

Virtual Prayer Meeting for March 18, 2020

Clicking on the song links will likely trigger a warning on your computer about whether you trust the site (YouTube). You will have to click "OK."

Song: A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

<https://youtu.be/PB5XvHq8UHK>

Song: God Will Take Care of You

<https://www.youtube.com/embed/MdZ7RdF07Eo>

Text: Psalm 90

The heading of Psalm 90 tells us it is “a prayer of Moses, the man of God.” The primary requests of the prayer do not appear, however, until the 12th verse, where Moses expresses separate pleadings, which we shall see in time. Moses is called “the man of God” multiple times in Scripture (Deut. 33:1, Josh. 14:6; 1 Chron. 23:14; 2 Chron. 30:16; Ezra 3:2; and this psalm). Many liberal commentators reject Moses’ authorship, but there is no justification for that and plenty of support for it, particularly in light of the fact that Moses died at 120 years of age in full strength, yet denied entrance into the Promised Land because of His sin against a Type of Christ in striking the Rock (Num. 20:10-11). The requests at the end of the psalm may reflect the wisdom Moses gained from God’s denial.

Think about “man of God” as an epitaph. What higher credit could a person have from God Himself (since this is inspired Scripture) that he

was a “man of God”? David is called “the man of God” in 2 Chronicles 8:14, Nehemiah 12:24 and 36. The word “epitaph” comes from Medieval Latin *epitaphium*, a “funeral oration, eulogy,” from Greek *epitaphion* “a funeral oration.” Many tombstones carry epitaphs, testimonies from beyond of one who has gone before. One of the most famous epitaphs, of course, here in the United States, is that of Ben Franklin:

The Body of
B. Franklin
Printer;
Like the Cover of an old Book,
Its Contents torn out,
And stript of its Lettering and Gilding,
Lies here, Food for Worms.
But the Work shall not be wholly lost:
For it will, as he believ'd, appear once more,
In a new & more perfect Edition,
Corrected and Amended
By the Author.
He was born on January 6, 1706.
Died 17

Often if a testimony did not appear on a tombstone, it would appear in a will in which the person professed faith in Jesus Christ. Many wills from pious Christians of the 18th and 19th centuries in the United States carried such statements that would also run in their published obituaries online.

If we understand Psalm 90 as being the work of Moses, much falls into place in the psalm. Derek Kidner wrote, “Only Isaiah 40 can compare with this psalm for its presentation of God’s grandeur and eternity over against the frailty of man” (Psalms 73—150, IVP, p. 327).

The psalm begins in verse 1 with a direct address to God as “Lord,” or Adonai, meaning boss or master. The word was often substituted for “Jehovah,” the Self-Existing One, the name by which God revealed Himself to Moses in Exodus 34:13:14: “They shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.”

The psalm develops through confession of the eternity of God in verses 1-2, to the frailty of “man” (Hebrew *Enosh*, signifying man in his weakness or “insignificance or inferiority,” according to Girdlestone’s *Old Testament Synonyms*, p. 50) in verses 3-6. It then moves to describe the sinfulness of man in verses 7-8, the brevity of his life (vss. 9-11), and prays for God’s grace and blessings in the specific petitions.

“Dwelling place” in verse 1 translates a Hebrew word that means a “lair” or place of refuge. God is always the refuge of His people—in whatever times they live and against whatever dangers they face. In all time periods and all conditions, God is the safe place for His people. Compare Psalm 32:7: “Thou art my hiding place” (cf. 119:114).

Moses steps back a step from the generations of humanity to before the Creation: ““Before the mountains were brought forth.” This is certainly prior to the Flood, but Moses went further: “Or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world.” “Formed” is a word that can literally be translated “danced.” It means to twist, whirl, calve, or whirl about, probably the best picture here. What of the contrast between “earth” and “world”? “Earth” is *erets*, the physical land, while “world” is *tebel*,

the habitable part of the world. Moses asserted that before God twirled about the land and its populated areas, “even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.” From eternity, God has been and IS God. “Art” is not in the Hebrew text, which reads: “Thou God,” using the Hebrew word for mighty One for “God.”

Man, in contrast to God, the Eternal One, is temporal, short-lived. “Destruction” in verse 3 can be translated “dust.” “Man” here is once more enosh, man in his weakness. “Return, ye children of men” reflects back on Adam and his sin with its reference to “men” by another Hebrew word for man, *adam*. We are all children of Adam and as such, we are all sinners before God.

Is the call to “return” a call to repent, or is it a call to return to the dust? The old phrase “ashes to ashes, dust to dust,” from the Order for the Burial of the Dead in the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* (in which Psalm 90 is recited), is a reference to Genesis 3:19: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it thou was taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shall thou return.” The context seems to point toward returning to the dust rather than repentance, a reminder of man’s short life, however long it may be, when contrasted with the eternity of God.

Moses then puts that eternity in perspective: “A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.” For God, human time is insignificant. One thousand years ago was 1020. Can any of us without the aid of Google name one event that took place in 1020 A. D.? I cheated and discovered that approximately 1020, King

Cnut, the King of Denmark, England, and Norway, codified the Laws of England at the conclusion of two centuries of inroads by the Northmen into England. How many kings have lived since Cnut? How many countries have come and gone? How many lives have returned to the dust? All those are but the comparative brevity of a day with the eternal God. The longest-lived man, Methusaleh, lived but 969 years (Gen 5:27). They are “as a watch in the night,” a brief four-hour stand on guard duty.

Moses multiplied metaphors: all humanity carried away as with a flood affects a river valley, sweeping everything away in its path. A night’s sleep in the morning is as if it did not exist. Humanity is like the brief lifetime of grasses that pop up in wet weather and by the end of the dry season dies. I noticed under my bird feeders yesterday that grasses from seeds that had fallen to the ground were in some place over a foot tall. I know from the past they will wither and die by the end of the summer.

Moses said humanity is like those grasses: “we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled” (vs. 7). Is this a reference to the forty years of the Wilderness Wanderings in which everyone twenty years of age and above withered and died as a result of God’s judgment on them for their rebellion in refusing to enter the Promised Land? It might well be. “Consumed” translates a word that means to bring to an end. “Anger” translates the normal Hebrew word for “nostril,” a picture of flaring nostrils which men exhibit when angry. “Wrath” translate the word for “heat” and the King James translates it “fury” sixty-seven times. “Troubled” means disturbed, vexed, alarmed, or terrified. Jonathan Edwards’s most powerful message, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry

God” reflected this same concept. Baptist John Gill noted that a study of a concordance will show more references to the wrath and anger of God than to the love of God. Moses saw that through the forty years of wandering as person after person died. It was a journey, much as our lives, marked by funerals.

Moses explained that “our iniquities,” literally our perversities, depravities, faults (plural) God “hast set” or stationed in front of Him. In the light of God’s eyes, our twistedness shows its reality. “Our secret sins,” the things we would hide or conceal from others (and ourselves because they are such a part of us) God has set in the light of His face. The word “sincere” comes from two Latin roots, *sin*, without, and *cere*, wax. It referred to the practice of sculptors filling in imperfections in their work with wax. They would not be visible under normal conditions, but in the light of the sun, they could be declared *sincere*, without wax, if they contained no such filling. Before God’s eyes, Moses said, Not one of us is sincerer.

He continued to describe humanity’s brief stay here as “passed away in thy wrath,” describing humanity as spending our years as a tale that is told. “Spend” comes from a word meaning to complete or finish.

Shakespeare these lines in *Macbeth* (Act 5, Scene 5):

“— *To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!*

*Life is 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."*

Moses then explained the normal limits of human life: "threescore years and ten," 70, and "if by strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow." "Labour" is a word that speaks of toil, hard work, miserable work. "Sorrow" renders the word *aven*, which translated "perversity" and "wickedness" in other places. Ryrie noted, "Extension of life is a mixed blessing." There is a tacit contrast with the lives of the pre-Flood Patriarchs, whose lives were marked by many more years. "It is soon cut off" (vs. 10) indicates that no matter how long a human life may be, too quickly is it over. "We fly away" pictures the journey from time to eternity. Gill noted, "It is well if we fly away to heaven and happiness" (*Exposition of the Whole Bible*).

Verse 11 calls attention to our ignorance of life: "Who knoweth the power of thine anger?" Moses had learned it. Kidner remarked, "Nowhere outside the book of Ecclesiastes is the fact of death so resolutely faced, of the fear of God so explicitly related to it (cf. Ec. 12)."

Against the stark and bleak background Moses has painted for us of life come the heartfelt petitions we all have in verses 12-17. First: "Teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts to wisdom." May God remind us of the brevity of life. Paul echoed this in Ephesians and Colossians. In Ephesians he urged us to be actively involved in "redeeming the time, because the days are evil." Days of quarantine,

days of separation from church meetings and hymn-singing, and prayer should be used productively. I read the other day that during a quarantine in his day, Sir Isaac Newton, a committed Christian, spent his time thinking and working on a new system of mathematics that became calculus. I'm never going to invent calculus; I think I passed it with a low-B. But during these times, we need to continue doing what God wants us to be doing to the best of our abilities.

Teach us how short life is, God. That is the prayer of Moses.

Second, Moses asked God to change His mind about the discipline He was laying on His servants. Does God want the whole world to know that He is in charge? Does He want us to learn that the best scientists in the world cannot stop His judgments? Our God sent a Plague on Egypt that killed every firstborn. Yet at the same time He gave a covering for His people with a bloody cross on their doors (Exod. 12:7, 12-13).

Third, Moses asked for God's early intervention in mercy, the normal word for God's covenant love for Israel. "Satisfy" comes from a word that means to "make fully," "satisfy," or "stuff full" in ordinary language. The request is for God to withdraw His hand of judgment so that in the brief years on earth we have we can "rejoice" and "be glad."

Fourth, Moses asked for blessing corresponding to the judgment: "Make us glad according to the day wherein thou hast afflicted us." It's a simple request for a reciprocity of judgment and blessing, a request for joys to balance out with the sorrows experienced already. Paul noted in Romans 8:18 that "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in

us.” He used the picture of an oldtime balance scale (“worthy”) and envisioned piling up suffering of this life with God’s glorious blessings that we will one day see and enjoy. In 2 Corinthians 4:16-17, Paul contrasted the two again: “For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

Finally, Moses requested a comprehension of the scope and breadth of God’s work in time and eternity: “Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory to their children.” May we see what You are doing, God. The cross is a partial answer to that request. In verse 17, Moses asked another request— for God’s “beauty,” His kindness, His pleasantness, to rest upon His people. The word is regularly translated “goodness” and “sweetness.”

Moses’ last request was for God’s blessing in making the pursuits we seek and follow to be based in eternity. “Establish” means to make firm, stable, or secure. I think the final request Moses expressed was for God to make what we do count for eternity. He had seen the waste and loss of life in the Wilderness Wanderings. He himself had missed entering the Promised Land. He wanted permanence. Hebrews 11:10 describes Abraham as looking “for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” It is that Moses sought and we should seek in these apparently pointless days of quarantine.

Closing Song: “O God Our Help in Ages Past”

<https://youtu.be/ZjdmLstpNGE>

Email prayer requests mailto:prayer_requests@kelham.org