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Sermon Notes

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Number Your Days Properly

Psalm 90

Time:

How do we measure time?

God ordained the movement of the celestial beings across the sky as the main way of measuring time:

Genesis 1:14 And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years"

So the earliest timepieces were sundials... the obvious problems being the impossibility of measuring time at night, as well as the effect of changing seasons and cloudy days

Water clocks came next... more accurate than sundials and could be used at night

Mechanical clocks were developed over centuries, but it was not until Dutch astronomer Christian Huygens invented the pendulum clock in 1656 that the mechanical clock was practical and precise

Until recently, the most accurate time piece in the world is the atomic clock, which measures the vibrations of a cesium atom and counts them... for every 9,192,631,700 billion vibrations the clock registers one second. This clock was accurate to one part in 10^{15}

Recently, however, researchers at the University of Tokyo have developed an "Optical Lattice Clock" using strontium atoms and six laser beams... supposedly 1000 times more accurate than the cesium-based atomic clock

Biblically, however, time is measured in **opportunity**... For the Christian, the passing of days is the passing of unique **opportunities** to serve Christ

For the non-Christian, the passing of time represents the squandering of **opportunities** to repent and trust Christ

At some point for all of us, **time runs out**

Psalm 139:16 All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

At Belshazzar's wicked Feast, while Belshazzar and his nobles drank wine from the golden goblets taken from God's Temple, suddenly a hand appeared and wrote the famous **writing on the wall**

MENE MENE TEKEL PARSIN

The first word was repeated... MENE MENE

Daniel interpreted this plainly:

"MENE: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end"

That very night Belshazzar's reign—and his life—came to an end

Brothers and sisters, 2007 is almost in the history books... the year is almost over

Now is a good time for us to reflect on this past year spiritually, and to look ahead to the future, to 2008

This brings us to Psalm 90... the wisdom from Moses, written 35 centuries ago... Moses, the Man of God, with its primary message:

Psalm 90:12 So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

Context: Moses, the Man of God... wandering in the desert with the Israelites... perhaps three events on his mind, (Numbers 20): 1) the death of Miriam, Moses' sister; 2) Moses' own sin in striking the rock in the wilderness, a sin which kept him from entering the Promised Land; 3) the death of Aaron, Moses' brother

Psalm 90: Perhaps the oldest of all the Psalms...

Tone is somber, but not morose... Moses is not bitter about these events, just bluntly realistic... and yearning to give advice to those who follow

Jesus spoke of the rich man in hell, being in torment:

Luke 16:27-28 I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house, ²⁸ for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.

He is concerned to warn those who come after him to not do what he did

John Bunyan, author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, wrote a classic "A Few Sighs from Hell" based on Luke 16, the Rich Man and Lazarus... a predominant theme was that of regret... and perhaps of surprise:

"I always thought I would have more time!!!"

So also Moses is concerned to warn the young that follow him to number their days... that they may gain a heart of wisdom

I. The Eternal Greatness of God (vs. 1-2)

Psalm 90:1-2 Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. ² Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

A. God Alone our Eternal Dwelling Place

1. Moses, reflecting on all his wanderings, has come to this realization
2. God alone is our permanent home
3. The ground beneath our feet is temporary... it can be shaken as at Mount Sinai; it can open up and swallow us alive, as it did to Krah, Dathan, and Abiram
4. Moses' ancient ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, were strangers in the Promised Land and had to bargain for a place to bury their dead... they wandered around in tents
5. Moses' immediate ancestors, the Jews, lived in bondage in a country not their own...
6. Moses himself had fled from Egypt after murdering an Egyptian, and had lived in his father-in-law's house, tending his father-in-law's sheep even at age 80... Moses had no permanent home in this world
7. And the Jews?? Now God had moved them out of Egypt, and had led them to the brink of the Promised Land... but because of the great sin of the people when the Ten Spies spread a bad report about the land and the people grumbled against God, they were condemned to wander homeless in the desert for forty years
8. The wisdom of Moses after over a hundred years of life on this transient place... **LORD, YOU HAVE BEEN OUR DWELLING PLACE THROUGHOUT ALL GENERATIONS**

Illus. A few weeks ago, my aunt died in Miami... the last remaining link to my father's family; I visited the small home she had shared with my grandparents... I had a few memories of that home from when I was a boy... now its time was gone

B. The Eternality of God

1. Moses compares the transience of life spent wandering on the earth with the eternity of God
2. God alone is ETERNAL... timeless... permanent... unchanging... an immovable rock on which to build your life

Vs. 2 Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

3. The mountains are old... God is older!! The earth is old... God is older!!
4. Implied is the IMMUTABILITY of God... He never changes; He never can change, He never will change

"...from eternity past to eternity future YOU ARE GOD"

5. The experiences of our lives leave us with this one unchanging reality: GOD

II. The Temporary Frailty of Man (vs. 3-6)

Psalm 90:3-6 You turn men back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, O sons of men." ⁴ For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night. ⁵ You sweep men away in the sleep of death; they are like the new grass of the morning-- ⁶ though in the morning it springs up new, by evening it is dry and withered.

A. Like Dust in the Wind

The DUST OF DEATH... scattered by the WINDS OF TIME

1. The Dust of Death
 - a. Man originally created from the dust of the earth
 - b. After man sinned, he came under the death penalty

Genesis 3:19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."

Illus. Growing up as an altar boy in the Roman Catholic church, I well remember the Ash Wednesday service, when the priest would smudge ashes on our foreheads and say

"Remember man that thou art dust, and to dust thou shalt return."

- c. However... it is not a mere accident that we return to dust... it is not the mindless processes of nature; NO!! It is the direct act of God, a judgment on the human race for sin

d. Moses writes: **YOU TURN men back to dust SAYING ‘Return to dust O sons of men’”**

e. No one on the face of the earth dies accidentally when it comes to God... rather it is God who gives life and God who has power to take it back again

2. The Winds of Time

a. Not only do our bodies return to dust... but also the dust is scattered by the relentless march of history

b. Time erases all memory of our actions: what we loved and what we hated, what we did and what we refused to do;

Illus. In the wind-swept plains of Pasargadae in modern Iran stands a simple monument, a small stone house built on six stone steps... it is reputed to be the burial place of the world ruler Cyrus the Great of Persia... at the height of his power, he ruled over an empire of immense proportions, stretching from modern-day Turkey to the Indus River in India... 127 provinces, stretching over 2800 miles... almost as far as from LA to NY

According to ancient historians, Alexander the Great visited the small monument and paid it honor... on it was written

O man, whoever you are and wherever you come from, for I know you will come, I am Cyrus who won the Persians their empire. Do not therefore grudge me this little earth that covers my body

However, the winds of time have erased the inscription and it no longer exists

If so great an emperor is scarcely remembered and his tomb so vulnerable, how much more the countless billions of average human beings

B. Life is Brief

1. Later in the Psalm, Moses will comment on how brief human life is:

Psalm 90:10 The length of our days is seventy years-- or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.

2. This is directly contrasted with God's eternity

Psalm 90:4 For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.

a. Time is nothing to God

b. Another verse says plainly

2 Peter 3:8 do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.

3. But for us humans, time is BRIEF: Death stands over us at every moment, reminding us of our frailty

Vs. 5 You sweep men away in the sleep of death

- a. Moses is almost certainly reflecting on the death of his sister, who watched his little basket floating in the Nile be picked up by pharaoh's sister so many years ago; Moses is also thinking about the death of his brother Aaron, who was his partner and mouthpiece when he first spoke to Pharaoh saying "Let my people go"
- b. He is also thinking about all the sinful Israelite men who, one by one were dying in the desert because of their sin... so that their children could enter the Promised Land in their place

4. The wisdom of God for us under the death sentence is this:

James 4:14-15 What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."

C. Strength is Even More Brief

1. Our life flies by quickly
2. Our strength flies by even more quickly

Psalm 90:5-6 they are like the new grass of the morning-- ⁶ though in the morning it springs up new, by evening it is dry and withered.

- a. We reach our peak physically in our teen years and improve through our mid-twenties
- b. By the thirties, our best physical days are behind us
- c. Mentally, we peak later... but again, our time of maximum power and strength and capability as people is extremely brief

Application: MAKE THE MOST OF EVERY MOMENT, of every opportunity

Each day has unique opportunities... and soon, we can do little, for age and feebleness has overtaken us

Behind all of this is the sinfulness of man... these troubles are caused by Adam's sin, and our own!!!

III. The Sinfulness of Man and the Wrath of God (vs. 7-11)

Psalm 90:7-11 We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation. 8 You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. 9 All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan. 10 The length of our days is seventy years-- or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away. 11 Who knows the power of your anger? For your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you.

A. Man's Sinfulness No Secret to God

1. God sees our secret acts... He knows our secret thoughts
2. Verse 8 clearly teaches that there are no secrets before Him

Psalm 139:11-12 If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," ¹² even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.

Hebrews 4:13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

B. God's Just Wrath: The Humiliation of Death

1. God's wrath is the just punishment for human sin... it is His emotional and passionate reaction to the evil virus known as sin
2. God expresses His wrath every day, the Bible says
 - a. The lost person, who doesn't trust Christ, lives every moment under the wrath of God

Psalm 90:9 All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan.

- b. God's wrath causes the difficulties sinners have on earth,

Vs. 10 their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away

- c. Infinitely greater wrath awaits sinners on Judgment Day, when the full power of God's wrath will be poured out in Hell

Psalm 90:11 Who knows the power of your anger? For your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you.

Revelation 14:10-11 he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with

burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. ¹¹ And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night

IV. Man's Dependence on God's Grace (vs. 12-17)

Vs. 17 May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us

Like a Spiritual Beggar, Moses pleads with God for grace upon grace...

Verses 12-17 are a series of prayer requests to the throne of Almighty God for grace upon grace

A. Grace to Number our Days Properly (vs. 12)

Psalm 90:12 Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

1. Naturally, we are foolish about the passing of time
2. Naturally we think life will go on like this forever
3. We think little of the day of our death until the final disease overtakes us and we can read the writing on our own wall
4. Moses knows the proper numbering of our days comes from GOD
 - a. God alone knows how many days He has ordained for us in His book
 - b. BUT Moses gives us a practical guideline

Seventy years... or eighty if we have the strength

- i) It will not go on forever
- ii) Of course, there is no guarantee that we will live that much... a shocking accident can come and claim us at any time
- iii) But even if we die peacefully in our beds of old age, our lives are extremely brief, then we **fly away**
5. From God alone comes the wisdom to number your days, and from God alone comes the proper heart attitude—the humbling that comes from knowing how incredibly brief is the remaining time we have here

B. Grace to Limit God's Disciplines for Sin (vs. 13)

Psalm 90:13 Relent, O LORD! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants.

1. Moses spent much of his prayer time with God urging Him to be merciful to sinful Israel, to not deal with Israel according to what they deserved
2. Moses is begging God to be gracious, to relent, to be merciful to us sinners... in wrath to remember mercy
3. If God poured out a fraction of what we deserve for our sins, we would not be able to endure a single day

C. Grace to Satisfy Us Richly with God's Love (vs. 14-15)

Psalm 90:14-15 Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. ¹⁵ Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble.

1. Living as we do constantly in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, how can we ever know any joy?
2. Moses prays for that as well: the joy that comes from God alone
3. Satisfied with GOD and GOD ALONE
 - a. To love God only for His gifts is idolatry
 - b. Moses focuses on the true delight... the true satisfaction of God Himself
4. John Piper's greatest insight

“God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.”

- a. In other words, when we are satisfied with God and God alone, and not merely the good gifts of God, God is glorified
- b. When Job can worship God after the loss of all his worldly possessions and his children...God is greatly glorified
- c. When Paul and Silas can sing at midnight in a Philippian jail after being beaten publicly for Christ... God is greatly glorified
5. BUT this kind of satisfaction in GOD and GOD ALONE is a gift of grace... naturally we are idolaters, and filled with complaints when God touches “our stuff”
6. Notice the practicality: satisfy us IN THE MORNING with your unfailing love
 - a. Morning quiet times are the best time to renew your love for God
 - b. Daily say these words to God!!!

D. Grace to See God's Mighty Works (vs. 16)

Psalm 90:16 May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their children.

1. Moses had seen more miracles than any man in history
2. The astonishing burning bush; the staff that turned into a serpent and back again; his own hand leprous and healed again; the ten terrifying plagues, showing God's great power over all aspects of nature; the awesome Red Sea crossing with the water walling up on the right side and the left; the water from the rock and the manna from heaven; the descent of God to Mount Sinai; the glory of God shown him on the summit of the mountain
3. Moses is praying that ALL of God's servants would see the mighty deeds of God
4. And we "see" them only by faith
 - a. Pharaoh saw all ten of the plagues and still didn't believe in God
 - b. Israel experienced one miracle after another, and still didn't trust God
5. Moses is asking God to reveal His power and His glory to that generation and to future generations
 - a. The word translated "splendor" means adornment... the ornaments of God's mighty person and all His deeds
 - b. He wants that future generations to know how great is the glory of God

E. Grace to Establish our Works (vs. 17)

Vs. 17 May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us-- yes, establish the work of our hands.

1. If our lives are dust in the wind, what's the point of anything we do?
2. Moses here prays that our OWN deeds would be established... that our actions in the world would count for eternity
3. The greatest loss a human soul can have is the loss of his soul
4. The second greatest loss is the wasting of our LIVES... that our works would be swept away as meaningless

John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life*, tells of his evangelist father who would go from town to town preaching the gospel... in one town there was an old man who had steadfastly refused to become a Christian... year after year, his godly wife and his saved children and friends

prayed for him; finally the man gave his life to Christ... there was incredible rejoicing in that small church, and people crying for joy

But soon, over the din, came the loud sobs of this old man... realizing the bitterness of the years he'd wasted waiting to come to Christ

"I've wasted it! I've wasted it!!" He cried aloud... most of his years were gone, now... the best strength of his life given to serve the devil. Those years he could never have back

5. Moses prays a VERY BOLD PRAYER here... O Lord, may our works also be rooted in eternity as you are!! May we not WASTE OUR LIVES

V. Christ Our True Dwelling Place

A. In Christ, Our Frailty is Only Temporary

1. We are feeble now... our years are brief, our bodies weak
2. BUT in Christ, our frailty is only temporary

1 Corinthians 15:42-44 So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; ⁴³ it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; ⁴⁴ it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

B. Christ Alone our Eternal Home

1. Christ is our eternal dwelling place
2. If we have trusted Him, He will never leave us or forsake us, and we will live IN HIM and WITH HIM forever

C. The Sting of Sin and Death Removed

1. Our secret sins God places in the brightness of His presence and studies them well
2. BUT God has graciously agreed to cover our sins with the blood of His Son
3. In Christ alone the sting of sin and death are removed!!
4. Death then is not something to be feared but a gateway into eternal joy, life with Him forever

D. The Future is Bright, and Coming Soon

Revelation 22:12-14 Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. ¹³ I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. ¹⁴ "Blessed are those who

wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.

VI. Application: Teach Us to Number Our Days

A. Total Dependence on Christ

COME TO CHRIST

Do not delay... John Piper spoke of his father's persuasions to those delaying:

- The motto on Daddy's college wall was, "The wise man prepares for the inevitable"
- The plaque in our kitchen when I was growing up was: "Only one life 'twill soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last."
- The stories of wasted lives tumbled from his mouth:
- "During a South Carolina [campaign] a lovely high school senior attended every night but refused to accept Christ. Shortly after the crusade while driving her car over a treacherous railroad crossing, she was killed instantly by a freight train she failed to see coming."
- "While in a Pennsylvania campaign, I witnessed a whole town shaken by the sudden deaths of six young men. Driving home from an afternoon football practice, they failed to stop at a major intersection and were struck broadside by a heavy truck. Six were dead within three hours."
- "I've seen babies die in their mothers' arms. I've seen little boys and girls struck down before their lives had scarcely begun. I've witnessed men die in the prime of life and others at the height of success." (*Menace*, pp. 49-50)
- He told story of a girl who said she would give her life to God when she was old. A wise old woman sent her a bouquet of dead flowers, and when the girl expressed offense, she said, "Isn't that the way you are treating God?"

B. Daily Recognition of the Fleetingness of Time

1. NUMBER YOUR DAYS PROPERLY

2. If you are a Christian, do not fear death... just prepare for it
3. Consider each day a precious one... with good works God prepared in advance that you shall never have another chance to do

C. Daily Life in Light of Eternity

Hebrews 9:27 man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

D. Special Dangers of 21st Century America

1. Immense distractions... entertainments, sports, hobbies
2. Pride in medical advancements... as though we're not still going to die at 70 or 80
3. Forgetting the business of the Kingdom... how urgent is our time here
4. The fact that in America we don't think much about death, but tend to hide it away

E. Practical Steps: Setting Spiritual Goals

1. New Year's resolutions...
2. Assess where you want to be in one year in your spiritual growth
3. Set goals for Bible intake and Scripture memorization... daily QTs... prayer life
4. Set goals for your family life: family devotions, worship, discipleship of each of your children
5. Set goals for your physical life... physical health and strength
6. Set goals for your financial life

STOP PROCRASTINATING...

Hebrews 3:7-8 So, as the Holy Spirit says: "Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸ do not harden your hearts