

# Eternity and Time (Psalm 90)

Happy new year! 2020 went surprisingly fast didn't it. I was speaking to my neighbour just before Christmas, and he said "Christmas snuck up on me this year." That's true isn't it. With COVID-19 changing our routines, and slowing us down in many ways, you think time would have felt slower. But it didn't. The year got away from us. But time is like that isn't it. It gets away from us. Dr. Seuss said summed up the experience of time like this: "How did it get so late so soon? It's night before it's afternoon. December is here before it's June. My goodness how the time as flown. How did it get so late so soon?" That's sums up 2020 doesn't it. In fact it sums up life in general. How did it get so late so soon?

Psalm 90 is a sobering reflection on the brevity of life. You might have heard it read at a funeral. The book of common prayer has it as one of the readings for the burial service. It is used at other time milestones in life, such as birthdays and the beginning of a new year. Which is why we're looking at it now.

So whether you're just starting off your journey of life, or it's coming to end, reflecting on this Psalm is time well spent. There's something in here for everyone. Plenty of stuff that makes you sit back and think: what am I doing with my life? How do I want to spend it? What do I want to fill my calendar with?

Notice the heading says, "A Prayer of Moses, the Man of God". There's another reason to listen, because these are Moses' words. He is a towering figure in history. A man of much wisdom and learning. He was educated in Pharaoh's house. He had a lot of life experience. But the main reason we should listen is because Moses was a man of God. He knew God in a deep and intimate way. And so we can learn a lot about the deep mysteries of God and life from him.

Moses probably penned this Psalm during the wanderings in the wilderness. God had delivered the Israelites from Egypt. And he was leading them into the promised land. But the people rebelled against God. And in Numbers 14 we're told the people are grumbling against the LORD and saying they want to go back to Egypt. And so the LORD judges them and makes them wander through the wilderness for forty years. And Moses sees a whole generation lead out of Egypt only to die in the wilderness.

I think this prayer we have in Psalm 90 came out of that time. But it's relevant for us as we also wander through the wilderness of the world. The Psalm breaks up into three sections. In the first two sections, Moses contrasts God and us. And that leads him to finish by asking for three things. Let's look at these three sections together now.

# 1. God's Eternity/Our Frailty (vv. 1-6)

They say comparison is the mother of all clarity. And Moses begins by reflecting on God's eternity and human frailty. Notice how the Psalm begins? "Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations, before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God." God is eternal. You might have tried to explain this to a little child. "God made everything: the sun, moon, trees, and God made you." And then you see their little brain tick over and they say..."Mummy, who made God." And then you think, "Oh no! Where do I go now!" And then you calmly reply this: "Honey, if someone made God, that someone would be more ultimate than God, and therefore would be by definition be God." And their little eyes glaze over and say, "Yes mummy". The best answer to the questions 'Who made God?' Is that God never needed to be made, because he was always there. God has no beginning and no end. God doesn't have a birthday. And he doesn't have an expiry day either.

And as Moses wanders through the wilderness, watching his friends and family die. Watching the seasons come and go, and the years pass by. And as he moves from one place to another, like a pilgrim. He says, "Lord, you're my home." Because God is eternal he never changes. And Moses in the midst of an ever changing world, takes great comfort in his everlasting God. Home - there's something comforting about going home isn't there? Things haven't changed much, same beds, same photos, same smells, same meals. It's nice to go home knowing things will be the same. That's how Moses feels with God. Moses had left his homeland. He was from Egypt. And he's wandering through some strange land, and yet he feels at home. They say 'Home is where your heart is.' Moses' heart was with the LORD. The God of all the earth who never changes.

And that's the same for the Christian. We often think about, God living in us by his Holy Spirit - which is true. But we also live in God. In Christ - your life is hid with Christ in God. Safe and sound. The Christian's home is the safest and most secure place in the world. In the eternal God. The maker of all the universe. I've felt that as someone who has moved around a fair bit in the last few years - at home. And the Christian should feel most at home with God. In prayer. In his word. With his people. Where do you feel most at home? Where do you see your home as being? In this world? Is all your attachment to this life? To the here and now? Well let me say, what a tragic thing that is. What a sorry state to live knowing you have to move out very soon. Knowing that any day now you'll be evicted. "What do you mean?" You might say. I mean, life is short and then you die. I mean what Moses says in verse 3, you return to the dust. I mean what the Burial of the Dead says - "We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. The Lord gave, and

the Lord has taken away, blessed be the name of the LORD. I mean what Benjamin Franklin said, "Nothing in this world can be said to be certain, except death and taxes." I mean the mortality rate of every human being is 100%.

Compared to the everlasting God our lives are over before they begin. To the eternal God a thousand years is like yesterday gone. A thousand years is like a watch in the night - three hours. A thousand years is a long time isn't it! So much history. It could fill millions of books. And yet to God it's like a drop in the bucket. And that's a thousand years! We only get a fraction of that don't we. Our lives are swept away like a flood. It's like a dream - you wake up and it's nearly over. How did it get so late so soon? Our lives are like the grass that flourishes in the morning and then dies at night. My family and I were talking the other day and the mortality rate of COVID-19 came up. And then we got discussing how many people have died from it. And then somehow we got on to the death clock. Every second someone dies. Every minute - 106 people die. Every hour 153,000. Every month - 4.6 million. Every year - 56 million. In the midst of life we are in death!

But notice for Moses death isn't meaningless. It happens for a reason. It's not something that's just natural.

That leads us to the second comparison:

## 2. God's Holiness/Our Sinfulness (vv. 7-11)

In the background of Moses' meditation is Genesis 1-3. The everlasting God created us to live, not to die. Death is the universal curse on the human race for rebelling against our Creator. "From dust you came and to dust you shall return." The human race is a race under judgment. The wages of sin is death. That is why we die. We talk about fair wages. Death is the fair wage for sin. Each of us has sinned. And so each of us die. If death is only natural, why is it so sad? Why do we experience it as a tragedy if it's something that just happens? Why? Because it isn't natural. We weren't created to die and then vanish into non-existence. You and I were created to live with God forever. To live in a loving relationship with God and with one another for all eternity. But our sins have separated us from the everlasting God. Our rebellion cut us off from the fountain of life. And so we die. But God loves us too much to let his creation die. And so he sent his Son into the World. Jesus - the Resurrection and the life. Remember when his close friend Lazarus died? Jesus was so upset. And he came to the place where Lazarus was buried. And he who is the resurrection and the life stood outside the the tomb. And we're told he was deeply moved. He was angry at death. Death who was destroying his creation. Death who had stolen his beloved friend, Lazarus. Death who steals away each of our lives. And he called out in a loud

voice - "Lazarus come out!" And he who was dead came out. Jesus is the resurrection and the life. And he said, "Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live. And everyone who believes in me shall never die." Notice he says, "Anyone and everyone." It doesn't matter my friend if you've wasted your whole life not living for God but rather in rebellion against him. Jesus came that you might have life. Won't you accept him if you haven't before? It's not too late! Now is the time. It's appointed for you to die once and then face the judgment. You don't want to die in your sins do you? And then face the holy judgment of God? You don't want to face the second death do you? Where you'll face the wrath of God forever. Jesus came and died for your sins and rose again so you can be right with God. So that you can live forever with God. Accept him and you don't need to fear judgment.

If you believe in Jesus, if you take him as your Lord and Saviour. You're no longer a child of wrath. You no longer come under the judgment of God. For the child of God, God reveals his anger to us, not to punish us for past sins, Jesus has taken the punishment for sin. But to correct us against future ones. God doesn't punish his children but he corrects them. Augustine said, "All this misery of humankind in which the world groans is medicinal pain not penal sentence."

The Christian looks at the brevity of life. The suffering and pain. The tragedy of existence, and draws a lesson from it. The severity of our experiences teaches us something.

### 3. Three Petitions (vv. 12-17)

Moses' meditation on the Everlasting God and the brevity of human life, leads him to ask God for three things. The first one is wisdom. "Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom." Moses prays for wisdom to live a day at a time for the glory of God. To live according to God's calendar and not our calendar. To live as a pilgrim passing through. The reason Moses prays for wisdom is because he and us are prone to waste our time. We don't number our days but tend to waste them away, don't we. In the Bible, the fool is the person who lives for this life only. Why is that foolish? Because of eternity. Because life is short and then we die. And this life isn't all there is. Why would you squander it all by bingeing Netflix. Why would you make all your investments in the here and now? Billy Graham said, "Time is the capital that God has given us to invest. People are the stocks in which we are to invest our time." Richard Baxter was a pastor of Kidderminster in England, in the mid 1600s. He got sick in his late twenties and almost died. And during this time he wrote his spiritual classic, 'The Saints Everlasting Rest'. Eternity gave Baxter a new perspective on life. He counted every particle of sand in the glass of time as

precious. He used to meditate on eternity for 30 minutes every day. And he once said,

A life still near to Death, did me possess  
With a deep sense of Time's great preciousness  
I preached as never sure to preach again  
And as a dying man to dying men.

People are dying, hell is real, only Jesus can save us. That should profoundly shape how we spend our time shouldn't it?

So with Moses we should pray for wisdom to live a day at a time for the glory of God. And next he prays for satisfaction. "Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love. That we may rejoice and be glad all of our days." Yes the Christian is a pilgrim passing through, but a happy pilgrim. How can you not be happy? You've found the fountain of life and happiness in Christ. The source of all joy and satisfaction. You have an everlasting home in the everlasting God. A home that will never change. A home where nothing can separate you from - not even death. No one can ever be truly happy unless you're freed from death. And the Christian is freed from death - Jesus is the Resurrection and the life. And so we pray for wisdom and satisfaction.

And last of all Moses' prays for transformation. Notice in verse 17 - Moses prays the beauty of the LORD would be upon us. WE need the grace of Jesus to rest on us. That's the only way we're going to be able to do anything that lasts. As the grace of our Lord Jesus rests on us we are transformed. Only by grace can we do work that lasts into eternity.

Let me finish by telling you a story about a fella named Mr. Eternity. A few years after Arthur Stace was converted he went into Burton-Street City Tabernacle in Darlinghurst, 1932. That night the Evangelist John Ridley was preaching.

Near the climax of the sermon, Ridley begun crying out - "Eternity, eternity! I wish I could sound, or shout, that word to everyone on the streets of Sydney. Eternity, friends you have got to meet it. Where will you spend eternity?"

Arthur left the building that night and said this: "Eternity was ringing through my brain and suddenly I began crying and felt a powerful call from the Lord to write 'Eternity'. I had a piece of chalk in my pocket and, outside the church, I bent down right there and wrote it."

Arthur's one word sermon changed a whole city and many lives. Let's pray as we go into the new year we would have Eternity ringing in our ears. And our whole lives would be lived for the glory of the everlasting God.

Lord, may your grace be upon us, and establish the work of our hands! Amen.