

MOSES, THE PSALMIST

Moses - Part 24 (Final)

Psalm 90

Intro: The book of Psalms is, as we all know, the largest book in the Bible. It was the hymn book of Israel. It teaches us that the Psalms were to be an integral part of the worship of God individually and nationally. The Apostle Paul made it clear in his epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians that the Psalms were to be sung in the Church. He told the Ephesians that the Psalms were a part of their ministry to each other, and of their worship of God. This was, in part, evidence of a Spirit filled life. Paul's words were these:

18 . . . be filled with the Spirit;

19 Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord (Eph. 5:18b-19).

In all of my years of ministry I have never met a Christian who did not love the Psalms. They minister to us in joy, and they minister to us in sorrow. A friend of mine said to me many years ago when his wife was dying with cancer, "Somehow when there is trouble, you always find the Psalms."

The first Psalmist of Scripture was Moses. His first psalm is found in Exodus 15, written after Israel had successfully crossed the Red Sea, and had seen Pharaoh and the Egyptian army destroyed in the Sea trying to do what the Israelites had done. His second Psalm is in Deuteronomy 32. Moses wrote it shortly before his death. Today we come to his third Psalm which has been preserved for us in the book of Psalms – Psalm 90. We don't know exactly when it was written, but the content of Psalm 90 seems to suggest that it, too, was written shortly before Moses' death as he had spent forty years watching the generation of adults who had come out of Egypt with him, die one by one under the judgment of God. We will see the evidence of this in a moment as we consider the Psalm.

Moses was not used by the Lord to give us many Psalms as He used David, but Moses' psalms may have greatly influenced David as to the pattern and contents of the many Psalms that he, that is, David, wrote.

Historically the Psalms have been divided into five books. Most Bibles indicate what those five books are. Psalms 1 through 41 make up Book 1; Psalms 42 through 72, Book 2; Psalms 73 through 89, Book 3; Psalms 90

through 106, Book 4; Psalms 107 through 150, Book 5.

You will find that the last Psalm in each book concludes with a doxology. And Psalm 150, which concludes the entire book of Psalms, is totally a doxology, forming a conclusion to the whole book of Psalms.

No one really knows who arranged the Psalms in the order in which they are found in our Bibles, but it seems that most evangelical expositors think that it was the work of Ezra.

So Moses' Psalm comes at the beginning of book 4.

In one way it stands out in contrast with the others in Books 4 and 5. Most of them are later Psalms, but Moses' Psalm is the earliest of all of the other 149 psalms. So it is given a special place of emphasis, an indication of its great importance.

It has a lot to do with sin and death. And, having just been through the life of Moses in twenty-three of the last Sundays, perhaps we can understand the background better than if we have just come to Psalm 90 reading through the book of Psalms. For forty years Moses had lived with death. It would be almost impossible, if not completely impossible, to know how many funerals Moses would have attended at that time. One by one he saw a whole generation of his people die. They died because of their rebellion when the Lord was ready for them to invade Canaan, but they refused to go. Moses must have spent a lot of time during those forty years thinking about human mortality. He literally lived with death. And saddest of all, he had to spend those forty year contemplating his own death. He knew that he was not going to lead the people into the promised land because of his own disobedience to the Lord. How he must have regretted striking that rock twice when the Lord told him that he would get water if he just spoke to the rock. He had sinned against the Lord, and it turned out to be "sin unto death."

People have never like to talk about death, but that is especially true of our generation. Even we as Christians don't like to think about death even though we know that it will mean the end of all of our troubles and being present with the Lord forever, with even sin a thing of the past. But death is coming for all of us unless the Lord comes first. Perhaps it is not so much death that we dread as how it might be that we would have to die.

But I want you to note that in the heading of this Psalm Moses is called, “the man of God.” It is important to notice this because it means that even though this Psalm has a lot to say about death and sin, it also has some very important things to say about God. Moses had the habit of looking at everything in life in the light of Who God is. And he knew that sin and death are a part of our lives, a part of the life of every human being, that are not a part of the life of God. Moses learned to put together sin and death, and he knew from his understanding of the past that people die because of sin, that if there had not been sin there would not have been death. Perhaps this is one reason that people who don’t know the Lord usually object to any talk about sin, possibly realizing in their hearts, as James 1:15 tells us, that “sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”

Psalm 90 is divided into three parts:

- 1) The contrast between the immortality of God and the mortality of man (Psa. 90:1-6).
- 2) The relationship between death and the wrath of God (Psa. 90:7-12).
- 3) The supplication of Moses (Psa. 90:13-17).

All of this Psalm is a prayer because in all of it Moses is talking to the Lord, but there are different kinds of prayer. In the first twelve verses Moses was telling the Lord the truth that he knew; in the last five verses he was pleading with God to be merciful to him and His other servants on the basis of what he knew. Not every child of God has taken the time to think these things through as Moses had, and so Moses felt burdened to pray for all of God’s servants the same requests that he was praying for himself. Note the prevalence of “us” and “we” and “our” in his prayer at the end of the chapter.

But let us start at the beginning.

I. THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE IMMORTALITY OF GOD AND THE MORTALITY OF MAN ((Psa. 90:1-6).

I don’t know why our translators have indicated that Moses addressed God as LORD, Jehovah, because the Hebrew text uses the name for God, *Adonai*, which is equivalent to Master. My Hebrew dictionary indicates that this is the title which people used when they were addressing God “submissively and reverently.” It was an indication that Moses was very conscious of the “divine majesty” of God. It is a title which is especially consistent with the fear of God. And this is probably why Moses in this

Psalm spoke of the Lord's people as His "servants" (cf. vv. 13, 16). So Moses was clearly humbled in his heart as he addressed the Lord. And this is how we should always come to the Lord, even when we address Him as our Father.

He recognizes that the Lord Himself has been the "dwelling place," the shelter, the home, the safe retreat, of His people generation after generation, from the beginning of time to the end of time. And probably in the context of Moses' immediate past he had in mind that the Lord had been their dwelling place, their home, their safe shelter, all through their years of wandering in the wilderness. It is not that the Lord had built a shelter for them, but that He was their home, their safe haven.

And then in verse 2 Moses turned to creation, and that which was considered the strength of creation, the mountains. Before they were brought forth from God as a mother gives birth to her children, even before the earth and the world—from eternity to eternity, spanning all of the years of time, "Thou art God!" As we are going to see, men come, and men go, but God lives and He remains ever the same, never changing in the least, always God, always holy, always sovereign over the heavens and the earth. The evolutionists have tried to get rid of God, but they have only made clear their utter stupidity.

Verses 1 and 2 give us in germ form the foundation of all theology.

But what about man who is so self-centered, so self-sufficient, who feels he can do anything that he wants to do? Look at verse 3. The idea in "Thou turnest man to destruction" is that God crushes him into dust. One expositor says that in death God pulverizes man until there is nothing left. And this is in sharp contrast with God Who is eternal and unchanging, not confined within the limits of time. And as God brought creation into existence by His Word, so by His Word He bring complete destruction upon man. Although the words for dust are different in Genesis 3 from the word for dust here, yet the idea is the same. Man is dust, and at death he returns to dust.

In verse 4 we are reminded that at creation man lived to be almost a thousand years. It was a long time then, and it seems even longer to us now when we don't live that long. But to God a thousand years to God is like yesterday is to us. It is nothing at all to Him who inhabits eternity. Or if you think of the night which the Hebrews divided into three

watches, a thousand years on earth was like a third of the night to God. It was nothing at all.

Moses continued in verse 5 by recognizing that generation after generation is swept away like a ranging storm or flood waters carry people of every generation away in death. The certainty of death for everyone is like the hopelessness of people caught in a tsunami.

Death is as common as people going to sleep. Everybody sleeps, and everybody dies.

Or we are like grass which appears in the morning, grows up and flourishes during the day, and then withers and dies at night. This is God's view of man with all of his achievements. They do not obtain mortality. They appear for a short time, and then they are not only gone, but soon forgotten altogether. For man to see himself as God sees him, leaves absolutely no room for boasting or any feeling of security.

When we moved into our new home, John and Marilyn gave us a round bowl with beautiful flowers to set out on our porch. When they were gone, I replaced them with other flowers. Last fall I brought the bowl in with the withering flowers, and they all dried up through the winter. On Friday I took them in to Seven Dees and jokingly asked the young man who waited on me if he could bring the plants back to life. He looked at me to see if I was serious. Moses said here that those dried up plants are like man. Annuals last for a season, and then they are gone.

But now the question is, Why is it that people die? What doesn't anybody live forever? Now in verse 7 we come to the answer. I have called this:

II. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DEATH AND THE WRATH OF GOD (Psa. 90:7-12).

In verse 7 we read, "we are consumed." That is death. It actually means that we waste away, wear out, decay, cease to exist. So it speaks of the process that leads to death. And this is "by thine anger," said Moses, speaking of God. That is the cause. Some people say that God is love and that is all that He is. They feel that He wants us to feel good all of the time, and have fun on our own terms. But people who talk like that only know half of the story. "God is love." That is Scripture. But God is also righteous, and He will judge anything that is wrong in His sight. "God is

angry with the wicked every day.” That is Scripture too, and you will find those words in Psalm 7:11. And God has said also in His Word that “the soul [the person] that sinneth shall die” (Ezek. 18:4, 20).

It is by God’s wrath that we are “troubled.” This mean shocked, confounded, terror-stricken. And we are not only like this over our own approaching death, but we are like this over the death of those we love.

But in verse 8 Moses explains why God is angry with the human race, and why we die. It is because of sin, our sin. “All have sinned,” and so all die. “The wages of sin is death” – not only physical death, but eternal death.

Moses had learned that while we may hide our sins, or try to hide them, from each other, yet we can hide nothing from God. He keeps a record of every sin that every person ever commits. And that includes our “secret sins,” which one expositor says includes the sins which we try to tell ourselves are not really sins. He is present everywhere and all of the time. The darkness is just like the light to Him. Men love darkness because their deeds are evil. They may succeed in hiding them from other people, but there is no such thing as hiding anything from God. Moses learned that, and you and I had better learn that too. He sees the wrong things we do. He hears the wrong things we say. He knows the wrong places we go. He even knows the wrong things that we think.

We spend our years on that which amounts to nothing. It is as when the end comes all that is left to us is a sigh.

In verse 10 we are told that we do not live nearly a thousand years as our ancestors did. Have you ever wondered why the length of life hasn’t become shorter and shorter under there would be no one alive on the earth? It is evidence of the mercy of God. And so He has stopped the decline in life expectancy to where it is and has been now for many years. We live to be 70. If we are strong, we live to be 80. And we know that sometimes people live to be ninety or a hundred. Some live a few years over that. But regardless of how long people live, life is like Moses has been describing it. A long life doesn’t mean a better life. Moses was speaking of the general course of a person’s life without God. It never goes from bad to good, but always from bad to worse. It is “labor and sorrow.” And then what? “We are cut off, and we fly away.” We don’t determine the time of our death. That is in God’s hands. But what an

unspeakably terrible thing it is to die still under the wrath of God.

And when death comes, the person who still us under the wrath of God, not having sought the Lord and the forgiveness of sins through faith in the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, the punishment will be just as bad, and even worse, than we thought it would be.

And this second section of the Psalm ends with a prayer that Moses prayed for himself and for all of the people of God. The NASB translates verse 12 more accurately like this:

12 So each us to number our days, that we may present to Thee a heart of wisdom.

How wonderful it would be if more people understood the first twelve verses of Psalm 90. But with most people today, “God is not in their thoughts.” They are not thinking about God. We can hear of the tragic deaths of hundreds and thousands of people. We can see our children taken away and grievously mistreated and often killed. We can see the prevalence of evil in high places. But no one in public links any of this with God’s displeasure with our generation. No one has linked together God, man’s sin, God’s wrath, physical death, and eternal judgment. Solomon said long ago, speaking by the Spirit, that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy [One] is understanding”(Prov. 9:10).

At this point we come to:

III. THE SUPPLICATION OF MOSES (Psa. 90:13-17).

In our study of the life of Moses one thing has become increasingly clear: it is that Moses was a man of prayer. Nobody can truly be a “man of God” without being a man of prayer.

Now in this Psalm we see that it was the knowledge of God that helped him to understand man and his problems. But it was also this knowledge that drove him to pray for himself and for the people of God under his ministry. I have already called you attention to the words “us” and “we” and “our” in his prayer.

While God calls ungodly people to return to the dust, Moses was pleading with God to return to His servants, and nullify the judgment that was

upon them as it was upon all people. We now know that that judgment upon us was satisfied when the Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins, and how by His grace our lives have been changed. The judgment of God has been removed from us, and now we enjoy His blessing.

We pray that people will be saved in their youth that their days might be filled with the joy of the Lord. This is verse 14.

We will find, as Moses prayed in verse 15, that the Lord more than compensates with blessing the time that His displeasure has been upon us when we were living in sin.

And in verse 16 it is His work, not ours, that we desire. It is what pleases Him that we want, not what pleases us in our selfishness and sin. A real change has taken place. In addition, we are burdened for our children.

Finally, we want the Lord's blessing, His favor to be upon us. Then and only then will our works last. With Christ we can do nothing, nothing that will please God, nothing that will be fruitful for all eternity. But with His blessing our works can produce results that will last for all eternity.

Concl: There was a simple verse of poetry that I learned as a child which goes like this, I am sure that many of you will remember it. I have seen it since on wall plaques:

Only one life, 'twill soon be past;
Only what done for Christ, will last.

I would like to change one preposition in that verse to make it more accurate, more in agreement with Scripture. It ought to read:

Only one life, 'twill soon be past;
Only what's done *in* Christ, will last.

It is not what we do *for* Him that lasts eternally, but what He does in us and through us that will produce results that last for a lifetime, and then throughout all eternity.

May Moses' prayer for himself and the Lord's servants, be our prayer for ourselves and for all we know who love the Lord.