

May 8, 2016
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Psalms
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Psalm 90.

1. How can we experience the Lord as our dwelling place?
2. Explain what God's anger toward sin is like.
3. How to we get a heart of wisdom?
4. List several results mentioned in this Psalm (vv.14-17) of God returning to us.

TEACH US TO NUMBER OUR DAYS

Psalm 90

The title of this psalm calls it a prayer of Moses, the man of God. That would make this the oldest of all psalms. Spurgeon pointed out that "Moses was peculiarly a man of God and God's man; chosen of God, inspired of God, honored of God, and faithful to God in all his house. He well deserved the name which is here given him. Men of God are sure to be men of prayer" (C.H. Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*, vol. 3). And so this psalm will encourage us to appeal to God, to cry out to God to show us His mercy especially when we come to grips with who and what we really are by nature. The petition, the request, is most obvious in the last six verses of the psalm.

But this psalm is also a song in which Moses sings about a clear and obvious contrast we do well to contemplate. He sings about the frailty and sinfulness of man, contrasted with the eternal power and

mercy of God. Because we are what we are, we must have a God and Savior like the one described in this great psalm.

God Makes Life Short (vv.1-6).

On one hand, we should feel safe because God is our dwelling place (vv.1-2). Moses was confident that *Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God* (v.2). That God is before all things requires that God be everlasting. These words, showing up in a song Moses wrote, remind us that the God to whom we sing praise and to whom we pray is the God of Genesis one. That record teaches that this God spoke the word and all things came into being fully mature and with age. This truth is so foundational that Satan has marshaled nearly all his powers against it for at least the past 200 years. If the opening words of the Bible are fantasy, legend, or merely allegory, then the entire message of the Bible fails. God related in the opening words of the Bible how He brought all things into existence so that He would explain why we need the Savior to redeem all things to their original state. Therefore, if God really did not create all things, then sin is a myth and there is no need for the Savior.

Only God could bring all things into existence because only God is eternal. That is easy to say and hard to explain. When we attempt to comprehend and explain eternity, we become lost in a fog of ignorance. That is because we are temporal beings. We live in a temporal, passing world that is always dying because of sin. Therefore, we accept by faith that God is who is says He is, that He is what He says He is, and that He does what He says He does.

Because God alone is the eternal Creator, He alone is the most suitable dwelling place. *Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations* (v.1). We should stop to consider for a moment that Moses wrote this in the context of Israel living in tents in the wilderness. For forty years, an entire generation, people of God's chosen nation lived in tents in the foreboding desert. They longed for the permanent residence of the Promised Land. But because of their disobedience they were destined to spend life without a permanent home.

Yet in that context, God still offered to be their dwelling place. By way of illustration, God put the tabernacle with the holy of holies containing the ark of the covenant and the mercy seat in their midst. He

promised to meet the people there, as He dwelt in their midst. The one principle God continued to try to teach His people is that He wanted fellowship. Fellowship is God's people dwelling in Him.

That God wanted Israel to dwell in fellowship is clear and very encouraging. However, we should be very encouraged to consider the astonishing promise of God being our dwelling place. Jesus taught: "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:4-11).

Human nature attempts to find peace and rest by dwelling in anything and everything but God. We try to dwell in relationships only to find that everyone is like ourselves – fickle, undependable, and self-centered. We try to dwell in wealth only to learn that Solomon was right to describe wealth as taking wings and flying away. We try to dwell in possessions only to discover that they wear out like an old garment and become a burden to maintain. We try to dwell in religion but soon realize that all teaching apart from God's Word is inconsistent and foolish.

All the time we are floundering around finding no peace, God our creator invites us to come and dwell **IN** Him. Jesus put the invitation like this: "*Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him*" (John 6:56). The terms "eat" and "drink" do not promote cannibalism but speak of intense fellowship, full dependance on Christ. To dwell in God is to experience real fellowship with Him moment by moment.

At the same time, we realize that He who invites us to dwell in fellowship with Him also determines our end (vv.3-6). That is a rather sobering thought. God holds each person's life in His hands. Moses stated, *You return man to dust and say, "Return, O children of man!"* (v.3). God created the first man out of dust. God created the first man to enjoy fellowship with Him, to dwell in Him. Adam's sin broke that fellowship. As God had warned and promised, sin would result in death, both spiritual and physical. It did. But in that dying, it is not just that we die. Human death is not just the consequence of laws of thermodynamics. Death is really not just that we wear out or succumb to disease. We die because it is God's command. He created with a word and He destroys with a word. Job said, "*Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD*" (Job 1:21).

God who creates also determines the end of life, and life ends so quickly (vv.4-6). Moses illustrated the brevity of life by contrasting how eternity is different than time. He said, *For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night* (v.4). How do we who live constrained by time understand eternity? We live according to sunrise and sunsets, clocks, calendars and seasons; God does not. He created the constraints of time as mile markers or guidelines for human history. Moses used two illustrations here to help us understand. He said that eternity is like 1,000 years for God compared to one day of human experience. Or, he said that eternity is like 1,000 years with God compared to a four-hour watch in the night for us. The point is to teach how brief my entire life is compared to God's eternity.

Life is indeed very brief. Concerning life and its end, Moses concluded, *You sweep them away as with a flood; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning: in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers* (vv.5-6). God who creates life with a word and ends life with a word, does so quickly. When we come to the end of life, we realize that it was over so soon even if by reason of strength we live to be 80. We must conclude with Job that *My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle and come to their end without hope* (Job 7:6). David realized, *Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath!* (Psalm 39:5). The prophet Isaiah pointed out that *The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the LORD blows on it; surely the people are grass* (Isaiah

40:7). And James warned in the New Testament, *Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit" yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes (James 4:13-14).*

And in this brief existence, we are wise to ask at some point:

Is God Angry with us (vv.7-11)?

God is indeed angry at sin (vv.7-8). Moses understood, *For 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 (vv.7-8).* Moses concluded this from experience because God was certainly angry with Israel in the desert. There is multiplied evidence in the Torah that God was angry with His people.

He was angry because the people created and worshiped the golden calf. *And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you" (Exodus 32:9-10).*

God was angry with the people because they complained continually. *And the people complained in the hearing of the LORD about their misfortunes, and when the LORD heard it, his anger was kindled, and the fire of the LORD burned among them and consumed some outlying parts of the camp (Numbers 11:1).* He became angry when Aaron and Miriam criticized Moses who God had chosen to lead (Numbers 12). He was definitely angry because the men of His nation engaged in sexual promiscuity when they worshiped the Baals of Moab (Numbers 22).

One thing is very clear throughout Scripture: God does not tolerate sin and it makes Him very angry. After all, sin ruined the Holy God's perfect Creation. It cost Him the horrendous price of His precious Son's sacrifice to pay for it.

We know that God is angry with sin because He reveals His wrath against all sin. Still humanity as a whole rejects God and worships their own creation like Israel did in the past. Still God has not ceased to be angry with sin. Paul pointed out: *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God*

is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools (Romans 1:18-22).

The wise person comes to grips with this reality. We are wise to acknowledge that we reject God, worship self, and therefore sin against God. We are wise to acknowledge that God is angry at us because of our offense against Him. We are wise to acknowledge that God is justified to pour out His wrath against sin, ultimately punishing us in hell forever.

But, in agreement with Moses, we kind of wonder, who thinks about God's anger (vv.9-11)? There is no time for that when life is quickly passing by in futility (vv.9-10). We too understand, *For all our days pass away under your wrath; we bring our years to an end like a sigh. The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away (vv.9-10).*

Sure God's wrath abides against sin, but we are busy with life. In fact, we are just trying to keep up. We will think about God's anger later, when we get older and have nothing to do. And if we are fortunate, we will live to age 80. Even that will seem like a very short time. Will we deal with God's anger against our sin at that time, at the end of life? Who knows when that will be?

But in the brief time, who stops to think that the Almighty God is angry? *Who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you (v.11)?* The fact is that most people seldom spend any time considering this reality. But who wants to be negative? What kind of person would spend much time throughout life worrying that some God somewhere out in space is angry at their sin? There is too much to do, too much to experience, too much to gain, to spend life in the dumps. Again the wise man or woman considers that God is angry at his or her sin. Okay, then what is the solution? What should we do when we come to that conclusion?

Have Pity on Your Servants, Lord (vv.12-17).

The right response for us when we have come face to face with the truth about God is to agree with Moses. We too should say to God, “Teach us to number our days.” *So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom (v.12)*. We will say that kind of thing when we learn the brevity of life. It is important for us to admit that life is short. Admit that we do not have unlimited time in order to get right with our Creator who is angry at our sins against Him. The longer a person puts off this matter, the less likely he or she is to ever deal with it. If we would be wise enough to admit that our days are numbered and we do not know when our number will come up, we will be steered in the direction of wisdom.

Second (or maybe in the process), we need to get a heart of wisdom. Where do we go to get that? Solomon told us that *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction (Proverbs 1:7)*. He concluded, *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight” (Proverbs 9:10)*. We must remember that the heart, as it is referred to here, is the inner man. It is our eternal part which will dwell forever with God or exist forever in suffering. It is the part of us in which we make our decisions, in which we respond to God, in which we think or reason. When that part of us is being conformed to the standard of wisdom God has set forth in His Word, we are wise.

This wisdom is not the same as man’s ability to be skillful. This wisdom is actually the person of Christ personified. Paul taught this truth when he wrote, *He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30)*. Therefore, in the warnings of Solomon, it is Christ Himself who stands in the streets of human society and cries out for all who are simple to turn to Him. He cries for all who would have life as the Creator meant it to be, to come to Him. That is why learning to fear God, learning that He is angry with sin and will punish sin, is the beginning of wisdom. To pursue a right relationship with God, sins forgiven by the sacrifice of Christ, is wisdom.

And the world as a whole rejects it as foolishness. But this is God’s plan. *For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe (1 Corinthians 1:21)*.

Therefore, having come to a right perspective of our nature and condition before God, we are wise to call out to Him, “Return and have

pity on us, O Lord.” Our desire should be for God to show pity on us, satisfy us, and make us glad (vv.13-15). It is good for us to long for God’s mercy. Pray with Moses, *Return, O LORD! How long? Have pity on your servants! (v.13)*. The Lord must return because our sin has separated us from God. To beg God to return to us is to acknowledge our sin and ask Him to remove it, cover it over.

God loves to grant that request because He shows pity to His servants. The Hebrew word behind the English word *pity* means to change your mind because of sorrow or grief. When we realize our sins cause God to be angry, our great desire is for Him to change His attitude toward us. God delights to see the humility of a heart broken by sin because it opens the door for His pity. David learned that *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise (Psalm 51:17)*.

We should pray for God to satisfy us with His steadfast love. Moses did. He prayed, *Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days (v.14)*. God’s steadfast love is constant because it is rooted in His covenant. We know that God loves us, forgives our offenses, covers our sin, and is available for fellowship because He made promises He keeps. That reality is plenty of cause for us to rejoice.

Therefore, also, we should ask God to make us glad. Pray, *Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, and for as many years as we have seen evil (v.15)*. It is good for us to ask God to make us happy. Moses understood that the people’s sins brought God’s affliction upon them. Once we have figured that out in our own lives, we can then turn to God alone as the source of our happiness. When we are in fellowship with God, not only do we find gladness, but we can be used by Him for His glory.

Therefore, we ask, “Do Your work through us, Lord.” If we really understand that God has forgiven our sins and we really are enjoying fellowship with Him, we should also desire to see God’s power at work. Moses prayed, *Let your work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power to their children (v.16)*. This work and power of God is most obvious in changed lives. Do we long to see God accomplish this in our lives? Do we long to see God change other people to be like Himself?

Desire to see God display His favor in your work. Pray, *Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our*

hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands! (v.17). We do not desire success for our own glory. We long to let our good works shine so that others will see God. Do we grasp what Jesus meant when He taught, “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16)?

Life is short. This short life begins in sin and continues in sin until we acknowledge our need and come to God for help. Our sin makes God so angry that He will punish it. When we confess it to God and ask for His pity, He delights to forgive our sin, make us glad, and use us in His service. So what keeps us from acknowledging our offense and getting into fellowship with the eternal God?