

A Prayer of Moses

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[0 : 0 0] I want us to look together just for a few moments this morning as we gather on this first day of another new year in our lives by God's providence and it is by his providence that we are here today. It's the one thing that we can lay hold upon. There is nothing that takes place by chance in the life of the Christian or indeed in the life of anybody. We're here by the goodness and the kindness and the grace of God and so we want to turn to his word, his revelation and we want to find strength and encouragement in that revelation. We're going to do so by turning to Psalm 90, the book of Psalms and Psalm 90 and I want us to look at the end of that psalm from verse 12 onwards and I want us to think about the prayer which Moses makes. This is the psalm that was written by Moses and it ends with a prayer which begins in verse 12. I suppose you could think of the whole psalm as a prayer but insofar as he's asking the Lord to give him specific things in verse 12. So he says, 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. 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. We read in that first reading in Deuteronomy that when Moses died, the description that the Bible gives us is this, there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses whom the Lord knew face to face. That's not to say that there haven't been great men and great women in the Bible who knew God and loved him and followed him and yet Moses amongst them, he stands as someone who is quite unique in that he knew God face to face. None like him for all the signs and the wonders that the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt. And it's one thing of course to read the life of Moses as we can do in the book of Exodus and Numbers and Leviticus and so on. But it's another thing to get a window into the heart of Moses and I believe that Psalm 90 gives us a window into the private life of Moses and it gives us an opportunity to see what lay at the center of such an extraordinary man and such an extraordinary relationship with God. I don't want to go into the Psalm from the beginning but I want us to focus on three of the petitions, three things that Moses asks for just very briefly this morning as he reaches the conclusion of the Psalm. I want us to first of all look at verse 12 and what he asks for in verse 12 he asks God to teach us, he says, to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. That's the first thing he asks the Lord for. And then secondly if we turn to verse 14 he asks him for something else.

This is what he asks, satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. Satisfy us in the morning. That's the second thing that he asks for. Then if we jump to verse 17 I want us to think of a third petition and that is let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us and here we go establish the work of our hands upon us. Establish the work of our hands. Just three things and I want us to select these three areas that Moses focuses on. I believe that they're appropriate for ourselves as well to focus as perhaps the prayer that you and I would want to make if we really want to enter into a new year in the right spirit, in the right frame of mind and as the Lord would want us to do. And that's why it's so important to come around God's word at this time of year because it's only in God's word that we'll get direction, the true direction as to how and where God would have us go. I want us to first of all ask how does a person go about numbering his days? How do I right now number my days? Teach us to number our days. How do I how do I do that? Well I can only select from from what I know is the teaching of the Bible and I can first of all conclude that what it doesn't mean is that I simply do an arithmetic calculation as to the number of days that I have lived in this world. That's not what it means.

And yet it's a very interesting exercise to do. It's a very superficial thing and yet it contains some very interesting information. I've lived 19,530 days in this world.

In less than two years I will live if God spares me 20,000 days. Perhaps a more sobering count would be to take the general allotted age which a person might reasonably reach in this life given to us in this psalm which would be 25,550 days which leaves me if it's God's will to allow me to live for that long. 6,020 and what that tells me is that I'm way beyond halfway.

[6 : 11] And it arises it raises some very very interesting and very sobering thoughts in my mind like for example what have I done with those 19,000 days? Have I lived them to the full? Have I used them as God would have me use them? Or how much of that time have I wasted in this world? Because the Bible tells us that we're given talents. We're given opportunities in this world and it's God that gives them to us. To what extent have I been like the man with the one talent and buried my talent in the ground? Well I can only reflect on that myself. It's a very interesting question isn't it? What have we done with the time that God has given us in this world? Paul tells us to redeem the time because the days are evil he says. And when you think about all the days the huge number of days that the Lord I know our lives are like a vapor the Bible tells us that they're like a vapor that is here today and it's gone tomorrow. And yet as far as we're concerned we do have days in this world. We've all had days in this world. What have we done for them? For the Lord? How much use have we made of these days? And how much use will we make of the days? However many they may be. I may only have one more day in this world and so might you. But the important thing is to live that day as if it was my last and to live it for the Lord in obedience to him and in love to him and in service to him. Because the Bible calls us servants. If we're Christians we're servants of the Lord. And we are as servants we are in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so however number however many days we have in this world the question is we are not it's not for us to decide how many they are but what are we going to do with them? How much are we going to give them to the Lord in his service? That's the question. And to ask the Lord for forgiveness for all the waste at least I do anyway for all the waste and for the lack of service and for the days that I could have been doing what I should have been doing that I wasn't. But that that needs to there's where the word needs to teach us. So that's what it doesn't mean and yet and yet there are very interesting questions that we can raise by doing such a calculation. What I believe it means it means that we first of all live for the present recognizing each day as a gift from God. And that means concentrating on today and making most the most of the day that

God has given to us. What does the psalm say? It says this is the day that the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it. And I say that because of the amount of time that we sometimes waste either dwelling in the past or dreaming for the future. Both of these are entirely wrong and they are not the way to spend our lives in the service of God. What do I mean by saying dwelling in the past? It can happen in several ways. For some people looking back to the past it's it means this the kind of experiences and the times in which we have taken great pleasure and some people cannot move beyond those times. I have to confess to you that the older I get the more often I'm going back into the past to times and occasions and events that have taken place in my life I look back to with incredible pleasure. When the kids were small for example places that we went to occasions that we enjoyed together and so on and so forth and and we we tend to go back to these times and you dwell in them and that's okay. There's nothing wrong with doing that except when it turns into wishing that we still lived at that time. There's no nothing wrong with memories. There's nothing wrong with great memories and pleasant memories and memories for which we're thankful to the Lord for but there's a subtle difference between remembering something in the right way and dwelling in it as a means of escaping the difficulties of the present day. We need to remember that just as God has given us our past life and all the great things that we're thankful for today he has given us now today as a new opportunity he has kept us in this world and remember this that the Lord will keep us in this world until our work for him is past. That means the fact that we are still alive means that God still has something for us to do. He still has a purpose and a work for us in this world otherwise we wouldn't be here.

He would have taken us away to glory. He has something for us to do. Now you and I may never find out what that work is and yet that's the fact of the matter and sometimes life gets so difficult for us that we tend to go back and we dream back into the past and I don't know what it is but we go back there and we and we dwell there and we what we really say to the Lord is I don't like today. I wish I was still living when I had all these great times in the past whatever those times are and the the the what the Bible tells us what the Apostle Paul tells us is this I have learned to be content whatever circumstances God has given me I am for I have learned in whatever situation to be content he says I know how to be brought low and I know how to abound in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger abundance and need I can do all things through him who strengthens me and for other people perhaps it is today that they feel that that's life is just going so well for you that you don't want it to stop you don't want your life to change many people experience that as well you feel that God you there are times in our lives aren't there when we experience the goodness of God to an extraordinary amount we're conscious of the grace of God and the the generosity of God and you're in good health and things are it's a it's a moment of great happiness for you and you don't want it to change it's like when the disciples were were at the sea of

Galilee and Jesus fed the 5,000 I think in their experience that was probably one of the greatest highlights in the ministry of Jesus they wanted to stay there they wanted to make him king there and then but Jesus forced them into the boat and it was as they went into the boat and as they obeyed the command of Jesus they were crossed the sea of Galilee and all of a sudden in a moment of time their lives plunged plunged into danger that's the kind of change that God must bring about in the life of the Christian and if you're enjoying an easy a time of great abundance a time of prosperity at the moment make the most of it thank God for it but don't expect it necessarily to last because the Christian experience is a changing one in which we have to face the difficulties of the Christian life as well as the prosperity of the Christian life thank the Lord for all the experiences that we have other people are the opposite they have an opposite attitude to to their past and perhaps there there are people here and indeed amongst us for whom the past is a painful experience even to remember and you feel that what you are today is a product and your deficiency today perhaps you're suffering today perhaps the pain that you experience day by day is a result of something that you've experienced in the past either as a child or during your upbringing or whatever they tell us that your upbringing has such an incredible importance in what you are today our personalities are so much part of the way that we were brought up now for many of us that was a pleasant experience those of us who are brought up in balanced homes but not everybody is like that not everybody has that great experience that privileged upbringing and I've heard people saying over the years almost that they're angry with the Lord for the way in which they've for what they've experienced in the past and they feel that if only God had given them a different experience in the past if only God had made it different for them then they would be so much different today from what they are but God hasn't you are what you are and you are where you are today in the providence of God every one of us has a different experience of what God has given to us and ordered and we're all we must remember at the same time that we're all part of a fallen world so it's not as if God points his finger at somebody and and deliberately and in a cruel manner make sure that that person goes through pain for some kind of pleasure that's not God at all we're part of a fallen world in which we as human beings we suffer at the hands of events and circumstances and people that leave a mark and a stain and a scar perhaps on our hearts and our souls and yet

God is able to take us through that he is able because he has given us a new life in Jesus Christ it doesn't mean that the that the the past disappears it doesn't mean that we can somehow forget everything that we've gone through in the past and yet it means that with the Lord's help we he can do in us and for us more than we can ask or even think bring to him everything that gives you a heartache and pain today come to him with it and pour it out before him and believe that God is able to make all things work together for good to those who love him and those who are called according to you to his purpose that's another way but some people of course there are other people who can't get beyond their conversion now don't get me wrong our conversion is the greatest day of our lives the day that we came to know the Lord the day that

[17 : 38] Jesus touched our hearts and opened up our hearts and brought us to life in him and yet I've heard people saying why is it that when I was converted I had a different experience of being a Christian I found my sense of the Lord's affection and his love and his closeness I couldn't get away from it I just relished it every day I treasured it every day now I don't feel the same my experience of him is different and some people they actually come to the conclusion that I couldn't have been converted anyway because my experience of the Lord is so different now to what it was then well let me offer let me offer an answer to that question because I've heard it over the years on many occasions when a person is first converted the Bible tells us that that person is a baby a baby in Christ and like any baby a baby depends on his parents his parents for everything that the baby needs the affection the milk the love the changing nappies everything has to be done for that little baby but there comes a time when the baby grows and when for example he has to learn to walk my little grandson for example he was with us last week he's just started walking and you can see him struggling on the floor and you can see that it's not coming easy to him at all and you sometimes wonder if he could speak maybe he'd be saying why are you guys not picking me up the way you used to be why are you not helping me here I am struggling on this floor and you're not doing anything about it you're standing watching me and you're not doing anything about it but the reason we're standing watching him is because he has to go through this otherwise he'll stay as a baby he can't stay as a baby he's got to learn to walk and the bible tells us that we can't stay as babies our whole lives and the process of growth is painful and it involves us going through sometimes confusing things things that we don't understand and the easiest thing in the world is to conclude that God no longer loves me because my experience today is not the same way as it was then but have you ever given thought to the fact that it's perhaps that the Lord is bringing you through a different phase in your

Christian life and it's important for you to go through that phase his love for you has not changed it is the same yesterday today and forever what's changed is the stage in your Christian life at which you're at and it's important that we understand that because before you know it the devil comes in he tells you that the Lord doesn't love you anymore and that you've done stuff that has offended God to the point that he's given up on you that's not the case God never gives up on his people never so you lay hold upon that steadfast love of the Lord and don't ever conclude that because your experience or your feeling is different that somehow or other God's love for you has changed that's not the case at all now I'm not trying to say here that there's no place for memory in the Christian life there is

Paul says it he says I thank to the Philippians he says I thank God for every remembrance I have of you why was that because he saw the Christians in Philippi as a result of the working of God in their lives and that's what our memory should be full of today so we look back over 2010 which is now gone is it a nostalgic looking back is it a sentimental looking back or is it a real thankfulness can you see what God has done in those days and beyond then 2009 2008 all the way through your life are you able to look through your life and say I thank God for all that he has done in my life that's the proper use of memory now it's the same when we look and we dream into the future as well isn't it Jesus says not to plan unnecessarily not to plan too far he says sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof that's because he was surrounded by people just like us who tend to get lost in the future and for them it's not so much the past that's an escape it's the future that's an escape and it's not just a sensible planning in the future it's a dreaming of the future what I'd like to be what I want to be and what I'm going to try and be and before you know it your mind is filled with ambition and dreams and success and you look in the mirror and you think well I'm one day this is what I want to and the world outside encourages you to be like that they say to you look you look at yourself in the mirror and you say to yourself decide what you want to be and go for it of course in one sense there's nothing wrong with being determined hard-working decisive nothing wrong with that at all but the

Lord tells us not to travel into the future because the future belongs to God and you must say whenever you're thinking of planning ahead you always have to say if it's the Lord's will I will do this and do that you know sometimes you hear people saying God willing and sometimes it becomes a bit of a habit and like every habit you lose sight of the importance of the habit if it just becomes a habit so people say God willing and they don't even know sometimes what they're saying but it is important it is really important to remember every time that you look into the future that there may not be a future for you here in this world or God may have a very different plan for you and it's very very important to make everything contingent upon the whole the work of the

Holy Spirit and the will and the mind and the sovereignty of God so we must not use the past as an escape and we must not use the future as an escape we have to count our days so that we may apply our hearts to wisdom and live every day as a unique gift from God it also means take it turning away from past wrongs now now is as good a time for as ever for all of us today to think about how we have failed the Lord either in things we should have been and failed to be or things that we know we've done that we know have been against his word now is as good a time as any in where we're sitting at the moment to come to the Lord afresh and to lay hold of the cross the blood of Jesus

[25 : 27] Christ that cleanses us from all sin and ask the Lord to bring you into a new year cleansed and washed and ready to serve him once again is that not the wisest thing that we could possibly do today and is that not part of what it means to count our days and does it not mean also asking that the Lord will give us the wisdom to see that our days here will come to an end one day Jesus will come again and that this whole world will be destroyed the new heavens and the new earth will be inaugurated and God's people will go forever to be with the Lord every day ought to be lived in that light and every day needs to be lived within that understanding this one thing I do says Paul forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead he says I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God so that's the first petition then and I'm certainly not going to spend the same amount of time on the second and the third petitions

Moses goes on in verse 14 to ask the Lord to satisfy him in the morning with his steadfast love now that gives us a fascinating insight into what lay at the heart of this man of God first of all I believe it gives us the insight that the mornings were very important for Moses satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love now I guess that he could have meant something figurative by the morning but I reckon that Moses mornings were well spent and I hope that our mornings are well spent as well because for Moses every day that what lay at the heart of what he was was his relationship to the Lord and his start of the day just like they tell us that the breakfast that we have is the most important meal of the day it is also hugely important to start the day with the Lord if we're able to some people are not able to because the timetable or whatever but for some people it has to be at the end of the day but what lay at the heart of

Moses was his relationship with the Lord and what he tells us here is that for him his relationship with the Lord was not just something that was routine from the outside but something that he took absolute delight in he wants to be satisfied some people think of religion as going through the motions of some kind of ritual and once they start they keep on until they're finished and then they go and that's it finished that's not the Christian relationship with God at all Christian knows the Lord he loves the Lord and nothing less than being satisfied with God what is it the commandment tells us that the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever so for us it's not just going through the motions of something from the outside it's a deep rooted personal love for the Lord and Moses knew that he knew the Lord face to face and by the way so do we we belong to the

Lord Jesus we have exactly the same relationship with the Lord as Moses did we know God face to face through Jesus Christ so we have as much right as Moses to ask satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love now do you know what I find fascinating about this this request the whole of the psalm he's been speaking about the anger and the wrath of God and Moses knew first hand experience what the wrath of God was like he knew for example when they built the golden calf or when the ground opened up Daron Korah Dathan and Abiram who rebelled against Moses he saw first hand what God's wrath and his anger was like and yet look at what he says he says satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love that we may rejoice and be glad all our days now how is it that a man who knows so vividly the wrath and the anger of God who can write so extensively about it can talk at the same time about being satisfied in God because he has discovered that in wrath

God remembers mercy he saw that during the plagues he saw that on the night of the Passover where God the angel of the Lord was going through Egypt putting to death the first born at the same time he was saving all those who put their trust in him by keeping the Passover and placing the blood on the lintel and it's the same in the gospel today we are not ashamed of the wrath of God we serve an angry God today we worship an angry God kind of sounds strange doesn't it saying that but when we talk about God's anger it is a righteous and a controlled anger it is an anger that's only directed against the right things and yet within that anger there is love a love that is extraordinary a love that holds itself to his people and that loves them with an everlasting love in wrath he remembers mercy satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love and today in Jesus

[31 : 18] Christ and in him alone there is perfect forgiveness perfect cleansing and a new life that has been given to us and then lastly the third thing he asks for is that his work the work of his hands will be established again I find this absolutely fascinating because it would appear from this that perhaps Moses from time to time became discouraged I don't think that's surprising at all given the number of times that the Israelites rose up against him and given the number of disasters he had to face discouragement is when you say what's the point where is all this going to lead to what is the point in doing what I am doing there doesn't appear to be any fruit or any result nothing appears to be happening there were many times in Moses experience when that was the case it appears from all appearances it appears that everything was a failure

Israel came to within a hair's breadth of being destroyed by the Lord and it wouldn't be surprising if Moses from time to time came to the Lord and said I don't know what my work is going to achieve and yet we can today look back at the work of Moses with tremendous respect and tremendous honor as one of the greatest men of God that God brought upon the face of the earth and God is able to establish our work wherever we are today whatever we're doing for the Lord the life that you and I live today is a life that is lived for the Lord if we follow him and God is able to make that life count he's able to take our little deeds here and there and he's able to work his own purpose and his own plan into our lives and our routines so that to make all of those acts of obedience significant in his plan and that's what we want isn't it we want our lives to count we want our work and our service to count he's able to do that we may never see what God is going to do in us perhaps others will see it perhaps not the important thing is that

God sees it three things teach us to number our days satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love and establish the work of our hands I can't think of three greater and more important prayers to ask the Lord for today at the beginning of a new year will you join with me in praying these three prayers as a congregation and as people who love the Lord and want to serve him teach us to number our days satisfy us in the morning and establish the work of our hands let's pray together our Father in heaven we give thanks that today whilst your word reveals your wrath and your judgment against sin that your word also reveals in the person of Jesus

Christ your mercy and your love towards sinners in bringing them to a new life and in giving forgiveness to them through the death of Jesus and in creating within us a new heart and a new beginning and we give thanks oh Lord that we're able to stand here on this first day of a new year and reflect on the greatness of God towards us the mercy your mercy towards us and we're able to take delight in it we're able to rejoice in the Lord we're able to rejoice in hope and in anticipation of what you can and will do we pray that you'll make us obedient and bless us abundantly as a congregation and as people we ask Lord that you will do in us and for us we pray that you will work within us we pray that you will take us meet with us where we are and we give thanks that you're able

Lord to resolve the kind of issues that we find so impossible to deal with and to cope with we pray that you will make them an opportunity for us to come to the Lord in dependence and in prayer so teach us to number our days teach us Lord to ask for that we may be satisfied in the morning with your unfailing love and we pray that you will establish the work of our hands in Jesus name Amen