

“Teach Us to Number Our Days”

The Psalm we are looking at this morning is a reflection on the brevity of life and the reality of death.

In the text the psalmist compares the eternal and sovereign nature of God over death with the finite nature of human beings who ultimately succumb to it. In it we are told that God **“turns people back to dust”** and that **“a thousand years are like a day”** to God and that we are like a **“blade of grass”** that is here today but then tomorrow is **“dry and withered”** by the sun. **“All of our days pass way under God’s wrath”** (meaning his judgment on sin) and we **“finish our years with a moan.”** We may get **“seventy years”** on this earth, or **“eighty”** if we are fortunate, yet even those days are often filled with **“trouble and sorrow,”** and then our days **“pass”** and we **“fly away.”** It is a sober but realistic picture of the way our lives often end.

The psalm we are looking at this morning is attributed to Moses and it is certainly the way his life ended. In many ways Moses’ life was filled with trouble and sorrow and his years indeed *did* end with a moan.

Though he was God’s chosen leader to lead the Israelites out of slavery from Egypt into the Promised Land, a good portion of life was spent wallowing in the wilderness dealing with an ungrateful, unhappy, and idolatrous lot of people.

There were times along the journey Moses wished God would strike him down and there were a couple of times when Moses lost his temper so bad that he went overboard and offended God with his anger. In fact, the book of Deuteronomy tells us that at the end of his life God told him that he would not be the one to lead his people into the Promised Land because of those angry outbursts.

Instead, Moses would only make it to a mountain that overlooked the Promised Land and it would be there that he would die. This would be like a QB leading his team 99 yards down field but then when the team got down to the one yard line the head coach suddenly pulled him out of the game and put in the next QB to lead the team to the last yard of victory. Or it would be like making it to the end of your first marathon but then dropping dead just before crossing the finish line.

The world does not like to think about death. It is a thought to be avoided at all costs. To think about death is to think about the finality of one’s existence and how it will bring to an end all of one’s relationships, accomplishments, and failures in this life. After death the relationships end, the accomplishments cease, and the failures can no longer be rectified. So for a person with a worldly mindset the thought of one’s death is terrifying because he has no remedy for what death does to his life, relationships, accomplishments, failures, and sufferings.

There are lots of signs in our culture today that we are uncomfortable with the thought of death. Sometimes this can be seen when there is a funeral. Some people are uncomfortable looking at a dead body. They say to themselves I want to remember what that person was like when he was alive, not dead. Others don’t want their bodies to be shown for the same reasons.

We also see our uncomfortableness with death in the explosion of cosmetic surgery. You have actors and actresses in Hollywood in their older years who have had cosmetic surgery done to their faces to the point that it looks like their skin was soaked in pickle juice. You see that to a lesser degree in everyday society. There is nothing wrong with makeup and trying to look attractive but I think what we have happening with the cosmetic surgery stuff is a society that is refusing to accept the aging process and trying to reverse (subconsciously) the inevitable-death. In America we worship the fountain of youth.

The text we are looking at today and the Bible as a whole for that matter, counsels us to deal with the inevitability of death in a different manner. The Scriptures instruct us to think about death with regular frequency. We are not to deny it, we are to accept its reality and prepare for it accordingly.

On the one hand, we have to say that death is our enemy; the Bible is very clear about that. God did not create Adam and Eve to die but they sinned against God and in doing so they cut themselves off from God and when you do that you die. It is like cutting yourself off from oxygen. Once you remove yourself from the life source it is over. This is what happened to Adam and Eve and every one of us else since then have followed suit.

Death *is* our enemy but thanks be to God because He has made a way for us to be redeemed from the curse of death through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ our Lord. Christ redeems us from death's curse by paying sin's penalty for us on the cross and defeating its power over us through his resurrection from the dead. The Bible says that **"the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord."** (Rom. 6:23)

So on the one hand, death is clearly our enemy. Yet on the other hand, God in his sovereign power over death, has made a way for death to become our friend as well. A friend not in the sense that death is good because it is not. Even when death brings relief from a life of suffering and misery on this earth it is still not good. As Christians we must always name death for what it is, our enemy. Death is contrary to the perfect will of God that we see in the Garden of Eden. We were born to live, not die. That's what Genesis 1 and 2 so clearly teaches us. But death can become our friend in the sense that if it is reflected upon with regular frequency (in a healthy manner) it can be of great help to us in living *this* life we are called by God to live on *this* earth.

Our chief goal in life is to love and serve the Lord with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength. The Westminster catechism is right. "Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever." God has made us for this purpose and thinking about death can be of great benefit in helping us to do this. This psalm is right. **"Lord, teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."**

In other words, realize that one day you will die and make the appropriate adjustments in your life to live according to this reality. What the psalmist is telling us is that we don't always have tomorrow to do what needs to be done today. We don't always have tomorrow to become what God is calling us to become now.

It is a grave mistake to think to yourself, "I will repent and serve the Lord tomorrow. Right now I want to do what I want to do and after I've had all my fun then I will love and serve the Lord."

That is a mistake because tomorrow you could die of a heart attack or in a car wreck and then there would be no more time to *do* and *be* what God was calling you to do and be in *this* life on earth. Such a poor and foolish decision could have eternal consequences. This psalm is exhorting us to wake up and **“number our days our days so that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”**

Do you want to be wise? Then realize that you are not guaranteed tomorrow to *do* and *be* what God is calling you to do and be and ask the Lord to **“teach you to number your days so that you may gain a heart of wisdom.”** Once you do that you will begin to take more seriously God’s call in your life.

The book of James in the New Testament says something very similar to what God is saying to us in Psalm 90. He who has ears let him hear...

Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this city or that city, spend a year there, carry on business, and make money. Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.” As it is, you boast in your arrogant schemes. All such boasting is evil. If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn’t do it, it is sin for them. (James 4: 13-17)

How foolish it is of human beings to live as if they will never die, always thinking that tomorrow is guaranteed. It is not. **“Lord, teach us to number our days so that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”**

Brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ your time on this earth is short, even if you get ninety or a hundred years, your time is still short. What are you living your life for? Are you living it for the things of God or the things of this world?

Jesus tells us in his Sermon on the Mount, **“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths destroy and thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths do not destroy and thieves do not steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” (Matthew 6:19-21)**

If you live life for yourself when you die you will be like an old bed sheet stored up in a hot attic. You open the box and the cotton sheet is full of holes. Or it will be like the house that I once lived in in Atlanta. I came home one day and the door was kicked wide open, the lamps were busted, the drawers pulled out, the cabinets gutted, the bed overturned, stuff was strewn all over the floor, and the TV and stereo gone.

If you live for yourself and not the things of God then at the end of your life you will lose everything you had on this earth (and not just your material possessions). You *will* lose *everything*. Let us not make this mistake. **“Lord, teach us to number our days so that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”**

The other reason reflecting on death can be our friend is because reflecting on it *now* helps us to prepare to deal with it in the future when our time does come.

If we have spent our whole lives avoiding the thought of our own deaths then it is possible that when our time comes we will become overwhelmed with an inordinate amount of fear and anxiety over dying. This is because we will be joltingly forced to deal with something that we have long neglected to think about.

Also as a Christian when you think about death you are also forced to think about the heart of the gospel.

Paul says in his letter to the Corinthians that if **“Christ has not been raised from the dead then your faith is futile, you are still in your sins, and you are to be pitted above all people.”** So when I think about my own death I am reminded that the way I am living my life now is based off this one promise being true. This is what it comes down to. Either Christ is raised from the dead or he is not. If he is not then I am a fool, but if he is then it means everything.

So for me (in a way) I am glad to think about my death because it makes me think about the promises of the gospel and that gives me hope because the Bible says that my death will not be the end of me. My spirit will not die and my body will not forever rot. The Lord Jesus Christ has redeemed me from all my sins and he will resurrect me, body and soul, to be with him forever in God’s eternal kingdom. I have no other answer to the problem of death.

And now **“may the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us”** as we think about our own deaths so that he may **“establish the work of our hands, yes the work of our hands.”**

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen.