**All In His Hands**

**Psalm 90**

When my father conducted funerals, it was his custom to lead the remains and family into the service. During these processionals, he would read Psalm 90. As a boy preacher, the only thing my father allowed me to do to assist was read Psalm 90. I never asked why he always read Psalm 90 to begin funerals. But when I studied this great psalm for myself, I understood.

The ascription of Psalm 90 reads: A Prayer of Moses, the man of God. This is the only Psalm attributed to Moses, which makes it the oldest Psalm. It describes Moses as “the man of God.” This is a proper title for Moses who was the God-appointed emancipator, lawgiver, and prophet of Israel. The fact that Moses was a man of God is also clear by meditating on Psalm 90.

Moses wrote this Psalm during the wilderness wanderings of Israel, as they traveled to the Promised Land of Canaan. When Israel arrived at Kadesh-Barnea after coming out of Egypt, the Lord commanded them to take the land. The people refused to go forward. Their lack of faith angered God, who sent them back into the wilderness. For forty years, Moses led the children of Israel in circles through Negev until the entire generation died. It was the longest and largest funeral procession in history. During this time, Moses wrote this Psalm. James Montgomery Boice rightly noted: “This Psalm is probably the greatest passage in the Bible contrasting the grandeur of God with man’s frailty.” Psalm 90 declares that life, death, judgment, and grace are in God’s hands.

1. **Life is in God’s hands.**

Why are you alive today? Lamentations 3:22-23 says: “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” This is the truth with which Moses begins this prayer. Our lives are in the faithful hands of Almighty God.

1. **God’s faithfulness is evident throughout our lives.**

Verse 1 says, “Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.” A “dwelling place” is a home. It is where you live. It is a place of rest, comfort, and security. This prayer was written during Israel’s wilderness wanderings. They had been slaves in Egypt. They had not yet reached the Promised Land. They lived in tents as they endlessly circled the Negev. Yet Israel had a dwelling place in the wilderness. It was a person, not a place. Israel did not have houses to live in, a temple to worship in, or land to settle in. Yet they had a dwelling place in God himself. God is the ultimate “home-maker.”

Moses prayed, “Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.” Throughout the adventures of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God was faithful. When a Pharaoh arose in Egypt that did not know Joseph and was determined to stamp out the children of Israel, God was faithful. As the unbelieving generation of Moses died in the wilderness, God was faithful. Moses declared that as generations come and go, one thing remains the same: “Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.” We, too, can look back and claim this testimony as our own. From the moment God breathed into Adam the breath of life to this present moment, God has been our dwelling place. In Acts 17:28, Paul proclaimed, “In him we live and move and have our being.” God has been faithful throughout our lives. I know God was there because you are still here. God is the unchanging dwelling place for all who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

O God, our help in ages past

Our hope in years to come

Our shelter from the stormy blast,

And our eternal home.

1. **God’s faithfulness is evident beyond our lives.**

Verse 2 says, “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.” God made the mountains, the oldest and most stable things on earth Moses could point to. Then Moses points even further back, noting God formed the earth and the world. Genesis 1:1 declares: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” This verse assumes God exists and declares God existed before the beginning began to be. Moses reiterates this point in verse 2 of Psalm 90: “Before the mountains were brought for, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.”

This is a key statement about the eternality of God. God is not bound by time. Seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, years, decades, and centuries are all the same to God. God lives in one eternal now independent of clocks and calendars. It is a trick question with no true answer to ask how old God is. Eternity cannot be calculated by time. God has no beginning and no ending. In eternity past, before time began, God was God. After history is consummated, God will still be God in eternity future. The eternality of God is an essential truth of the nature of God. If God had a beginning, God had a creator. If God has an ending, God cannot offer eternal life to anyone. You cannot give what you do not have. We can entrust our lives to God with confidence that God is eternal. Humanity is immortal. Every soul born into this world will live forever. But only God is from everlasting to everlasting. Isaiah 46:9-10 says: “for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declared the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.’”

1. **Death is in God’s hands.**

The first stanza of this Psalm addresses the faithfulness and eternality of God. The second stanza shifts the focus to the brevity and frailty of human existence.

1. **Consider the brevity of life.**

In verse 3, Moses prays: “You return man to dust and say, “Return, O children of man!” We will all die. Genesis 2:7 says: “Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.” Humanity is a mixture of deity and dirt. Sin has marred, perverted, and distorted the image of God in humanity. As a result, all of us have a date with death. Hebrew 9:22 says: “it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes the judgment.” Moses states this stark reality is poetic terms. We return to the dust. During funerals, the deceased is eulogized with kind words – some true, some not. But the ultimate truth about every person is stated after the funeral, when the officiating preacher stands at the open grave of the deceased and declares, “Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, and dust to dust.” We all return to the dust. Why? Moses says the Lord, sends us back to the dust, saying, “Go back to where you came from!”

Verse 4 says, “For a thousand years in your sight are but yesterday when it is past, when it is past, or as a watch in the night.” This is why life on earth is so brief. You are not God! For proof, Moses compares the way we count time to the way God counts time. The antediluvians lived for centuries. Methuselah lived 969 years. That is an unthinkable length of time to us. But a thousand years in the sight of God is like yesterday when it is past. The passing of a day is no different than the passing of a millennium to God. More than that, the passing of a millennium is as a watch in the night to God. A watch in the night was a four-hour period. What is the world like between 12 and 4 AM? Night owls do their best work during those hours. But many have slept right through them as a watch in the night. Its coming and going has no bearing on us. In some infinitesimal way, this is how God views the passing of a thousand years. It might as well be a watch in the night.

1. **Consider the frailty of life.**

In verses 5-6, Moses describes the frailty of human life three ways. It is like a flood. We sit under a tree for shade. We get in our cars and feel safe. We rest in the comfort of our homes. But let the rains fall, the waters rise, and the floods come. Trees are uprooted. Cars drift away. Houses slide off their foundations. This is life. Our lives can be stable one moment. Then circumstances change and sweep us away as with a flood. Likewise, it is like a dream. I have vivid dreams. I sometimes wake up shocked by my dreams. I cannot wait for my wife to get up so I can tell her about my dream. But by the time I get the opportunity to tell her, I forget the dream. Life is life that. It is like a dream. It is so vivid that it captivates us. But then it is over.

In verse 5b-6, Moses says life is “like grass that is renewed in the morning; in the morning it flourishes and its renewed; in the evening it fades and withers.” We are like grass. We may be green and pretty in the morning. But we fade and wither in the evening, if we are not mowed down before then. In Isaiah 40:6-8, the prophet says, A voice says, “Cry!” And I said, “What shall I cry?” All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the Lord blows on it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.” This is why we should trust in God and not in ourselves. In Matthew 6:30-33, Jesus teaches: “But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith. Therefore do not be anxious saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

1. **Judgment is in God’s hands.**

The third section of this Psalm explains that death is sure because we are sinners. God is holy and we are not. The holy justice of God demands sin be punished. Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death.” When we receive the news of someone’s death, we ask, “How did he die?” The circumstances differ. But the reason is the same for all. Death is by sin. Sin kills us. Sin is at the bottom of life’s brevity, frailty, and tragedy. Martin Luther commented: “Just as Moses acts in teaching the law, so does he in this Psalm for he preaches death, sin, and condemnation, in order that he may alarm the proud who are secure in their sins, and that he may set before their eyes their sin and evil.” In this section, Moses states the reality of and response to the judgment of God on guilty sinners.

1. **The reality of divine judgment.**

Why do our lives come to end? Verse 7 answers: “For we are brought to an end by your anger; by your wrath we are dismayed.” We get angry about the wrong things for the wrong reasons and express it in the wrong way. But God’s anger is holy anger. The holiness of God cannot allow sinners to continue to live as if sin does not matter. It may seem we are getting away with something in life. But God has the last word. We are brought to an end by the anger of the Lord. We are dismayed by the wrath of God. Divine wrath is God’s righteousness reacting to unrighteousness. Hebrews 12:29 says: “for our God is a consuming fire.” God is a God of wrath and to be the object of it brings dismay.

Verse 8, “You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence.” This verse makes it clear the wrath of God is just. God is rightly angry because he sets our iniquities before him as evidence against us. Moreover, the light of his countenance exposes secret sins. 1 John 1:5 says: “God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all.” There is no such thing as secret sin. You may be able to hide your sin from people. But you cannot hide your sin from God. What is a secret sin on earth is an open scandal in heaven.

1. **The response to divine judgment**

Verses 9 says, “For all our days pass away under your wrath; we bring our years to an end like a sigh. The children of Israel were confronted with the wrath of God, as their brothers and sisters died in the wilderness. So are we. The world around us points and affirms the wrath of God. It may not be cataclysmic wrath. It may be the wrath of abandonment, which is even worse. As a result, “we bring our years to an end like a sigh.” Life may start out with a bang during our youthful days. But we end our years with a moan of woe, weakness, and weariness.

This was not the case with Moses. Deuteronomy 34:7 says, “Moses was 120 years old when he died. His eye was undimmed, and his vigor unabated.” Moses lived more than a century. And he did not die with any debilitating weakness of old age. This was not the norm. In verse 10, Moses declares, “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.” This verse generalizes the typical lifespan. Under normal circumstances, a person lives about seventy years. If that person is strong enough, he or she may live beyond eighty years. But what do you have to boast about? The span of life is filled with toil and trouble.

This is not to deny the health and joy and riches of life. Life can be good. But life at its best is not free from the toil and trouble. Job 14:1 says, “Man who is born of a woman is few of days and full of trouble.” Then, before you know it, it’s over. Our days are gone. We fly away. Verse 11 asks, “Who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you?” The realities of life and death ought to make us fear God. But we waste our lives on the things of this world. We are like the Rich Fool of Jesus’s parable. We receive blessings and take credit for what God has done. Then we consume ourselves with building bigger barns. But do you remember what God called this rich man? God called him a fool. In Luke 12:31, Jesus warns, “So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.”

Verse 12 is the golden verse of the psalm. Psalm 90 is the prayer of Moses. But verse 12 records Moses’s first request: “So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.” Wisdom is a matter of the heart. It is not merely about what you know or what you do. It is about your disposition toward life. Walter Brueggemann wrote: “I suggest that the “heart of wisdom” in verse 12 is not simply one that is realistic about human transitoriness and guilt, but one that knows there is “athomeness” in God’s governance.” This is not an attitude you wake up with one day. You have to learn it. And only God can teach it. To enroll in God’s school of wisdom, you must ask God to teach you to number your days. This is not about marking off days on the calendar. It is about living every day in light of the reality that it may be your last. It is to measure today in light of eternity

1. **Grace is in God’s hands.**

Much contemporary worship music confuses the church militant with the church triumphant. It does not acknowledge the battle continues though the victory is assured. The Psalms are more realistic. Psalm 90 is a good example. As Moses led this funeral procession through the wilderness, he taught them to sing inescapable truths about their circumstances: God is sovereign. Life is short. Sin is wrong. Death is sure. Judgment is coming. Yet this song is not pessimistic. It is filled with hope. Life, death, and judgment are in God’s hands. But so is grace! In the closing stanza, Moses teaches us to pray God’s sovereign grace would give us what we do not deserve.

1. **Pray for God’s compassion.**

In verse 13, Moses prays, “Return, O Lord!” As Israel wandered through the wilderness, it seemed that God had forsaken them. Moses pleaded with the Lord to return to them. Of course, God had not forsaken his people. The Lord had been their dwelling place in all generations. Moses assumed God’s faithfulness. He prayed for God’s compassion. “How long?” he asked. How long will you be angry with us? How long will you punish us? How long will you hide your face from us? Then Moses pleads, “Have pity on your servants!”

This is how you pray to access the grace of God. Cry out for divine compassion. Plead with the Lord to return. Be desperate for God’s mercy. Ask the Lord to have pity on his servants. On what grounds can you expect God to answer such a prayer? Moses identifies the children of Israel as “your servants.” In other words, they may not be worth much. But they belong to you. You are obligated to take care of your own. This is our hope in Christ. When God grips us by his grace through faith in Jesus Christ, we can pray with confidence for God’s compassion, no matter what we have done. Hebrews 4:15-16 says: “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in the time of need.”

1. **Pray for God’s joy.**

We often get into trouble because we seek joy in the wrong persons, places, and things. 1 John 2:15-17 admonishes: “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions – is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.”

Moses and his people learned the hard way there is no lasting joy in the things of this world. True joy is only found in God. Verse 14 says, “Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.” If you want to learn to number your days, start your days with this prayer: “Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love.” Ask the Lord to help you to find your satisfaction in his loyal love. “In loving us,” said Augustine, “He has made us loveable.” We are not lovable because of who we are or what we have or where we live. We are loveable because God loves us. He loves us perfectly, unconditionally, and unceasingly. When you are satisfied in the morning with the steadfast love of God, you can rejoice and be glad all your days!”

Verse 15 says, “Make us glad for as many days as your have afflicted us, and for as many years as we have seen evil.” Moses asks for equal time. God afflicted them. Now Moses asks God to give them gladness for as many days as he had afflicted them. Then he moves from days to years, asking God to give them joy for as many years as they had seen evil. God is able to do that. After Job’s sufferings, God restored all he lost and gave him twice as much as he had before. If you are in Christ Jesus, God has already done this for you! Ephesians 1:3 says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.” God has blessed us in Christ with gladness that infinitely surpasses the affliction we have experienced and the evil we have seen.

1. **Pray for God’s work**

In the Old Testament, there is an increasing disappearance of God. In making the children of Israel his people, God worked sovereignly, obviously, and supernaturally on their behalf. Over time, however, God’s work on his people’s behalf was not as conspicuous. Yet God was still at work. Moses knew this. But he was not content with God working behind the scenes. In verse 16, Moses prays, “Let the work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power to their children.” Moses was confidant God was at work. He wanted God’s work to be obvious to his people. He wanted the work of God to be obvious and ongoing, so their children may see the power of God.

Verse 17 adds: “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!” Your work will not matter in the end, unless God shows his favor to you. Divine favor is the goodness and grace of God poured out on his people. It is the beauty and splendor of the Lord’s kindness shining in the life of his people. It is to live with the smile of God on your life. This is the only way life works. The only work that lasts is the work the Lord establishes. 1 Corinthians 15:58 says, “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”

Time is filled with swift transition,

Naught of earth unmoved can stand,

Build your hopes on things eternal,

Hold to God’s unchanging hand.

Trust in Him who will not leave you,

Whatsoever years may bring,

If by earthly friends forsaken

Still more closely to Him cling.

Covet not this world’s vain riches

That so rapidly decay,

Seek to gain the heav’nly treasures,

They will never pass away.

When your journey is completed,

If to God you have been true,

Fair and bright the home in glory

Your enraptured soul will view.