

Christmas 1 / December 31, 2023

Psalm 90:12

“Therefore, teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.”

Teach us to Number our Days Wisely

The end of the calendar year is a natural time to reflect on events of the past in general and the past year in particular. When we consider this year now ending, we have much for which to give God thanks and praise. We have received from His hand food and clothing, shelter and the blessing of family and friends. The psalmist sang, *“You cause grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man’s heart.”* As He has provided for our physical needs in the past year, He will continue to do so in the New Year. As Moses sang, He is our dwelling place in all generations. In Christ Jesus, God is our dwelling place for eternity.

In the past year we have all dealt with hard things. Perhaps we have lost family members and friends to death. We may have experienced turmoil and troubles within our families and among our circle of friends. We may have faced challenges to our health, or to the health of a loved one. As Moses said, the span of our lives is filled with trouble and sorrow. But through it all we have had the promise of God’s faithful love for the sake of Christ Jesus. Whatever the coming year may bring, we continue to have the promise of God’s loving presence in Christ Jesus. He promised in our baptism, *“Never! Will I leave you. Never! Will I forsake you.”* Whatever the years may bring we have the peace and certainly that in Christ, God will be with us. In Christ, He is our dwelling place in time and for eternity.

Psalm 90 teaches a number of important things about God and about ourselves. God is eternal. We are not. God is the Creator. We are the creation. There is trouble in the world and in our lives because of sin. God’s judgement on sin is death; physical death in time, spiritual and physical death in eternity. Human beings are different from all other sentient creatures in many ways, one important way in terms of this psalm is our sense of time and eternity. Unlike any other creature we sense the passing of time and have the ability to number our days. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon observes that God has set the sense of eternity in the human heart. Although we cannot attain it, we can sense it. Sentient beings live in the moment. Human beings live in the past, the future and the present. The sense of the eternal frames our existence. It shows us where we stand in relation to the universe. It reminds us our days are numbered. It helps us to appreciate the sacredness of time, so we make the most of our time and live as fully as possible with the people who are part of our lives at this time. The awareness of the passing of time teaches us to use time wisely under God’s eternity.

Sometimes we live as if we have forever. However, as Moses observes there is a definite limit to our lives. He says, *“The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength; eighty.”* Moses himself lived more than 120 years, but even his long life is a drop in a bucket compared to God, to whom a thousand years are like a watch in the night. Part of wisdom is knowing our limitations, so that we don’t overreach on the one hand, or under extend ourselves on the other hand. God made us so that we can appreciate the sacredness of time. In Christ, God blesses us with both a sense of time and the ability to use our time wisely. The Psalmist sang, *“In your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me.”* God knows the number of our days. We know our days are numbered. A heart of wisdom sees time as God’s gift to be used wisely. A heart of wisdom sees God as the giver of time through creation and as the giver of eternal life through the recreation in Christ Jesus.

Moses sings, *“Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations...from everlasting to everlasting you are God.”* We humans like to control our environment. We humans think we can control our environment. Whether that is harnessing the forces of nature, or searching the heavens for another world in which to transplant ourselves when we wear this world out. Intergalactic colonialism! People are atheists not because they know or can prove empirically there is no God. People are atheists, because we want to be our own gods. As well as the only creatures with a sense of time and eternity, humans are the only creatures that have a sense of deity. That sense of deity was implanted in our nature by the Creator. He created humans in His image with intellect, curiosity, the ability to love and with both a sense of eternity and a sense of God. Nothing good comes when that sense of deity is turned in on ourselves and we make ourselves gods.

Intrinsically in our souls we know there is a Creator. Externally we see there is a Creator, because of the things that are made. The intricacy of the biological universe is mind boggling. There is a microbiological universe within every creature, so complex that it defies our control. On a larger scale, life forms interact with each other

to preserve their being and enhance their existence. Biodiversity and the complexity of the relationships among life forms is astounding. All of these speak against random chance. Instead, they testify to the intellect of the Creator. God expresses His being through the things that He created, human beings first and foremost. The beginning of wisdom is to acknowledge God as our Creator and the continuing source of our being. As the ancient Greek poet said, *“In Him we live and move and have our being.”* We are His creation. He is our dwelling place in time as our Creator. He is our eternal home in Christ Jesus.

It’s as important to know our limitations as it is to know what is possible for us. Sometimes we learn more from our weaknesses and limitations than from our strengths and potentialities. God created us with both a sense of eternity and with the awareness we have no possibility of attaining it. And why would we want to? Moses observed that the days of our lives are trouble and sorrow. Who would want to live forever in such a life? A woman in her mid-nineties once said to me, “I don’t want to live to one hundred.” Then she paused and added, “But I don’t want to die either.” Such is the conundrum of human life. We don’t want to live forever in bodies that weaken and become disabled with age, but we don’t want to die either.

This leads us to wonder why our bodies weaken with time and eventually die. That’s a question much on the mind of people who study death. Life is the most powerful force in the natural world. Trees cling to life on the tops of mountains with only rock for nourishment. Weeds reaching for the sun force their way through concrete. In a sense life is unstoppable, but then it stops. What causes cells to grow in a stable, life sustaining manner, only to eventually turn cancerous, degenerate and die? Is there something we can do to manipulate our bodies, so that we achieve a steady state of cellular growth where a good life is maintained in perpetuity? Is death a biological problem?

The bible teaches that death is not a biological problem, but rather a spiritual problem. Our bodies, become ill and die, because our spiritual relationship with God has been ruined through sin. We have trouble in our relationships with others, because sin has ruined that as well. God didn’t create humans to have trouble and die. He created us in His image to live with Him and each other at peace, eternally. Sin shattered our relationship with Him in whom we live and move and have our being. The sense of the eternal remains, but we live in time under the shadow of death. Death is the result of God’s judgement on human sin. Not all the biological research and advancement will change that reality. We can extend and prolong our lives, but only God can release us from His judgement on sin, which is death. Only God gives life. Only God can give eternal life. He does this through Jesus, by whom He heals our broken relationship in the forgiveness of His cross.

As we reflect on the passing of another year, considering both our mortality and the sense of eternity God has planted in our souls, we pray with Moses, *“Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom.”* We number our days wisely, not by living for ourselves under the shadow death. We live life to the fullest when we live in God through faith in Christ Jesus. We live in time, not under the shadow of death, but under the shelter of God’s eternal love in Christ Jesus. We number our days wisely by remembering God is our Creator and most importantly, by treasuring Christ Jesus in our hearts as Saviour and Lord. In time and for eternity, God is our dwelling place for the sake of Christ our Saviour. In His Name. Amen