

Psalm 90 AM

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 July 2024

Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 00] Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we ask now that you would teach us to number our days so that we might gain hearts of wisdom. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Please sit down. If you would turn to Psalm 90 that was read for us so well by Theo a couple of minutes ago, I make it on page 496 in the Old Testament part of the Bible, Psalm 90.

This is the oldest psalm we have, written by Moses. No one else. And it's written by Moses to the people of Israel as they're wandering in the wilderness.

And it's basically about the bizarre and deliberate blindness we have to death. It's about our stubborn refusal to face up to the reality of our limitations and the shortness and uncertainty of our lives.

So if you're a young person and think you're going to be immortal, this is for you. If you're a middle-aged person and a bit disappointed with the way life has gone and think you need to run faster, this is for you.

[1 : 24] And if you're an older person like me, feeling increasingly frail and time is running out, this is for us as well. And at the heart of the psalm is the prayer in verse 12.

Just look down at it. So teach us to number our days rightly, it says, that we may get a heart of wisdom. So it's a prayer that God would reveal to us a different way of living, to gain the wisdom of what it means to live in the context of eternity and grace, and not just live under the tyranny of the clock and the pressure of deadlines.

That is, to live life at God's speed, if you will. Because to be human is to have our eternal home in God, not to find our real home here, as Moses shows us, this is the home of death.

But to grow wise and to live in love and grace to one another, knowing that God loves us and fills our lives with a vast and eternal significance. And the first two verses of Psalm 90 act as a kind of a heading and a foundation, not just for Psalm 90, but for all the psalms from Psalm 90 to 106.

It's about God and time. A friend told me this week he went to see a movie. It's one of those time-shifting movies that goes forwards and backwards. And unknown to him, he and a friend came into the movie halfway through.

[2 : 59] So it made absolutely no sense whatsoever. Things were all messed up and mangled, and there was no possible meaning in it. And it ended up just a confusion of events floating before his eyes without any connection.

And that's because time is the context that gives meaning to everything in our lives. And it's a great picture of what happens in our life if you take God away. You take God away, our lives are just a confusion of events floating around without a lot of meaning.

But what gives meaning in our lives is that the eternal God himself offers to be our dwelling place. Look at verses 1 and 2. Let me read it with you.

Lord, Moses says, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth. I mean, the most solid thing you can think of in creation.

Wherever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting, you are God. And what that means is that we're not just creatures of time.

[4 : 06] We're creatures who have an eternal home in God. So that God himself is the deepest and highest context for our lives, and our lives can't have meaning apart from him.

Sometimes you hear people say, well, God is timeless. God is outside of time. It's not really the Bible view. It's true that God created time when he made the world, and God is not determined or limited by time.

But the idea that God is outside of time is more a Greek than a Bible view. And these verses show that the God of the Bible is eternal and everlasting, and at the same time intimately and deeply involved with each of us at every moment being our eternal home and dwelling place.

He's present to us at every moment of our lives, loving us and welcoming us and offering and drawing us into our true home. And that's why we have a sense of rootlessness and groundlessness outside of him.

He was our home on the day we were born. He will be our home on the day we die. And because his eternity is not in conflict with our short lives, the eternity and everlastingness of God is not just in contrast to the shortness of our life.

[5 : 32] It is the remedy. It is the healing solution to the shortness of our lives. See? So when Moses says, from everlasting to everlasting you are God, he's saying that God is unchangeable and consistent and unalterable, just as Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever.

And all of time is always present to God at the same time, immediately, if you will. And he is present and fully present in every moment of time.

And that means all the time that we have comes to us as a gift from God. And because it's a gift from God, it's a gift of love. And that means time is intended for love, the kind of love that makes a home for us and welcomes us in.

Now, is everyone with me so far? If you're not, let me give you a little illustration. I read this this week. This is a Japanese theologian, Kosuke Koyama. And he asks, how fast is God?

What speed does God move? And the answer is three miles per hour. Or kilometers, that's probably four kilometers per hour. He says, here is Moses writing to the people in the wilderness who walked for 40 years.

[6 : 54] And the average speed the humans walk is three miles per hour. So Jesus walked at three miles per hour. So God's educational philosophy for us is to walk in our lives at three miles per hour, which delivers us.

I love this. Which delivers us from the unrelenting deadline and fussiness of getting everything done. And three miles per hour is time for love. And it's time for wisdom that comes slowly.

I'll just offer that to you and leave it where it is. So what this psalm teaches us is this. That to be truly human means to recognize a double-sidedness in our experience.

That on the one hand, we live in a world of decay and darkness and death. And at the same time, we are making our home in the eternal God.

So on the one hand, we live outside the Garden of Eden in a world full of frustration and disappointment, trying to find meaning pretty feverishly, knowing much of what we do is just a fantasy.

[8 : 03] And at the same time, we have a growing sense that God is powerful enough and kind enough, not just to bring us home after death, but to intervene in the world now in all its messiness.

To live under the wrath of God as sinners in a sinful world. And at the same time, to live under the glorious grace and love of God, which is infinitely more powerful than his wrath and able to save us and to satisfy us.

And we struggle to grasp both sides of this. And we particularly struggle to grasp the grace and love of God, because we don't really believe in the wrath and anger of God.

Let me show you what Moses means here. So Moses makes two points in the rest of the psalm. And the first point is in verses 3 to 12, and he's speaking here about time outside the Garden of Eden.

Time outside the Garden. And I think we ought to be really thankful that the Bible tells us exactly what we need to say. The Bible tells us things that we would never dare to say to each other.

[9 : 14] And the reason we don't live forever, the reason that we decline and go downhill and decay and die, Moses says, is because of sin and the wrath of God.

Now, would you ever come up with something like that? And though the wrath of God is not the first word or the last word in the psalm, Moses is unsparingly truthful with us.

Not because we are specially wicked, but because we've all sinned and death has spread to all of us. This is the Bible understanding.

The reasons our lives are fragile and short is not because this is how God intended it from the start, but because this is what it is to live outside the Garden of Eden, under the curse of God.

This is what it is to be human outside the Garden. And as we go through these words, I hope you see them as devastating and distressing and deadly accurate.

[10 : 15] And as resistance rises in your heart to them, pray that God would reveal the truth of them to you. So look at verse 3. Moses goes back to the Garden of Eden, brings it into the present and says, God, you return man to dust, saying, return to dust, O children of man.

So after all our hopes and our dreams and our achievements and our amusements and our assets and our good deeds and our grand things, we're reduced to a pot of ashes. I remember when I was first a minister, handling the ashes of babies and older people and middle-aged people, it's so disorienting.

You feel the intense emptiness and contrast to life. But we all imagine we're going to go on and live for a very long time and we have hopes and plans and dreams, but any day God can come to us and say, return to dust.

And that's what it means to be human. Our lives are brief, passing away, temporary. As he says in verse 5, they're swept away like a flood.

We're like a dream. We look fine in the morning, and you all look very fine this morning, like grass. We grow up, but then we fade and we wither and we die.

[11 : 31] And we close our eyes and we grit our teeth and we do anything but face up to this truth. And you may be thinking, okay, that's all very fine and well.

Our lives are short and uncertain, but every philosophy, I mean every tin pot philosophy acknowledges this. There's nothing new and noteworthy about this.

So what? Tell us, Moses, tell us something we don't know. And that is why Moses begins verse 7 and verse 9 with the word for. Here is the reason.

The reason for illness and death and frustration. For verse 7, we are brought to an end by your anger, by your wrath where dismay.

You have set our secret sins before you, sorry, 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.

[12 : 28] So here is the Bible answer to why we are mortal, why we get old and frail, why we die. We are sinners and we live in a sinful world. Again, not that a particular illness or suffering is punishment for a particular sin, but generally we are mortal because God is angry and God is angry because we are sinful.

The wrath of God, as you know, is not an essential part of God. It's not a character of God. God is love. And it's because he is love, holy love, that evil in this world raises his anger.

We're all interested in living longer. Moses here puts the average between 70 and 80. Some of you are way beyond that even now. And even if we add 30 or 40 more years, he'll still be under the wrath of God.

And there's nothing we can do to turn his wrath away. That's what it means to be human. And that is why the question in verse 11 is so unflattering. Look down at verse 11.

Who considers the power of your anger and your wrath according to the fear of you? Answer, no one. Nobody considers this.

[13 : 46] We would never have come to this on our own. You're never, this is never, you're never going to read about this in a medical journal or a scientific journal. It's because we're deliberately blind to this.

And the reason we're blind to it is because it has to be revealed to us by God. And that's the point of verse 12. It's so practical, this first prayer. Teach us.

We need teaching God. Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. He's not saying, Lord, help us to make a clock calculation of how many hours and minutes we've got left and run harder and work faster.

Now, I heard an illustration from a preacher this week that goes like this. Imagine every morning the bank put \$86,400 in your bank account for you to do with whatever you want.

And whatever you haven't used, by the end of the day, it zeroes it out. And the next morning when you get up, it puts \$86,400 into your bank account. Now, what would you do?

[14 : 52] Well, you'd withdraw it, wouldn't you? You'd invest it and you would use it. Well, he said, the preacher, every day you get 86,400 minutes. And at the end of the day, what's left is taken away and tomorrow you'll have another 86,400 minutes.

How will you use your time? It's a good story and it has a point. You know, we only have a certain amount of time left and maybe another passage in the Bible it might be useful for, but that's not what Moses is talking about here.

When he says, teach us to number our days, he's not saying, you know, get harder and faster, feel guilty about the wasted time. He says, look away from yourself and look to God for this kind of wisdom.

Pray for the Holy Spirit to open your eyes and undeceive your heart so that you might be ready to redeem the time. And if you ask Moses, what are you talking about?

What does it mean to redeem the time? The answer comes in the second point, verses 12 to 17. Because what we need is an invasion of God's eternal lives, God's eternal life, into our life now as we live outside the garden.

[16 : 08] We need his compassion. We need his love. We need his grace to come into our lives now, even if we still live under the wrath of God. We need to know we also live under his smile so that our days might be filled with new purpose, even joy, even satisfaction.

And what we really, wouldn't it be grand if God were able to take our small and fleeting days and draw them up into his everlasting story so that the meaning and significance of our lives outlasts our little lives?

That's exactly what he says God does in verses 12 to 17. And there are essentially two prayers in this last part of the psalm. Number one, Moses prays that God would reveal his love to us.

Let me read 13 to 15. Return, O Lord, how long? So God who said to man, return to dust. Now we're asking God to return. Have pity, compassion on your servants.

Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love. There it is. That we may rejoice and be glad all our days. Make us glad for as many days as you afflicted us, for as many days as we have seen evil.

[17 : 24] See, it's only the pity and love of God that can reverse the curse and turn it into blessing. This is a very bold prayer that ought to be on our lips.

Lord, I take refuge in the kindness of your love. I take refuge from your wrath in your love. I've tried everything else.

Nothing else really satisfied. Nothing else brings the joy that comes from you. I know your steadfast love is better than life itself. Show it to me.

Make it clear to me. Make it live in me that I might rejoice and be glad. That's why the Christian faith is not a gloomy funeral march.

It's not a grim turning away from pleasure to meditate on decline and decay and death and darkness. The Christian life is both facing the reality of death and being gripped by the love and grace of God which is greater than death and greater than his wrath.

[18 : 28] It's tasting that this eternal life is now ours in Jesus Christ and drawing partial satisfaction in this life knowing for full satisfaction in the life to come.

That's what it is to be truly human. To return to God in our own hearts. That's the first prayer for God's love to be shown. But the second prayer and this is the final thing in the psalm I think is even more astonishing.

It is that God's eternal purposes might be realised through our lives now. Look at verse 16. Let your work be shown to your servants your glorious power to your children.

Isn't that a great prayer? It's not Lord give us really happy well adjusted children who succeed and come out on top. But that God's work would be revealed to us and to our children.

He's praying for the generations yet to come. That God would continue his work and grace through them. We ought to pray for those who are yet to come. That God would retain a witness amongst our children and amongst their children.

[19 : 38] And then the last verse perhaps even more remarkable let the favour or the grace or kindness of the Lord our God be upon us and establish the work of our hands upon us.

Yes establish the work of our hands. You see since God is eternal and since God loves us he can take our fragile lives and he can work in them and he can work through them even the work of our hands to bring his eternal kingdom so that we can begin to live not just according to clock time but according to the rhythm of eternity.

So his grace and his kindness can make our lives greater than the few short years we're here. By his grace the work of our hands listen to this become the work of his hands and they begin to have a significance beyond anything we could imagine.

I mean this is true we see it all the time don't we? It's amazing by ourselves we can do no good thing we still live in a world that's fallen but the Holy Spirit takes our fragile fallen inadequate day by day serving and he redeems the time that he's given us through his love and makes it bigger than it was.

So brothers and sisters we have to hold these two sides together we have to hold the fact that we do live outside the garden we do struggle with sin and decay and death and and at the same time we're gripped by his grace and love working in us on a daily basis to make our lives part of his story and to take us into his eternal home and if we forget the first we become super spiritual and unrealistic and unhelpful to each other in suffering and sin and if we forget the second we become miserable and pretend this is all there is and it's up to us.

[21 : 39] I don't know which is worse but they're both bad. The only way for us to hold them together I think in the end and I finish with this is to look to Jesus Christ.

I mean Jesus was born at the right time born outside the garden of Eden like us who walked among us and lived among us and suffered the full wrath of God for us and promised eternal life and eternal joy to all those who trust him and follow him and so it's because of his death and because of his resurrection that we can say to each other with confidence brothers and sisters we can say be steadfast be immovable always abound in the work of the Lord because you know that in the Lord your labour is never in vain but is welcomed into the heart of God by his love washed by the kindness of the death of Jesus and established forever by his risen life.

So let's pray these things and meditate on things as we now hear a musical interlude.
Thank you.