

Psalm 90

Opening – family starting Navs Japan → Phx (seminary)

Read through 1x

vv. 1-12 **God returns man to dust because of our sin.
Subtitle: Dying under God's wrath!**

The prayer of Moses, the man of God.

Moses. – Abraham 2000, Moses 1500, David 1000, exile 500. 3500 year old prayer!
"man of God" = prophet → expect God to teach us through what Moses says here

- 1 **Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.**
- 2 **Before the mountains were born,
or ever you had formed the earth or the world,
from everlasting to everlasting,
you are God.**

Notice the references back to the Creation account of Genesis 1-3. Moses says that God has been his people's dwelling place for all of their generations, but then proclaims that even before God made the hills, the earth or the world, God was God. From everlasting past to everlasting future, He is God. This theme of time (of God's timelessness and of our short lives) is one of the main themes of this psalm.

- 3 **You return man to dust
and say, "Return, O children of man!"**

This verse 3 is the launching point for this whole Psalm. The following meditations on human mortality and death are all coming out of this fact. As Moses reflects on Creation, he also recalls what he wrote in Genesis 3, where God said to man (to Adam), "Dust you are and to dust you shall return."

In a few minutes we'll see pick up on these themes of dust and of being children of man (Adam), because for those who have put personal trust in Jesus for dying for us, we are not in this situation anymore. (putting on Christ) But first, let's walk through these verses where Moses meditates on human mortality. Because the everlasting God said to man "Return to dust," we all face mortality.

- 4 **For a thousand years in your sight are but
as yesterday when it is past,
or as a watch in the night.**

Can you feel the speed of time passing in this verse? Moses did not say that a thousand years are like a single day, but that they are like "yesterday when it is past." As soon as he considers a thousand years, in God's sight, it's like it is already gone like yesterday. And it's not a literal equation of 1000 years = one day, but it's even comparable to a "watch in the night." It's the like the period of time last night

Moses' first application of his meditations on human mortality is to tie it to wisdom, which starts with seeing God as the most important One in life. The OT wisdom writings (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, and some Psalms) often tie "wisdom & knowledge" to "the fear of God." That means seeing God as the One we must please, love, worship, obey, live for.

In light of our fleeting lives, in light of God's wrath at our sin, we should ask God for wisdom in how we live. **But** Moses does not just want to ask for wisdom in living. After all, if we are still under the cloud of God's wrath, even living wisely will not change our fate. We would still be headed for God's judgment in hell. What we need goes far beyond even wisdom. We need a way to get out from under God's wrath.

To recap: God is eternal and we are not. As Moses meditates on this he connects it to the very beginning of human history, when God told Adam that he would return to dust because of his sin. And we all live in the wake of that pronouncement by God.

But there is a way out!

And that's where Moses steps up as an intercessor. Here is his prayer:

13 **Return, O LORD! How long?
Have pity on your servants!**

This is where the Psalm pivots from dying under God's wrath to living in God's favor.

**vv. 13-17 God returns from wrath because of a mediator.
Subtitle: Living in God's favor!**

Notice the words "return" and "have pity." Those are the same two words Moses used in Exodus 32. There, God was in the process of giving the 10 Commandments and other laws to Moses on the mountain. Meanwhile, the people of Israel made a golden calf to worship. God tells Moses to go back down, and when they get there and see the people worshipping the idol, God tells Moses to stand back so that God can kill them all and make a new nation from Moses. Listen to Moses' intercession in Exodus 32:

**"Turn from your burning anger and
relent from this disaster against your people."** (Exo 32:12)

So here in **Psalm 90:13**, Moses is asking God to turn back from his wrath and instead have pity on his people. This word return frames the Psalm into two parts. In verse 3, God told people to "return," to "go back" to the dust. Here Moses asks God to "return" from his wrath; to "go back" to when he was not angry with his people. And that is a very bold request.

(pause)

But can even Moses ask that of God? How can God be just and just let sin go without punishment? Aren't all people still guilty of sin? Aren't we all still living under the death penalty of our rebellion in Adam? Yes. So what will actually turn God from wrath to mercy and not be a mere postponing of God's wrath?

Jesus.

Two keys that point this Psalm to Christ are in verse 3. The words “dust” and “children of man.”

3 **You return man to dust
and say, “Return, O children of man!”**

The fascinating thing is that Moses does not use the typical word for dust that was in Genesis 3. There God had said, “You are dust, and to dust you shall return.” That's the normal word for dirt, dust. But, this word here in Psalm 90 is a word that describes something that has been crushed. The verb form of this word describes crushing someone's body, breaking bones, crushing an enemy army, or oppressing people.

But here's the deal, **God crushed Jesus for us!** Look at Isaiah 53:5:

**But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.**

In Psalm 90, Moses is pointing out that the root cause of God's anger at mankind is our sin. That's the reason God gave the original death penalty to mankind in Genesis 3. And here we see Jesus being crushed for our iniquities, our sins.

And then listen to this just a few verses down in Isaiah 53:10. Notice the words crush and offspring.

**Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him;
he has put him to grief;
when his soul makes an offering for guilt,
he shall see his offspring;
he shall prolong his days;
the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.**

Notice here that the result of the LORD crushing Jesus on the cross is that Jesus will see his offspring! But we know Jesus had no kids; he wasn't married. These are spiritual offspring! This ties in with Psalm 90:3, where God says “Return, O children of man (Adam).” But, when we start to trust Jesus as our mediator who bore our sins on the cross, we become children of God, even offspring of Jesus. In other words, we are taken out of the family line of Adam and put into the family line of Christ.

(pause)

You can read about this in Romans 5-6.

And that is why the end of this Psalm is **not** about living under God's wrath, but living in his favor. We have been put into an entirely new relationship with God through our mediator Jesus, whom God crushed for our iniquities. So, we can actually pray and experience the things in the rest of the Psalm. Don't read this Psalm as if you are still under God's wrath sometimes. If you are not yet trusting in Jesus as your mediator with God, then you are still under his wrath. But he offers salvation if you want it.

But if you are trusting Jesus as your Savior and Lord, then you are not and never will again be under God's wrath. You are not a child of Adam, but a son or daughter of God.

So, let's read the rest of the Psalm to see what our inheritance is in Christ.

- 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.**
- 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!**

Verse 14. God's steadfast love (lovingkindness) is his sworn love to his people. No matter what God will love his people faithfully. And that should satisfy us and make us glad!

Verse 15. Moses asks God to make up for lost time, to show us goodness for the years of wrath. Well, in Revelation, one of the beautiful phrases about God is that "he will wipe away every tear from their eyes." And even now, we can pray that God would show his goodness to us here and now so that we can rejoice and be glad.

Verse 16 about letting God's work and glorious power be shown to us. I think that points to God's acts of salvation. And notice the much more positive view of the generations here. Earlier in the Psalm, when considering life under God's wrath, Moses can only see each generation sprouting up and dying off like grass in the sun. Here, on this side of God's turning from wrath to mercy, Moses can ask God to show his saving power to even the future generations.

Verse 17. This amazing verse ends Moses' prayer:

**Let the favor of the Lord be upon us,
and establish the work of our hands upon us;
yes, establish the work of our hands!**

First, the word for God's favor here something we need to hear. Psalm 27:4 says **"One thing I have asked of the LORD; that I will seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty (pleasantness, experienced goodness) of the LORD and to inquire in his temple."** So here Moses prays that God's pleasantness, his beauty, his goodness would be upon us so that we experience it.

The "work of his/our/your/man's hands" can mean human work in general, but in a number of passages, there is a nuance of frailty in this phrase. In a negative sense, if the "work" is idolatry, God mocks the idols as the mere "work of man's hands." But in a positive sense, several times people ask God to bless "the work of their hands." This phrase here in Psalm 90 is this latter sense. Moses realizes the ephemeral nature of human life, that compared to God, we are but a breath, like grass that passes away by nightfall. So, here he asks God to establish the work of our hands upon us (or "for our sake"). If you work your whole life toward certain tasks or goals, but those after you don't pick up and follow those, then the moment we die our whole life's work is gone. But if we are living in relationship with God, partnering with him in our lives, living by his priorities in wisdom, then we can ask God to make our lives count beyond our death. God wants our lives to count for eternity.

(pause)

recap: God is our dwelling place in all generations. But why do people all die, anyway? Because of our sin, to which God has responded that we must return to the dust. We must die. And we all, by default, live under God's just wrath at our sin. But there is a mediator who not only asks God to turn back from wrath, but who was himself crushed for our sins. By faith in Jesus, we become children of God who can now live in this amazing, satisfying, joy-giving relationship with God who is now pleasant toward us.

So, in close, I have a few questions:

(1) Which part of the Psalm describes you? Are you dying under God's wrath, or living in his favor?

(a) If you realize that you have not asked Jesus to be your mediator with God, that you are not trusting him as your Savior who died and rose for you, why not take today to ask him to do so? You can come up and pray with someone after the service, or ask any questions about that.

(b) If you are trusting in Jesus as Lord and Savior, do you live as if God is still angry with you, or are you experiencing/believing his favor? Spend some time praying and reading through this Psalm. Ask God to help you be satisfied and glad in his love and favor. And read Romans 5-6 if you want to think more about being in Christ instead of in Adam.

My wife Kyong A will be sharing a song that God gave her from Psalm 90 as she was meditating on it last week. Zac and the worship team have worked together to get this song ready as a prayer for us. As they come up, let me close in prayer.

For Further Reading:

(These sources and authors were very helpful in my study of Psalm 90)

Commentaries and Articles:

Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament (1864)

This old commentary is still considered one of the best for its technical skill in the Hebrew language. Also, these authors are very reverent and devotional in their approach (as opposed to the aloofness and skepticism that is often found in many scholarly works).

→ you can read this online at www.studylight.org/commentaries/kdo.html or download it as a module withing the these free Bible study programs: E-sword (for Windows or OS X), and Xiphos (Linux).

Mournet, Krista. "Moses And The Psalms: The Significance Of Psalms 90 And 106 Within Book IV Of The Masoretic Psalter." *Conversations With The Biblical World* 31.(2011): 66-79. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*. Web. 23 July 2016

David Noel Freedman, "Who Asks (or Tells) God to Repent?" *Bible Review* 1, no. 4 (1985): 56-59.

I was not able to find this article; I just saw it mentioned in a footnote in the Krista Mournet article.

But, just the title helped me see how bold a request it really is for Moses to make, to ask God to turn back from his wrath.

Lexicons and Word Study Books:

Harris, Laird R., Gleason Leonard Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publ., 1980.

Köehler, Ludwig, and Walter Baumgartner. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. 2 vols. Study ed. Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2001.