

Because We Have an Eternal God

Psalm 90

Main Idea: Because our lives are cut short as a consequence of His anger against sin, we need the eternal God to fill our lives with that which has eternal value.

Psalm 90 has to be one of the oldest psalms, because it is a psalm written by Moses. We are not given the historical background, but it sounds as if it were written from the perspective of Moses as an old man rather than as a young man in Egypt, or as a 40 year old fleeing into the desert. Verse 10, delineating seventy to eighty years as a lifespan, sounds as if it was written after Numbers 13 when Israel turned away from entering the Promised Land and the wilderness death sentence was imposed on all the adults.

So the perspective of the author seems to be as if shortly before he died, Moses were reflecting on Israel's relationship to God, looking back past the 40 years in the wilderness and the 400 years slavery in Egypt, all the way back to Abraham's time. Let's stand and read this psalm together as it appears on the screen.

Psalm 90 (NASB)

¹Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations.

²Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.

³You turn man back into dust and say, "Return, O children of men."

⁴For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it passes by, or as a watch in the night.

⁵You have swept them away like a flood, they fall asleep; in the morning they are like grass which sprouts anew.

⁶In the morning it flourishes and sprouts anew; toward evening it fades and withers away.

⁷For we have been consumed by Your anger and by Your wrath we have been dismayed.

⁸You have placed our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your presence.

⁹For all our days have declined in Your fury; we have finished our years like a sigh.

¹⁰As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, or if due to strength, eighty years, yet their pride is but labor and sorrow; for soon it is gone and we fly away.

¹¹Who understands the power of Your anger and Your fury, according to the fear that is due You?

¹²So teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom.

¹³Do return, O Lord; how long will it be?

And be sorry for Your servants.

¹⁴O satisfy us in the morning with Your lovingkindness, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.

¹⁵Make us glad according to the days You have afflicted us, and the years we have seen evil.

¹⁶Let Your work appear to Your servants and Your majesty to their children.

*17 Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us;
and confirm for us the work of our hands;
Yes, confirm the work of our hands.*

Recently at my uncle's funeral, one of my cousins gave a short summary of the Tuggy family starting with a shoe cobbler, Henry Tuggy in England who was the son of a James Tuggy. Henry Tuggy loved the Lord and his main claim to fame was that he studied in Spurgeon's Preachers' College. After immigrating to Colorado in 1869, he became the first president of the YMCA in Denver. His son Edward, also loved the Lord and brought up my grandfather, Harold, to know and serve the Lord. My grandfather was an engineer who became a missionary in S. America spending his whole life there, and is buried there. My dad who grew up with the Lord as his God, faithfully served the Lord his whole life. So I grew up in a family that loved the Lord and served Him, and I came to love Him too. Then Cheryl's and my children grew up understanding God's claims on their lives. I love to look back and see God's grace, His goodness displayed to all these generations of Tuggys, all the way to my grandchildren.

In verse 1 of Psalm 90, Moses looked back at all the generations in Israel's history, all the way back to God's call to Abraham to leave his home in Ur of the Chaldees, all the way through the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, through the lives of Joseph and his eleven brothers and through the Israelites' sojourn of 400 years in Egypt. As he looked back, he could say, *"Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations."*

One of the outstanding things that one sees from the biblical narrative in Genesis, as well as the commentary in Hebrews 11, is that these ancestors of Moses were never at home in the land where they lived. In fact Hebrews 11:13-16 makes it clear that during their lifetimes, they never were able to take full possession of the land promised to them by God. But Moses says that in all that time, God Himself was their dwelling place. I love the picture this paints.

Home is the place of refuge, comfort, safety, and rest. I got to observe that my dad was always "at home" in His identity in Christ. Dad's was not a show of religiosity, but a reality lived. Living in many places and in different circumstances, Dad always seemed at home. Even in the face of turmoil, injustice, and troubles around him, Dad was safe, content, at rest, and relaxed in the God who was his refuge, his dwelling place. You see, he witnessed the same thing in his dad, my grandfather Harold Tuggy, who learned all about it from his dad.

So at the time he wrote Psalm 90, Moses had come to understand just what it meant to have God as Israel's dwelling place in all those generations. God was the One to whom the generations before Moses went for refuge. He was the only One they could go to for comfort, for safety, and for rest. Moses cherished the notion that God had been that dwelling place for all those past generations since Abraham. What a comfort it must have been for Moses to understand that God was also the dwelling place for the Israelites who were wandering around in the desert, continually exposed to change and danger, and He would be the dwelling place for His people in the coming days!

The reason that God can be the dwelling place for all generations is that He is eternal. *"Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God."* He will always be there because just as He has no

beginning, He has no end. Verses 3-6 contrast the mortality of man with the eternity of God. Man is transitory and Moses uses various metaphors to describe just how fleeting man's life is.

The Tanakh, an Old Testament translation by the Jewish Publication Society, translates Verse 3 saying, *"You return man to dust. You decreed, 'Return you mortals.'" When God says, "Return to dust," we do just that. From God's perspective, even those of generations previous to Moses who lived closer to a thousand years, lived only a short time. You see, there is some comparison by proportion between a seventy year lifespan and a thousand years, but there is no proportion at all between time and eternity. One can only contrast time and eternity. And so man, as if caught in a flood or a tidal wave, is swept through time toward eternity. Our lives are no more permanent than a weed that sprouts in the morning and dries up and dies before evening.*

In verses 7-11 we read that our mortality has been pre-determined because of the fury of God's anger against sin. We are the mortal sons of Adam, and God's sentence of death is fully carried out on all mankind. He has placed our sins before Him, even the things we consider to be a secret are laid bare before the light of His presence. Verse 9 speaks of our lives passing like a sigh or a whisper. God has set our normal lifespan to seventy to eighty years, but our life, in the words of V 10, is *"...soon cut off and we fly away."*

Then V 11 asks *"Who understands the power of God's anger?"* Note that God's anger is more than righteous indignation. Rather it is fury, an extreme anger. There's a fury in His anger that causes us to fear in the true sense of a fear of God. You see, God's wrath far exceeds the most intense apprehensions which even the most thoughtful people, the most serious people have of it. It is impossible to have too great a dread of God's wrath because the fury of His wrath cannot be overstated. There could never be an excess of God's anger because He is perfectly righteous and one hundred percent just, and His justice is outraged by the violation of His just law. And it's important to realize that God's anger is un-tempered by His love. The Bible shows Him to hold both His anger and His love simultaneously to the full degree.

And so V 12 brings us back to the reality of the short time that we have here on earth. *"Teach us to number our days that we may apply a heart of wisdom."* A beginning point for wisdom is to recognize who we are and who God is. We increasingly fear Him when we recognize how transitory we are and how He is unchanging from eternity past to eternity future.

Doesn't it seem to be almost a childish prayer to ask God for the wisdom for numbering our days? Even a child can count to seventy or eighty birthdays. But isn't it interesting how though by April 15th, most Americans can count how much money they made during the year and how much they will have to pay the IRS; though a man can easily count how much he "lost" or "gained" in paper value of stocks; though scientists can calculate how to put a man on the moon; though a man can count how much more he needs to make to carry a mortgage, still a man can't count the number of years that God gave him on earth and be wise in their use. That requires a wisdom that is beyond man.

We often seem to have the same perspective about our lives that the comedian had who said, "I expect to live forever. ...so far, so good!" And so V 12 brings us back to the reality of the short time that we have here on earth "Lord, teach us how short our mortal life is so that we can present to You

a heart of wisdom." May our days be consecrated to you Lord, in our sad mortality which lies under the cloud of God's wrath.

In V14 - 15 Moses recognized that only in the Lord's lovingkindness could sinful, mortal man be satisfied in this short life. His prayer was that they might experience that mercy early in life, "in the morning," so that the remainder of their life would be filled with joy and gladness. *"Make us glad according to the days You have afflicted us and the years we have seen evil."*

Moses finishes the Psalm with three more petitions. First of all in Verse 16 he prays, *"Let Your work appear to Your servants and Your majesty to their children."* Indeed God's majesty is seen through His work. He reveals Himself through His work, and as He is revealed, we see His majesty. Though you see God's wrath against sin mentioned so clearly in the early part of this psalm, the work of God that Moses was talking about was not merely God's work in punishing or disciplining Israel. The work of God that most shows His majesty is the work of provision and restoration that demonstrates His glory as a merciful loving God simultaneously with His being a just, powerful, and righteous God.

God maintains His glory in judging the world because indeed, it would be an affront to His glory to not judge the darkness since He is altogether light. But it is the work of salvation, in particular, that displays the glory of God. As we see in Ephesians 1, the glory of God never shines brighter than when His gracious nature is displayed through Jesus Christ and Jesus' work in the Christian. That applies not just to the individual Christian but also to God's work in the church. Indeed, as Eph. 1:22 & 23 says, Jesus is the head of the Church which is His body. And this Church is the fullness of Jesus Christ who fills all in all with His glory.

Now look with me at verse 17. *"Let the favor of the Lord be upon us."* The King James Version translates it *"Let the beauty of the Lord be upon us."* Both translations are accurate, but I prefer the translation "beauty" because God's favor is shown, not primarily in material goods He gives us but in His character displayed in His people. Moses petition was that the imprint of the Lord Himself might be upon Israel; not the god of their own creation, but the imprint of the Eternal One, the Creator, who revealed Himself in His Son Jesus.

The representation of God's beauty suffers immensely when He is described through the limits of our preferences, our intellects, or even our imaginations. Rather, God is truly represented in the many facets of character that His Word describes. For instance, His beauty is only enhanced because His righteousness and his just wrath against sin militate against His love and mercy. His glory is revealed because they are all reconciled in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. God's splendor shines out of eternity past and remains unchanged tomorrow. He rules the whole universe and yet has time to answer my prayer and yours. All created things will worship Him yet He came to serve, not to be served. And the One who instantly created with just a word, patiently waits for His new creation to mature, to be transformed to the glory of His likeness.

V 17 ends saying *"Confirm for us the work of our hands, yes confirm the work of our hands."* This is a prayer that we too need to pray, that our work will have eternal significance because we are in His work. That should be our aspiration.

Moses had to pray this prayer, Psalm 90, in faith, never really understanding how God would answer it. Look again at verse 13. *"Do return O Lord; how long will it be? And be sorry for Your servants."* The translation "return" might be rendered better as "turn". "Turn from your wrath Lord. Turn back to your people. How long will it be before you turn?"

But we in faith can look back and see how God has answered Moses' prayer in Jesus Christ. God indeed could be Moses' dwelling place and can be our dwelling place, not because we do so good a job of sticking with Him but because Jesus broke down the wall dividing us from God. We can take refuge in God instead of seeking refuge from Him!

Because in our place, Jesus took all of the Father's just anger against our sin, because in His body He suffered the penalty God has to carry out against our sin, we can have peace with God. He is a God to be feared, and we still need to reverence Him, but we are no longer the objects of His fury if we are "in Christ" because Christ already took on the full force of His fury on the cross when He cried out, *"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* The Bible records that afterwards, Jesus triumphantly cried, *"It is finished."* The work of redemption was done! The fury of God's wrath was appeased. There is tremendous joy as we experience God's mercy in Christ!

Jesus is made to us wisdom and power and holiness. It is He who can teach us to number our days and live those days wisely. It is Jesus who satisfies us, giving us joy and peace throughout our lives, even when we are inundated by mortality and failure and sorrow and disappointment and weakness.

The display of the beauty of the Lord in our very nature as new creatures in Christ surely brings Him glory. It is Jesus who restores His image in us, the imprint of God upon us, so that His beauty is seen in us. It is Jesus who is the head of the church, His body, which is the fullness of Him who fills everything in every place with His glory. The church is the display cabinet where His glorious beauty is best seen.

And our all-powerful Savior is the one who makes our lives have meaning. He is the One who gives the work of our hands eternal significance. Yes, as short as this life is and as affected as it is by the curse, by God's anger against sin, there is eternal life in Jesus, not just an eternity in His presence someday, but it is a life of eternal significance in our mortal life on this earth. It all starts when you put your faith in Jesus and start to walk with Him!

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V 1 – 6 Eternity of God c/w mortality of man

The eternal "dwelling place"

Metaphors of transitory nature of man

V 7 – 11 God's wrath makes man transitory

Sin as the object of God's anger

God's anger examined

V 12 – 17 Supplication for wisdom and grace

Numbering our days

Seeing His mercy early on

His beauty (favor) upon us

Our work established

Family Life Groups

Sermon Discussion Questions

“Because We Have an Eternal God”

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1. What are some practical ways through which you can find God to be your dwelling place like Moses did?
2. What practical ways does God open up for you to help your children and grandchildren to know God as their dwelling place?
3. What are some practical ways of keeping the perspective of “numbered days” always before you so that you can apply your heart to wisdom?
4. What will it look like for the “beauty of the Lord” to be upon you? Is there some way you do not reflect His beauty that the group could pray for His work in you?

Questions? Feel free to contact Pastor Dan Tuggy at dan@ebcsalem.com.