Psalm 90: Numbering Our Days

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[0:00] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this morning, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, the book of Psalms, in Psalm 90.

The book of Psalms, Psalm 90. And if we read again at verse 10. Psalm 90 at verse 10.

The years of our life are 70, or even by reason of strength 80. 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? So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

Particularly those words of verse 12. So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. The Reverend Dr. Thomas Chalmers was the first moderator of the Free Church of Scotland in the General Assembly after the disruption in 1843.

[1:23] And Thomas Chalmers, he was one of the most influential preachers during the 19th century. But before Chalmers was converted, he spent many years as a professor of mathematics in St. Andrew's University.

But because of his intellectual position as a professor and the fact he could read, Chalmers was also licensed to preach the gospel.

Which means that during the week he would give lectures on maths in St. Andrew's. But then on the Lord's Day, Chalmers would preach in his congregation of Kilmani.

And even though he was not a Christian, he wasn't converted. There were many moderates at that time. And there were men in pulpits who were unconverted. He was a very religious man.

But he wasn't a Christian. But before he was converted, Chalmers used to say that ministers had the easiest job in the world. Because Chalmers could lecture all week.

[2:24] Then prepare two sermons on a Saturday afternoon. And preach both ends on the Lord's Day. But of course, Chalmers' view of ministry had changed when he came to faith.

He was converted. And he began to preach a gospel of grace. Grace, salvation through grace. And not a gospel of religion and works. But it was after Chalmers had left his position as the professor of mathematics in St. Andrew's, he went into full-time Christian ministry.

And Chalmers said that there was one mathematical equation that he had never considered before. All his years as a mathematician. But this one equation had passed him by.

And he said that the equation which he had never considered before was the shortness of time and the length of eternity. The shortness of time and the length of eternity.

And what we see when we come to Psalm 90 is that that's the same equation which Moses was considering. Because we're told in the title of this Psalm that it was written by Moses, the man of God.

[3:38] And that it was a prayer of Moses. And in his prayer, Moses was considering the shortness of time and the length of eternity. But what's remarkable is that Moses was considering this equation 3,500 years ago.

And I say that because Psalm 90 is the oldest psalm in the Psalter. And it dates back to around 1500 BC. But even though it's the oldest psalm in the Psalter, it has the most relevant truth.

That God doesn't change. He's from everlasting to everlasting. But everything around us and everyone around us is changing. Because we are temporal.

As Moses says himself and as we were singing, Our years are like a tale that is told. And you know at the beginning of another year in life's journey, We're being reminded in this Psalm that time is passing so quickly.

That's another year gone. 2016, now into history. And yet we see that it's not only one year, but a lot can change in one year.

[4:51] And it's inevitable that as we stand on the threshold of a new year, that we become very reflective. Because we think back over the year that has just gone by.

Even in the run-up to new year, there are all these programs that review the year that has just gone by. And there are things in the past that we think about. And for all of us, there were highs and there were lows.

There were blessings and there were very difficult providences. There were joys and there were sorrows. There were those who were with us at the beginning of 2016. Who are no longer with us at the beginning of 2017.

And there will be some who confess that 2016 was the best year of their life. There will be others who confess that 2016 was the worst year of their life.

And you know, I always find that New Year is a very emotional time. Because we're reminded that we just don't know what's ahead for any of us.

[5:55] Because our life is so short. Our life is so short. And that's what was on the mind of Moses as he came before God in prayer. He considered that life was just passing by before his eyes.

And he could see that his days and years upon the earth, they were now more than what he had ahead of him. He had had more years than what was ahead of him. And as a result, Moses prays for himself.

And he prays for the children of Israel. Because Moses could see the frailty of life. And he came before the unchanging God, seeking to set his heart upon true wisdom.

And you could say that in the words of the Apostle Paul, Moses looked not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are temporal.

But the things that are unseen are eternal. And so as we walk through this psalm, or this prayer of Moses, we will see that the desire of Moses was that we would all come to the same conclusion as he came to.

[7:06] When he considered the shortness of time and the length of eternity. And I'd like us to consider the prayer of Moses just under three headings. The constant, the curse, and the conclusion.

The constant, the curse, and the conclusion. So if we look first of all at the constant. Look again at verse 1. This is the constant.

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, wherever you had formed the earth and the world. From everlasting to everlasting, you are God. And although it cannot be proved, I believe that this prayer of Moses was written just before he died. And I say that because when we consider the book of Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy was a book which was written by Moses near the end of his life. In which the children of Israel, they had been led through the wilderness for 40 years. They had been taken out of slavery in Egypt, led through the wilderness for 40 years.

[8:15] And they had now reached the banks of the river Jordan. And they're about to cross over into the promised land. But in the book of Deuteronomy, Moses reminds the children of Israel all about the Lord's faithfulness towards them throughout their wilderness journey.

To the point that you could say that, well, when you look at the book of Deuteronomy, consider it as an old photo album. We all have an old photo album somewhere in our house.

And if we were to start at the beginning of our photo albums, and look at all the photos, we would see all these different stages along the way. We would see births, then infancy, then childhood, teenage years, adulthood.

We would see all these different stages. And that's what the book of Deuteronomy is like. It's like an old photo album which recounts all the different stages throughout the history of the children of Israel until they're about to cross over the river Jordan into the promised land.

But in the book of Deuteronomy, Moses reminds the children of Israel that although their many years in Egypt and throughout the wilderness, although the Lord had been faithful to them, the Lord had...

[9:27] He reminds them that the Lord has been faithful. The Lord has blessed them. The Lord has been good to them. The Lord has been with them. Because he has been with them even though a lot has changed.

Even though a lot has changed with them and an entire generation have died in the wilderness. Even though all that has changed, Moses reminds them, the Lord has stayed the same.

And you know, it seems to me that as Moses came to the end of his life, he began to reflect upon the Lord's faithfulness throughout all those generations. Because when Moses looked back and considered the experience of the children of Israel, he could see the one constant in their lives was the Lord.

The one constant was the Lord. Because the Lord was with Moses and his people. Even when Moses was a tiny baby being placed in a basket on the River Nile, the Lord was with Moses and his people when the children of Israel were delivered from bondage and the tyranny of Pharaoh in Egypt.

The Lord was with Moses and his people when he brought them safely through the Red Sea. The Lord was with Moses and all his people when he fed them manna from heaven and water from the rock.

[10:45] The Lord was with Moses and his people when he gave to them his law and when he gave to them the tabernacle as a place of worship. My friend, the Lord was with Moses and his people throughout all those generations.

And so it's no wonder that Moses begins his prayer by saying, Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Lord, you have been faithful to us.

You have remained steadfast and trustworthy. You have continued to be committed to your people. You have been our eternal refuge. Lord, you have been our constant.

You have been our constant. And this is why I believe that Moses prayed these words just before he died. Because at the end of the book of Deuteronomy, having reflected upon the whole history of the children of Israel and the Lord's faithfulness towards them, Moses blesses the children of Israel.

He blesses the 12 tribes. And as he stands on the banks of the river Jordan with this new beginning awaiting them, as they go into the promised land, Moses says to them, The eternal God is your refuge and underneath are his everlasting arms.

[12:05] That's what he says to them. The eternal God is your refuge and underneath are his everlasting arms. And my friend, what better words to say to those who had seen and experienced so much change throughout their life?

What better words than to be reminded on the threshold of a new beginning? What better to be reminded of the Lord's faithfulness in the past, the Lord's faithfulness in the present, and also the Lord's faithfulness as they go into the future?

The eternal God is your refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms. And as the children of Israel had to take these words into a new chapter in their lives, so too we also ought to take these words into a new year in our lives.

The eternal God is your refuge and underneath are his everlasting arms. Because we are being reminded in those words, he has been faithful to us in the past, he is faithful to us in the present, and he will be faithful to us in the year ahead.

Whatever that year has for us, whatever it has for us, he will be faithful. He will be the constant. And you know, this is what gave Moses the greatest comfort and the greatest assurance that whatever the future held for the children of Israel, the Lord would be with them.

[13:41] Whatever was going to come their way, the Lord would be their constant because he doesn't change. He is, as Moses says, from everlasting to everlasting. Amid all the changing circumstances for the children of Israel, the Lord would remain the same.

His character, his character of love, mercy and grace, would remain the same. His covenant, his covenant of all the promises of blessing in the promised land, they would remain the same.

His commitment, his commitment towards his people, despite their sinful nature and their disobedience, the Lord would remain the same. And my friend, it's because the Lord remains the same that we can claim all these great and precious promises to ourselves today.

It's not that the Lord is stagnant in any way. That's why, that's not why he's the same. It's because he's the only constant, the eternal constant in our lives.

And because he's our only constant, we know that his character of love, mercy and grace doesn't ebb and flow. It remains the same. We know that his covenant and all the blessings that flow from it, they're not dependent upon our faithfulness, but his faithfulness.

[15:04] And because the Lord is always faithful, his covenant and all the blessings, they stay the same. And we know that his commitment towards us, despite all our failures, despite all our shortcomings, he remains the same.

His commitment remains the same. My friend, it's because the Lord remains the same. It's because the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting. It's because he doesn't change.

It's because he is our constant that we can take all these great and precious promises and claim them as our own in Jesus Christ.

This is the wonder of it. We can claim it all as ours in Jesus Christ. And you know, I love that description which the writer to the Hebrews gives to us of Jesus.

In the letter to the Hebrews, the writer, he elevates Jesus as one who is supremely better than all that went on in the Old Testament. All the Old Testament types and shadows.

[16:08] Jesus is better, he says. And he says that he's better than the prophets, he's better than the angels, he's better than Moses to lead his people. He provides a better Sabbath rest.

He's a better high priest because he's the great high priest. He provides a better covenant, a better sanctuary for worship, a better sacrifice than all the blood of bulls and goats.

And as the writer to the Hebrews, as he comes to the conclusion of his letter, he says that Jesus is better because he is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

He's the same in the past, he's the same in the present, and he's the same in the future. And that's the description he gives to us of Jesus. Jesus Christ, the best saviour you can trust in because he is not only the saviour who promises to you hope and life, but he also promises peace in death and security for all eternity.

And he says, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever. What a wonderful saviour. And my friend, what better Jesus to trust in today than the Jesus who is better than everything.

[17:28] Better than everything because he never changes towards us. Never changes at all. He's our constant. And so knowing the shortness of time and the length of eternity, who better for us to trust in than this Jesus for time and for eternity?

Who better to trust in than this Jesus? But even though Moses found comfort and security in the fact that the Lord was his only constant in life, he had to admit that there was something that had changed with mankind.

As Moses continues his prayer, he confesses that the curse upon mankind is what has changed us. So let's look secondly at the curse.

We've considered that the Lord is the only constant in our lives. But secondly, the curse. Look at verse 3. He says, 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're like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning.

[18:44] In the morning it flourishes and is renewed. In the evening it fades and withers. And in these words Moses presents to us the great contrast between the eternality of God and the mortality of mankind.

Because in verse 2 or verses 1 and 2 Moses confesses that even before the mountains were born and before the world was formed God was from everlasting to everlasting.

But Moses says that that's not the case with mankind. Because God says to mankind that they are to return to the dust. Return O children of man.

But we have to ask why? Why does the God who creates life and sustains life why does he command mankind to return to the dust?

Well the clue is in the word man in verse 3. Because that word man can also be translated as Adam. And so what God says to mankind is that they are to return to the dust.

[19:55] Return O children of Adam. And of course this immediately brings us back to the Garden of Eden and to the fall of Adam. In which Adam fell from that perfect estate wherein he was created by disobeying God's law.

Adam was created as you know in perfection. Created in the image and likeness of God. He reflected perfectly the glory of God and he possessed the free will to sin or not to sin.

And it's not that God was restricting and oppressive upon Adam. God had given Adam everything. He had given him a paradise of which he was able to enjoy all of God's creation with his wife and family.

As someone once put it the Garden of Eden was a garden full of yes but a single tree of no. A garden full of yes but a single tree of no.

God said that you may eat of every tree of the garden but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat of it for in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die.

[21:07] And we know what happened because we're still seeing the effects of Adam's disobedience today. When Adam fell God pronounced the curse upon Adam and upon all his posterity all the children of Adam were affected by the curse.

God said to Adam cursed is the ground because of you in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you and you shall eat the plants of the field by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground for out of it you were taken for you are dust and to dust you shall return.

And this is what Moses means when he says in verse 10 that the span of our life is but toil and trouble toil and trouble where we work we either work the ground or we have a job we work by the sweat of our brow and we do it until we return to the ground.

And my friend working the soil it's not only a reminder of where we came from it's also a reminder of where we are going. From the dust we came and to the dust we shall return.

And you know there's nothing more solemn than standing over an open grave and be reminded of the curse from dust we came to dust we shall return.

[22:38] And you know I was thinking about how true this is because last year I attempted to plant some potatoes. I'd never done it before and I thought I'd give it a go.

Especially as my predecessor Kenny Roor he was very successful in the vegetable plot behind the manse. So I thought well I'll try and find time to prepare the ground and plant the potatoes and I did.

But with a young family and with everything else that goes on in life I didn't find as much time to deal with the weeds. And as one thing led to another in the end I just had to abandon it because the weeds had taken over.

And you know if you were to look at what I had done if you were to look at it today if you were to come to the manse and have a look you would think that I was never there. You would think that I was never there because the weeds have taken over.

The curse has taken over. And you know I was thinking that the problem was I couldn't keep up with the curse. I couldn't keep up with the curse.

[23:44] And my friend the same is true about our life. We can't keep up with the curse. Because one day the curse which is upon us will take over.

We spend our life trying our utmost to keep up with the curse. We keep fit we eat healthy we take vitamins we receive treatment when necessary but the reality is we can't keep up with the curse.

Because one day the curse will take over. We can't keep up with the curse. And Moses reminds us here that that one day is very soon.

It's not far away. And with that Moses gives all these illustrations to emphasize the shortness and the brevity of our life. Because he says well the Lord's perspective on time a thousand years it's like yesterday.

It's already gone past. Our life is almost nothing. And he says that it's just like a watch in the night. The watch of the night it was well the duty of the watchman to stand in the watchtower protecting the city from attack.

[24:52] And there would be three watches in the night three parts of twelve hours each lasting four hours. It's not long. And what Moses says that well that's our life.

It's short. Passes so quickly. But more than that Moses says that our life it's like new grass. New grass with the morning sun. It springs up in the morning as the sun rises.

And it springs up full of youth full of strength full of vitality. But it doesn't take long for the sun to go round and the evening to come. And the grass begins to wither fade and die.

And David he also uses the same imagery in Psalm 103. You know the words well. God well he remembers we are dust and he our frame well knows.

Frail man his days are like the grass as flower and field he grows. For over it the wind doth pass and it away is gone and off the place where once it was it shall no more be known.

[26:03] The curse takes over because we can't keep up with the curse. And you know I believe that this is fitting with what Moses was saying because as we said he's about to die.

He has reached the end of his life. He's looking back over all the years that the Lord has given to him and he can see the Lord's faithfulness towards him but he can also see how short his life has been and that his life has passed in a moment.

It's been like a tale that is told gone past in a flash. But then he says in verse 7 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. Throughout his life Moses had seen many demonstrations of God's wrath against sin.

He had seen the plagues in Egypt he had seen the destruction of the golden calf but the ultimate demonstration of God's wrath against sin was death.

[27:15] In Egypt as you know the last plague the angel of the Lord passed over passed over all the houses that had blood on the lintel and the doorposts but it killed the firstborn of all the Egyptians.

The Egyptian army God's punishment drowned them in the Red Sea. The generation of the Israelites they died in the wilderness because of their constant complaining and disobedience and even Moses he was to die in the wilderness because he disobediently struck the rock for water instead of speaking to it as God had commanded.

Despite all the demonstrations of God's wrath throughout the history the ultimate demonstration of God's wrath was death. And the Apostle Paul he reminds us the solemnity of this curse the curse of sin and death when he says in his letter to the Romans the wages of sin is death.

The cost of being a disobedient sinner is death. But thankfully Paul didn't leave it there. He gives to us the remedy to our ruin.

He says the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

[28:39] And my friend we need to lay hold of this point that God so loved the world he gave to us the gift of his only begotten son the gift of a son who was blameless without sin yet made sin for us and at Calvary he bore our wrath he took our sin he endured our hell and he died our death.

Yes we all have to experience death unless Jesus comes again but Jesus entered into death so that we would not experience an eternal death in hell.

my friend this Jesus bore our wrath he took our sin he endured our hell he died our death all so that he could present to us sinners the free gift of God which is eternal life life life my friend we weren't created to die we were created to live we were born to live but because of the curse of sin and death that's upon us we need a new birth we need a new beginning we need to be born again because Jesus says to us except a man woman boy or girl except they be born again they cannot enter the kingdom of God my friend he has provided for us God has provided for us in Jesus Christ the gift of eternal life and it's a free gift you don't have to earn it you don't have to work for it no amount of church attendance or bible reading or religious righteousness will give you eternal life because it's not for sale it's not for sale it's free for the taking free for the taking it's yours if you want it it's on offer to you it's a free gift and in order to receive the free gift all you have to do is ask just ask ask and you will receive that's the promise that's the promise ask and you will receive but I must remind you you don't have much time you don't have much time because the offer of eternal life it ends at death and that's what Moses says our years will come to an end whether the years of our life are 70 or if we are given the strength to reach 80 or even past 80 he says it's not long it's not long and yet as we know only too well death is no respecter of persons doesn't ask us how old we are death never asks us if we're ready death never asks us if we are prepared if we've set everything in order death is the great enemy that just takes and takes and takes because we can't keep up with the curse the curse just takes over the curse just takes over but as we said earlier the desire of Moses was that we would all come to the same conclusion that he came to when he considered the shortness of time and the length of eternity because if God is the only constant in our life and we are all under the curse of Adam then the conclusion we must come to is to pray like Moses we must pray like Moses so let's look at the conclusion to the prayer of Moses look at the conclusion look at verse 12 he says so teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom return oh 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

I once read a quote that summed up the gospel in only a few words life is uncertain death is sure sin is the cause Christ is the cure life is uncertain death is sure sin is the cause Christ is the cure Christ is the cure and you know that's the conclusion that Moses came to and that's the conclusion we must come to as we consider the shortness of time and the length of eternity life is uncertain death is sure sin is the cause Christ is the only cure and Moses prays that we would all look at life from the right perspective that we would all look at life from God's perspective and see that time is short and eternity is long that this world is brief and the next world is eternal that our life will come to an end but the next will not and it was knowing that an eternity in heaven or an eternity in hell awaits us

Moses prays teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom my friend what's the wisest thing we could ever do what's the wisest thing we could ever do well the oldest psalm in the Psalter with the most relevant truth tells us that the wisest thing we could ever do is number our days consider our life the wisest thing we could ever do is to consider every day of our life as a blessing from the Lord and a privilege to love follow and serve him the wisest thing we could ever do is not to waste our life living for the moment enjoying the pleasures of this world seeking the praise of others my friend the wisest thing we could ever do is to seek the Lord while he is to be found while he is to be found the cut off point is death while he is to be found and you know it was King Solomon the wisest man who ever lived he wrote a sermon called Ecclesiastes that's what the book of Ecclesiastes is it's a sermon by the preacher and in that sermon

[35:38] Solomon is asking the question what's the point to life why are we here what is life all about and as Solomon analyses life and all that it entails he can see that life is well it's this continuous circle it's a circle of life and death life and death life and death he says when one generation comes the other generation goes and life goes on life goes on it's one big circle and as Moses continues Solomon continues through his sermon he says that there's a time for everything in life to everything there's a season time for every purpose under heaven he says there's even a time to be born and there's a time to die and in his sermon Solomon confesses that he has tried everything tried absolutely everything he's tried all the pleasures of this world he's gained all the pleasures and all the riches of this world and he says they're all vanity vanity of vanity say the preacher all is vanity but right at the end of his sermon having asked the question what's the point to life why are we here what's it all about right at the end of the sermon read it for yourself

Ecclesiastes 13 Solomon comes to the same conclusion that Moses came to because he says that we're all going to our long home we're all going to the grave in which the dust will return to the earth as it was and Solomon says let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter fear God keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man fear God keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man fear God keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man fear God keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man and what both Moses and Solomon mean by fearing God is applying God's word to our life applying it to our life because it's not just about hearing what we need to do it's not just about being told from a pulpit or from anyone else about the shortness of time and the length of eternity it's not just about being reminded that life is uncertain and death is sure and sin is the cause and Christ is the cure it's not just about knowing the remedy to our ruin we have to act upon it we have to seek the Lord we have to repent of our sin we have to change our ways we have to ask the Lord to come into our heart we have to bow our knee in submission to King Jesus we have to commit our life to loving following and serving this Jesus and we have to do it now before it is too late we have to do it now now is the accepted time today is the day of salvation my friend

I hope and pray that before we die you might think it's a morbid thing to speak about but I tell you for the Christian some can't wait the best is yet to come but I hope and pray that before we die we will all come to the same conclusion that Moses came to that we will see that the Lord is the only constant in our life that we will see that all the changes around us in our homes our families our circumstances all these changes they're all because of the curse but the conclusion we must all come to is the shortness of time and the length of eternity the conclusion we must all come to is to pray like Moses prayed teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom and you know it was because of this wonderful psalm that Isaac

Watts he paraphrased it in the words of the well known hymn you have it before you where he says our God our help in ages past our hope for years to come our shelter from the stormy blast and our eternal home my dear friend make this new year a new year a new beginning and a new start to your life by seeking the Lord while he is to be found and calling upon him while he is near because life is uncertain death is sure sin is the cause Christ the only cure may the

Lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray O Lord enable us to pray like thy servant of old to pray daily teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom that we would know that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom that we would fear God and keep his commandments for this is our whole duty glory to glorify thee and to enjoy thee forever we thank thee O Lord for thy word that it is so relevant to us it may have been written thousands of years ago but yet it speaks to us today and it will speak to us a thousand years from now we bless thee O Lord for thy faithfulness to us keep us Lord in the year that lies ahead keep us by thy side keep us Lord at thy footstool help us to know the promise that behind before thou hast beset and laid on me thine hand such knowledge is too strange for me too high to understand the marvel that thou art the

[42:18] God who keeps us who keeps us each and every day go before us then we pray thee bless us and do us good take away our iniquity for Jesus sake Amen shall sing in conclusion the concluding words of that psalm psalm 90 psalm 90 verse 14 page 350 with thy tender mercies lord as early satisfy so we rejoice shall all our days and still be glad in thee down to the end of the psalm and let the beauty of the lord our god be us upon our handiworks establish thou establish them each one these verses to God's praise oh with thy tender mercies lord unscaredly satisfied so we rejoice

The Lord our days And still be glad in thee According us The days of thee Wherein we dream of heart And years wherein We ever see So do thou make us fly O let thy word And power appear

Thy servants' faith be poor And show unto their children dear Thy glory evermore And let the beauty of the Lord Our God be us upon Our heart The works Establish Thou Establish