

Numbering Our Days

Scripture Text: Psalm 90

Introduction

I love timepieces. Clocks and watches fascinate me. I particularly love watching how traditional timepieces keep time. I love to see the movement of the internal components. Part of it is that timepieces are a reminder that something so intricate with so many parts had to be created by someone. And once created, it had to be “wound up” in order to work. It is a helpful reminder to me of God’s work in creation. Timepieces are also a reminder of time, which is their purpose. They keep time for us. They remind us of the movement of time, sometime faster than we expected and other times slower than we want it to be. Timepieces are also a good reminder that our time on Earth grows shorter with each passing minute. Some clocks often carry the motto “time flees,” which it does!

I do not know about you, but I seem to be more aware of the passage of time the older I get. It seems that each year passes much more quickly now than it used to be. Of course, we know that there are still 60 minutes in an hour, 24 hours in a day, 365 days in a year. But we hear things such as the following:

“I wish I had more time.”

“There’s just not enough time in the day.”

“Time is so short.”

“Time goes faster every month.”

With all the time that has passed, I often wish I had done more than I have. I wish I had used what time I had to serve God more, to use what He has given me to live wholeheartedly for Him. Time is the most precious commodity we have, for once it is gone, it is gone forever. We cannot reclaim it. We cannot live in the past, we can only live in the present. Even tomorrow is not promised. We have to make the most of today.

Psalm 90, the only psalm we know that is ascribed to the prophet Moses, speaks of our using the time we have. It pictures a “time” when the nation of Israel was about to cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land. Their parents had followed Moses out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, but they had rebelled against God. As a result, God swore that they would not enter the land He had promised them (Num. 14:20–35). For the Israelites to accomplish their mission and for God to establish the “work of their hands” (Psa. 90:17) would require the people to embrace the covenant God made with them and live in faith toward Him. This prayer reminds us that we should use the time we are given to faithfully seek God’s blessings so that we can carry out His mission.

Honor God as God

In planning our time each year, Psalm 90 first tells us to remember God’s place in our lives. Before we do anything, we ought to first remember Who God is.

Psalm 90:1-4 ¹ Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. ² Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. ³ You return man to dust and say, "Return, O children of man!" ⁴ For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.

Moses' prayer here contrasts God's eternity to human mortality. God is the Creator. We are the creation. God is eternal. We are mortal. God is not subject to time, but is the Creator of everything, including time. Being the Creator means He has always been God and He always will be. From everlasting to everlasting, He is God. We ought to always humbly come before Him in awe and reference. God being God is enough, but He is something else.

Some translations say that God has been our "refuge". Indeed, many passages of Scripture refer to God as a refuge. He is a safe place we can go in times of trouble. Different from a refuge, which is temporary, a dwelling place is where one lives in good times and bad. It is a place more permanent, not just where we go in times of distress. The New Living Translation says, "Lord, through all the generations you have been our home!" That is Who God is for those who know Him. Dwelling in the presence of God results in an eternally significant life. It means a life of purpose every year of our lives.

Know Yourself and Turn to God

Knowing Who God is ought to help us remember who we are. We are told that God returns man "to dust". This reminds us of God's judgment on mankind from Adam and Eve's fall. We will return to the dust in death. In light of God's eternity and our mortality, we ought to humble ourselves before God. Unfortunately, we often exalt ourselves to a place where only God belongs. The next verses remind us who we are.

Psalm 90:5-8 ⁵ You sweep them away as with a flood; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning: ⁶ in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers. ⁷ For we are brought to an end by your anger; by your wrath we are dismayed. ⁸ You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence.

The psalmist compares our mortal lives to that of a dream. A dream exists for a few moments and then it is over. Humanity is also compared to grass, which is a common metaphor in Scripture for the brevity of human life. Grass flourishes for a while and then fades and withers away. Our lives are brief. I am reminded of Shakespeare's MacBeth. In Act 5 of the play, MacBeth delivers a famous soliloquy in response to hearing of Lady Macbeth's death, in which he says the following:

And all our yesterdays have lighted fools, the way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.

While I do not share MacBeth's negative assessment of human life, I do think he captures the brevity of it. The shortness of life can seem useless if we do not live to our fullest potential. Mankind's fleeting life span is due to the entry of sin into the world at the Garden of Eden. Death is not a natural part of being human. It is an unfortunate result of our descent into sin. Sin and death are *now* a part of the human condition. We cannot hide our sin from God. As a result of sin, we are all under God's wrath and judgement. But thanks be to God, He sent His Son into the world so that the world may not perish. (John 3:16) We no longer need to strut and fret upon the stage of life waiting for our act to end. We can begin living right now through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Seek God to Use Our Time Wisely

Knowing that we have a limited time to live in this world, how should we live? Should we as some believe eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we may die? (1 Cor. 15:32) The Apostle Paul rejected this way of thinking. If we know Christ, we ought to live like people with new life. The Christian life is not a call to just accept Jesus and wait for Him to return. It is a call to wisely use the finite time that God has given us.

***Psalm 90:9-12** ⁹ For all our days pass away under your wrath; we bring our years to an end like a sigh. ¹⁰ The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away. ¹¹ Who considers the power of your anger, and your wrath according to the fear of you? ¹² So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.*

We are told to number our days. This refers especially to making the most of one's days, since they are so few. When I recently visited a museum in Jamestown, Virginia, I saw a gold signet ring supposedly owned by an English Puritan from the early 1600s. On that ring was written a Latin phrase, *Memento Mori*, which means "Remember your death." It was a strange statement, particularly for someone to say while he is alive. How can one remember his death, unless he is a ghost? However morbid that phrase may be, it is a reminder of the shortness of life. Perhaps, one would recite that phrase to remember how short his or her life is. Maybe it was a reminder that because our lives are short we should make the most of them. Live with the knowledge that life is short.

Moses prayed that God would teach His people to number their days. They should live with the understanding of the brevity of life. They should make the most of the time God has given them. Moses prayed this so that they would receive a "heart of wisdom". The heart of wisdom would enable God's faithful people to live by the right priorities. It is important for us to live with the right priorities in order to live a purposeful life. What is the right priority? The fear of God would be one. Scripture says the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, so start there. (Prov. 9:10) Fear God. Love God. Follow God. This is the key to living wisely.

Seek God for Satisfaction and Joy

What do we do when life brings disappointment and trouble? What should we do when life seems to be full of hurt and pain? Moses did not expect to live a life without adversity, in fact he acknowledged it. He had experienced moments of despair and discouragement. He asked God for both blessing and adversity. Listen to these words:

Psalm 90:13-15 ¹³ *Return, O Lord! How long? Have pity on your servants!* ¹⁴ *Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.* ¹⁵ *Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, and for as many years as we have seen evil.*

One thing to remember is that this life is short, but so is the pain and trouble that is part of it. Sometimes we bring pain and suffering into our lives through sin. In those times, we must turn back to God. In other times, adversity comes from no fault of our own. Trouble, pain and evil will not last forever, though. Darkness only lasts for a while, and then comes the morning. Moses prayed to God for Him to satisfy them in the morning. Also, remember what the psalmist has already told us — to Whom can we turn? Who is our refuge and our dwelling place? God! In the midst of life in the wilderness, only the blessing of God's own presence can give meaning and joy. Seek God for satisfaction.

That word, satisfaction, means to eat one's fill of something — to satisfy oneself with something. We should be so full of God's love and mercy that we would long for nothing else. If we are satisfied in anything else, we will be disappointed. Convicted of his sinful lifestyle, Saint Augustine repented, gave himself completely to Christ and was baptized on an Easter morning. However, sinful desire does not cease when we experience salvation. We do not immediately stop sinning. Rather, this is when our relationship with God truly begins. Desire keeps us ever seeking the Lord. In his *Confessions*, Augustine wrote, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you." Our lives will be restless until we rest in Christ. Seek God for your every desire and you will experience satisfaction and joy.

Seek God to Accomplish His Work

The awareness of the brevity of human life led Moses to earnestly pray for God's help. How many of you believe that your success depends on you? How many of you believe the success of the work of ministry depends on you? I think we can certainly hinder God's work. We can be ineffective and stagnant in our faith, but listen to the last verses of this psalm:

Psalm 90:16-17 ¹⁶ *Let your work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power to their children.* ¹⁷ *Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands!*

Whose work is it? Whose power is at work? Whose favor should we seek? It is all God's. And yet, we should seek God for Him to establish the work of *our hands*. We have a part to play. We are to do His work. We are God's *new* creation that He uses to do good works. (Eph. 2:10) Without God's help, however, we can accomplish nothing of

lasting value. Jesus said that apart from Him we can do nothing. (John 15:5) We want God to confirm what we are doing, to make our efforts successful. What God has called each of us to do for the brief time we are on this earth is to faithfully serve Him and do His work. The work of our hands is the work that God's people do as they live out their Christian calling. Seek God's favor for what He has called you to do.

Conclusion

So, Happy New Year! What does God have planned for you this year? How will this year be different from the last one? Thinking about resolutions, I was challenged by something another pastor in our association said. He wrote, "New year's resolutions (commitments) from Christians gives the impression that we decide what we want to do, but a surrendered life to Jesus means He sets the agenda." I think his point is that the best resolution or commitment we could make is to surrender our lives completely to Jesus. He sets the agenda, not us. Resolve to completely surrender to Him.

I encourage to not dwell in the past. The past is gone. You cannot change it. Memories of the past can too easily feel like shackles holding us to failures, regrets, ignorance, foolishness, and sin. However, God does not want us bound to our past. When God saves us from the death we deserve for our sin, He frees us from the guilt and shame of our former life as well. He gives us a fresh beginning. The old is gone. The new has come. God frees us to receive every good thing He wants to give us. Embrace the fresh beginning God wants to give you. Live in the present with Christ with a view of the glorious future He has prepared for you.

As we look forward to the year ahead, let us focus on what really matters — a genuine relationship with Jesus Christ. Let us remember Who He is and who we are in Him. Consider Paul's words in his letter to the Ephesians:

Ephesians 5:15–17 ¹⁵ *Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise,* ¹⁶ *making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.* ¹⁷ *Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.*

Seek God not just this year, but this day and every day. Commit yourselves to Him. Wisely use the time He has given you. We have such a short time to serve God, to live purposefully, so let us serve Him faithfully. Live life now to the fullest for Jesus Christ.

This is Good News. Thanks be to God. Amen!