

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 3-29-15 PM NOTES
"THE PRAYERS OF MOSES" (PART 3)
PSALM 90:1-12
#12 in Series, "Learning to Pray From the Experts"

I. A Prayer Concerning God's Eternality (vv. 1-2)

"Psalm 90 is a reflection on human mortality and the brevity of life, plus quiet confidence in God who is the steadfast hope of the righteous. This Psalm is probably the greatest passage in the Bible contrasting the grandeur of God with man's frailty."
—James Montgomery Boice

Malachi 3:6 (NKJV) "For I *am* the Lord, I do not change..."

James 4:14b (NKJV) "For what *is* your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away."

II. A Prayer Concerning Man's Frailty (vv. 3-6)

Genesis 3:19b (NKJV) "For dust you *are*, and to dust you shall return."

III. A Prayer Concerning God's Holiness (v. 7)

Numbers 14:6-10a (HCSB) "⁶ Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who scouted out the land, tore their clothes ⁷ and said to the entire Israelite community: 'The land we passed through and explored is an extremely good land. ⁸ If the Lord is pleased with us, He will bring us into this land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and give it to us. ⁹ Only don't rebel against the Lord, and don't be afraid of the people of the land, for we will devour them. Their protection has been removed from them, and the Lord is with us. Don't be afraid of them!' ¹⁰ While the whole community threatened to stone them..."

IV. A Prayer Concerning Man's Sin (vv. 8-10)

A. God Will Judge Our Sin (v. 8)

Psalms 139:2-3 (NKJV) "² You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. ³ You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways."

B. God Will Measure Our Lives (vv. 9-10)

Philippians 1:21 (NKJV) “For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain.”

*Just a few more weary days and then,
I'll fly away;
To a land where joys shall never end,
I'll fly away.*

*I'll fly away, O glory,
I'll fly away;
When I die, hallelujah, by and by,
I'll fly away.*

—Alfred Brumley (1932)

V. A Prayer Concerning God's Blessing (vv. 11-12)

Ephesians 5:16 (ESV) “making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.”

- Resolved, never to lose one moment of time, but to improve it in the most profitable way I possibly can.
- Resolved, to live with all my might while I do live.
- Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life.
- Resolved, to think much on all occasions of my own dying, and of the common circumstances which attend death.
- Resolved, that I will live so as I shall wish I had done when I come to die.

—Jonathan Edwards' Resolutions

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Notice that the heading on this Psalm says, “A Prayer of Moses the man of God”. While the text is inspired by the Holy Spirit, the headings are not inspired. However, most all Old Testament scholars believe that this heading is accurate. This is a prayer prayed and recorded by Moses. This makes it the oldest of the Psalms. It was likely written just after the Israelites came to Kadesh-Barnea on the border of

the Promised Land and refused to trust God and refused to enter in (Numbers 13, 14). As a result, all those 20 years old and above with the exception of Joshua and Caleb were sentenced to wander in the wilderness and die. The Promised Land would be for their descendents, but they would miss it.

The text itself gives evidence that it was written by Moses. Much of what is said in this Psalm can be tied to incidents in the wilderness journey and the phrasing is similar to the phrasing in the first five books of the Bible that Moses wrote. I am convinced that this indeed is a Psalm and a prayer of Moses.

We live in a world that moves at warp speed. We are continuously busy and often controlled by the technology that we thought would make our lives easier. Remember the days when you could go on vacation and be “unreachable”? Now with smart phones, tablets, and laptops everywhere we go, we can be found. I remember calling a member to ask them a question and when they answered my call they were in Thailand on a mission trip with our church. I would guess that the majority of the things that we deal with through our technology are trivial and yet they occupy us almost constantly. There is a reason that the writings of the Puritans and Jonathan Edwards and Spurgeon have a depth to them and a richness that little being written today has. If Jonathan Edwards had possessed our technology, we would likely have never heard of him today. He would have spent his meditation and writing time answering emails. We find ourselves constantly pressured to focus on what is immediate but not the most important. We are in desperate need of coming back to what is really important and stop focusing on what is screaming for our time. To put it another way, we need to apply a Biblical, eternal perspective to our lives instead of blindly giving in to that which loudly demands our time and attention, but is not all that important from an eternal perspective. I believe that we should not only strive for that in our daily lives, but it should also be true in our worship services when we gather together on Sunday mornings and Sunday evenings. This is why our services might seem kind of dull and boring compared to some others. That is by intention. There is no smoke and light show. We don’t intersperse the message with clips from popular movies. We want to focus on songs that allow us to worship because they contain the truth of Scripture and messages that bring us back to the glorious Gospel and present the unchanging, glorious, Triune God we worship in all of His glory. We desire that nothing distracts us from the glorious truths of Scripture. This prayer of Moses is a prayer that focuses on an eternal perspective which Psalms 90:12 says leads us “...to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”

I. A Prayer Concerning God’s Eternality (V1-2)

James Montgomery Boice gives us a good summary of this prayer that Moses prayed. “Psalm 90 is a reflection on human mortality and the brevity of life, plus quiet confidence in God who is the steadfast hope of the righteous. This Psalm is probably the greatest passage in the Bible contrasting the grandeur of God with man’s frailty.” [Quoted in Danny Aiken Sermon on Psalm 90, *Who Is God and What Is Man?*]. Moses indeed gives us a biblical perspective of God and of man. **Malachi 3:6 (NKJV)** says of God, “For I *am* the Lord, I do not change...”. Compare what Malachi 3:6 says of God to what James says of man in **James 4:14b (NKJV)** “For what *is* your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.” What a contrast! We see in verse 2 of this Psalm that “Even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God”. Of man we see in verse 3 (NASB), “You turn man back into dust...” That changes our perspective.

The Hebrew word translated “dwelling place” in verse 1 means refuge or even hiding place. It is a place of refreshment, a haven, a place to escape the things that desire to pull us down. Our refuge, our place of peace and safety is not found in anything that the world has to offer. It is found in God Himself. In contrast to everything in this world that passes away, God is eternal. He was, He is, He forever more will be. He existed before the mountains were formed and really before every material thing was formed. He alone is from everlasting to everlasting. There has never been a time when He was not. Everything it seems is changing around us, but God is our refuge and He never changes. Moses takes great comfort in that. I can picture Moses having to deal most all day everyday with the problems and complaints of these

2-3 million people. How discouraging! What kept him centered? It was his love relationship with the Lord. He went to the eternal One who was his dwelling place, his refuge, and his hiding place.

In verse 2, we are reminded of His eternity. To ground us in the busyness and chaos of all that seeks to hijack our time, our priorities, our joy in Him, Moses points us to theology – the study of God. He says that we must set our minds on Him in prayer and praise. Then and only then will we get a proper perspective. The truth about God that he points us to is His eternity. Hundreds of generations of people come and go, but God is constant and eternal. Only God is eternal. The angels had a beginning, because our God created them. Remember that Satan was a created angel. Every human being had a beginning. But God has no beginning. He is eternal. We will live forever in the future, but we are not eternal for there was a time that we were not and God created us in our mother's womb. God has no beginning. He is eternal.

II. A Prayer Concerning Man's Frailty (V3-6)

In order to really appreciate God's awesomeness, we must see man's puniness. God is great; we are not. These verses do not fit well with those who have a man-centered worldview. They contradict the prosperity movement. These verses were not meant to make you feel good about yourself. They were meant to move you to turn your focus on God and not yourself and then to feel good about the awesomeness of God.

In Psalm 90:3 the word translated destruction is better translated "dust". **Genesis 3:19b (NKJV)** "For dust you *are*, and to dust you shall return." How's that for self esteem and having your best life now? The point is that we are frail and finite. In stark contrast to our eternal Lord, we have a date with death and these bodies return to dust. We are weak and temporal. God is eternal, but we are temporal.

In Psalm 90:4-6 we see a contrast concerning time. Time for God and time for man is not the same. From God's eternal perspective, a thousand years is one day, like a watch in the night (3 hours). So many human beings have lost sight of the fact that we will die, short of the Lord's return. I often share at funerals that statistics show 10 out of every 10 people die. For us a thousand years is like an eternity. For God, it is like a 3 hour watch in the night.

Look at the illustrations that Moses uses of frail man. He is like dust (V3), like a 3 hour watch in the night (V4), like a brief flood after a hard shower (V5a), like a sleep that seems like a few moments (V5b), like grass that shoots up but before evening is burned up and wilted away, (V5b-6). The thing that all of these have in common is that they are so brief. We are truly here for a little time and then vanish away.

III. A Prayer Concerning God's Holiness (V7)

Death is not the only problem that we face. Actually death is rooted in a deeper problem. That problem is sin. Because God is holy, there must be consequences for our sin. Why is there death and judgment? It is because of the wrath and judgment of God in response to our sin. The specific sin that elicited God's wrath and anger that Moses refers to is likely the sin of unbelief when the Israelites refused to trust God and turned back into the desert rather than enter the Promised Land that God had already given them. Numbers 13-14 tells us the story of Moses sending 12 spies into the land of Canaan to bring back a report. The summary of what happened is that 10 of the 12 came back affirming that the land was indeed a rich land, but there were giants and fortified cities there. They recommended that the mission be aborted. Only Joshua and Caleb believed God and said, "Let's go!" **Numbers 14:6-10a (HCSB)** "6 Joshua son of Nun and Caleb son of Jephunneh, who were among those who scouted out the land, tore their clothes ⁷ and said to the entire Israelite community: 'The land we passed through and explored is an extremely good land. ⁸ If the Lord is pleased with us, He will bring us into this land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and give it to us. ⁹ Only don't rebel against the Lord, and don't be afraid of the people of the land, for we will devour them. Their protection has been removed from them, and the Lord is with us. Don't be afraid of them!' ¹⁰ While the whole community threatened to stone them..."

Because God is holy, sin must be judged and one of the most hideous sins we can commit is unbelief. Unbelief says to God, “you are not worthy of my trust; you can’t deliver what You promise.” That is no minor sin.

IV. A Prayer Concerning Man’s Sin (V8-10)

Moses is pouring out his heart to God in prayer. These were people that Moses loved and now they would suffer God’s wrath for their sin and then die.

A. God Will Judge Our Sin (V8)

Don’t ever listen to any Bible teacher who tries to eradicate the wrath of God. His wrath as much a manifestation of His glory as is His love. When Moses looks at all the suffering that is coming as the result of the refusal of the people to go into the land that God promised, he doesn’t draw the deduction that there is some problem with God. He goes in the opposite direction. Someone compared modern man to those of days gone by and said that today man looks at suffering in the world and says “Why suffering?” Wiser men of days gone by looked at suffering and said, “Why sin?” It was sin that brought suffering into the world. That doesn’t mean that every episode of suffering can be directly attributed to a specific sin that the sufferer committed. It does mean that the fact of sin in the world explains the fact of suffering. Moses wants us to look at suffering, death, and judgment and draw a line back to sin. God has appointed suffering and death and judgment in response to sin.

In verse 8, Moses speaks of our “secret sins”. Our sins are never secret to Him! Everything done in the secret area of our thoughts is known by God. The Psalmist said in **Psalms 139:2-3 (NKJV)** “² You know my sitting down and my rising up; You understand my thought afar off. ³ You comprehend my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.” No sin “slips by” Him. It was not just for our open flagrant sins that Jesus took the wrath of God on the cross. It was also for the secret sins that no one else but God knew about. Oh how studying the Scriptures on the wrath of God should drive us to worship the Son of God who took our deserved wrath on Calvary’s cross.

B. God Will Measure Our Lives (V9-10)

The point is that our days here are quick! They are like a sigh or a moan (NIV) and they are passed away, they are gone. Oh how brief are our days here. Moses notes that a normal life is about 70 years and sometimes an extended life is 80, but he is making the point that life is so short even if we live to be 80. What is 70 or 80 years compared to eternity? There are some people who experience phenomenal health and long life. I remember reading articles about fitness and nutrition pioneer Jack LaLane. Even at 70, he had muscles that were well defined. On his 70th birthday, he swam a distance of a mile pulling 70 rowboats and several passengers in one of them. I saw a picture of Jack LaLane in his 90’s and he looked his age. He died of pneumonia at age 96. Someone may say, “That is amazing!” It is pretty impressive, but the fact is that he died and 96 years compared to eternity is like a moan or a sigh.

The fact is that however long and healthy our life is, we are going to die. Death itself is the result of the wrath of God against sin coming into the world. We are going to be cut off from life and “fly away”, never to be seen or heard from in this world again. That ought to humble us!

How can we leave these depressing verses and not share the glorious truth of the Gospel? Because Jesus Christ absorbed the wrath of God for all who would repent of sin and believe on Him, that time of death is not just a reminder that our time here is short; it is also a reminder to affirm what the Apostle Paul said in **Philippians 1:21 (NKJV)** “For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain.” We can take Moses’ phrase about flying away and re-interpret it in light of the Gospel and say with the old song:

*Just a few more weary days and then,
I’ll fly away;
To a land where joys shall never end,
I’ll fly away.*

*I’ll fly away, O glory,
I’ll fly away;*

*When I die, hallelujah, by and by,
I'll fly away.*

- Alfred Brumley (1932)

V. A Prayer Concerning God's Blessing (V11-12)

In light of the brevity of our time here before we fly away, what ought we to do? The first part of verse 11 is a rhetorical question, but it demands a response. Moses says that we must be aware of limitations of life here on a fallen planet under the deserved wrath of God. We must utilize every moment of time that God gives us here. What is a heart of wisdom? It is a realistic view of our physical life here and the permanence of eternity. To those who have never come to Christ, there must be the realization that the ultimate eternal wrath of God is after this life in a literal Hell. Face the fact that you are not going to live forever and when you fly away, you will not be headed up, but down. Instead of going to a "land where joys shall never end", those without Christ will be going to a land where there is no joy, no hope and no relief.

There is also a strong word here for Christians. Verse 12 is an admonition to utilize the allotted time we have with wisdom. The reality is that we don't know the allotted time so we take each day realizing that it may be our last. Don't put off that which God tells us to do. **Ephesians 5:16 (ESV)** "making the best use of the time, because the days are evil." Moses would add to that that we should also remember that the time is short.

Some would say that Jonathan Edwards is the greatest theologian ever born in America. In 1722 – 1723 when Edwards was 18 and 19 he wrote 70 resolutions that were in reality purpose statements for his life. Several of those resolutions had to do with what Moses is calling for us to do in verse 12. Let me give you some of these resolutions that served to enable Edwards to discipline his life to be mightily used of God.

- Resolved, Never to lose one moment of time, but to improve it in the most profitable way I possibly can.
- Resolved, to live with all my might while I do live.
- Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life.
- Resolved, to think much on all occasions of my own dying, and of the common circumstances which attend death.
- Resolved, that I will live so as I shall wish I had done when I come to die.

I submit to you that this is a good illustration of what it means to "number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

CONCLUSION

Learn to pray as Moses prayed. His prayer focuses on the eternality of God and short time on this earth that has been given to man. Apart from the return of the Lord, we are all going to die. I found an old church directory from the 1980's in a file I was cleaning out last week. As I turned the pages I was sobered by what I saw. On most every page there were several people that I would think, "I remember doing their funeral, and theirs, and theirs, oh yes and theirs." It was sobering. When I came here as Pastor, Kathy and I were both 36 years old. Our 5 children ranged in age from 12 years old down to 10 months old. Truly as Moses acknowledged in his prayer, our lives are so fragile. I have done more funerals of young people than I want to even think about. Our days are numbered. May we ever be aware of that and live with a heart of wisdom.