

Psalm 90 A prayer of Moses the man of God.

- ¹ Lord, you have been our dwelling-place throughout all generations.
² Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world,
 from everlasting to everlasting you are God.
³ You turn people back to dust,
 saying, 'Return to dust, you mortals.'
⁴ A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by,
 or like a watch in the night.
⁵ Yet you sweep people away in the sleep of death –
 they are like the new grass of the morning:
⁶ In the morning it springs up new, but by evening it is dry and withered.
⁷ We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation.
⁸ You have set our iniquities before you,
 our secret sins in the light of your presence.
⁹ All our days pass away under your wrath;
 we finish our years with a moan.
¹⁰ Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures;
 yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow,
 for they quickly pass, and we fly away.
¹¹ If only we knew the power of your anger!
 Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your due.
¹² **Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom.**
¹³ Relent, LORD! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants.
¹⁴ Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love
 that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.
¹⁵ Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us,
 for as many years as we have seen trouble.
¹⁶ May your deeds be shown to your servants,
 your splendour to their children.
¹⁷ May the favour of the Lord our God rest on us;
 establish the work of our hands for us –
 yes, establish the work of our hands.

I've given the theme for today as *You won't live forever!* I wonder if you read that, how it made you feel? *Candy Chang an artist and designer living in New Orleans gave a Ted talk - Before I die I want to... . She lives in New Orleans and starts her talk by describing how there was a derelict house in her neighbourhood – a miserable wasted space. So she put up a blackboard: Before I die I want to... various responses: be tried for piracy! Change a life; cure cancer; be at peace with me; understand why I am here. Then she describes what prompted her to do this. Someone she greatly loved – a 2nd mother to her had suddenly and unexpectedly died. It led her to start thinking about her own death and mortality. This is not something we often do in the West. We don't like to think about our death – it seems to us rather morbid. Candy Chang said she discovered that "Preparing for death is one of the most empowering things you can do – it clarifies your life." Samuel Johnson famously said "when a man knows he is to be hanged in a fortnight, it concentrates the mind wonderfully!" Moses actually discovered this truth 3½ thousand years ago Psalm 90 is a meditation on the shortness of human life and in v. 12 Moses prays **Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom***

Being written by Moses, Psalm 90 is the oldest of all the Psalms. It comes perhaps towards the end of his life after He has seen most of Israel perish in the 40 years in the desert. There is a kind of world weariness about the Psalm.

When we are young, we think we will live forever. Often when we reach the age of 40, we suddenly realise that we are about ½ way through our lives and maybe for the first time we realise we won't live forever and maybe wonder, what on earth we are doing with our lives. It's at that point we have the mid-life crisis!

You may find it hard to identify with Moses when he says in v.10 the best of our years are but trouble and sorrow. Moses himself seems to recognise the bright optimism of youth when he talks in vv.5 & 6 about people being like the *new grass of the morning – springing up new* with if you like all the joys of spring. But what is undoubtedly true for all us is that we cannot stop getting older! Indeed as life goes on it seems to go faster and faster and whilst when you are young and have your whole life stretched out before you, it looks like it will go on forever, as you get older and look back on your life, you cannot believe how quickly it has passed by. As Moses says in v.10 our years *quickly pass, and we fly away*.

This Psalm is a wonderful aid in helping us not only to think about the meaning and purpose of our lives, but perhaps more importantly in helping us to **pray** about the purpose of our lives in the light of our mortality.

It shows us we need to start with God our heavenly Father – it will give us a very different perspective:

1. First, God lives forever. v. ¹ *Lord, you have been our dwelling-place throughout all generations.* ² *Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.* ⁴ *A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.*
2. By contrast our lives on earth are frail and transient. *Like dust, like a dream, like grass.* Spurgeon: *Here is the history of grass: sown, grown, blown, mown, gone ! We are not immortal!*
3. Because God is eternal, He is our true home, our *dwelling-place* Remember Moses wrote this after years of wandering in the desert, forever pitching and striking camp Where do you live? *When we go down to St Ives, someone might ask us that, and we might say LH Street-an-pol but we're only there for a week. Our real home is in Cholsey.* But from God's perspective, we should say: *Well at present my home is in Cholsey or England, but I'm only staying there for 70 or 80 years – my real home is with Christ in my heavenly Father's house. Jesus said: : In my Father's house there are many rooms. I am going there to prepare a place for you... ²⁰ On that day you will realise that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you...*
4. We acknowledge that our ageing and mortality is God's just and fair punishment for our sinfulness.
 - a. Moses writing in the context of leading the children of Israel in the desert, maybe after the plague of venomous serpents which God sent us judgement for their constant complaining and lack of faith; maybe towards the end of 40 years in the desert when nearly all the adults who had left Egypt with Moses had died.
 - b. But thank God, that He **does** limit the power of sinful men by death! How terrifying if Hitler, Mao Zedong or Pol Pot were able to live for ever!
 - c. We need to realise that we also totally deserve God's wrath and it is only through Jesus bearing that wrath in our place that we are saved
 - d. even though in Christ we have been forgiven, in our bodies still suffer the consequences of sin as we age and die. We still await the redemption of our bodies when Christ returns in glory
5. The good news is that if the eternal God is our real home then this short earthly life in which we age and die, is not the whole story. We can also pray this psalm not just as it were with Moses, but in the presence of one who is greater than Moses, Jesus himself.

- a. I don't think we can honestly pray: ¹¹ *If only we knew the power of your anger!* But Jesus could – and did; and God answered that prayer on the cross.
- b. In Christ, God has answered Moses' prayer and the prayer of the Old Covenant believers that we find in *verses 13-17*
 - i. on one level God has answered the cry *How long!* with the resurrection of Jesus. He has *shown us compassion. He has satisfied us in the morning with his unfailing love, that we may now sing for joy and be glad all our days.* For we live in the joy of the resurrection morning, satisfied by God's unfailing love.
In the death and resurrection of Jesus, God has shown us his mighty deeds and the splendour of his justice, mercy and grace.
- c. On another level however, we still wait and cry with Moses *How long will it be?* as we wait for Jesus to come in glory and rescue his church and redeem our bodies.

In this time of waiting we need to pray with Moses and with Jesus

¹² *Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.*

Jesus may well have sensed that he would have only 33 years in which to complete the task that his heavenly Father had given him. How could he make the best use of that time? – both in the early years of preparation and then those 3 short years of public ministry. And yet what he did had an impact on the whole of human history. He wants us to bear fruit that will last. So like Jesus we need to ask our heavenly Father,

What are you calling me to do, what should be the main priorities in my life, what do you want me to focus on.

If we feel we have not made the best use of our life up to now, it is not too late, we can with Moses pray: ¹⁵ *Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble.* It is never too late for God to turn our lives around.

And like Moses, we need to recognise that we cannot do anything of value, anything that will last apart from Christ and unless God himself blesses and establishes what we do. We can pray with Moses and in faith: *May the favour of the Lord our God rest on us; establish the work of our hands for us – yes, establish the work of our hands.* This psalm reminds us that we can only move forwards on our knees – we can only do lasting work, kingdom work by being in an attitude of constant prayer and dependence on our loving Father. Jesus said *Apart from me, you can do nothing* - but He also promised that if we obey his voice, we build on rock. He also said *Whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last –*