

- ⁷ *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 *Our days may come to seventy years,
or eighty, if our strength endures;
yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow,
for they quickly pass, and we fly away.*
- ¹¹ *If only we knew the power of your anger!
Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your due.*
- ¹² *Teach us to number our days,
that we may gain a heart of wisdom. (Psalm 90:7-12)*

How do we Number our Days Aright?

When I was in the army, I had a friend who became a Christian during the time I knew him. He used to talk to me sometimes about faith related issues. Some of the guys were giving him a lot of grief. We served in an army intelligence unit. There were a lot of guys in our unit with college degrees and really high scores on their standardized tests. As is often the case among people who think of themselves as smart, faith in Jesus seemed dumb. So they were giving this young man a pretty hard time about his newfound faith. Finally he asked them, “If I’m wrong, and I die and there’s nothing, but I spend my life trying to serve and help other people, would that be a wasted life?” I thought that was a pretty good answer, especially for someone so new to the faith. And it brings up an important question for us today: what is a life well spent? What is a good life? A successful life? In the word of God that we have before us this morning, Moses prays, “**Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.**” He didn’t mean, “Help us not lose track of how many days we’ve lived.” Sometimes, I visit elderly members who have trouble remembering how old they are. But that’s not what Moses had in mind. He was asking God to help us evaluate how we spend our days. He was asking God to help us understand the lives we live and what they mean, so that when all is said and done, our lives are not wasted. How do we do that? My friends, **how do we number our days aright?**

I.

It starts **by being realistic about life here.** Psalm 90 doesn’t pull any punches about life here. The psalm begins with God who existed before the mountains were born or the earth began. God always has been. God always will be. But our lives are different. Compared to eternity, they’re nothing. Moses wrote, “**The length of our days is seventy years— or eighty, if we have the strength.**” Today, we live longer than most people did in Moses’ day. I’ve had funerals for lots of people who had the strength to reach their 80’s and even their 90’s. Moses himself lived to 120. In fact, he was probably past 80 when he wrote these words, so he wasn’t laying down a law of nature here. But even today, don’t we generally figure that we have 70 or 80 years in this world? Compared to God who has been watching this world circle the sun since the beginning of time, 120 years, 200 years, a thousand years is nothing. Our lives are short and then they’re done.

But it isn’t just that our lives are short. Moses says that the best of our days are trouble and sorrow. He says we finish our years with a moan. I’ve seen that. I’ve spent a lot of time with Christians whose lives were ending. I’ve been with a number of them at the time God called them home. It is not unusual, even with all the pain management tools we have today, to hear a dying person moan as the time draws to a close. It can’t be easy to feel your life slipping away. Finally, all the hurts and sorrows we face in this life come down to those last hours and minutes on this earth when we only have the strength to moan.

Why is it all so hard? If God loves us so much, why doesn’t he make life easier? Well, he does. He answers our prayers all the time. He gives every one of us days of joy and blessing in this life. But there may

be people here who have had more sad days than joyful days. There may be people here who are facing pain and sorrow and even the final days of their time on this earth, and they don't expect it to be easy. Why does God let us suffer like that?

Because of sin. God cursed this world when Adam and Eve sinned. You see, God made this world to be the perfect place for us to live. When Adam and Eve sinned, God let them live out their lives in the world he gave them. He let them have children and grandchildren and all the generations of descendants, right up to us. And he may allow countless more generations to come before Jesus returns. God did that because he loved us and he wants us to be in heaven. But he still cursed this world because of sin. So our sin brings all the pains and sorrows of life. Now, that does not mean that every sickness is a specific punishment by God for a specific sin. You can't go rooting through the life history of family members who have COVID or cancer trying to figure out what they're guilty of. Sometimes, in a sinful world, bad things just happen. But the world is cursed because we human beings began sinning in the Garden of Eden and we never stopped. Lest you think it's not fair that our world is cursed today because Adam and Eve sinned so long ago, when was the last time you sinned? Was it today? Was it during this church service? Is it impossible even to know for sure what your last sin was because there are so many? We sin every day. Pain and sorrow and death follow.

Moses said, **"We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation. You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence."** The worst part of this life knowing we're guilty and knowing that God knows we're guilty – and that can't end well for us. God even knows our secret sins. God has all the evidence to put us on trial. He has the tapes of our whole lives. He can play back every sinful thought and every evil desire. He can play back every hurtful word and every selfish action. We have no defense. So Moses said, **"All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan."**

All the pain and sorrow of this life comes from sin. And it is all an indication that one day, every single one of us will have to face God's judgment. That's the point. Now, Moses actually emphasizes the fact that even in this life, God judges what we do. But the worst that this life throws at us is nothing compared to what's coming when sinners appear before the judgment seat of God. Hell will last forever. Hell will be the ultimate pain and darkness and loneliness. Hell is what every sinner deserves. God designed all the pain and sorrow of this life to be a little taste of what is coming.

We simply cannot number our days aright until we recognize that truth about ourselves. This Sunday of Last Judgment is designed to call our attention to the final act of this world's existence. Jesus will come again, with all the holy angels, in all the power and glory of heaven. He will call all those who have died out of their graves. He will gather all those who are still alive. And then he will judge the world. Every human being will have to face him. Every single one of us deserves the same verdict: guilty. Because we have all sinned. Numbering our days aright begins when we recognize that fact.

II.

But that's not where it ends. Numbering our days aright ends with Jesus. But we cannot be saved by Jesus if we don't think we need saving. We cannot find peace and comfort in his promises, if we figure we're good people and we're going to heaven anyway. So Psalm 90 points to all the pain and sorrow in this life and reminds us that it means that every single one of us is a sinner who deserves all that pain and sorrow and even more. But then God points us to Jesus. He rescued us from all that we deserve. He promises us a new and better world. He promises us freedom from pain and sorrow and even from death itself. He promises us a day when we will have no sin in our hearts and no reason to ever feel guilty again. Then he calls us to make all this life about getting to that life. That is the key to numbering our days aright. We need to know what this life is really all about. So **how do we number our days aright? By living for the life to come.**

Moses taught us to pray, **"Teach us to number our days aright."** We can't do that without God. It takes the power of the Holy Spirit to break through our self-absorbed hearts. Our ability to make excuses and to justify ourselves is truly endless. Only God could hit us with the hammer of his law and break our pride into pieces. And he does that. But driving us to our knees is not actually something God likes doing. It breaks his heart that we need it. He does it because we do need it. But always he wants to do his true work: forgiving us and comforting us and pointing us to Jesus and all that he has won for us.

Jesus has paid for all our sins. God sent his own Son to become a real human being and to live a perfect life in our place. He sent his own Son to suffer all that sin does to us in this world, to walk where we have to

walk and to experience how much this life hurts – only he didn't deserve it. He was perfect. But he tasted that foretaste of God's judgment and then he drank all God's judgment down. On the cross, he suffered hell and then death in our place. He paid for all our sins and God has forgiven us. Jesus rose to make that absolutely clear to us. Jesus has paid for every sinful word we ever spoke and for every selfish action we ever did. Jesus has paid for all the sinful lusts in our hearts and all the evil thoughts in our minds.

That means that when Judgment Day comes, we have nothing to be afraid of. When God pulls out his tapes and presents his evidence, do you know what he's going to say about you and me? Nothing. He's going to run the tape of Jesus' life and say we were perfect. He's going to play the tape of Jesus' heart and mind and say that no sin ever even came close to us. So Jesus – the same Jesus who did all that for us – will then pronounce the verdict: not guilty. He will do that in front of all people who have ever lived and then he will take us to live with him forever.

We will live in this world as it was supposed to be. We will go back to the Garden of Eden. And death will die. We won't have to count our days because they will never end. Sickness and pain and old age will all die. We will forget how to shed tears. We will experience joy beyond our ability to imagine it – so God never actually tries to describe it. He simply tells us that we will be with Jesus forever.

That's what God promises us. He teaches us to number our days aright when he gives us the gift of faith. Day by day, as we hear that gospel, God works. He teaches us to let go of this life and look forward to life with him. He teaches us that what we see here temporary. It has to end so that something greater can begin. But it's really hard for us to put what we can't see ahead of what we can. Even in this life, it's hard to put off instant gratification. Most high school students want to graduate. They even want to get decent grades. But the immediate gratification of playing video games or surfing the web with their phones or sharing pictures and videos sometimes outweighs the future benefit of graduating, so they have trouble putting their phones away and getting out their books. If it's hard for us to put future blessings that we know are real ahead of the instant gratification of this moment, how could we ever put heaven ahead of this life? Nobody has ever seen it. Even that young friend of had to admit the possibility that he might be wrong about it. On our own, we simply can't put eternal life first.

But God works through the good news about Jesus. And he teaches us to number our days aright. He does a miracle in our hearts and he creates faith there. And he redoes that miracle every time we hear about Jesus. He makes it possible for us to put heaven ahead of this life. He makes it possible for us to put forgiveness ahead of guilt and joy ahead of sorrow. He makes it possible for us to wait for Jesus to come and take us home. That is numbering our days aright. By God's grace, we will do that until we see Jesus with our own eyes. Amen.