

# A Prayer for God's Beauty to Be upon Us

Psalm 90:1-17

Halifax: 15 April 2018, 10:30 AM

## Introduction:

Today, I am starting a new sermon series.

- We are going to be looking at *The Christian in Every Stage of Life*.
- My plan is to show how God is at work to beautify and bless His people, and how they are to shine forth for Him in every stage of life from the cradle to the grave.

We are going to begin with our theme song for this series—a Psalm of Focus.

- If you have been around here for long, you know that it is my normal practice to choose a Psalm as a theme song related to what am preaching on.

The Psalm I have chosen to sing along with this sermon series on *The Christian in Every Stage of Life* is Psalm 90.

- It is very appropriate because it is a prayer for God's beauty to be upon us in our lives as His people.
- This is the prayer the we need to lift up to God during this series—
  - for the church's babies—that God's grace and beauty would be seen upon them;
  - for the church's young adults—that God's grace and beauty would be upon them;
  - for the church's married people, and the church's seniors, and all the other stages of life that we will be looking at—that God's grace and beauty will shine forth upon them.

Psalm 90, we are told, is a prayer of Moses, the man of God.

- He opens the prayer (verses 1-6) with a most marvellous declaration to God—that He Himself, the eternal God, is our dwelling place.
  - We will look at what this means to us—it means everything!
- But then in verses 7-11, he speaks about the reality of what Israel had experienced during the forty years that he had spent leading the people of God...
  - It was a period of forty years of living under the anger of God—under His chastening hand that destroyed a whole generation in the wilderness...years of exposure of sin and of terror in which little was accomplished...
- But this leads him to his earnest pleading in verses 12-17 that the next generation will be different...
  - that they would know the joy and gladness of serving God...
  - that they would have His grace and beauty upon them and would live fruitful lives for His glory.

And I think it bears pointing out that the LORD actually answered this prayer!

- The forty years that followed wilderness were some of the best years of Israel!
  - They went from rebellion and judgment in the wilderness to faithfulness—
    - They had the joy of serving God and experiencing His grace in their lives as they conquered Canaan and received their blessed inheritance in the land.
  - Judges 2:7 summarises this wonderful period with these words: **So the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD which He had done for Israel.**

- Perhaps we ought unite our hearts in praying for what Moses prayed in Psalm 90—
  - for our own lives, for our congregation, for our denomination, for the whole catholic church the world over!
  - One of the tactics of the devil is to make us think that mediocrity is all we can ever expect.
    - Don't settle for that lie!
    - By God's grace in Jesus Christ, you can live godly lives, have godly families, and we can have a godly church—indeed the whole church can be godly in the coming generation.
    - Your responsibility begins with you, then with your family, then with your church, and so on.
      - But if you do not look to the Lord in faith, if you do not expect Him to reward you as you diligently seek Him, then mediocrity is what you will get.
- So over the next few weeks as we look at the blessing that God has for each stage of life as His people, let us earnestly lift up Psalm 90 to Him in faith.
  - And remember what I always say to you...you do not sing this prayer alone...
  - This is ultimately the prayer of Jesus Christ, the head of the church—we join Him in singing this prayer, and the Father always hears Him.
    - Ultimately, this prayer will be answered, but it is answered more or less in each generation—in some times and places much more than in others—as we join our hearts in supplication with His in faith.

Listen carefully now as I read it to you. Psalm 90...

**Psalm 90:1-17: A Prayer of Moses the man of God.**» **1** Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. **2** Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You *are* God. **3** You turn man to destruction, and say, “Return, O children of men.” **4** For a thousand years in Your sight *are* like yesterday when it is past, and *like* a watch in the night. **5** You carry them away *like* a flood; *they are* like a sleep. In the morning they are like grass *which* grows up: **6** in the morning it flourishes and grows up; in the evening it is cut down and withers. **7** For we have been consumed by Your anger, and by Your wrath we are terrified. **8** You have set our iniquities before You, our secret *sins* in the light of Your countenance. **9** For all our days have passed away in

Your wrath; we finish our years like a sigh. **10** The days of our lives *are* seventy years; and if by reason of strength *they are* eighty years, yet their boast *is* only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. **11** Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, *so is* Your wrath. **12** So teach *us* to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. **13** Return, O LORD! How long? And have compassion on Your servants. **14** Oh, satisfy us early with Your mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days! **15** Make us glad according to the days *in which* You have afflicted us, the years *in which* we have seen evil. **16** Let Your work appear to Your servants, and Your glory to their children. **17** And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands for us; yes, establish the work of our hands.

May the Lord bless to us the reading of His holy Word.

**I. Let's begin by looking at the truth in verses 1-6 that God is our dwelling place!**

A. This is a marvellous thing:

- **Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations!**

1. God is our home—He is where we live...

- Not merely in the way that all men live and move and have their being in God...
  - Moses is speaking about the unique privilege that belongs to the church in both the Old and New Testaments...
    - That God Almighty has taken us in to Himself—that He has revealed and continually reveals Himself to us through His Word and Spirit so that we know Him...
    - That is why Moses says that God has been *our* dwelling place in all generations...
      - He is thinking about Abraham to whom God said, “I will be your God and you and your seed will be my people.”
      - As John puts it in his first epistle, we have fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.
  - God was with His people, making Himself known to them,
    - revealing His promises to them, revealing His ways to them, teaching them in all the affairs of their lives, protecting them, leading them...
    - He was truly their God—their life is in Him.

2. Dwelling in God means that we have eternal life!

a. Do you remember how Jesus made the point that when God refers to Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, long after they have departed from this world, it proves the resurrection?

- He told the Sadducees that when they tried to stump Him with their arguments that denied the resurrection...
- Jesus said, you err, not knowing the scriptures or the power of God...
  - If God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, it means that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still alive because He is not the God of the dead, but of the living!
- When God becomes the God of anyone, it means that that person will live forever because God as their God will not let them die.
  - They are under His charge and He will sustain them.

b. Notice how Moses emphasises the eternality of God who is our dwelling place.

- In verse 2, he says, **Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.**
- God does not change, He does not evolve or develop or form—what He is now, He has always been, and what He has always been, He always will be.
  - The world is His creation—He formed it—it has a beginning, but He is not part of the creation.

TRANS> So if we have the blessing of becoming His people—of having Him as our dwelling place—it means that we will live forever.

- He takes care of and blesses what is His—it cannot perish.

B. But note well, dwelling in God is all of grace.

1. Moses explains in verses 3-6 that God has turned man to destruction.

- Men don't live forever, not because it is just the way they are, but because God has turned them over to destruction.
- He doesn't just let people die—no—it is much worse than that...
  - He Himself does away with them—look at what it says:

a. v. 3: **You turn man to destruction and say, “Return, O children of men.**

- It is an sentence of death pronounced against us as those condemned—
  - He turns us over to destruction—to dust—
  - Because of our sin, He said, **Gen 3:19: In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return.**

b. As a result of this sentence, our lives are extremely short—just a blip—

- We are impressed when we read of those in the ancient world who lived for almost a thousand years, but to God, this is nothing.
- But as it says in verse 4, **For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past, and like a watch in the night.**
  - It is but a day, even but a watch in the night—a three hour period that most sleep through—and then it is gone.

c. And again, the deliberateness of this short life is emphasised...

- In verse 5, it says that God *carries* men away like a flood...
  - He does not just let us perish, He causes us to perish.
- And then it compares man to grass that grows up and flourishes and then is cut down in the evening...
  - The words “cut down” speak of violent disruption of life.

2. That God cuts people down makes it clear that He is angry with us.

a. We don't like to face this—nobody does...

- But suffering and death is a testimony of God's wrath against mankind.
- There would be no death if there had been no sin.
- Death is common now, but it is not natural.

b. Romans 1:18 supports this when it says, **For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men.**

- It is revealed by the fact that our lives are cut off by Him—that we die.
- Satan twists the mind of man to deny his own guilt before God and turn death and suffering into an accusation that God is unjust...
  - But this is a gross deception.
  - God is not unjust, we are all sinful—the only reason we die is because we are guilty of rejecting God as our God.
  - The wrong is not God's wrong, but our wrong.

3. But now Moses comes along here and tells us that we, the church, the people that God has called out to be His people, have had God as our dwelling place in all generations!
  - How can that be when we too are sinners, rebels in Adam?
  - a. This is sheer grace!
    - We deserve to die the same as everyone else—
    - We are guilty of rejecting God too—
    - Yet God has taken us in—
      - He is now our refuge, our protector, our place of living—we are made alive in Him as our home—we are at home with Him.
  - b. Do you know what He, in His marvellous grace, has done that He might take us in?
    - 1) He has sent His only Son to be our Saviour.
      - He has sent Him to take responsibility for us in our sin.
      - He has sent Him to become one of us—He who is the eternal Son of God to become flesh and dwell among us—as a man...
      - And He has sentenced Him to die in our place—for our sins—to be punished for what we have done that we might be released and pardoned.
    - 2) And then He has called us to come and receive this blessing...
      - To come to Him, trusting in Jesus, and receive eternal life.
      - To come and live in Him as our dwelling place forever.
      - To come and not just exist forever—but to exist as God’s people, reconnected with Him as our God forever and ever.
      - And then He works in us and changes us to live for Him.
    - 3) Already, we are set apart to live for Him if we are indeed His people.
      - Already we dwell in Him, already we are pardoned, and already He is working in us.
      - It is ours, as His people, to live in joyful communion with Him.

TRANS> But where had that grace been for Israel in the wilderness?

- For forty years, the people that God had called out of death to be His people, were not living in joyful communion with Him.
  - In verses 3-6, Moses was talking about all men—that they have their lives cut off...
  - but in verse 7 he changes back to the first person plural and begins to talk about we who have God as our dwelling place...and it is not a pretty picture.
- He shows us the disturbing reality in verses 7-11 that:

## **II. Having God as your dwelling place can actually be the *cause* of your present sorrows and terrors.**

A. That’s right.

- If you know anything about the forty years in the wilderness that Moses lived through while he led Israel, you know that it was a miserable time.

1. First of all, it was a time when Israel was carrying out a sentence for the sin of refusing to go into the Promised Land as God had commanded.
  - Even though God had delivered them from Egypt, the strongest nation in the world, and had even parted the Red Sea for them to cross,
    - they questioned whether He really would be able to give them victory in conquering the land of Canaan.
    - God had sentenced the Canaanites to annihilation because of their great wickedness, but had waited for four hundred years for their sin to grow to full maturity.
    - He had appointed Israel to be His agent in wiping them out completely, but now the people of Israel had not believed God and had refused to take the land.
  - So in anger, the LORD had sentenced them to wander in the wilderness for forty years and to die off so that the next generation could do what they had refused to do.
    - So they were under God's displeasure to start with.
2. But then while they were in the wilderness—what a miserable time it was.
  - All those years, they had to eat manna, a kind of bread that God miraculously provided, when they might have enjoyed the fruit of Canaan.
  - But worse than that, they were subjected to dreadful judgments from God for their constant rebellion...
    - Some of them had the ground open up to swallow them up for presuming to make themselves equals of Moses whom God had chosen to lead them,
    - Others had fire consume them for taking it upon themselves to offer incense to God when He had called the priests alone to do this.
    - And then fourteen thousand seven hundred of them died in a plague for complaining that Moses had killed the people when God sent these deaths...
    - Later, twenty-four thousand died in a plague because they committed sexual immorality.
    - It was a dreadful time for them... *because* they were God's people... *because* He was their dwelling place!
      - If they had not been God's people, it wouldn't have mattered.
3. The nations around them, the Moabites, the Edomites, and even the Canaanites whom they were to conquer,
  - were living in relative ease compared to Israel in the wilderness.
    - God was not their dwelling place, and they were not having fire falling from heaven and plagues wiping them out in a day for their sins.
  - This reminds us of the truth that judgment begins with the house of God.
    - We are held to a higher standard because we are God's people.
    - The Lord loves and He chastens us so that we will turn away from our rebellion.
    - If He didn't, we would be just like the people that do not know the Lord.
      - But all this means that it is often worse for us in this world, if we are God's people, than for those who are outside the church.

- B. Look at how Moses describes that awful experience of the people who had God as their dwelling place...
1. In verse 7, he speaks of how they were both consumed and terrified: **For we have been consumed by Your anger, and by Your wrath we are terrified.**
    - God does this especially at the start of the New Covenant as well...
      - We might think of those who were sick and even died for their abuse of the Lord's Table in the New Testament church—or of Ananias and Sapphira who were struck dead of exaggerating about how much they had given.
      - All this has a way of smartening up God's people when God is first establishing them as His people—making Himself to be their dwelling place.
  2. In verse 8, Moses speaks of how the LORD exposed their sins...
    - v. 8: **You have set our iniquities before You, our secret *sins* in the light of Your countenance.**
    - Often, we err in thinking that we are getting away with sins—
      - that no harm will come to us on account of them...
    - But God often exposes what we have tried to hide—even years later.
      - He has all sorts of ways of doing this—and sometimes it is quite painful.
        - Think of all the sorrow David had for his secret adultery.
        - It came back to haunt him.
  3. In verse 9, Moses speaks of the people throughout this period dying with a sigh... they were carrying out a sentence for their past sin and they knew it...
    - v. 9: **For all our days have passed away in Your wrath; we finish our years like a sigh.**
    - Even Moses himself did not get to go into the Promised Land—to see the victory that God gave to His people.
      - Today, we live in a time when the church is at a low ebb in our land.
      - Over the years, we, as God's people, have not been faithful and now we see churches closed up, we see division in the church, we see corruption, we see a general lack of fruitfulness.
      - We see young adults who grow up in the church and apostatise...
  4. Indeed, Moses shows that they had little fruit to show at the end of their seventy or eighty years of toil—
    - Look at verse 10: **“The days of our lives *are* seventy years; and if by reason of strength *they are* eighty years, yet their boast *is* only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.”**
      - What a sad thing to work very hard in difficult days and have nothing to show for it at the end.
    - Certainly, in God's gracious work, He taught His people many lessons in the days of the wilderness—lessons that we still benefit from...
      - but as far as they were concerned, they did little to advance His kingdom.
      - They had been called to go and conquer Canaan, but that was entirely left up to the next generation.
        - Their lives had been, as far as their labours, a waste—like a car spinning its wheels in the mud until the engine is burned out.

5. Verse 11 sums it up—the thing that had been accomplished in this period was that God had shown that He is a God to be feared.
  - **Ps 90:11: Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath.**
  - We do not even begin to grasp the anger of God against sin, but this miserable forty years helps us to gain a greater respect for God—or at least it should!
    - They had not realised how ill it would go for them as those who had God as their dwelling place if they did not follow Him.
  - But through those awful years, God had shown them that He was a God to be feared.
    - No one should suppose that they will be blessed by mere association with God in the covenant if they do not have true faith that transforms them.

TRANS> So clearly, having God as your dwelling place is not all fun and games.

- It can result in much sorrow and fear...
  - If He is our dwelling place, He will address our sin and rebellion more than if we are not His people.
- But it is not to misery and terror that God calls us when He calls us to find our dwelling in Him—it is to a life of forgiveness and of joy and fruitfulness.
  - We must seek the blessing of life through faith in Jesus Christ—not by mere association as so many do—but by living faith!
  - Moses (or rather Christ Himself) leads the way in such a prayer in Psalm 90.

### III. Plead with God in faith to bring you into the blessing that belongs to those who dwell with Him!

- That is what Moses does in verses 12-17...
  - He pleads with God for the blessing that belongs to those who dwell with Him.
  - See that you join him—that you join Jesus Christ Himself our true mediator—in this prayer...

A. First, plead that we will have wisdom that comes from dwelling with God.

1. Ver. 12 says: **So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.**
  - Let us see clearly how short our time is here so that we will not waste it.
2. Of all people, those who dwell with the everlasting God should know that our time here is very short...
  - Only a fool lives as if this world is all there is when eternity is before us!
  - The wise man lives for God—he lives for eternity—not for a blip in time that will soon be gone.

B. Second, plead for mercy—

1. You see the request in verse 13 that God would return—return with His favour.
  - That He would not continue to afflict us but would have compassion on us in our suffering...
    - **“Return, O LORD! How long? And have compassion on Your servants.**
2. Instead of sorrow and misery, that He would satisfy us with His *mercy*—
  - *Mercy* here is His *steadfast covenant love*...

- Verse 14: **Oh, satisfy us early** (right away) **with Your mercy...**
  - The word *mercy* is *hesed*, it speaks of the promised love that is ours through the blood of the covenant, shed to atone for our sin.
  - It is the steadfast love that is rooted in the Saviour who was promised to Israel and who had not been revealed to the world.
- The wise among the people look to Him alone to secure God's favour.
  - God has shown us that it is only through Him that we may dwell with God and not be cast out.
  - The wise are trusting in Him and they are clothed with His righteousness who alone is worthy to secure their salvation and blessing.
  - The problem with God's people has always been that they do not look in faith to Christ for blessing—they look for blessing merely by association.
    - They do not have life by the Spirit—only a bit of religious sentiment.
    - They go to church, but they do not look to the Lord in faith for life.
- It is by faith in Him alone that our sorrow and terror will be turned to joy and gladness...
  - verses 14-15: **Oh, satisfy us early with Your mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days! Make us glad according to the days in which You have afflicted us, the years in which we have seen evil.**
  - Instead of the prospect of more affliction and more terror in God, there is the prospect of mercy and gladness.

C. Next, plead that we will see God at work among us!

1. What a contrast there was with Israel in the wilderness and Israel in the conquest of Canaan!
  - In the wilderness, they saw the power of God in judging them—a dreadful thing—
    - but in the conquest they saw His powerful hand at work to subdue their enemies under Christ, the Son that was to come.
    - They saw Him giving them strength to serve Him and to live for Him so that His kingdom was advanced.
2. Where would you rather be...in the wilderness of misery or going forward with Christ in the advance of His kingdom?
  - See the prayer in verse 16: **Let Your work appear to Your servants, and Your glory to their children.**
  - Even in the wilderness, those who sought the LORD saw His work in their lives as they grew in grace and learned to live for God...
    - But this is a prayer that this work will become predominant among the whole nation—that instead of chastisement, the hand of the Lord will be seen leading them to victory...
      - It is the difference of wandering aimlessly in the wilderness and of going ahead for the LORD in conquest.
    - As I mentioned before—the Lord answered that prayer—the days of Joshua were days of faithfulness and blessing for all the people.
      - Oh that God would give us such days in Atlantic Canada!

D. And then we come to the great climax of the prayer...that God as our dwelling place would make us beautiful and fruitful!

1. Verse 17 begins: **And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us,**
  - How ugly the people were in the wilderness with all their complaining and their idolatry, with their envy and their lack of faith.
    - They who were the light of the world were rather darkness.
  - This is our prayer—that as His people, His beauty would be seen upon us!
    - That we would love one another as Christ has loved us and so show ourselves to be His disciples.
    - That as husband and wives and mothers and fathers and seniors and young adults and widows and single adults and children and even babies,
      - we would be beautiful because God is our dwelling place!
      - Because He Himself makes us beautiful through His work in us.
2. And then verse 17 goes on to ask that He would not only make us beautiful but also fruitful...it says:
  - **And establish the work of our hands for us; yes, establish the work of our hands.**
  - That instead of toiling endlessly for seventy or eighty years and having nothing to show for it, we would bring forth fruit for eternity...
    - that instead of spinning our wheels and going nowhere, we would do work that counts for eternity—work that is established forever because it is done in God.
  - And don't misunderstand me here...
    - I am not talking about us all being great evangelists or great leaders who start political movements...
    - I am talking about God's grace settling into our lives so that we live together as His people in ordinary godly living that honours Him forever.
3. I will conclude with the words of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Scottish minister, James Hamilton:
  - God is glorified and his work advances when his church is beautiful. "The beauty of the Lord" is the beauty of holiness, —that beauty which in the Lord Jesus himself shone with lustre so resplendent, and which ought to be repeated or reflected by every disciple. And it is towards this that all amongst us who love the Saviour, and who long for the extension of his kingdom, should very mainly direct their endeavours. Nothing can be sadder than when preaching or personal effort is contradicted and neutralized by the low or unlovely lives of those who pass for Christians; and nothing can go further to insure success than when prayer is carried out and preaching is seconded by the pure, holy, and benevolent lives of those who seek to follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.