

Psalm 90:
Life in Perspective

Sermon

Hobart, July 10th, 2016

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Psalm 90 *A prayer of Moses, the man of God.*

- 1 Lord, through all the generations
you have been our home!
- 2 Before the mountains were created,
before you made the earth and the world,
you are God, without beginning or end.
- 3 You turn people back to dust, saying,
“Return to dust!”
- 4 For you, a thousand years are as yesterday!
They are like a few hours!
- 5 You sweep people away like dreams that disappear
or like grass that springs up in the morning.
- 6 In the morning it blooms and flourishes,
but by evening it is dry and withered.
- 7 We wither beneath your anger;
we are overwhelmed by your fury.
- 8 You spread out our sins before you—
our secret sins—and you see them all.
- 9 We live our lives beneath your wrath.
We end our lives with a groan.
- 10 Seventy years are given to us!
Some may even reach eighty.
But even the best of these years are filled with pain and trouble;
soon they disappear, and we are gone.
- 11 Who can comprehend the power of your anger?
Your wrath is as awesome as the fear you deserve.
- 12 Teach us to make the most of our time,
so that we may grow in wisdom.
- 13 O Lord, come back to us!

How long will you delay?

Take pity on your servants!

14 Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love,
so we may sing for joy to the end of our lives.

15 Give us gladness in proportion to our former misery!

Replace the evil years with good.

16 Let us see your miracles again;
let our children see your glory at work.

17 And may the Lord our God show us his approval
and make our efforts successful.

Yes, make our efforts successful! 1

¹*Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. 1997, c1996 (electronic ed.) (Ps 90:1). Wheaton: Tyndale House.

INTRODUCTION:

A. PSALMS:

1. As we looked at in detail a couple of years ago at Camp Clayton, the Psalms are down to earth expressions of our life and relationship with God and the world around us
2. Beyond being beautiful literature, they are wonderfully connecting, because of their authenticity
3. They contain the Outpourings of hearts of God's people
 - a) David and others
4. Real life struggles
 - a) Struggles with relationships; friends, enemies, persecution, battles
 - b) Health problems
 - c) Struggles with their own inner selves
 - d) Struggles with God
5. Many are triumphant and full of praise
6. Many are pleadings for rescue, forgiveness, understanding

A. TODAY LET'S LOOK AT PSALM 90

1. A psalm that I hope you will find some connection, some resonance with
2. Let us examine it, and see what message God has for us and our lives and our world

B. PRAYER

BODY:

II. TYPES OF PSALMS

A. MOST PSALMS ARE PRAISES, OR SUPPLICATIONS.

1. Actually slightly more supplications
2. Robert Alter defines a supplication;

The supplication is essentially a poetic cry of distress to the Lord in time of critical need. It may be short or long, it often refers to enemies, but these may be either actual military adversaries, or shadowy underhanded types somehow scheming against the speaker, or simply mean-spirited detractors who would crow in triumph were he to succumb to physical illness.²

3. Our Psalm is clearly a supplication, a prayer, an appeal to God

III. THE PSALM'S THEME

A. READ IT THROUGH AND SEE WHAT THE THEME IS

1. What is the Psalmist's purpose, the main motive and point for writing this Psalm?

BOOK FOUR (Psalms 90–106)

90 *A prayer of Moses, the man of God.*

¹ Lord, through all the generations
you have been our home!

² Before the mountains were created,
before you made the earth and the world,
you are God, without beginning or end.

³ You turn people back to dust, saying,

² Alter, p.248

“Return to dust!”

⁴ For you, a thousand years are as yesterday!

They are like a few hours!

⁵ You sweep people away like dreams that disappear
or like grass that springs up in the morning.

⁶ In the morning it blooms and flourishes,
but by evening it is dry and withered.

⁷ We wither beneath your anger;
we are overwhelmed by your fury.

⁸ You spread out our sins before you—
our secret sins—and you see them all.

⁹ We live our lives beneath your wrath.
We end our lives with a groan.

¹⁰ Seventy years are given to us!
Some may even reach eighty.
But even the best of these years are filled with pain and trouble;
soon they disappear, and we are gone.

¹¹ Who can comprehend the power of your anger?
Your wrath is as awesome as the fear you deserve.

¹² Teach us to make the most of our time,
so that we may grow in wisdom.

¹³ **O LORD, come back to us!**

How long will you delay?

Take pity on your servants!

¹⁴ Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love,
so we may sing for joy to the end of our lives.

¹⁵ Give us gladness in proportion to our former misery!
Replace the evil years with good.

¹⁶ **Let us see your miracles again;**

let our children see your glory at work.

¹⁷ And may the Lord our God show us his approval

and make our efforts successful.

Yes, make our efforts successful!³

B. WHAT PROBLEMS DO WE SEE THE PSALMIST INDICATES IN THE LIFE OF THE FAMILY, OR TRIBE OR NATION?

1. Things aren't what they used to be

C. KEY VERSE IS V 13

O Lord, come back to us!

a) Continues on to paint a picture of their situation in what he asks of God

How long will you delay?

Take pity on your servants!

¹⁴ Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love,

so we may sing for joy to the end of our lives.

¹⁵ Give us gladness in proportion to our former misery!

Replace the evil years with good.

¹⁶ **Let us see your miracles again;**

let our children see your glory at work.

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and make our efforts successful.

Yes, make our efforts successful!

³*Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. 1997, c1996 (electronic ed.) (Ps 90:1). Wheaton: Tyndale House.

2. Clearly all they are doing is not working out successfully

a) They want to be happy again

b) They want the bad years replaced with good ones

(1) They want to see God active among them

(2) To have his approval

D. SO CLEARLY THE PLEA OF THE PSALM IS FOR GOD'S RESTORATION

1. For his unfailing love *chesed* (covenant loyalty and love) (v14)

2. For his involvement and blessings in their lives

E. ROBERT ALTER GOES ON TO SAY;

the psalm is manifestly one of the great biblical evocations of the ephemerality of mere human existence against the backdrop of God's eternity, and this, rather than the pleas for help, seems its most urgent subject: "For a thousand years in your eyes/ are like yesterday gone, /like a watch in the night" (v.4).⁴

F. SO NOW WE HAVE AN OVERVIEW OF WHAT LIES AT THE HEART OF THE PSALM

1. Let's go through it, and see what we can glean from each verse

⁴ Alter, p.250.

IV. V1-2 GOD

A. ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE KNOWLEDGE COMMENTARY:

This portion of the psalm contrasts God and man, and gives the response which that contrast prompts.⁵

B. WE START WITH GOD

1. As most Psalms do.

¹ Lord, through all the generations
you have been our home!

C. WHAT A BEAUTIFUL STATEMENT

1. God, down through our generations, you've always been our home!

2. What a pithy, beautiful statement

a) One you could write on a plaque on a living room wall

3. What does the term "home" evocate?

a) What does it convey to you?

4. Moses, if he is the author, would be looking back on all the Patriarchs, and how God was their home as they wandered as strangers and pilgrims in foreign lands, with no physical home

² Before the mountains were created,
before you made the earth and the world,
you are God, without beginning or end.

D. CLEARLY GOD IS FOREMOST IN THE PICTURE

1. He has always been there

a) He is the creator of it all

b) He will always be there

⁵Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary: An exposition of the scriptures*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

V. V3-9 MAN'S TRANSITORY NATURE

³ You turn people back to dust, saying,
"Return to dust!"

A. WE ARE JUST PHYSICAL ELEMENTS:

1. Carbon, and some other chemicals and earthly substances

a) As we read in Genesis, we are made from the earth, from the dirt

b) In all that we think we are, and in all we think we are heading towards with all our great ideas and inventions, our destiny hasn't changed a bit,

(1) We are all headed back to the dust

2. The human body is made of the basic elements of the earth;

a) 59 all together according to Dr. Ed Uthman from the American Board of Pathology.

(1) We are mostly oxygen and carbon along with hydrogen, nitrogen, calcium and phosphorus, with a bit of lead, tin, arsenic, lithium, silver and about .2mg of gold plus a bunch of other elements

b) I guess all we add up to really is enough gases for a few balloons, a large number of pencils, a couple of small nails, and some fertiliser and trace elements for the garden

3. What a contrast to God

⁴ For you, a thousand years are as yesterday!
They are like a few hours!

4. We see his power over us all

⁵ You sweep people away like dreams that disappear

5. Another beautiful word picture; how long do our dreams last

6. Very ephemeral

- a) Just wisps in our sleeping imagination that are so tentative and fleeting
- b) That's all we are in the ultimate reality of time and space
 - (1) Grass is used as another metaphor for how we stack up against God

or like grass that springs up in the morning.

⁶ In the morning it blooms and flourishes,
but by evening it is dry and withered.

⁷ We wither beneath your anger;
we are overwhelmed by your fury.

7. Continuing the grass analogy, we are reminded of how vulnerable we are to God's powerful justice and anger against our sinful natures.

⁸ You spread out our sins before you—
our secret sins—and you see them all.

8. Another graphic picture

- a) Our secret sins are plain to God
- b) laid out like food on a table, or junk and rubbish strewn over the ground

⁹ We live our lives beneath your wrath.
We end our lives with a groan.

B. A PRETTY GRAPHIC DESCRIPTION OF OUR END

1. A groan, and we are gone!

VI. V10-12

¹⁰ Seventy years are given to us!

Some may even reach eighty.

But even the best of these years are filled with pain and trouble;
soon they disappear, and we are gone.

A. AGAIN, OUR LIVES ARE CONTRASTED TO GOD'S

1. Our 70-80 or so years are so short in contrast to his eternity
2. Clearly Moses, or whoever the author has had a tough life;
 - a) To say that even the best years are filled with pain and trouble
3. Many people would feel the same, sadly

¹¹ Who can comprehend the power of your anger?

Your wrath is as awesome as the fear you deserve.

4. Again God's power and anger at human sin, injustice, abuse and other evils is focused on

¹² Teach us to make the most of our time,
so that we may grow in wisdom.

B. WHAT A WISE SAYING;

1. Similar to what we looked at in Acts the other month
 - a) Making the most of the time God has given us
 - b) Being good stewards of our time, our lives, our opportunities
2. Stress is on gaining wisdom
 - a) Robert Deffinbaugh comments on this verse;
...verse 12 teaches us that we must live our life in the light of its limits. We must "number our days." Most of us in dealing with life tend to focus either on the past or the future. Young people usually focus on the future looking forward to

the “good life.” Older folks reminisce about the past knowing the future is shorter and less certain. We reluctantly focus on the present.

Verse 12 states that since life has its limits and is so short, we do not have any assurance of tomorrow nor do we dare waste today. We must live wisely, understanding life’s limitations and its brevity. God has given us the ability to serve Him for a season. We do not know about tomorrow. We should not presume upon an uncertain future and thus procrastinate with respect to our present obligations.⁶

C. THE GREATEST WISDOM THAT COMES THROUGH IS

1. That we can’t see ourselves as we really are;
 - a) Until we see God as he truly is
 2. Then we can more realistically understand our state, and our need of God’s help
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⁶ Bob Deffinbaugh , Th.M, Psalm 90: Place for Pessimism, http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page_id=520

VII. V13-17

A. NOW MOVE TO THE CENTRAL POINT OF THE PSALM

1. In one sense the first half of the Psalm is about God and his significance and state compared to man's state, man's insignificance and plight
2. The second part is a supplication or prayer to God from man, for help

^{v13} O LORD, come back to us!

3. Clearly they felt God had left them
 - a) Perhaps it is Moses crying out to God on behalf of the people, during the 40 years in the wilderness?
4. The great thing is that no matter how deep we are into our problems and how weak we are, or how long we have been away,
 - a) It is never too late to call out to God for his love

How long will you delay?

Take pity on your servants!

¹⁴ Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love,
so we may sing for joy to the end of our lives.

5. We all need God's mercy, his pity
 - a) We need his help early
 - b) His love, his *chesed*, his faithful love, is the only thing that will really satisfy our life's needs

¹⁵ Give us gladness in proportion to our former misery!

Replace the evil years with good.

¹⁶ Let us see your miracles again;
let our children see your glory at work.

6. He is longing to see God at work in their lives again

a) They had seen so many miracles as God rescued them from Egypt, but the 40 years in the wilderness must have been really hard, especially on Moses

7. These pleas echo with many people in the tough times of life, where gladness and God's involvement has been lacking

¹⁷ And may the Lord our God show us his approval

and make our efforts successful.

Yes, make our efforts successful!

B. DON HOFFMAN;

...no matter how little and weak and helpless we are, God loves us anyway! God loves every sparrow that falls from the sky, and every hair that falls from your head. Maybe human beings are no different from the grass, but there is an ancient Jewish saying that every blade of grass has a guardian angel!

It may be a tough universe, but we have a tender God.

The ancient Hebrew Scriptures are full of mass destruction, wholesale slaughters. Worldwide floods. Rains of fire. A wall of water to wipe out one army, an epidemic to destroy another. But the New Testament is full of individual healings, and conversions one-by-one. Apparently God is not into mass production, assembly line techniques, the efficiency of scale. God is an artist crafting one-of-a-kind originals. No two snowflakes have the same shape, and no two people have the same fingerprints, and no two zygotes have the same dna. God cares about every detail.

In an infinite universe, our infinite God has time to notice every sparrow fall, and to pour infinite love and mercy onto your head, however many hairs it holds.

So it's pretty obvious that God doesn't love you because you are so smart and good looking. God doesn't love me because of my clever jokes and my dimples. God doesn't love any of us because our hair is naturally curly, or because our hands are so artistic, or our brains so high in IQ.

Maybe God loves you because God made you to be loved. Maybe God loves me because I am little and helpless. Maybe God loves us just because we are such insignificant little specks in a huge and uncaring universe.⁷

⁷ Don Hoffman, Tough Universe, Tender God, Matthew 10:28-31, Psalm 90

C. ROBERT DEFFINBAUGH SUMS UP THIS LAST SECTION:

I have chosen four words to describe the petition that is found in verses 13-17.

The first word is **relent**. This term describes Moses' petition that God would change in His response toward men. While God has been righteous in judging men for their sin, now Moses implores God, not for justice, but for mercy and grace. In verse 13 Moses pleads, "Relent, O Lord! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants." God is a God of salvation and here Moses petitions God to save, to turn to the help of His people.

Next is the word **reveal**. He says in verse 16, "May your deeds be shown to your servants, Your splendor to their children." It is as though God's face, His personal intimate contact with His people, has been veiled. God's righteous power has not been employed for a considerable period of time. .. so Moses asks that now God would intervene, breaking into history, that God would reveal His might, power and salvation to men.

Third, Moses asks God to **restore**. ..What we have seen described is a result of man's sin and the fall. Moses cries out to God to restore all creation and mankind to what it could and should be. Life ought not to be futile, but it is. Life ought not to be short, but it is. God is besought to remove the stigma of sin, the futility of life, to restore and renew. We read in verses 14 and 15, "Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, That we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, For as many years as we have seen trouble. Exchange sorrow for joy, frustration for fulfillment, fruitless toil for meaningful labor."

The last word is **reward**. While Moses looks forward to God again breaking into history, revealing His strong right hand, he does not see God's actions as totally unrelated to man's activity. We read in verse 17, "May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; Establish the work of our hands for us—Yes, establish the work of our hands." While this life may be characterized by limitations and frustrations, we are not only able to pray that God will change us, but that He will change life. In addition, we may even pray that God would bless the work of our hands by allowing us to accomplish eternal results.⁸

⁸ Don Hoffman, Tough Universe, Tender God, Matthew 10:28-31, Psalm 90

Conclusion:

D. DEFFINBAUGH SUMMARISES THE MESSAGE OF PSALM 90 SAYING;

In the psalm Moses petitions first,

that God would give us the wisdom to live in this life as it is and in the light of who He is,

and secondly, that God would change life to what it should be.⁹

E. IN MANY WAYS THIS PSALM SUMS UP OUR LIVES;

1. and calls us to be aware of and live in the light of the realities of life

F. FIRSTLY;

1. We are reminded to live wisely, in the light of God, and who he is

2. To live life in it's full reality, not pretending that it is any other way than it is

a) To more fully understand and accept that we and the world we live in aren't so great and important

3. And to accept who God is, his power and righteousness

a) and in that knowledge, to humbly accept our true state and need of him

G. SECONDLY;

1. In the light of all this, to continue to call out to God to change our lives to be as they should be

2. That he would give us his love and grace, and be in our lives, leading us and blessing us in his ways

H. DON HOFFMAN

It's the small and meek, someone said, who inherit the earth. The small and meek whom God loves. Like you. Like me.

⁹ Deffinbaugh

Notice that being loved by a tender God doesn't protect us from the tough universe. Not very often. We pray for miracles, but we call them miracles because they so rarely happen.

More than 20 centuries since Psalm 90 was written, and 70 or 80 years is about all we have a right to expect. You'd think a tender God could stretch it out to seven or eight hundred. But God doesn't guarantee the sparrow won't fall from the sky, or the hair from your head. God only promises to be there with us when we go through the valley of the shadow of death.

Because God also had to go through the valley of the shadow. Jesus had to die. The immortal God had to find out what mortality was all about.

Superman gave up his invulnerability. And because of what Jesus went through, God knows what I'm going through, what you're going through. The universe may be tough, but God is tender.

No matter how little and insignificant we are, we are important to God. No matter how meaningless our lives seem to us, they are part of God's plan. From our perspective they mean nothing.

From God's perspective, they complete the picture. There are many woven patterns that, looked at from the underside, are meaningless and ugly. Only when you flip the fabric over can you see the beauty.

God is the Master Weaver, who can take the jolts an uncaring universe can deal us, and make of them, and us, a beautiful tapestry of love. The universe may be tough, but God is tender.¹⁰

I. PRAYER

¹⁰ Don Hoffman