

Rev Murdo M Campbell: Psalm 90 - Number your days

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 0 0] If we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this evening, if we could, turn back to that portion of scripture that we read, the book of Psalms and Psalm 90.

The book of Psalms, Psalm 90, and if we read again at verse 10, Psalm 90 at verse 10, the years of our life are 70 or even by reason of strength 80, yet their span is but toil and trouble, they are soon gone and we fly away. Who considers the power of your anger and your wrath according to the fear of you? So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

And in particular those words of verse 12. So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

Reverend Dr. Thomas Chalmers, he was the first moderator of the Free Church of Scotland General Assembly after the disruption in 1843. And Thomas Chalmers was one of the most influential preachers during the 19th century. But before Thomas Chalmers was converted, he spent many years as a professor of mathematics in St Andrew's University. But because of his intellectual position and the fact he could read, Chalmers was also licensed to preach the gospel, which means that during the week Monday to Friday, Chalmers would give lectures on mathematics in St Andrew's. But then on the Lord's Day, Chalmers would preach in his congregation of Kilmany, even though he was not a Christian.

There was moderates at that time and they were men who were very religious, but they were not converted. But before he was converted, Chalmers used to say that ministers had the easiest job in the world. Because Chalmers, well, he said he could lecture all week, then prepare two sermons on a Saturday afternoon, and then preach both ends on the Lord's Day. But of course, Chalmers' view of the ministry had changed when he came to faith. When he was converted, he realized that preaching the gospel of grace was a lot harder than preaching a gospel of religion. But after Chalmers left his position of Professor of Mathematics in St Andrew's, he went into full-time ministry, as you know. And Chalmers said that there was one mathematical equation he had never considered. He spent many years as a mathematician. But he said this one equation had just passed him by. And he said that the equation which he had never considered before was the shortness of time and the length of eternity. The shortness of time and the length of eternity. And what we see when we come to Sam 90 is that that's the same equation which Moses was considering. Because we're told in the title of this, Sam, that it was written by Moses, the man of God. And it was a prayer of

[3 : 25] Moses. And in his prayer, Moses was considering the shortness of time, but the length of eternity. But what's remarkable about this Sam is that Moses was considering this great equation three and a half thousand years ago. And I say that because Sam 90 is the oldest Sam in the Psalter, which dates back to around 1500 BC. But even though it's the oldest Sam in the Psalter, this Sam contains the most relevant truth. It contains the truth that God doesn't change because he is from everlasting to everlasting. And it also contains the relevant truth that everything around us and everyone around us is always changing. Because we are temporal. God is eternal. We are temporal. And as Moses says himself, our years are like a tale that is told. And you know, at the beginning of another year in life's journey, we're being reminded in this Sam that time is passing so quickly. There's nothing in a year. It's another new year again. And you know, looking back over the year that's gone by, we can say, well, although it's only a year, a lot can happen in only a year. And it's inevitable that as we stand on the threshold of a new year, we often become very reflective. We often think back over what's just gone by. You see all those programs that are doing reviews of everything that's happened in the throughout the year. And we think back over what has just happened.

And we consider all the things that have gone by. And for all of us, there were highs, and there were lows. There were blessings, and they were difficult providences. They were joys, and they were sorrows. There were those who were with us at the beginning of 2016, who are no longer with us at the beginning of 2017. And there will be some who will confess that 2016 was the best year of their life. There will be others who will confess that 2016 was the worst year of their life. And you know, I always find that new year is a very emotional time because we're reminded that we just don't know what's ahead of any of us. We don't know what's ahead, because life is so uncertain, and our life is so short. And that's what was on the mind of Moses as he came before God in prayer.

He considered that life is just passing before his eyes. He could see that his days and years upon the earth are now more than the days and years that are ahead of him. And as a result, Moses is praying for himself, and he's praying for the children of Israel. Because Moses could see the frailty of life, and he could see that he needs to come before the unchanging God, and seek to set his heart upon true wisdom. He needs to number his days. And you know, in the words of the Apostle Paul, just thinking about it, Moses was looking not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are temporal. But the things that are unseen are eternal. And as we walk through this Sam or this prayer of Moses, we'll see that the desire of Moses was that we would all come to the same conclusion that he came to, when he considered the shortness of time and the length of eternity. And unlike us to consider the prayer of Moses just under three headings, the constant, the harsh and the conclusion, the constant, the harsh, and the conclusion. So if we look first of all at the constant, the constant, that is the

Lord, look at verse one. Moses prays Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations, before the mountains were brought forth, whatever you had formed the earth and the world from everlasting to everlasting, you are God. Now, although it cannot be proved, I believe that this prayer of Moses was written just before he died. And I say that because when we consider the book of Deuteronomy, Deuteronomy was a book which was written by Moses near the end of his life, in which the children of Israel, they had been taken out of slavery in Egypt and they had been led through the wilderness for 40 years. And now they have reached the banks of the river Jordan, and they're about to cross over into the promised land. But in the book of Deuteronomy, Moses reminds the children of Israel all about the Lord's faithfulness towards them throughout that 40 year wilderness journey and even been brought out of slavery in Egypt. And to the point that you could say that the book of Deuteronomy is just like an old photo album. We all have old photo albums somewhere in our house. And if we were to start at the beginning of our photo album, and look at all the pictures, we would see all these different stages. We would see births and infancy and then childhood and teenage years and adulthood. We would see all these different stages.

And that's what the book of Deuteronomy is like. It's like an old photo album which recounts all the different stages of the history of the children of Israel until they are about to cross over into the promised land. But in the book of Deuteronomy, Moses reminds the children of Israel that throughout their years in the wilderness and in Egypt, the Lord has been faithful to them.

[9 : 25] The Lord has been good to them. The Lord has blessed them because even though a lot has changed around them and an entire generation of people have died in the wilderness, the Lord hasn't changed. He has remained the same. And you know, it seems to me that as Moses came to the end of his life, he began to reflect upon the Lord's faithfulness throughout all those generations.

When Moses looked back over his life and considered the experience of the children of Israel, he could see that the one constant in his life was the Lord. Because the Lord was with Moses and his people throughout every stage, throughout every experience. He was even with Moses and his people when Moses was the tiny baby being laid in a basket in the river Nile.

The Lord was with Moses and his people when he delivered the children of Israel from bondage and the tyranny of Pharaoh in Egypt. The Lord was with Moses and his people when he brought them safely through the Red Sea. The Lord was with Moses and his people when he fed them manna from heaven and water from the rock. The Lord was with Moses and his people when he gave to them the law and he gave to them guidance how to build the tabernacle in order to worship the Lord. My friend, the Lord was with Moses and his people throughout all these generations. And so it's no wonder that Moses comes before God and prayer and says, Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.

And what Moses is saying is that Lord, you have been faithful to us. You have remained steadfast and trustworthy. You have continued to be committed towards your covenant people. You have been our eternal refuge. Lord, you have been our constant. Lord, you have been our constant. And this is why I believe that Moses prayed these words just before he died. Because at the end of the book of Deuteronomy, having reflected upon the whole history of the children of Israel and the Lord's faithfulness towards them at every stage, Moses then blesses the people. He blesses the 12 tribes of Israel. And as the children of Israel stand on the banks of the River Jordan with this new beginning awaiting them in the promised land, Moses stands before them and says, the eternal God is your refuge and underneath are his everlasting arms. What a promise. The eternal God is your refuge and underneath are his everlasting arms. My friend, what better words to say to those who had seen and experienced so much change throughout their life? What better words to be reminded of on the threshold of a new beginning than words that remind them of the Lord's faithfulness in the past, the Lord's faithfulness in the present, and the Lord's faithfulness in the future. The eternal

God is your refuge and underneath are his everlasting arms. And as the children of Israel had to take these words into their new chapter in their lives, so also we ought to take these words into a new year, the new year ahead, being reminded that the God who has been faithful to us in the past is the God who will be faithful towards us in the present, and he will be faithful towards us in the future. He will be faithful in the year ahead, whatever the year ahead has for us. And you know, this is what gave Moses the greatest comfort and the greatest assurance, that whatever the future held for the children of Israel, the Lord would be with them. Whatever was going to come their way, the Lord would be their constant because he doesn't change. He is from everlasting to everlasting. And amid all the changing circumstances for the children of Israel, the Lord would remain the same. His character, his character of love, grace and mercy, it would remain the same. His covenant, his covenant and all the promises of blessing, they would remain the same. His commitment, and his commitment towards his people, despite their sinful nature, and despite their disobedience, the Lord would remain the same. And I find it's because the

[14:17] Lord remains the same that we can claim all these great and precious promises for ourselves tonight. It's not that the Lord is stagnant in any way, that he just stays the same as he was in the past, doesn't move. But he's like this eternal constant, ever present, and ever present help. And because he is our only constant, we know that his character towards us, his character of love, grace and mercy, it doesn't ebb and flow. It remains the same. We know that his covenant and all the blessings that are held out to us, they're not dependent upon our faithfulness, but his faithfulness. And because the Lord is always faithful, his covenant and all its blessings, they remain the same. And we know that his commitment towards us, despite our failures and our shortcomings and our disobedience, his commitment remains the same. My friend, it's because the Lord remains the same. It's because the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting.

It's because he doesn't change. It's because he is our constant, that we know that all these great and precious promises are ours in Jesus Christ. They're all ours. Ours to claim, ours to hold on to.

They're all ours in Jesus Christ. And you know, I love that description, which the writer to the Hebrews gives of Jesus. Because throughout the letter to the Hebrews, if you read it, the writer is elevating Jesus. He's presenting to us this Jesus who is supremely better than all the other Old Testament types and shadows in the past. And he says, Jesus is better. And he says, Jesus, he's better than the prophets. He's better than all the angels. He's better than Moses to lead his people. He provides a better Sabbath rest for his people. He's a better high priest than Aaron was, because he's the great high priest. He provides a better covenant, a better sanctuary for worship, a better sacrifice than all the blood of bulls and goats. And then as the writer to the Hebrews reaches the end of his letter, he says, this Jesus is better because he is the same yesterday, today, and forever. It's wonderful. He's the same in the past. He's the same in the present.

And he's the same in the future. And that's the description which is given of Jesus, Jesus Christ, the best savior you can trust in, because he's the only savior who promises to you hope and life, peace and death, and security for all eternity. And he presents Jesus to us and says, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever. My friend, what better Jesus to trust in than the Jesus who is better than everything, because he never changes towards us, never changes. And knowing the shortness of time and the length of eternity, who better for us to trust in for time and for eternity.

But even though Moses found comfort and security in the fact that the Lord was his only constant in life, he had to admit that something had changed with mankind. And as Moses continues his prayer, he confesses that the curse upon mankind is what has changed us. So let's look secondly at this curse.

[18:07] If considered that the Lord is the only constant, but secondly the curse. Look at verse three. Moses prays, you return man to the dust and say return, oh children of man, for a thousand years in your sight or but as yesterday when it is past or as a watch in the night, you sweep them away as with a flood, they're like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning. In the morning it flourishes and is renewed. In the evening it fades and withers. And in these words, Moses presents to us the contrast between the eternity of God and the mortality of man. Because in verse two, Moses confesses that even before the mountains were born and before the world had been formed, God has been from everlasting to everlasting, no beginning and no end. But Moses says that that's not the case with mankind. Because God is saying to mankind that they are to return to the dust, return, oh children of man. But we have to ask, well why? Why does God, the God who creates life and sustains life, why does he command mankind to return to the dust? Well the clue is in the word man in verse three. Because the word man can also be translated as Adam. And so what God says to mankind is that they are to return to the dust, return, oh children of Adam. And of course it immediately brings us back into the garden of Eden and to the fall of Adam, in which Adam fell from the perfect estate from which he was created by disobeying God's law. Adam was created in perfection, created in the image and likeness of God. He was created to perfectly reflect God's glory and yet he possessed the free will to sin or not to sin. And it's not that God was restricting and oppressive upon Adam in any way, God had given Adam everything. He had given him a paradise of which he was able to enjoy all of God's creation with his wife and family. Someone once put it that the garden of Eden was a garden full of yes and a single tree of no. A garden full of yes but a single tree of no. God said that you may eat of the tree of the garden, every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat of it for in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die. And we know what happened because we're still seeing the effects of Adam's disobedience today. When Adam fell God pronounced the curse upon Adam and all his posterity. All the children of Adam were affected by the curse. God said, cursed is the ground because of you. In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life, thorns and thistles that shall bring forth for you and you shall eat the plants of the field by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground for out of it you were taken for you are dust and to dust you shall return. And this is what Moses means in verse 10 when he speaks that he says that the span of our life is just toil and trouble in which we work the ground we work all our lives by the sweat of our brow we go to work every day and we do it until we return to the ground and my friend working the soil if any of you do it it's not only a reminder of where we came from but it's also a reminder of

where we are going and you know there's nothing more solemn than standing over an open grave especially for a minister standing over an open grave having to address those who are living and being reminded that this is our end the grave is our end from dust we came and to dust we shall return. And you know I was thinking about how through this actually is because last year I attempted to plant some potatoes I'd never done it before and I thought I would give it a go especially if you know my predecessor Kenny Ruech he was very successful in the vegetable plot his there was a huge plot out the back behind the mats. Anyway I found time to try and prepare the ground to dig it all up to turn it over and then plant the potatoes but with a young family and with everything else that was going on I couldn't find enough time to deal with all the weeds and as one thing led to another time went by I had to abandon it because the weeds had taken over and if you were to look at what I had tried or attempted to do in the summer if you were to look at it today you would think I'd never been there because the weeds had taken over you could say that the curse had taken over and you know I was thinking that the problem was the reason I couldn't keep up was that I couldn't keep up with the curse I couldn't keep up with the curse and my friend the same is true about our life we can't keep up with the curse we can't keep up with the curse because one day the curse that is upon us will take over we spend our life trying to keep up with the curse by keeping fit or eating healthily or taking our vitamins or receiving treatment when necessary but the reality is we can't keep up with the curse because one day the curse will take over and Moses reminds us here that that one day is very soon it's not far away and with that Moses gives all these illustrations that emphasize the shortness and the brevity of life he says that the Lord's perspective on time is a thousand years it's like yesterday it's already past it's almost nothing our life is almost nothing and he says that it's like a watch in the night which was the hours of duty that a watchman would stand in the watch tower to keep the city safe and there would be three watches of the night three watches of a 12 hour shift which would mean four hours for one watch and that's what Moses says our life is like so short passing so quickly but more than that Moses says that our life is like new grass it rises with the morning sun it springs up when the sun comes up full of youth full of strength full of vigor full of vitality but it doesn't take long until the evening comes and the grass begins to wither and fade and die and David he uses the same imagery in Psalm 103 words that I'm sure you're very familiar with when David says about God he remembers that we are dust he our frame well knows frail man his days are like the grass as flowering field he grows for over it the wind of pass and it away is gone and off the place where once it was it shall no more be known the curse takes over because we can't keep up with the curse and I believe that this is fitting with Moses' situation

because as we said he's about to die he's at the end of his life he's reached the end of his life and he's looking back over all the years that the Lord has given to him and he can see the Lord's faithfulness towards him but he can also see how short his life has been and that it's passed in a moment it's been like a tale that is told just gone by in a flash but then Moses says in verse 7 he says we are brought to an end by your anger by your wrath we are dismayed you have set our iniquities before you our secret sins in the light of your presence he talks about God's anger and God's wrath and there were many Moses saw many demonstrations of God's wrath against sin in his lifetime he saw all the plagues in Egypt he saw the destruction of the golden calf but the ultimate demonstration of God's wrath against sin was death in Egypt all the firstborn of the Egyptians they were killed or they died when the angel of the

Lord passed by the houses the Egyptian army they all drowned in the red sea the generation of the Israelites they died in the wilderness a whole generation died because of their constant complaining and disobedience and even Moses he was to die in the wilderness because he disobeyed struck the rock for water when he should have spoken to it and even Moses he didn't he didn't realize or he saw God's wrath and despite all seeing God's wrath throughout his life the ultimate demonstration of God's wrath was death and you know the apostle Paul he reminds us of the solemnity of this curse of death the curse of sin and death when he says in his letter to the Romans the wages of sin is death the cost of being a disobedient sinner is death but thankfully Paul didn't leave it there because he gives to us the remedy to a ruin he says the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord and my friend we need to lay hold of this point that God so loved the world that he gave he gave to us the gift of his only begotten son a son who was blameless and without sin and yet he was made sin for us and at Calvary he took our sin he bore our wrath he endured our hell and he died our death yes we will all have to experience death unless Jesus comes again but Jesus entered into death so that we would not experience eternal death in the torments of hell my friend this Jesus took our sin he bore our wrath he endured our hell and he died our death also that he could present to us sinners the free gift of God which is eternal life life my friend we weren't created to die we were created to live we were born to live but because of the curse of sin and death we need a new birth we need a new beginning we need to be born again because as Jesus says accept a man be born again he cannot he will not it is impossible for him to enter into the kingdom of God my friend this eternal God who has been faithful to us in every sinful generation he is provided for us in Jesus Christ the free gift of eternal life and you don't have to earn it you don't have to work for it no amount of church attendance or Bible reading or religious righteousness will give you eternal life because well it's not for sale it's not for sale it's just free for the taking free for the taking it's yours if you want it it's on offer to you it's a free gift and in order to receive it all you have to do is ask all you have to do is ask ask and you shall receive but I must remind you you don't have much time and every day time is running out because the offer of eternal life it ends at death it ends at your death

it ends at my death and that's what Moses says he says our years they will come to an end whether the years of our life are 70 or if we are given the strength to reach 80 years or even more than that he says it's not long it's not long at all and yet as we know only too well death is no respecter of persons it doesn't ask us how old we are death never asks us if we're ready death never asks us are you prepared death never says to us have you made a will death just takes and takes and takes it's a great enemy and it takes because we can't keep up with the curse the curse just takes over but as we said earlier the desire of moses was that we would all come to the same conclusion that he came to when he considered the shortness of time and the length of eternity because if God is the only constant in our life and if we are all under the curse of Adam then the conclusion we must come to is to pray like moses the conclusion we must come to is to pray like moses so let's look at the conclusion to the prayer of moses we've looked at the constant the curse and now the conclusion look at verse 12 so teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom return oh lord how long have pity on your servants satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love that we may rejoice and be glad all our days and once we had a quote that summed up the gospel in only a few words it said life is uncertain life is uncertain death is sure sin is the cause christ is the cure life is uncertain death is sure sin is the cause christ is the cure and that's the conclusion moses came to and that's a conclusion we must come to as we consider the shortness of time and the length of eternity life is uncertain death is sure sin is the cause christ is the cure and moses prays that we would all look at life from the right perspective he prays that we would look at life from god's perspective and see that time is short and eternity is long that this world is brief and fleeting but the next world is eternal that our life will come to an end but the next will not and it was knowing that an eternity in heaven or an eternity in hell awaits us moses prays teach us to number our days that we might apply our hearts to wisdom teach us to number our days my friend what's the wisest thing we could ever do if we are to gain a heart of wisdom what is the wisest thing we could ever do well the oldest psalm in the Psalter with the most relevant truth tells us that the wisest thing we could ever do is number our days the wisest thing we could ever do is to consider our life and consider every day of our life as a blessing from the lord and a privilege to love and follow and serve him in this world the wisest thing we could ever do is not to waste our life living for the moment and enjoying the pleasures of this world and seeking the praise of others the wisest thing we could ever do is to seek the lord while he is to be found while he is to be found it only

[35 : 48] lasts a while the offer is only for a while and you know it was king Solomon the wisest man who ever lived he wrote a sermon called ecclesiastus that's what the book of ecclesiastus is it's the sermon of the preacher and in that sermon Solomon is asking the question what's the point of life why are we here what's it all about and as Solomon analyzes life and all it entails he can see that this life is just a continuous circle of life and death life and death life and death where one generation comes the other generation goes and life just goes on one big circle round and round and round and as Solomon continues his sermon he says that well that in life there seems to be a time for everything he says to everything there's a season and a time for every purpose under heaven a time to be born and there's even a time to die and in this sermon

Solomon confesses that he's tried everything tried every avenue he's tried all the all the pleasures of this world he's gained all the pleasures of this world he's gained all the riches of this world and he says they're all vanity vanity of vanity say at the preacher all is vanity but right at the end of his sermon having asked the questions what's the point of life why are we here what's it all about Solomon comes to the same conclusion moises came to because he says that we're all going to our long home which is the grave in which the dust will return to the earth as it was he says and then Solomon says let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter fear god keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man fear god and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man and what both moises and Solomon mean by fearing god is applying god's word to our life applying it to our life because it's not just about hearing what we need to do it's not just about being told about the shortness of time and the length of eternity it's not just about being reminded that life is uncertain and death is sure and sin is the cause and Christ is the cure it's not just about knowing the remedy to a ruin we have to act upon it we have to seek the Lord we have to repent of our sin we have to change our ways we have to ask the Lord to come into our heart we have to bow our knee in submission to King Jesus we have to commit our life to loving and following serving this Jesus and we have to do it now we have to do it now before we are too late before we are too late my friend i hope and pray that before we die we will all come to the same conclusion that moises came to that we will see the Lord as the only constant in our life and that all the changes around us the changes in our homes our families our workplaces our community all these changes they're all because of the curse but the conclusion we all must come to is to see the shortness of time and the length of eternity the conclusion we all must come to is to pray to the Lord teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom teach us to number our days my dear friend make this new year a new year and a new beginning and a new start in your life by seeking the Lord while he is to be found and calling upon him while he is nailed because life is uncertain death is sure sin is the cause christ the only cure may the Lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray