayers of rapture in the psalm. Prayers of complaint. Prayers that are near despair. Think of Psalm 88.

Passionate prayers. There's even at times wild prayers. Psalm 137. I think they did a wild prayer by the waters of Babylon. That prayer.

Paul might grant this remoteness. But I take it he would consider it, finally, just not really a concern. Paul, all the apostles, certainly Jesus of Nazareth, their Lord, they considered Scripture a kind of, a mode of, divine presence.

[2 : 25] When we look at Scripture today, we believe with the Church, and with the Scriptures themselves, that they are, again, a kind of divine presence.

Here, I am unsure if a first century Gentile Christian was perplexed at the idea of divine presence. They weren't really. Divine presence was, as they understood it, all too present in temples and sacred groves and in other places. More certain is the alien nature of the very idea of divine presence for a modern person.

Even for, I think, modern Christians, we have to work at this idea. What does holy dread mean for a modern liberal person?

Asks one named Roger Scruton, an English philosopher, quoted by a man named Charles Taylor, his book, A Secular Age, which we talked about a couple of weeks ago.

[3 : 32] This idea, this feeling, this consciousness, shall we call it, holy dread, is perhaps a relic, a kind of consciousness simply gone from modern people and from the modern world.

But, if divine presence was real, if it is real, then something called holy dread, properly understood, would surely be one's only response to it.

If the psalm we're going to look at today is a kind of divine presence, there has to be an appropriate response to it. There's something dreadful about the holy scriptures.

There are complexities here, of course, there always are. The divine presence, which is scripture, is a veiled presence. As such, it will keep away the proud.

They see nothing in the scriptures to reverence. There's no beauty there which commands reverence. But, in attending to this divine presence, one learns, one hopes, a proper response.

[4 : 49] So, Paul tells Gentiles in pagan cities to attend to, even to sing the psalms. He thinks that's important for them. They, these writings, this psalm we're going to look at today, will teach and it will shape us.

It will create a kind of sensibility in us. Even if this is true, and I wonder, I could ask, has it been true for you? We could all ask ourselves.

They create in us a kind of, again, holy dread. Or, if that's too strong a term, and that is a pretty dramatizing term, isn't it?

They create in us piety. Piety. An old-fashioned word, indeed. Piety is simply, isn't it, a due reverence for God. A due reverence for the living God.

It, piety, will set you quite apart from most others in a culture like ours, if it's noted in you. How a Christian piety might set you apart in other cultures, perhaps, say, a Muslim Islamic culture, I simply don't know.

[5 : 59] But difference there would be. Piety may go bad, of course. It becomes misshapen in people. It needs ongoing correction.

It needs a realism, something to keep it healthy. Is that what the psalms are for, concretely for? Because, again, we are urged by an apostle to sing them.

Singing puts them in the heart. Singing puts them in the mind. And there they shape a godly sensibility, a piety in us.

This psalm, then, we're going to look at today. Psalm 90. We believe it is a God-given prayer, which we are commanded to know and to sing, as we are all the psalms.

Here we're going to look at today a God-given prayer, which will correct us, create in us a godly piety. So, again, today we're going to look at Psalm 90.

[7 : 05] And with that kind of introduction, let's, of course, remember, as God's presence in our midst, the Holy Scriptures, what better way, really, before we look at it directly, what better thing to do than to pray.

So, let's pray. Lord, we thank you for the gift of your Holy Word. We confess that it is glorious, that it is your presence amongst us, that you have given it to us to learn, to mark, to read, to inwardly digest.

We pray, Lord, that it will accomplish in us today that which you have sent it for. And we pray this for your glory, for our benefit. And we pray in the name of your Son, Jesus.

Amen. So, enough of my talk. Let's have a... That is really high, isn't it? But it's not on the ceiling. Let's just look at this very slowly for a while. This is Psalm 90. It's called in the superscription of prayer of Moses. Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.

[8 : 21] Before the mountains were brought forth, wherever thou hast formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God. Thou turnest man back to the dust, and sayest, turn back, O children of men, for a thousand years in thy sight, or but as yesterday, when it is past, or as a watch in the night.

Thou dost sweep men away. They are like a dream, like grass which is renewed in the morning. In the morning it flourishes and is renewed. In the evening it fades and withers.

For we are consumed by thy anger. By thy wrath we are overwhelmed. Thou hast sent our iniquities before thee, our secret sins, in the light of thy countenance.

There is more. For all our days pass away under thy wrath. Our years come to an end like a sigh. The years of our life are three score and ten, or even by reason of strength four score. Yet their span is but toil and trouble. They are soon gone and we fly away.

[9 : 34] Who considers the power of thy anger and thy wrath according to the fear of thee? So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

Have pity on thy servants. I can't see it. Here's me.

Return, O Lord. Have pity on thy servants. Satisfy us in the morning with thy steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

Make us glad as many days as thou hast afflicted us, and as many years as we have seen evil. Let thy work be manifest to thy servants and thy glorious power to their children.

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

[10 : 39] So end Psalm 90. Of the hushed and oversaw we read that, the sombering, sobering kind of song.

In, you know, Four Quartets by T.S. Eliot, there's a line there called by one commentator, one of the most despairing lines penned by a great poet.

The line reads very simply, and this is from T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets, distracted from distraction by distraction. Distracted from distraction by distraction.

According to the Christian poet here, this is how we spend our days. Human beings, Eliot says as well, cannot stand very much reality.

Eliot loved Pascal, you know, the great 17th century scientist, Christian, who said the saying, didn't he, in his famous *pensées*. He says there, we spend our lives mostly in diversion.

[11:58] We want distraction. We want diversion. Sophisticated diversions, indeed, sometimes. Banal diversions. Sometimes, alas, ludicrous diversions.

Something, anything. To get our minds away from, well, from what? Psalm 90 is the great answer to that question.

And there's a corrective, or at least the beginning of a corrective, to a life lived largely in a trivializing diversion, in trivializing distraction.

Obviously, I think, would you agree, Psalm 90 is most appropriate, especially appropriate, in the Lenten season. Psalm 90 takes us into, what are sometimes called, a Lenten land.

Or the place where we might begin to put away life's numbing or deadly distractions. This psalm, again, as we said in the introduction, is heaven sent.

[13:03] I find it, I've been reading this psalm now for the last two or three months, I find it sobers the mind. It clarifies the mind.

It instructs us. Perhaps most of all, I find it sort of, if you will, chastening. Did you feel any of that as we read it? Sobers us.

Clarifies life. God instructs us and chastens. Here the fog, if you will, of distraction lifts, if only for just a little while.

Here is where we really are. And so the psalm begins by saying, doesn't it, Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations.

Lord, that has been our dwelling place in all generations. Verse 1. Throughout all generations. All. Is it the focus?

[14:05] I think it is in this opening verse. Or, I would think that's the case. Because we then hear immediately, don't we, before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.

That's powerful. throughout all generations. Is intensified, throughout all generations, is then intensified with this lovely phrase, from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.

The Bible, doesn't it, usually speaks to us in a very concrete language, doesn't it? Often it speaks in poetry. I don't think it's noted enough how much of the Bible is in poetry.

large sections of the prophets come to us in poetry. Psalms are poems. There's poetry in the New Testament. Now and again, it approaches somewhat, somewhat abstract, somewhat, we might call it metaphysical language.

This is one of those, I would take it. This little phrase, from everlasting everlasting to everlasting. The Bible invites us in a phrase like this, doesn't it, to ponder, to contemplate attributes of God.

[15:32] From everlasting to everlasting. Here is God's, if you will, his infinitude is spoken of by such a phrase.

Perhaps it implies God's immensity. Do you ever just think about God's infinitude? God's immensity. Even properly understood, you know, in a sense, God's unthinkableness.

If there is an infinitude of time, our God, the one who is called in this psalm our dwelling place, exhausts the infinitude.

God exhausts it. He's greater than any infinitude. God never began. That's, how can you think that? In that sense, God is unthinkable. God never began from everlasting. God outlasts or he exhausts all endings.

[16:37] God is too everlasting. From everlasting to everlasting. This language is in fact, isn't it, it's the speech of adoration.

Attributes are, in fact, the divine perfections and they shape in us adoration. An attribute of being human is our capacity for the acknowledgement of such realities and the capacity to adore them. that's a human attribute. This is piety or more strong as we said earlier, holy dread. So, verses 1 and 2.

Verses 3, 4, 3, 4, 5, and 6 follow and here we are invited into Lent for sure. Into a turning away from distraction, as we called it, from diversion.

As we are to know that our God is from everlasting to everlasting, so we are to know that we are dust.

[17 : 44] Can you imagine a greater contrast? God is from everlasting to everlasting. We are dust. There it is.

We are dust. A passing presence in the world. A grass, the psalm says, which is withered by evening. From this fact, this mystery of death, of course, we flee.

Like Lent, so Psalm 90 urges us to look intently at death and learn, we'll talk about this more later in verse 12, we are to learn wisdom by contemplating the fact of death.

Or more precisely, this psalm urges us to look at death, if you will, theologically. Other ways there are to look at death, that's for sure.

We need to note this. Others claim in our world an indifference to death. Have you ever met people who claim that for themselves? David Hume, the great 18th century philosopher, said that his dissolution in death, his coming abolishment in death, if you will, bothered him no more than contemplating his non-existence before his birth.

[19 : 07] Within that atheist frame of reference, that makes sense enough, I suppose. We might note that another famous philosopher, Descartes, thought it was not possible to really think one's oblivion.

And he concluded from that, we see this impossibility to think his non-existence as a proof of his immortality. Glossers do say strange things, don't they?

How very different, what another world are we in as we read Psalm 90? Humanity as dust and as such ready, how appropriate, ready to be swept away.

Isn't it nice that the poem says this? What do you do with dust at home? You sweep it away. That's what God's going to do with us. Humanity is dust and it's ready to be swept away.

Death we see in Psalm 90. Can the Christians, sometimes I think that we Christians just forget that. Death is an intentional act by the author of life.

[20 : 17] God means our death. Death is his intentional act which he imposes on each of us. Verses 7 through 12 brings this, doesn't it, into sobering clarity.

They speak so clearly. Not really are they in need of comment. Just note some of the verses like 7. We are consumed.

We are consumed by anger. Verses 7 again. Terrified by indignation. Under wrath our days pass away.

That's verse 9. Under God's wrath according to this song our lives pass away. Even the years that lead us up to death are called in verse 10 trouble and sorrow.

Aren't they? Toil and trouble in the RSV. Toil and trouble. There they are. And they quickly pass and we fly away.

[21 : 32] What words? They are soon gone and we fly away. This is of course a form of rhetoric, a divine rhetoric and it speaks, could it speak any more clearly than it does.

Life after all does afford good days. The psalter celebrates them often and later in this psalm 90 as we'll see later good days are requested even.

But trouble attends us it goes without saying. Sooner or later trouble comes and life's brevity is after all universally acknowledged.

There it is. Verse 8 is very interesting isn't it? When we it's back on the other one Almighty God we call it at the communion service we always pray Almighty God unto whom all hearts are open all desires known from whom no secrets are hid.

Think of when you pray that prayer think of Psalm 90 verse 8 Thou hast set our iniquities before thee our secret sins are in God's presence.

[22 : 48] Christianity says when I read this Psalm I find it so sobering Christianity says so in Kierkegaard introduces into the world Kierkegaard had a gift for rhetoric introduces into the world what he called infinite seriousness your sin is in the presence of God and it will be dealt that is infinite seriousness why is it infinitely serious because Christianity reveals judgment it reveals hell our sins are not nothing again they are in the holy God's presence so says Psalm 90 a more sobering thought more appropriate thought for land I can't imagine David Hume of course the philosopher would call this primitive superstition our faith says this is the truth that every person will confront sooner or later this is the God with whom we have to do again holy dread is either an anachronism or it is something that we are very wise to learn and this song says learn at verses 11

and 12 you can see in there

I think you can there's a kind of quiet turning that takes place in this song this song is more complicated when you ponder it than it seems at first blush a little shift takes place I would think at verse 11 and 12 love the Nietzsche aphorism I think Eugene Peterson quotes this all the time Nietzsche one of Nietzsche's simple aphorism says truths that change the world come on dumb feet the psalmist says that God wants dust God wants dust to know that it is dust and he wants dust to become wise can you imagine God wants dust to become wise just in passing a couple weeks from now we're going to have a literary scholar talking to us about a poet or a writer is this where George

Herbert got his line oh that thou shouldst give dust the tongue to cry to thee isn't that a great line oh that thou shouldst give dust the tongue to cry to thee cry to thee verse 12 says it teach us teach us according to this psalm the everlasting God is a teacher wrath and anger and indignation teach if we are willing to be taught by them God is holy and therefore his wrath is not a mere madness one great theologian said God's wrath is not a madness same theologian says in acts of man's vindictive justice there is something of impurity perturbation passion some mixture of cruelty but none of these fall upon

God in the severest acts wrath we can learn we talk by God's indignation and his wrath it's not a mere madness that comes out of God because we're sinners and so this psalm famously says so teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom even our finite days spent under the wrath of God however you understand that they will teach if we will be taught we owe God says C.S.

Lewis one of his most pungent statements surely profoundly true we owe God a death says C.S. Lewis it is Lent it isn't Easter so don't be too discouraged by being psalm of God but we do owe God a death I think that's what Psalm 90 in part at least major part is saying from verses 13 through to the end of the psalm this little shift as I'm calling it becomes I would think more puzzling again there's something puzzling about this psalm I find it it takes a lot of reading a lot of it demands more and more from a reader but first I would wonder I would ask with the saints here today if there is more to contemplate again especially in Lent more to contemplate more to assert in faith about the revealed mystery of death we need to be excluded do you agree with this statement in the discussion time tell me if it's true or not or if it's distorted we need according to

[28 : 20] Psalm 90 we need to be excluded from God's creation there is a severity or the chief severity this is a severity or the chief severity of Christianity perhaps usually by the theologically minded it will be called something what might often be called Augustinian it's a severe full or Christianity that looks these truths full in the faith some note or at least think that they note a tension in our faith between this severity and a Christian call to human flourishing decidedly a human flourishing in this world again we talked about him a couple of weeks ago and I'll just briefly mention him again a thinker like Charles Taylor if I read him correctly challenges western Christians to think through this what he thinks is a tension if we narrate the gospel wrongly here reactions do set in so in tricking guys infinite seriousness might just become simply insupportable for a lot of hearers of this message this full orb

Augustinian Christianity as we're calling it this is not new of course it's always in the life of the church and it will always be a challenge for the church but that's something to think about is it too obvious to mention here but the presenting issue of our current Anglican train wreck as it's often called is simply yet again this tension in a sense surfacing which church which theologians which teachers own with integrity the meaning of God's holy love and how it confronts man in the world the meaning of judgment the meaning of indeed human flourishing now in this world these issues will repeat themselves all across the spectrum of church life and thought but again to understand death why we die even physically why we approach death in lives of trouble and sorrow and worse again a trouble and sorrow unevenly divided in this world demands constant mature thorough if that's possible thorough

Christian teaching great theologian once said I think he's a great theologian the humanity of Jesus Christ is redeemed matter the only truly eschatologically redeemed matter great that is not easy of understanding but I think that's profound the humanity of Jesus Christ the humanity that he shares with us the humanity of Jesus Christ is redeemed matter the only truly eschatologically redeemed matter it is Jesus Christ exclusively Jesus Christ despite what some bishops might say it is Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ exclusively where our answer resides to these great questions of God's

judgment and yet man's desire to flourish in the world it will give offense as we talk about Jesus in these exclusive ways and it will tear down however the spiritual darkness that creates the offense to the praise of God's grace and does not it seems to me Psalm 90 serve as a classic Old Testament Old Dispensation introduction to this New Testament answer in Jesus Christ to the issue to the mystery of our death and yet man's desire to flourish in the world these verses are a strange term again in this Psalm verses 13 to 17 if all we had was Psalm 90 say we found Psalm 90 together in a Sinai cave that strange desert we would conclude it seems to me that our author was a somewhat divided soul reviewing this Psalm he begins by confessing life in some belief in some kind of transcendence doesn't he we abide in this

God he has been our dwelling place then admirably most people would say our poet sees life steady and sees it whole he sees that we are swept away our life is just a mere passing presence but unlike the Greeks might we say he ends with a plea strangely for a few good days that his works and the life of his community might for a while flourish it seems like a strange ending to this Psalm in a word this Psalm this theological confession I'll call it is a plea isn't it for more it awaits a kind of nevertheless what will come next this Psalm to put it bluntly knows that in Adam all die but it does not know that in Christ shall all be made alive a pagan reader of

[34 : 09] Psalm 90 and perhaps a modern humanist reader of Psalm 90 might read it as at best an approach to a tragic even heroic tragic and mature understanding of our human condition which unfortunately faltered at its end a cry to an impotent God for help a help which we know never arrives so speak many in our time so speaks the dismissive humanist who says we're beyond this now but what an approach is in our Psalm to the more that cries out to fulfill Psalm 90 verse 13 have compassion on your servants this poet cries out the God who sweeps away who holds our sin in his presence and who will judge it he might be he might be expected to hear a plea this poet believes for compassion and there is in this

God according to this poet a steady unflinching love and this God this poet knows God it's a God who is known by his deeds verse 17 act for us God show us good days may your deeds be shown to your servants Psalm 98 I find it's quite strange in its shape its form God is our dwelling place God is going to sweep us all away in death but God give us just a few good days before you do a very interesting form this is the divine presence of the Bible however Moses our psalmist I think it Moses did write this psalm he yearns for this divine presence this presence is free perfectly free apparently to approach us in good deeds he may approach us variously even he may approach us in a written form as in the divine writings psalm 90 is a part of this divine presence a veiled presence God is there God is there in his word so the church so the Christian confesses as we said at our opening this presence is not not really knowable in his infinitude but he is really knowable in his revelation but it is again a veiled revelation veiled as was Jesus Jesus was veiled in a measure wasn't he he had no beauty or majesty to attract us nothing in his appearance that we should desire him and he was familiar with suffering our Lord knew the reality that psalm 90 points to that Isaiah 53 magnificently awaits in its words and yet after all of this Lenten sobriety and clarity it seems to me it's in this Lenten sobering

Easter does arrive sooner or later this year it's sooner isn't it it arrives on a calendar it will arrive in our liturgy world and it will I trust and pray it will arrive in all of our hearts like the day spring rising in our hearts and then we see and we'll go on forever seeing Jesus unhidden and unveiled as the beauty and majesty of our God in great deed as Psalm 90 hopes for the beauty and majesty of our God in action for sure an action which will give us an eternal dwelling that this psalm yearns for which will give us triumph over death that this psalm meditates on so profoundly and it will give us not a few good days but it will give us life real life and that God's presence at his right hand where pleasure is forever more we are told

Psalm 9 is a great Lenten presence for us and it just yearns for a further word and that further word comes in the mystery of Jesus crucified and risen and sending his spirit into our hearts to know and believe these things commend to your attention Psalm 90 you can do a much better job with it than I have I found thinking about it a real blessing God our dwelling place God who will sweep us away you can even say amen to that we owe you again we ask for further good days and we thank you for the day a Christ that will give us endless good days more than Moses ever anticipated a great song Psalm 9 you are as blessed by attending to it just for a few minutes today as I have been we say a word of prayer and converses about these things

[39 : 54] Lord we thank you for your word we confess it is it soars above us may we be humble diligent teachable students of your word always and may again may it accomplish in us what you have sent it for to your glory Lord to your glory we pray this in Christ's name amen after that to lighten up a bit I just before you I can contemplate your good questions that will probably set me back this idea of life filled with trouble and trouble and it flees away so quickly there's that

Woody Allen joke you know the tune you tired well to do seniors who spent most of their lives in their late years in some fancy resort in Catsville and one woman says to the other the food here isn't that good the other woman says that's right in the portion that you smell now this song sort of says you know it's filled with trouble and it goes away so quickly so it's a divine rhetoric it still makes its point beautifully our lives are filled with trouble I may just flee away which sort of it is an admission that yes in the midst of that there are glorious and good things which this poem is best is by asking for good days so it isn't stupid this poem it is balanced and rich in wisdom number your days you gain wisdom that is that that is my footnote please please please comment or question or whatever there is not a lot of good news in this it doesn't seem to be is me

I do look for good news but what occurred to me is there is good news there because obviously he's painted a portrait of a god that can be known and perhaps that's the good news in them that he's a god that can be known even though we are but dust the good news other than that I can't see can you I guess in land it's okay to be sad one but yes if god is the author of our death we take that really seriously there's the hope that it will have meaning if god is not the author of our death if it's some result of fate or some aesthetic inadequacy in the creator and couldn't stave off death then death really does make like meaning so the hope is that god is the author of your death he might make death good as he did in christ haven't you gone beyond the psalm well yes yes of course yes as a christian yes but this song is a good step to take do you think it tells you to take death seriously god will sweep you away you just embrace that as

I read the psalm any I'm reading one or as I read in its biblical within the fullness of a biblical worldview take this psalm seriously as it stands alone and as part of the fullness of catholic biblical truth the great of the great admirer of Thomas Kramer who put it all together I think we should note that psalm 90 is the song that he chose for use in the bearing service in the prayer book and all the resonances that he pulled out of it are meant to be there in the prayer book burial service along with the hope of resurrection which is very clearly expressed in the prayers so that Kramer's hope was that every various service not every

Bible service on Sunday morning and evening prayer would actually be identifying to all the folk who were there in this particular instance because it would give them this realism about life and death which you've confronted us with and a hope that sustains us as we cope with a toil and trouble and as we face the fact that the biggest transition that we've ever faced is still to come moving out of this body into one of all which so many dismisses well God sweeping the dust away you know the idea death trivializes life in the context of the burial service death doesn't trivialize life but it seems simply because of

[46 : 14] Christ resurrection and the Christian hope but at the same time the burial service I think is meant to rub our noses in the fact that if you don't have faith in Christ and therefore hope in Christ death does trivialize life and there's no there's no attitude towards death that makes any sort of sense without Christ except well there's two possibilities if you're sensitive then the attitude inevitably will be one of this and if you're not sensitive you will then settle for the fact that death shows that life isn't important and let's not bother ourselves or grieve ourselves by getting serious about it that's Woody Allen actually you know Woody Allen of mine I'm not worried about my death

I just don't want to be there when it happens well all of that is there in the purple burial service oh yeah this is where well really where all the things that you say are amongst other benefits and there's so much benefit what you said one of the things that your presentation should do is teach us to make sense the third book burial says I get the wisdom out of it but still thanks for mentioning that because I was going to in the midst of life we are in debt is burial service material but I didn't go back to look it up if I had I would have known again that psalm 90 is there yet so I'm glad yes the church obviously makes great use of the psalms it's not there just to entertain us Paul surely would say sing them because they teach you such wisdom about the

God we believe in the prayer book I should add does allow you to use psalm 23 as an alternative to psalm 19 and most burial services these days do use psalm 23 and it's worth asking ourselves whether psalm 23 without psalm 19 will give us all the wisdom that we ought to be garnering for

burial sins rich stuff I don't know why but I find that clarified I am in more distraction than I realized and I just hear these simple words you sweetened that away you're like grass you're passing please remember this God is speaking reverence the facts of life and they'll teach you wisdom just just here thank you Harvey for this as usual you draw our attention to things that I would not necessarily have contemplated

I can't remember exactly what you said about Pascal and his reference to death but Becker who used to teach it Simon Fraser wrote a book called Denial of Death for which he received a Pulitzer Prize and he really said man is the only creature I think he used the word animal who knows he will die and he doesn't believe it and I think this song really does help us believe that we are a grass and we are going to be swept away like dust and for me that suggests two things one of which you alluded to that we need to be looking beyond death and I noticed the wrath of God reminded me of that hymn which is so fairly new to us the words on the cross where Jesus died the wrath of God is God and we don't with an experience of the Christian life behind us always think about God's anger as being something as really vicious as wrath you know but that hymn does help us to take care of that one thing this song does for me is not just to look ahead but also to look back and of course it's partly because more of my life is behind me than it's before me and I think that might be true for quite a lot of people here and we do really want to leave something behind and I think there's a suggestion of more good day stuff that to do what would be my question why would I need more days but I also think we need to know that our existence here has made a difference it actually meant something so it isn't just what we are looking forward to but tell us

[51 : 28] Lord that this wasn't all a total waste of time you know that I was here if I am really come out of dust and going back to dust what was I doing here anyway you know do you not get a feeling that there is that the psalmist or whoever is trying to say what difference did it make than I was here I just find the what I would call the minor note of hope is surprising in the psalm and it anticipates it's a request for something more from this God yes please Psalm 39 starting at verse 4 show me if you are not my sin and remember of my days let me know I'll plead if my life you have made my days on your hand rest you spanned my ears and I can't translate in front of breath that is here phantom goes to and throw you I was about only if they need to something else not going to look at it but now

Lord what do I look for in I hope you in you it's a lovely echo of it here there's a line bird says something that shadows we are and shadows we pursue that biblical wisdom it's in our culture people have picked it up philosophers poets our hymnody so it's we're being taught all the time to pull to remember the skills so please go I'm still very comfortable with the thought that this song does not seem even to begin to question the dogma that death is total extinction so it seems to me the only way Christians can read this song is to say what it's likely we're beginning to work with that student and

I don't see how one can actually then incorporate it as a Christian longing or a Christian understanding but rather see it as a stark contrast to a Christian understanding well I see your point and that's the point I was trying to get at by saying what if we found this song in a desert cave and we read it alone pagans would say oh yeah this guy knows a lot but it falters into the beginnings of religious illusion yes said the humanists say as well by this cry for hope this minor cry for hope but as a Christian of course I do read this is part of the mystery of scripture isn't it it's the fullness of God's word that that teaches that sure there are things standing alone which have a a sub-Christian profundity you spoke of a yearning during the season he yearns at least for a few good days a purely rather oh yes oh sure sure so there isn't even a glimmer of the hope turning back to him yes unless your interpretive self insists on seeing something as God our dwelling place but admittedly it still looks earthbound the God who was guided Israel but offers no hope for post-mortem anything I see your point I think that's true that's part of the strangeness of this poem so in a very low surface it seems to me the message of the song is where it would be yes if you have that in your share yes yes well it's a truism isn't it about I shouldn't I say this in fear and trembling in the presence of Dr. Packer but the Old Testament is divinely ambiguous about things post-mortem and sometimes it seems quite clear yes God has something more there but at other times there is a sense of hmm what's going on here is there anything for humanity after which I like after death because I like I think the profundity of Lewis' statement that we owe God the right to exclude us from the creation that's how bad it is with us and God God says you will die the day that you sin you will die the profundity of death I will give you as a gift do you want to call it that

I'm getting rid of you the way you are now is not acceptable to me only Jesus is found acceptable to the Father this is my beloved son in my well place and in him we're acceptable outside of that I think we're in this hopelessness or David Hume would say get over it we're not hopeless I mean there are these happy lucky pagans in our culture in the tradition who I don't believe them I don't take them seriously I think they're blinking and they're they're in Pascal's Pascal pins them to the wall you'll spend your life in mindless diversions to get away from the thought of your coming dissolution Four Quartet as I understand it is the great Christian poem on this topic the great modern which says it sticks your nose in the fact of death it all becomes meaningless in the end that it says to his pagan readers unless you can enter into the mystery of Jesus and in that there's a certain hope yes you spoke about

[57 : 26] God being everlasting and natural beginning and then James Philpott don't trivialize any life if you did not have life to believe in God now we are fortunate here presumably that we believe in our life tonight but what do I am still not going to believe how did you go again and if you are a non-believer that is a natural question I have been asked that question by a very thoughtful and non-believing child so what do I answer if that is a really difficult question for me well sure depends depends quite frankly on the kind of who you're the kind of conversation partner you have no I mean culturally if they're how sophisticated they are that doesn't mean good or bad or worse but how sophisticated they are so I and so it depends let's say you could ask anybody how is it that anything is there at all why is anything there and if there's something there that's been there forever fate some materiality space whatever it is they think something's always been there well is it unreasonable to confess that God has always been we don't claim it's thinkable it's an adorable fact it's not an argument it's a fact about

God that we adore that he soars beyond created comprehension is on the fact that he never began the author is all beginnings so that's there's the beginnings of an answer tell them to read out and plant it goes well oh yeah just a comment about the actual author but with Moses he uses the language collective language we he is making himself part of the community and yet this man that wrote this that was moved saw and his face grows so brightly he had to be with before other people could even see him and yet he doesn't use that kind of language he doesn't use the kind of language he uses he uses the collective of my people this is our common experience and it makes me think of David the kind of language that he uses

Lord forgive me my sinners taken in isolation this would lead us to in that sense hopelessness that view of humanity that is sad and and and yet we can't take this in isolation because it's mixed in with David telling you and he says Lord the result of my humanity and my weakness and my feelings is that I request you forgive me as a sinner and from that forgiveness I have moved into a new relationship which is an eternal forgiving relationship I hear you commenting quite lovely beautifully thank you on the the call of Christian reading that you can read something so to speak legitimately alone then other things are at your ear because you read other things you know so the Bible is that kind of a book isn't it we know more I want to think Moses was on the Mount of Transfiguration he did find out about Jesus but I don't want to trivialize Psalm 90 by too easily going outside of it he does say this and it is profound the scriptures say this for a reason don't they I mean anti-religious people one of their famous put-downs of we folks is that you have these fairy tales that you live by all the time and in fact the fact of death you are diverting yourself but the Bible doesn't divert us from it when you come to Psalm 90 it hammers it into your face you're going to die God says you're going to die you've got to die you owe God to death but it's a brilliant man how do you think the modern Jewish person would suffer the sense read it

I'm sure across the Jewish spectrum there'd be variations an Orthodox Jew would read it one way a very liberal Jew would read it the way a lot of modern king in this read it I don't know have you run across any particular readings in that view it's interesting that if you do ever this I'm going way off topic Psalm 90 is about the wrath of God Psalm 91 talks about the wrath of evil against you you know a thousand may fall at your right side but I will stand and this psalm starts a section of the Psalter and I wonder if the divine inspired editor is saying there's the wrath of God and then there's the wrath of evil and a couple Psalms later it's the triumph the certain triumph of God over the mighty ways the mighty ways mightier mightier than the ways of the our

[63 : 57] God on high is mighty and then there's a call for a holiness of life I think the Psalms in this section have this pungent progression there is a wrath of evil in the world too we've got trouble on every side God's wrath then the evil one has a wrath against us the dangerous neighborhood of

fallen creation but anyway there I'm leaving Psalm 90 and pushing on to other things there and I know we're running out of time I find if this kind of thing and you found it better than the saints are way ahead of me but to take this seriously will make Easter Sunday more joyful for you more triumphant will be the trumpet call he's risen someone has conquered that period put it behind and for us that this wrath this sweeping of us away has been overcome by Jesus but you have to take this seriously to take that with a deeper profundity

I would imagine I think does anybody feel depressed this morning I want to there is therapy available after thank you we're there to shame and all like oh my goodness you know Harvey you and I we're both at the 730 only communion service and we heard a good service in our midst every morning has something to be forward to the church but so thank you for attending to I hope Psalm 90 not too much you're almost there but just pointing good sir there seems to be there seems to be repentance in verse 3 doesn't it hope in repentance hope and repentance we'll turn back on children then that's not the voice of God is it okay thank you

Bill you've got a box of cream next time thanks a lot thank you thank you thank you everyone thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you