

## Passing Life in the Presence of the Lord

Psalm 90:7-10

During this 2020 pandemic, people are huddling in place while their thoughts are hurtling forward. What does all of this mean for us and for our children? Lives which once seemed stable now seem fragile. Worries can run wild making fears more fearsome, ignoring faith and wisdom. Many are asking big questions that begin with “Why?” and “What if?” Why are things this way? What if things could be different?

In Pastor Rodney King’s message last Sunday evening, he summarized Psalm 90:3-6 this way: “You must remember that you are sinful, frail, and finite in comparison with an omnipotent and eternal God; therefore, submit to Him now.” This passing life is being lived out in the presence of the Lord. *Your* passing life is being lived out in the presence of the Lord. Now is the time to fear Him and place your faith in Him. Only then will life make sense.

Verse 6 pictured this passing life as withering grass. Verses 7-10 explain the reason for this weakness:

**<sup>7</sup> For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled. <sup>8</sup> Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance. <sup>9</sup> For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a [sigh] tale that is told. <sup>10</sup> The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.**

Summary Outline: Three Important Observations about Sinful Humanity

- **Sinful humanity is consumed and haunted by the reality of God’s righteous indignation. v.7**
- **Sinful humanity is convicted by the reality of God’s righteous presence. v.8**
- **Sinful humanity is exasperated by the brevity and hardships of life. vs. 9-10**

These verses cause us to long for genuine hope. And later verses in this psalm speak of that hope. But to find that hope, we will first have to admit humanity’s hopeless condition (vs. 3-10). You see, the highway to heaven is hidden in humility, and that’s not a place that many people want to look. Sinful humanity is in an awful mess. But by taking the light of God’s truth into the darkness of your heart, you begin to see faint glimmers. If we can agree that man’s life dissolves because of his problems with sin, then we can learn how God’s life resolves man’s problems with sin.

#### *Do We Have A Prayer?*

Psalm 90 is a prayer of Moses, the man of God. He had begun by praising the glorious Lord who has been the dwelling place for His people in all generations. But then his prayer frankly admitted the rebellious nature of man. It is intriguing to speculate as to when this prayer was written. Which traumatic events in the history of Israel was Moses thinking of when he wrote verses 7-10? The only real hints we have are the words that Moses chose. Words such as “consumed,” “anger,” “wrath,” “iniquities,” “sins,” “labor and sorrow” give us these hints.

Used rightly, these verses can still inform our prayers today. All Scripture is profitable to us today (2 Timothy 3:16-17). It shows us with equal clarity what is right and what is wrong. Then it helps us to turn from the wrong by making it right and keeping it right.

In these days, we need the reminder in Jeremiah's Lament (Lamentations 2:14). He pointed out that false prophets with their false and deceptive preaching said nothing about the people's iniquity. But this is exactly what we need. Psalm 90:7-10 shows sinful people what is wrong so that he will acquire the need to know how to make it right. This is a prayer of lament leading to godly repentance.

**For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled. (v.7)**

The word "consumed" means "finished off" or "brought to an end." The word "troubled" means "to be horrified, be out of one's senses; be disturbed, dismayed, terrified."<sup>i</sup> Taken together, these words express the fears and emotions of many people during this current crisis.

However, it's important that we think about human death in its connection to God's righteous indignation against sin. One author wrote, "God's wrath is judicial in nature, based on His holiness as administered by His justice. And, it can exist simultaneously with His love. So, whereas love is a spontaneous attribute of God's being, wrath is a responsive, holy disposition brought out by sin."<sup>ii</sup> About the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, God had promised, "in the day you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17). God said what He meant, and He meant what He said. And in that rebellious act of Adam, death passed upon all men (Romans 5:12).

Moses remembered that word "consumed" during the rebellion described in Numbers 16:21-22. Three rebel leaders had stirred up the people against Moses. The Lord threatened to consume the people because they followed that rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Moses

and Aaron fell on their faces to pray for the people. The Lord spared the people, but a giant sinkhole opened up under the three rebels and consumed them and their families.

Perhaps Moses was thinking of what he had recorded in Exodus 33:1-5. There the Lord had told them that He would not go with them into the Promised Land. He said that they were a stiff-necked people and they were in danger by His being with them; He might consume them on the way. Man's iniquity in the presence of God's righteous indignation presents real dangers. Moses repeated these words to the people, and they mourned. Perhaps that word translated "consumed" was very much on Moses' mind as he wrote. **"For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled."**

Verse 7 gives us the first important observation about sinful humanity.

### **1. Sinful humanity is consumed and haunted by the reality of God's righteous indignation. v.7**

Estimates vary about the total number of Israelites who left Egypt in the Exodus. At least, we know that there were 603,550 (based on Numbers 1:45-46)<sup>iii</sup>. Some scholars see that number as a total census of the population (represented by the leaders of families). Others conclude that the number was more like 2.5 million (by multiplying that number by an average number of family members). In any case, Numbers 14:28-30 states that all those above twenty years of age would die within the next 40 years in the wilderness. Think of what this meant in terms of funerals per day. Depending on your calculation, there would have been an average of 150 to 500 funerals each and every day! At what is believed to be the height of this pandemic in New York City, 377 people are dying each day.<sup>iv</sup> Reporter Julia Marsh rightly called this "staggering."

But now just imagine if that same death toll went on for forty years: 14,600 days! Wherever they wandered, they left graveyards that were full of their loved ones. Is it any wonder that Moses would think of his people as consumed and haunted by the reality of God's righteous indignation?

But God's righteous indignation was not visited on the nation of Israel alone. In Romans 1:18, Paul wrote, "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness;" This presents a real danger for sinful humanity today.

### *No Holiday from History*

This message is being delivered on Sunday morning, April 26, 2020. Of the 365 days of the year, this is just one of the 24 hour periods. But as we look back across history to many of the days called "the 26<sup>th</sup> of April," we can get a snapshot of what life has been like. As you think about these ghastly statistics, keep in mind a comment made by columnist George F. Will. On the day after the United States was attacked on September 11, 2001, he commented, "'the nation's decade-long holiday from history came to a shattering end.'" This recent pandemic has caused people to recognize that, by and large, we have all been on a "holiday from history." It has been quite some time since thoughts about infection and death have dominated the thoughts of humanity as they have recently. But stop to consider the following:

- On April 26, 1721, a massive earthquake killed 80,000 people in Tabriz in what is now the country of Iran.<sup>vi</sup>

- On April 26, 1794, more than 9,000 French, British and Austrian soldiers were killed at the Battle of Beaumont during the French Revolutionary War.<sup>vii</sup>
- On April 26, 1933, Herman Göring formed the German Secret Police – the Gestapo.<sup>viii</sup> During the Holocaust, the Gestapo killed more than 6 million Jews.

But consider other Aprils

- The Asian Flu of 1957-1958 took the lives of more than one million people.
- The AIDS epidemic which has lasted from 1981 to the present has killed 35 million people.
- On April 26, 1989, the deadliest tornado in the history of Bangladesh (and perhaps the deadliest tornado in the history of the world) killed 1300 people.<sup>ix</sup>
- On April 26, 1991, a massive outbreak of 55 tornadoes struck the central United States, killing 21 people. 17 were killed in the F5 tornado that struck Andover, Kansas.<sup>x</sup>
- On April 26, 1994, China Airlines Flight 140 Airbus A300 crashed, killing 264 people.<sup>xi</sup>
- Across five deadly Aprils around 430 B.C. (not long after the war between Sparta and Athens began) the plague of Athens killed 100,000 people.<sup>xii</sup>
- The Antonine Plague (which was probably smallpox) lasted for 15 deadly Aprils in 165-180 A.D. killing 5 million people in the Roman Empire. This plague was the beginning of the end for the Roman Empire.
- The plague of Justinian (probably the bubonic plague) 541-542 A.D., is estimated to have killed 10% of the world's population.
- The Cocoliztli epidemic (a viral hemorrhagic fever) in Mexico and Central America lasted three deadly Aprils from 1545-1548, killing 15 million people.

- The Black Death (a bacterium spread by fleas on infected rodents) lasted for seven years, 1346-1352 A.D. is believed to have wiped out half of Europe's population. It killed 200 million people in just four years.
- The Great Plague of London (the last outbreak of the Black Death) began in April 1665 and killed 100,000 people.
- Great Plague of Marseille, France, 1720-1723, killed 30% of the people in the city, about 100,000 people.
- During the Russian plague of 1770-1772, about 100,000 people died from a combination of the plague and the uprising of citizens who were frustrated with quarantines.
- The Flu Pandemic of 1889-1890 killed one million people worldwide.
- The Spanish Flu of 1918-1920 killed between 20 million and 50 million people throughout the world.

As Moses wrote, **“For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled.”**

Until someone recognizes the severity of man's wicked depravity and its deathly results, he will never recognize the need for the Gospel. The ghastly crucifixion of the Son of God on the cross at Calvary shows us what it means to be consumed by God's righteous indignation. But in those horrifying hours, we also see God's mercy on full display. He sent His Son as our Substitute to drink of the consuming power of God's righteous indignation – and grant mercy to us.

According to Exodus 33:13, Moses the Intercessor began his appeal for his people with the words “if I have found grace in thy sight.” He found God's grace in the secret place. But in a world where the loving words of John 3:16 are very popular, let us not forget the words 20

verses later in John 3:36, “He that believes on the Son has everlasting life: and he that believes not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him.”

Your passing life is being lived out in the presence of the Lord. Now is the time to fear Him and place your faith in Him. Perhaps you think of God as far off and death as a distant reality. But verse 8 shows you the truth:

**Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance. (v.8)**

Verse 8 gives us the second important observation about sinful humanity:

## **2. Sinful humanity is convicted by the reality of God’s righteous presence. v.8**

It’s important to know the reality of God’s wrath: His righteous indignation. But it is just as important to recognize the reality of His righteous presence with us.

Moses knew that all the sins of Israel were on full display before God. Even their dark secrets were illuminated by the light of God’s face. In their secret thoughts, they were sure that they were alone; but they were not alone. They assured themselves that no one knew; yet God knew.

And this is still true today. The full light of the sun cannot begin to compare with the light of God’s face. Nothing is hidden from him.

You can try to thrust the all-seeing eye of God from your thoughts. But to do so, you must tell yourself two awful lies. You can see these in Ezekiel 8:12: *“Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, The LORD sees us not; the LORD has forsaken the earth.”*



What are the two awful lies you have to tell yourself? 1. The Lord doesn't see me, and 2. The Lord has forsaken the earth. But He does see us. And He is paying close attention. Even our darkest, secret sins are floodlit by the luminescent glory of God's face.

God raised this question in Jeremiah 23:24: "'Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him?'" says the LORD. "'Do not I fill heaven and earth?'" says the LORD."

"For mine eyes *are* upon all their ways: they are not hid from my face, neither is their iniquity hid from mine eyes" (Jeremiah 16:17)

"... for I know the things that come into your mind, *every one of them*" (Ezekiel 11:5).

Proverbs 15:3 reminds us, "The eyes of the LORD *are* in every place, beholding the evil and the good."

"For the ways of man *are* before the eyes of the LORD, and He ponders all his goings" (Proverbs 5:21)

"Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee" (Psalm 139:12)

"Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things *are* naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Hebrews 4:13).

The fear of God is a powerful deterrent. The next time you are thinking of indulging in secret sins, quote these words, "**our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.**" The knowledge of His radiant presence helps men and women turn from their rebellion.

This much is very clear from these verses: Your passing life is being lived out in the presence of the Lord. Now is the time to fear Him and place your faith in Him.

**<sup>9</sup> For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a [sigh] tale that is told.**

**<sup>10</sup> The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.**

This is the third important observation about sinful humanity:

### **3. Sinful humanity is exasperated by the brevity and hardships of life. vs. 9-10**

The reality of God's righteous indignation has consumed and haunted sinful humanity. So Moses wrote, "For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a [*hegeh*] "a rumbling, growling, moaning."<sup>xiii</sup> We spend our years as a sigh. So Moses (who was well past 80 when he wrote this) said that, on average, people live for seventy years or so. But if they are strong enough to live past 80, he wrote, there is a lot of labor and sorrow. Just more sighing. And we fly away.

Reflecting on this, Isaac Watts wrote in "O God Our Help in Ages Past"

*Time, like an ever-rolling stream,*

*bears all its sons away;*

*they fly forgotten, as a dream*

*dies at the op'ning day.*

This frustration, this exasperation causes us to long for hope. Is there hope for man in his hopeless iniquity and depravity? God's righteous indignation and His holy presence cause us to fear. Is there any hope? Undoubtedly David remembered the words of Psalm 90 during his own rebellious stint of murder and adultery. Psalm 32 and Psalm 51 are two of his penitential psalms where he confessed his sin before the Holy God. Read those psalms carefully to find the way home. When David refused to admit his sin, he grew more and more troubled (Psalm 32:3-4). But when he confessed his sin, He discovered God's great blessing: "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. <sup>2</sup> Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputes not iniquity . . ." (Psalm 32:1-2). How can a rebellious man or woman, full of iniquity, avoid being consumed by the righteous indignation of God? This is God's grace in the secret place. David called out for the mercies and lovingkindness of God. That mercy is on full display in our Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. He lived a righteous life before God, and then died a criminal's death for us on the cross. Rising again, He proclaimed that way for rebellious man to escape from the consuming power of God's righteous indignation.

Probably the best description of this moaning sigh (of Psalm 90:9) is found in Ecclesiastes chapter 12. Take some time to read it soon. It's a great reminder to young people about this passing life. It begins with the words, "Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth . . ." In that chapter, the preacher compared a home (a house of that time) to a human body. And in a poetic fashion, that chapter alerts you to the ravages of old age. Teeth fall out, eyes grow dim, and it's harder and harder to hear. So much so that little things will begin to bother you; even the grasshopper becomes a burden.

What are we learning? We are learning that your passing life is being lived out in the presence of the Lord. Now is the time to fear Him and place your faith in Him.

This is why Ecclesiastes 12 concludes with these words:

*<sup>13</sup> Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. <sup>14</sup> For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.*

Moses' description of man's depravity could leave us angry, sullen and exasperated. But that is not the intent. We have a prayer, and it's Psalm 90. As we shall see in this series, Psalm 90:13 begins with the words, "Return, O Lord, how long?" There is hope. But the only way to find that hope is to recognize the hopeless condition of sinful humanity. No one can get real help on his own terms. The God who is righteously indignant, seeing all our secret sins does not leave us to live in exasperation. In mercy, He has given us His Son to show us the way back. He drank that cup of God's righteous indignation for you on the cross of Calvary. He rose again from the dead to proclaim God's mercies to you. Knowing Him as Lord and Savior will turn your passing life into the greatest adventure you have ever known.

Now we know the answer to some big questions: Why are things this way? What if they could be different?

Recently here at Calvary, we featured a hymn written by Robert Murray McCheyne. Consider the words of the hymn, "When This Passing World Is Done"

*When this passing world is done,*

*When has sunk yon glaring sun,  
When we stand with Christ on high,  
Looking o'er life's history;  
Then, Lord, shall I fully know,  
Not till then, how much I owe.*

*When I stand before the throne  
Dressed in beauty not my own,  
When I see Thee as Thou art,  
Love Thee with unsinning heart;  
Then, Lord, shall I fully know,  
Not till then, how much I owe.*

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<sup>i</sup> A. Philip Brown II and Bryan W. Smith, *A Reader's Hebrew Bible*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008. p.1200

<sup>ii</sup> Rolland McCune, [\*A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Scripture, God, and Angels\*](#), vol. 1 (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 245–246.

<sup>iii</sup> See “How many Israelites left Egypt in the Exodus?” <http://www.prophecysociety.org/?p=8983> Some of the difficulty in calculating the number surround the word [eleph] which now means 1,000. But the word may have an earlier meaning of “family” or “clan” (see Judges 6:15). However, see Jack B. Scott, [\*“109 אֶלֶף”\*](#), ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 48. “It is occasionally alleged that since *'elep* means a company of a thousand men it could mean any military unit, even of reduced strength. From there it

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came to mean a family unit or clan, even a small one. But this means that the 1000's of the mustering of the soldiers in Num 1 and 26 is reduced to a small figure in accord with the desire of the commentator. The wilderness wandering and its miraculous supply is also reduced to naturalistic proportions. But it should be remembered that the conquest of Transjordan and of Palestine was not accomplished by a handful of men. Also such juggling must alter the text of the Numbers passages which by the addition of their totals clearly speak of 1000's of soldiers. R.L.H."

<sup>iv</sup> Julia Marsh "The staggering toll of coronavirus in New York City: Nearly 400 die each day" New York Post April 24, 2020 accessed at <https://nypost.com/2020/04/24/this-is-the-staggering-toll-of-coronavirus-in-new-york-city/>

<sup>v</sup> George F. Will, "The End of Our Holiday from History" The Washington Post, September 12, 2001 accessed at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/opinions/2001/09/12/the-end-of-our-holiday-from-history/9da607fd-8fdc-4f33-b7c9-e6cda00453bb/>

<sup>vi</sup> Tabriz, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tabriz>

<sup>vii</sup> Battle of Beaumont (1794) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_Beaumont\\_\(1794\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Beaumont_(1794))

<sup>viii</sup> Gestapo <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gestapo>

<sup>ix</sup> Daulatpur–Saturia tornado [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daulatpur%E2%80%93Saturia\\_tornado](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daulatpur%E2%80%93Saturia_tornado)

<sup>x</sup> Andover Tornado Outbreak [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andover\\_tornado\\_outbreak](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Andover_tornado_outbreak)

<sup>xi</sup> China Airlines Flight 140 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China\\_Airlines\\_Flight\\_140](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/China_Airlines_Flight_140)

<sup>xii</sup> Several of the statistics in this list were cited in an article by Owen Jarus, "20 of the worst epidemics and pandemics in history" LiveScience accessed at <https://www.livescience.com/worst-epidemics-and-pandemics-in-history.html>

<sup>xiii</sup> Herbert Wolf, "[467 הַגָּה](#)," ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 205.