

Summer of Psalms: Having the Time of your Life¹

Psalm 90

September 6, 2015

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~When we see God for who He really is our temporality poses no threat to our significance~

This Sunday is our last in our Summer of Psalms series where we have been looking at what a right relationship with God looks like – this is what the Psalms are about. And what we have found is that when it comes to having a right relationship with God, or being righteous, God isn't looking for perfection from us, rather he is looking for desire and need.

So God wants us to pursue Him not out of duty, but out of love. Imagine a husband coming home with flowers for his wife on their anniversary. And as he enters the door and displays the bouquet his wife gushes “wow! You shouldn't have.” And at that the husband swoops her into an embrace as declares, “I love you so deeply, I just had to find the most radiant display of beauty I could – you deserve it.”

Now if you are a husband and you've done that you know that it usually works out pretty well for you – happy wife, happy life! But if this makes sense then you probably understand the different result if after she said “Wow! You shouldn't have.” Her husband responds matter of factly – “don't mention it, it is my duty.”²

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You see as noble as duty is, it pales in comparison with desire. So God is unimpressed by our services of duty, He doesn't want our gifts of obligation, He likes a cheerful giver, He wants us to see Him as the most desirable thing in the universe – and pursue Him with everything we've got.

The second thing God wants from us is need. Throughout the Scriptures we see that God loves to save broken sinners, but has no time for those who have their lives together. God wants us to cling to Him in desperation not come to Him imagining we are doing Him a favor by slotting Him into our otherwise busy life. God will be our Saviour but He will not be our object of pity.

But when we see Him for who He really is and desire Him for it; and when we recognize how desperate our situation, and how great His ability to save, then we find ourselves being rightly related to God. And it is attitudes and feelings like these that the Psalmists teach us to ponder.

¹ Sermon outline and some content adapted from Andy Stanley's sermon “Your Days are Numbered” <https://www.rightnow.org/Content/Series/149#1>

² John Piper “Desiring God” (Colorado: Multnomah Books), 2011, pg 93.

Today's Psalm follows that vein and examines how we should view our most valuable asset as we relate to God.

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Now usually when we think of the Psalms we think of David because he wrote most of them. But today we are going to be looking at a Psalm that pre-dates David by about 500 years. This is the oldest Psalm in the book.

So if you see a Bible in the pew in front of you, or have one on your phone, please open it up to Psalm 90. And as you turn there would you please pray with me?

[Pray]

As you find Psalm 90 in your Bibles notice first the words of context that come just under the title. They say "A prayer of Moses the man of God."

Now we don't usually think of Moses as a Psalm writer and that's because this is the only Psalm of his that we have, though he may have written more. But what we get in this one is profound. In this Psalm Moses says: **When we see God for who He really is our temporality poses no threat to our significance.**

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So in essence this is a Psalm about time – and time is incredibly important to us. Studies show that if you wear a watch or carry a cell phone you probably end up checking it around 110 times a day – that's the average – that works out to about 6 times an hour for the 18 hours you are awake.

So about the only things we do more than check the time is breathe or if you are in the younger generation, update your Facebook status.

So time is really important to us. And probably the number one question we ask in regards to time is "What time is it?"

And so we look at our watches or the bottom right corner of our computer screen or our phone or we bug the person next to us, because we need to know what time it is.

But the thing about time is that no matter how often you check up on it, it just keeps escaping. So two things are true: First your time is your most valuable asset. Nothing you own can be traded for more of it. And second, in spite of its importance none of us can keep it safe – even as we sit here time slips through our fingers. Some of you are checking your watches right now and realizing you are 5 minutes closer to death than before I began. How's that for encouraging?

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If you didn't like that then perhaps you would prefer to cheer yourself up with the words of Job? He has a few things to say about time. He writes:

My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle,
 and they come to an end without hope....
 My days are swifter than a runner;
 they fly away without a glimpse of joy.
 (Job 7:6; 9:25)

Thanks Job, that's great!

But no matter how grumpy you are that we are on this topic this is our shared reality – time is running out for all of us.

And as we get older we become more and more aware of this. This is why when you are 4 the thought that you have to wait two more days until your first day of preschool feels like an infinite injustice – that's where Elliana has been living for her last eternity. But why when you are older than four... like significantly older... every day starts feeling like Monday – are you there? Or if you get a little older still every other week starts feeling like Christmas. Are you there?

We have also articulated vocabulary to reflect this fleeting sensation. So we are constantly saying things like "It's about time. Time flies. We hardly have time to breathe because it's time to hit the road. We try to finish ahead of time. We try to beat the time and be in the right place at the right time. Occasionally it works out and we arrive just in the nick of time. But usually we end up racing against time or living on borrowed time. Ultimately every time we turn around something else happens because time is of the essence. And before we know it we are pressed for time. Then we are out of time. Then in no time at all time's up.

Do you know anyone who has lived a life kind of like that? ... Of course you do, we all live lives like that.

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Is it any surprise then that those who have spent time pondering this have often wondered what's the point? What is the point of life if it disappears so quickly? And Moses wants to speak into this question. Look at Psalm 90 verse 1

[Read Psalm 90:1-2]

Moses broaches the subject of life's meaning by putting it into the context of God's eternity. And if anyone can do this, Moses is probably a good candidate. He lived a long and diverse life.

Moses was born into slavery in Egypt but spent the first 40 years of his life growing up in Pharaoh's court. Here he learned to walk like an Egyptian and talk like an Egyptian. But eventually he realized he wasn't an Egyptian, he was actually a Hebrew so he killed a couple Egyptians and had to flee.

Then he spent the next 40 years wandering around in the desert herding sheep for his father in law. Now Moses was a brilliant man so can you imagine what this must have done to him? For 40 years he did nothing. If the sun was up he was out with the sheep. If the sun was down he was sleeping with the sheep.

And then God appeared to him in the burning bush and gave him a new job – go get My people out of Egypt. Now Pharaoh needed a bit of convincing, but eventually he let God’s people go. And then Moses spent the next 40 years leading God’s people around in the desert. When the sun was up he was with God’s sheep and when the sun was down he was with God’s sheep.

Now when Moses was working as God’s shepherd he saw probably the greatest miracles that have ever been seen on this planet. Moses watched God drown his enemies, and beat them down with hail and swallow them up in the earth. Moses watched rocks spit out water and even saw God’s finger carve out the 10 Commandments. So Moses was a huge and powerful prophet of God. And if anyone’s life was meaningful it was Moses’.

But in this Psalm Moses says even his life, as great as it was, only had meaning as it was in line with what God was doing. Moses says God is the point of life.

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Now this is something everyone struggles with. When we are young it comes out blatantly and then we learn to hide it a bit better. But the teenage years are classic for this – and I’m not picking on you if you are a teenager, we have all been there. But when you are a teenager you are pretty sure that you are the center of life. Everything in the world revolves around you.

I remember being about 16 and coming to what I considered an amazing realization. So one day I went to my dad and said “Dad, you know how in each generation the dominant genes get passed down to the next generation. Well look at me – like really feast your eyes on this.” Why?” He asked. “Because I am the culminating link at the top of this chain – I’m the result of all of these dominant genes!”

Talk about an ego problem! Anyway, it wasn’t until I had kids of my own that I realized why he wasn’t that impressed. Now I’m just one more link in a chain that just keeps going on and on. So I’m not near as special as I thought. I’m not the point after all.

And this is what Moses is getting at as he writes. Moses writes “Before the mountains we born, or You brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting You are God.” So if we want to find meaning in life we have to use God as the bookends instead of our own life because 1000 years from now even the most glorious rags to riches story isn’t going to be worth mentioning. The only thing that will matter is the One who has been there from the beginning.

Verse 3 adds on this.

[Read Psalm 90:3]

These words sound a bit like something Gandalf might say, but really they are just a repletion of Genesis.

In the first chapters of Genesis God speaks and the sun and stars come into existence, the dry ground forms at His command and every living being takes its place. And finally God crafts man from the dust of the earth, separating us from the rest of creation by breathing His Spirit into us.

But when we separated ourselves from this Breathe, choosing to live for our own glory instead of His, the curse was “for dust you are and to dust you will return.”³

Friends, the search for meaning apart from God is as old as time itself. But God wins the argument every time. As the bathroom graffiti reads: Nietzsche is dead – signed God.

Verse 4 goes on:

[Read Psalm 90:4]

A thousand years ago Viking Raider Leif Eriksson discovered North America rowing across the Pacific. A thousand years ago Macbeth murdered Duncan, king of Scotland. A thousand years ago the crusades began. That all feels like distant history for us doesn't it?

But Moses says the thousand years that divide then from now are like a single day to God. In comparison if you live to be a 100, which is pretty old, then your life would seem like 2 hours and 40 minutes to God. What did you do this last week that you managed to start and finish in 2 hours and 40 minutes? Anything of significance? But it's worse than that.

Moses goes on, or a thousand years is like a watch in the night. So picture soldiers dividing up the night shift into two or three parts so that they can take turns sleeping while someone stayed vigilant. And an average watch would be around 4 hours.

Now 100 years would seem like 20 minutes to God. So what did you start and finish within 20 minutes this last week? We are talking in fruit fly generations now – that's how significant our lives are.

Moses goes on. Look at verse 5.

³ Genesis 3:19

[Read Psalm 90:5-6]

And then verse 10

[Read Psalm 90:10]

In the morning the grass springs up green, but just as quickly the sun beats it down. So Moses says our lives, no matter how grand they are, are simply too short to have any significance in and of themselves.

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Friends, the first person to really change the world for good in the course of their life was Jesus Christ, and He is also the last person to have done it as well. The rest of us simply aren't that significant.

But hear this; Moses' intention here in saying this is not to depress us. This isn't Ecclesiastes. What Moses gives us here is the ticket to escaping meaninglessness. He says meaning comes as we develop a correct view of our temporality in light of God's eternity.

The reality is there is only room for one Saviour of the universe and you aren't Him. That should be an easy "amen." But this is exactly what our culture tries to make each one of us into. It preaches "look within to find meaning," But friends, as hard as you might search there is nothing there.

And that's because we only last 70 or maybe 80 years. What can we really accomplish in such a short time?

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Now remember Moses is the one who is saying this. He's the man who probably accomplished more in his life than anyone else, and yet this is what he says. We are just too small a stone to make big ripples in the ocean.

So friends, stop making life about you. Stop searching for meaning inside yourself. Stop trying to be significant. Instead recognize your insignificance in light of God's infinite eternity and join Him in what He is doing.

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We get this in verse 11 which is the linchpin of the Psalm. And I'm going to put this on the screen as it is really important, but really difficult to translate. Verse 11 reads:

If only we knew the power of Your anger!
Your wrath is as great as the fear that is Your due. (Psalm 90:11)

Does that make sense?... It didn't to me. When you come to a verse like this you need to appreciate how difficult an art translation is. Believe it or not this makes sense in the Hebrew!

But the nuances of it are incredibly hard to capture in English and so the NIV struggles. The New Living Translation helps us make a bit more sense of this. It reads:

Who can comprehend the power of Your anger?
Your wrath is as awesome as the fear You deserve. (Psalm 90:11 NLT)

Now let me work to unpack this for us. Moses says: “if only we knew” – which implies we don’t know. Or “Who can comprehend...? The implied answer is no one can comprehend. We don’t understand this outside of a miracle of God... But what is it we don’t understand?

If only we knew the power of Your anger – So it’s God’s anger we don’t understand. We don’t understand what makes God who He is. We don’t really get what God is passionate about or what drives Him – we can’t get this by ourselves. We are too small. But if only we could! If only we could get a glimpse of who God really is things would be different.

The next part is even more difficult, “Your wrath is as great as the fear that is Your due.” Or “Your wrath is as awesome as the fear you deserve.” Here is what this means: You are worthy of our reverent fear. You are worthy of us living our lives differently than we normally would.

Now I want to paraphrase this so we can hopefully capture it all together. Moses says:

“If we could see You as You really are God, we would give you the reverence You are worthy of.”

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And let’s take this one step further to connect this with the theme we have seen over and over again in the Psalms. So here it is:

“If we could see You for who You really are God, then we would live our lives in a right-related way.”

So it is only **when we see God for who He really is** that **our temporality poses no threat to our significance**. Because our significance as creatures come as we are in right relationship with our Creator. But all this depends on our ability to see God.

So what does it mean to see God correctly; to see Him for who He really is?

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I’ll give it to you first in a sentence, and then unpack it with two examples from Scripture. Here’s the sentence: It is when we glimpse God’s glory that we see Him correctly, and this experience changes us.

Now two pictures: One from Moses and one from Jesus.

First, in Exodus 33 Moses was on Mount Sinai where he received the 10 Commandments, and he made the boldest request anyone has ever made of God. We read:

Then Moses said, "Now show me Your glory." (Exodus 33:15-18)

And the crazy thing is that God agreed! Now He put a condition on it. He told Moses "you can't see my face, or the fullness of my glory, because it would kill you." My full glory is more than a person can bear. It would burn the flesh off our bones.

And so God hid Moses a crack in the rock, and God passed before him and Moses just caught a glimpse of His glory and it changed him. We read:

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai... he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses... they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called to them; so Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and he spoke to them... When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. (Exodus 34:29-33)

Moses hid the radiance of his encounter with the glory of God so he wouldn't terrify people. Rightly seeing God's glory changes a person.

We get something similar in the Gospel of John where Jesus lets a little of His glory out. The soldiers had come to arrest Him in the Garden they asked Him "Are you Jesus." And He answered "I Am He." But He shouldn't have said "I AM" because this is God's name. And just a little bit of God's glory squeaked out. And John tells us:

When Jesus said, "I Am he," they drew back and fell to the ground. (John 18:6)

The fact is nobody took Jesus' life from Him. He lay it down. If He didn't want to He simply wouldn't have. He would have let a bit more of His glory out and those soldiers would have evaporated. He wouldn't have had to call legions of angels to back Him up, He could have handled it by Himself. Friends, do you know that Jesus held back His glory that He might die so you may live? Do you see that? And if you see that how has it changed the way you live?

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This is what Moses is getting at: When we get a glimpse of who God really is it makes us view the time we have left differently. And then Moses gives us a prayer so that this reality can become our reality. Look at verse 12:

[Read Psalm 90:12]

Now we all know how to number our days. If you have ever spoken with an engaged woman you know how this goes. If you ask her "when are you getting married?" She will say: "26 days, 12 hours and 13 minutes!!"

And if you are that woman, in that moment you will be both excited and keenly aware of everything that still has to be done before that day arrives.

Or if you have ever bought a house or closed on a business deal you know what it means to number your days. People ask “when’s the closing date” And you say “four days from now.” And when you say this you probably think “man, I’ve got a lot to get done before then!”

Or if you have ever had surgery and your doctor has told you what you needed to do to prepare for it you know what it means to number your days.

And Moses says ask God to help you live in light of your days being numbered; ask Him to help you live preparing for the end. Not in a depressing way, but in a way that will motivate you to do things that count. Let your shortness of days lead you to wise living. May they cause you to invest your life in God’s eternity. Jesus says use the time that remains to “store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.”⁴ Because when you do this you will not only get heaven, but will find yourself to have truly lived here as well.

Brothers and sisters, Moses urges us to realize our lives are not about us – they are too short to be meaningful in and of themselves – so instead find your meaning by partnering with God’s purpose for your life. We were created to enjoy His glory and live for the expansion of His kingdom. So learn to number your days and invest the little bit of breathe you have left in something eternal – something that matters. And pray that God would show Himself to you that you might number your days. Because **When we see God for who He really is our temporality poses no threat to our significance.**

⁴ Matthew 6:20