

# Our Dwelling Place

Psalms for Uncertain Times

Psalm 90:1-17

Pastor Josh Black

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Good morning First Free family. And greetings to all of you who are not a part of our church. My name is Josh Black. I'm the Lead Pastor of First Free. Thank you for joining us on this livestream. While I'm grieved to not gather with you this morning, I am thankful for technology that allows me to open God's Word for you.

I believe the thing we need more than anything right now is to hear from God. Thankfully, our God is not silent! He has spoken in his Word. I am privileged to serve in a church that's grounded in God's Word. And I firmly believe God has prepared you to live faithfully during our present crisis, because you've hidden his Word in your hearts.

I was amazed last week how the text we already had scheduled in 1 Peter 4 spoke so directly to our situation right now. But as I've sought the Lord in prayer and in his Word over the last two weeks, I feel led to redirect our attention to the Psalms until we're able to gather again as a church. My plan is to teach on a number of Psalms from Book IV of the Psalms, which covers Psalms 90-106.

As Jeff said earlier, this morning we're going to be in Psalm 90. This psalm was written by Moses. It's the only psalm written by Moses. And it was likely written while Israel was in the wilderness.

Israel had been saved from Egypt, but they hadn't yet settled in the Promised Land. They were isolated from their home. And life in the wilderness wasn't pretty. There was a lack of food and water. There was anxiety and complaining. There was sin and unbelief.

And that led to God's judgment. There was judgment after the golden calf. And later, after the spies were sent to scout out the Promised Land, there was more sin and unbelief. The people didn't believe that God could bring them into the land. And so God declared judgment on that generation. God said they would die in the wilderness. And that's what happened. No one from that generation except for Joshua and Caleb came into the Promised Land.<sup>1</sup>

That's the setting of this Psalm. At some point during their difficult days in the wilderness. As people are dying left and right, Moses penned this psalm. This psalm helped that generation understand what was happening to them in the wilderness. And it helped them know how to approach God. And it can help us to do the same.

Even though our situation is different from theirs, we too are living in the wilderness. First Peter has taught us that much. We're elect exiles. This world is not our home. And there are many hard things in this life. How do we make sense of what's going on around us? And how do we seek God during our times? Psalm 90 helps us.

## Psalm 90:1-17<sup>2</sup>

*<sup>1</sup>Lord, you have been our dwelling place  
in all generations.*

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<sup>1</sup> Mike Bullmore, "[Drawing Near to the God Who Protects](#)"

<sup>2</sup> Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

- <sup>2</sup> Before the mountains were brought forth,  
or ever you had formed the earth and the world,  
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.
- <sup>3</sup> You return man to dust  
and say, "Return, O children of man!"
- <sup>4</sup> For a thousand years in your sight  
are but as yesterday when it is past,  
or as a watch in the night.
- <sup>5</sup> You sweep them away as with a flood; they are like a dream,  
like grass that is renewed in the morning;  
<sup>6</sup> in the morning it flourishes and is renewed;  
in the evening it fades and withers.
- <sup>7</sup> For we are brought to an end by your anger;  
by your wrath we are dismayed.
- <sup>8</sup> You have set our iniquities before you,  
our secret sins in the light of your presence.
- <sup>9</sup> For all our days pass away under your wrath;  
we bring our years to an end like a sigh.
- <sup>10</sup> The years of our life are seventy,  
or even by reason of strength eighty;  
yet their span is but toil and trouble;  
they are soon gone, and we fly away.
- <sup>11</sup> Who considers the power of your anger,  
and your wrath according to the fear of you?
- <sup>12</sup> So teach us to number our days  
that we may get a heart of wisdom.
- <sup>13</sup> Return, O LORD! How long?  
Have pity on your servants!
- <sup>14</sup> Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love,  
that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.
- <sup>15</sup> Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us,  
and for as many years as we have seen evil.
- <sup>16</sup> Let your work be shown to your servants,  
and your glorious power to their children.
- <sup>17</sup> 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!

This Psalm is divided into two main sections. Verses 1-12 give us a theology. They help us to see God and ourselves rightly. Verses 13-17 give us a prayer for our times. They help us to seek God rightly.

## SEEING GOD AND OURSELVES (1-12)

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Let's begin with theology. What does God want us to see? How does Psalm 90 help us to make sense of what's going on in our world? There are two theological truths in verses 1-12. One is a stabilizing truth. The other is a sobering truth.

### *A Stabilizing Truth*

Let's begin with the stabilizing truth. In Psalm 89, we find the people of God devastated. They're removed from Jerusalem. They're in exile in Babylon. The temple is destroyed. So, they can't gather for worship. And David's throne is empty. They would've felt isolated. Like things were spinning out of control. They may have even questioned God's faithfulness. Maybe some of you feel similar right now.

We would expect the psalms that follow Psalm 89 to express their despair. But instead Psalm 90 expresses a very mature faith. Their exile was an opportunity to grow in their understanding of who God is and who they are as the people of God.<sup>3</sup>

Listen to the opening words of Psalm 90. "Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations" (v.1). When things seem out of control, the Psalmist calls upon God as Lord, as Adonai. Even though the throne of David is empty, God's still on his throne. Even though things seem out of control, God's still in control.

And even though they're not able to gather together, the psalmist says, "You have been our dwelling place." Even though they were experiencing social distancing, they knew their God was near.

Just think of Moses. His whole life was lived away from his home. Egypt was not his home. Midian was not his home. The wilderness was not his home. And he never made it into the Promised Land. But he can still say with confidence, "Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations."<sup>4</sup>

Here's the stabilizing truth. Our God is a sovereign shelter.

Do you believe that? Do you believe that our God is Adonai? That he is Lord? That he's sovereign over all things? And that he's still on his throne? Do you believe that God is your dwelling place? That he's near? And that nothing can separate you from him, if you are in Christ?

Friends, this virus is not lost on our God. Our disrupted lives are not lost on God. He's our sovereign shelter, right now! This is the stabilizing truth we need to see.

### *A Sobering Truth*

But it leads us also to a sobering truth.

God is eternal. "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God" (v. 2). "A thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night" (v. 4).

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<sup>3</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *The Flow of the Psalms: Discovering Their Structure and Theology*

<sup>4</sup> Bullmore

We know God's eternal. But man is temporal. In verse 3, Moses says, "You return man to dust and say, 'Return, O children of man!'" In other words, we all die. He goes on to describe man's death with evocative language. In verses 15-16 he uses three metaphors. "You sweep them away as with a flood." "They are like a dream." They are "like grass that is renewed in the morning; in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers."

Friends, one of the basic things we need to be reminded of during a pandemic is the reality of death. We're all going to die. That's the sobering truth.

The way man dies varies. But the fact that man dies is constant. This coronavirus may be novel, but death is not novel. It was true in Moses' day. It was true during the exile in Babylon. And it's true in our day. In fact, it's been true ever since Genesis 3.

And that leads me to an important clarifying point. Here it is. The reality of death is not how it's supposed to be. We were created to live in relationship with the everlasting God for everlasting days. But Genesis 3 teaches us that when sin entered the world, all that changed. God promised Adam and Eve life. But he also said that if they sinned against him they would die and they would be banished from his presence. And the same is true for all of us. Paul tells us in Romans 6:23 that the wages of sin is death. We're all going to die. And death is God's judgment on sin. Or in other words, life is hard and then we die. And it's our fault.

That's exactly what Psalm 90 is teaching us as well. Verse 7 says, "We are brought to an end by your anger; by your wrath we are dismayed." And verse 8 says, "You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence."

We may think we're pretty good people, but God is like a trial lawyer. He sets the evidence of our sins out on the table. He brings that which is done in darkness out into the light of day. We're all sinners. And that's why we die.<sup>5</sup>

The reason Israel was dying in the wilderness was because of their sin. And the reason people are dying today is because of sin.

Now please hear me. I'm not saying that the people who've died from the coronavirus are being struck down by God for some sin they've committed. I don't believe that for one minute. But the reason deadly viruses exist at all in our world is because of the fall. It's because of sin. And death is God's judgment on our sin.

One of the specific sins we're judged for is highlighted in verse 10. It says, "The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away." That word "span" could also be translated "pride." Our pride is but toil and trouble. In other words, even the best life man's been able to live is nothing but toil and trouble in the face of death.<sup>6</sup>

And I'd say that in our modern world man is living the best and longest life possible. Medical advances make it possible. And these advances may lead us to pride. But death exposes our pride.

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<sup>5</sup> Bruce K. Waltke and James M. Houston, *The Psalms as Christian Praise: A Historical Commentary*

<sup>6</sup> Waltke

On Wednesday, one of our elders said this virus has exposed almost every idol in our culture. Think about it. We've placed our trust in medical science. And although I'm thankful for medical science, the coronavirus has exposed its limitations. No matter how far medical science advances, we're still going to die. God has decreed it. We've also placed our trust in government. But for all the help the government has provided in these days, it too is impotent against death. We've placed our trust in our financial security. That too is threatened. We've placed our athletes on pedestals. But this virus has cancelled almost every sporting event.

God is setting our iniquities out on the table. Again, I'm not saying this virus is in direct response to these sins. I'm not God. It's not my place to say what God is up to. But what I do know, from God's Word, is that all death is a judgment for sin. And we need to see this!

In verse 11 Moses says, "Who considers the power of your anger and your wrath according to the fear of you?" The answer to this question is not many. Not many people see the connection between our mortality and God's judgment on sin.<sup>7</sup> But Psalm 90 wants us to see the connection. Do you see it?

In verse 12 Moses prays, "So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom." What's Moses asking for in this familiar prayer?

I think at the most basic level he's asking God to help us consider the power of God's anger. He wants us to see the connection between mortality and God's judgment. He's asking God to help us think rightly about our lives.

Friends, now is the time to assess your life. Don't waste the opportunity this virus has given you to take stock of your life. Ask God to help you to see that your days are numbered. And then ask him to help you to make the most of your numbered days!

## **SEEKING GOD IN PRAYER (13-17)**

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So how should we make the most of our numbered days? The Psalm begins to answer that question in verse 13. This Psalm doesn't stop at teaching us theology. This Psalm not only wants us to see the reality of our situation. This Psalm wants us to seek God in the reality of our situation. This Psalm is not all sobering. It gives us a path forward. It teaches us how to pray in the wilderness. Verses 13-17 give us four things to pray for during this time.

### ***Seek God's grace.***

First, since our days are numbered, since we all die, we need to seek God's grace. Verse 13 says, "Return, O Lord! How long? Have pity on your servants!" This is Moses' way of asking for God's grace. He was asking God to bring the next generation into their inheritance in the Promised Land.

For us, we need to ask God to bring us into our eternal inheritance. We need to ask God to save us from his judgment. If we want God to be our everlasting dwelling place, we need his forgiveness and we need reconciliation.

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<sup>7</sup> Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library

Thankfully, God has provided grace for us in Jesus Christ. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have [everlasting] life.” Even though we all die, we don’t have to spend eternity separated from God.

Christ died in our place for our sins. And Christ was raised from the dead. So anyone who trusts in Christ will be forgiven of their sins. And even though we all die, if we’re in Christ, we’ll also be raised from the dead. And then we’ll dwell with the everlasting God for eternity.<sup>8</sup>

If you are listening today and you’ve not yet placed your trust in Jesus, I want to ask you to remember that your days on this earth are numbered. The wise person who fears God will cry out to God for grace and mercy. Fall on Jesus now during your numbered days, so you can live with God, days without number! That’s the first way to seek God.

### ***Seek joy and satisfaction in God.***

Second, seek joy and satisfaction in God. Verse 14 says, “Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.”

Even though the world is groaning because of the fall, we can still experience joy in this life. Even though we’re all mortal, we don’t have to be morbid. We can still find satisfaction in God’s steadfast love. Because of God’s steadfast love, we have something beyond our numbered days to look forward to. And that gives us joy now.

In verse 15, Moses prays, “Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us.” If we’re in Christ we will be glad for way more days than we’re afflicted. In 2 Corinthians 4:16-17 Paul says, “So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.”

Our numbered days are full of affliction. But we will live days without number in God’s eternal glory. The weight of those days is far heavier than the weight of these days. So, ask God to give you joy and satisfaction even in these days of groaning. Ask God to transform your inner nature even as your outer nature is wasting away. Don’t waste these days in despair. Seek joy and satisfaction in our everlasting God!

### ***Seek to see God’s work.***

Third, seek to see God’s work. Look at verse 16. Moses prays, “Let your work be shown to your servants, and your glorious power to their children.” In our present circumstances, some may be asking, “Where’s God?” In the face of death and disease, it may seem like God’s sleeping. But he’s not. He’s working.

Just this week, I spoke with a number of you, and you told me how God’s at work in your lives. Our staff also shared stories with me of how God’s at work. And our elders shared even more stories. God’s using this crisis to save and to sanctify people all over the world. Do you see it? If not, ask God to show you his work. Ask him to show you his glorious power. And then praise him for his work.

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<sup>8</sup> Waltke

***Seek God's favor in your work.***

Forth, seek God's favor in your work. Look at verse 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!"

These last two weeks have greatly disrupted our work. Some of you are now out of work. Some are working from home. And all of us are distracted from our work. Our work may even seem futile during these days. But your labor is not in vain. God wants to use your work to accomplish his work. So, ask for his favor upon your work.

Whatever vocation God's given you. Whether in the marketplace, or as a parent, or as a student, or even if you're retired, God calls you to do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for man. Knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve (Col. 3:23-24).

You have an eternal inheritance awaiting you. Days without number. In light of those days, let your numbered days be given to work for God. Ask God to help you focus in your work. Ask him to help you be productive. Seek to love your neighbor through your work. And seek to love others in the church through your work of ministry. Don't isolate yourself. Give yourself to build up the body of Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 15:58, after Paul spoke extensively about the implications of the resurrection, listen to what he said to the church. "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."<sup>9</sup>

That is my encouragement for you this day. God is your dwelling place in this wilderness. Seek him! Seek his grace. Seek his satisfaction. Seek to see his work. And seek his favor in your work.

## **PRAYER**

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Father, you are the everlasting God. We are a but a vapor.

Who considers the power of your anger? Help us to see our sin. And help us to see that your judgment on sin is deserved. We have taken you for granted. We have been arrogant and self-sufficient. Forgive us. We have not made the most of our limited time on this earth. We confess our sin to you. And we ask that you would be gracious to us. Help us to come back to you. Thank you for Christ and the grace we have in him.

I pray that you would also satisfy us with your unfailing love. Help us to find joy in these hard days. We also pray that you would make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us. We pray for an end to this deadly pestilence. We pray for healing for those who are sick. We pray for comfort for those who are grieving.

And with the days that are in front of us, help us to make the most of them. Give us eyes to see what you're doing in this world. And then help us to join you in your work. Establish the work of our hands, dear God. We want to live our lives for your glory and the good of our neighbors.

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<sup>9</sup> Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. And we desire that to be true of the next generation. And so we also pray for our children to come to know you during this time. We also ask that you would help parents who are home with their children to make the most of these days.

We pray for our friends and family members to come to know you. For those who have not placed their trust in you, I pray that you would draw them to yourself.

Help us to find our home in you during this time. I pray for the people of First Free to spend time with you. And I pray that you would remind each of us that no matter how bad things get that you are still on your throne. You are our sovereign shelter.

We pray this all through the mercies of Christ. Amen.