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## PSALM 90

Psalms – Book IV – Series

We're going to move into the book of Psalms now. As a pastor, as I'm trying to help you understand or grasp the scriptures, I try to provide you with a diet of scripture on Sunday mornings. The diet will change as we go because I think that's healthy for us as a church.

We spent some time in the book of Galatians, which is really talking about the freedom that we have in Christ through His Spirit and trying to develop some of the concepts that are taught in that book. I just think it's a delightful book, the book of Galatians.

Now we're going to go to a completely different kind of material in the Bible. It's wisdom literature. It's the book of Psalms. In the book of Psalms we learn a number of different things. It's devotional material. We're going to address some of the tough questions of life. We're going to deal with the unrest that we experience inside of our hearts. We feel upset sometimes. There's a calmness that we have in the Lord because of who we are in our relationship with Him. We're going to see that throughout the book of Psalms.

There are themes in the book of Psalms that are going to draw us to the New Testament. We're going to see we learn about the Redeemer. God is Redeemer. We're going to talk about God's mercy and the regeneration that comes from His Spirit. We're going to talk about the forgiveness of sins and repentance toward God and faith toward Jesus Christ. In all of that we are going to see pointers in the Old Testament toward those New Testament truths.

We're going to see the whole inner life of a person laid open, which is what I think is so valuable about Psalms. We look at this and it just opens up our hearts and we start seeing some important things. We address our own temptations, conflicts, perplexities, doubts, uncertainties, fears, our moaning, our overwhelming feelings that we have inside of our lives on one hand. And then on the other hand we learn about joy and peace, we learn about the victory, deliverance. We learn how to trust God in the challenging times as we come to the book of Psalms.

We're going to look at the book of Psalms through the eyes of the Israeli people as we look at the history of the Jewish people. We'll delve into the background of the psalms that tell us a little bit about what their background is. There are some of them we know the history of them because it tells us that and so we'll delve into that a little bit to understand more about the culture of the Hebrew people and their faith practices that give us then some insight into the meaning of those psalms.

There are 150 psalms. When we refer to a psalm, it's singular. Psalm 100. When you refer to a book of psalms, it's plural. So each psalm is one song, but when we talk about the whole book it's plural.

There are sixty of them that are dedicated to praise in the book of Psalms. One hundred and sixteen of them have prefixes that tell us who they're written for, or who wrote them, or what kind of musical instrument to use, or something along that line. A little over half of them refer to David as the author of them, the composer, so they're often called the Psalms of David. But there are many other composers and the one we're looking at today is composed by Moses. So it's one of those that wasn't composed by David.

There are five books of Psalms. The first book of Psalms goes from chapter 1 to Psalm 42. That's Book 1. Each one of the groups of psalms to follow is a different book.

We're going to start at Book 4. Why are we starting at Book 4? It's not that complicated. We're starting at Book 4 because I've never taught Book 4 before. I've taught Books 1-3 and it's just edifying for me. I'm going to teach something new.

Maybe someday we'll get around to Book 5, but we'll teach Book 4 now and in a couple years we'll come back to Psalms and I'll teach Book 5 just for my own edification as well as we're going through. Book 4 is seventeen psalms that start at Psalm 90 and end at Psalm 106.

Now each one of the five books of psalms corresponds to one of the first five books of the Bible. So the first book in the Psalms (1-42) corresponds to the creation or to the book of Genesis. When we get to the fourth book, that would be, of course, [Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus] Numbers.

The book of Numbers is the story of the wilderness wanderings. The fact that they could not go into the Promised Land because they didn't have the faith need and the lack of faith in that case was sin for them. So God took them on a forty-year faith-building journey wandering through the wilderness, and that is the book of Psalms. That is the backdrop to the psalms that we're going to look at in Psalm 90-Psalm 106.

Now Psalm 90 was written by Moses himself. We'll see the pain of not trusting God in this psalm. We'll see the frailty of man and the greatness of God here. You can imagine Moses leading the people in the wilderness wanderings in the midst of all this experience. Psalm 90 then is the oldest of the psalms because it was written by Moses, older than any of the other psalms that we have.

I want you to look at verse 1 of Psalm 90. *Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations.*

The *dwelling place*. This is really a very interesting statement that Moses makes here in the beginning of his psalm to remind us of the dwelling place. But let me just describe the words for you first of all. The word *dwelling place* implies home. This is home. You know in your life home is [hopefully] a restful place. It is for me.

When I go traveling (this last week I was in Lovett, Texas for a couple days teaching parenting seminars), when I come home I like to be home. It's restful. I look forward to being there. There's a sense of security. My routine is there. I appreciate being at home.

*Lord, you have been our home, our dwelling place.* That's why I think it's so important for us as we're developing our families to make the home a place where families can feel at home, the children recognize it's a place of rest. Not just a place of play. It's obviously a place where we're building character, but it's also this place we're calling home. *Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations.*

It's so interesting because remember Moses is leading people all around the wilderness. They don't have a home. Their home is tents. They're living in tents wherever they go. They have a portable worship tent called the tabernacle that they're picking up and taking wherever they go. They carry everything. It's all portable. Yet Moses is saying – what is he saying there? Not we're going to get home in the Promised Land. He's saying *Lord, you are our dwelling place.*

I think when we discover the fact that God is our dwelling place, He is our home then we have really arrived at home. Because then we take that wherever we go. Because then even if our home is a place, our family is a place of unrest, we have Christ, we have God as our dwelling place.

We're at home and then we can offer hospitality out of that dwelling place to other people because we have something. Let me give you some refreshment out of my home, who is God. God is my home. He's not saying a place is home here, he's saying a person is my home. He's going to elaborate on who God is and how important God is in his life.

I just find that when we get this truth then this peace, this rest that we need in our own hearts every day that we're going to catch as we go through the book of Psalms grabs onto our hearts. Because we find God as our home.

In verse 2 it says, *Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.*

I want you to picture this for a minute and imagine *before the mountains were born.* We're talking about before creation. God is immense. He's powerful. He says *you are God.* Before all these things, *you are God.*

I don't think we really understand here on the east coast what mountains are. At least not when you compare them to what we see when we go to the west coast. When I look out the airplane window as I'm flying from the west coast to the east coast, I see mountains. I'm talking about real mountains with peaks and snow and amazing sights. You just look out of the airplane window and you go, "Wow. That is amazing." And when you're on the ground you see majestic mountains as well.

Years ago the Turanskys and the Millers bought an RV and we went on a cross-country trip, ten of us, in the RV for thirty days. We left New Jersey and we went to Washington State. That took us a few days to get there. And then down to Tijuana, Mexico, then back across the southern states through St. Louis and then back home. It was an amazing trip.

On one particular Sunday we found ourselves near these mountains. These are the Tetons. Grand Tetons. We had our own worship service in front of these Teton mountains. They're just majestic. So when I think of mountains I think about my own experience with the Rocky Mountains or the majestic mountains that are out there, then I look at this verse – *before the mountains were born*. These are huge mountains. These are amazing mountains.

*Before they were born or before you brought the whole world forth, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.* When he thinks everlasting he's thinking as far as you can imagine going this way before creation, before the worlds were created. It just keeps going. So it's from everlasting to everlasting, he's saying.

You know when God created the world, before He created the world He had to first create space to put the world in. Because God's outside of space. God also had to create time when you think about it. Because God doesn't exist within time, so He had to create time as well. So first He created an envelope called time, then He created space within that, then He puts the world in there and we live in there. He lives outside of that time. It's just so amazing to think about.

And then, of course, *from everlasting to everlasting*, going the other direction, *you are God*. Now what he's trying to do is give us this big picture of who God is, which we all need to catch because when we get that big picture of God, it's the first piece for understanding how we can have this peace inside of our own hearts.

Before I go on to verse 3, I want you to see two of the names for God here in verses 1 and 2. In verse 1 the very first word is the word *Adonai*, which means Lord. You can see there in your version of the Bible that all of the letters are small except for the first one. So capital L-o-r-d. When you see that in your English translation it's referring to the name *Adonai* which means Lord or boss or ruler. That's the word Lord.

Compare that to verse 13 in the same passage because in verse 13 do you see all the letters are capitalized in your English translation. So you have capital L-O-R-D. That's not *Adonai* there. That's God's personal name, *Yahweh*. I'll talk about it more as we get down there.

Now you see in verse 1 it starts with Lord. Lord, *Adonai*, you have been our dwelling place through all generations. Verse 2: *Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.*

Now the word *God* here is *Elohim*. *Elohim* is the general term for God as opposed to a man. It comes from the word for strength. That's what it is at its root. The idea there is God is big and we're small and we are weak. We need to understand that God is big and who He is.

Sometimes we think we know something. We start thinking that we're great. We start to think as some of the kings did in the Old Testament and the Pharaohs that they were gods because of the mighty things that they did. That is dangerous. God is strong. We are weak and the frailty that we experience causes us to trust Him in our lives. We need to be reminded of that regularly. We are frail, we are weak. We need God. We need to trust Him.

Now let's go to verse 3 because in verse 3 it says, *You turn people*. Now the word there is *men*. It's translated *people* in some versions to incorporate men and women. The idea there is it's people, but it's the word men or *enoch* which means a weak one or someone who's frail.

*You turn people back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, you mortals."* The word *mortals* there is *adam* which is the term that means mortal. As opposed to God being God, we have the opposite of that is *adam*, the name Adam. Adam is a man.

The problem happens when we think we're Elohim. We start thinking we're so great and that greatness then captures us and we become proud about that.

It's scary for me to read the story in Daniel 4 about Nebuchadnezzar who had accomplished some great things in his life. It says (and I'll read this from Daniel 4), *Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, he said, "Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?"*

Man, that is scary. That is pride. It's scary because there's sometimes when I can start feeling like I've done something important. And when I start thinking it's because of me then I find myself in danger of being in the same place as Nebuchadnezzar.

It goes on to say – *Even as the words were on his lips, a voice came from heaven, "This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like the ox. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth and gives them to anyone he wishes."*

*Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled. He was driven away from people and ate grass like the ox. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.*

*At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever.*

The story about the king who went insane. Why? Because he was so egotistical and proud. There's an insanity about pride that we need to be careful of.

As we go further into verse 4 we're going to see a little bit more about God's greatness. Notice in verse 4 it says, *A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.*

We're going to talk about time for a minute. We're going to talk about time because it's going to illustrate God's greatness. *A thousand years* – we just can't even imagine what could take place in a thousand years. It's such a long period of time for us to imagine. But he says for God that's *like a day* or that's *like a watch in the night*.

The watch would go from twelve midnight to six a.m., six a.m. to twelve noon. There were four watches. So those watches in the day or watches in the night would be short periods of time. That's how a thousand years is like for God. He's outside of time. It's not that big of a deal as it is for us.

God is amazing, but now compared to us again (verse 5) – *Yet you sweep people away in the sleep of death— they are like the new grass of the morning: In the morning it springs up new, but by evening it is dry and withered.*

We're like people like grass. Here today, gone tomorrow is basically what it's saying. God is just so amazing and we are so weak. We need to live with this constant humility and dependence on God in order to enjoy the benefits of the life that He has called us to enjoy. God is strong. We are weak and we need Him.

Verse 7: *We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation.*

The whole concept of anger is that something is wrong. When you and I get angry about something it's because something's wrong. When that something is wrong then we want to do something about it. When God looks at us, there's something wrong. It's sin. So we're *consumed* by His *anger* because of the sin, *and terrified by your indignation*. Something is wrong. So he says the anger of God is terrifying for us.

That's Moses who's the one speaking or writing this psalm. He's the guy who wandered in the wilderness and they experienced the anger of God in the wilderness. When the people started complaining they complained then about the same things they complain today in families. People complain about the leadership, they complain about the food, and they complain about the living conditions. That's what people are complaining about in the Old Testament. So God brought a plague on them. It was a terrible plague. The anger of God is terrifying. God disciplined them for their complaining.

Verse 8: *You have set our iniquities before you (seeing the sin) our secret sins in the light of your presence. All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan.*

When you can't see the redemption of Jesus Christ then it's really scary. It's a sad life. That's what's being described here. The holiness, the wrath, and the justice of God are good things for us to think about every once in a while. I know we emphasize a lot the loving, compassionate kindness of God. That's going to be emphasized here in this passage as well, but it's really important for us to recognize that God is holy, He's just, and He hates sin. We have to understand those things as well. And that's what's being emphasized here in the passage.

Now look at verse 10. *Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures (so seventy to eighty years – hasn't changed much in that period of time); yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.*

When Moses is saying this you can imagine he's spent a lot of his time now wandering in the wilderness and it's a hard life. If you think about Moses' life, the first forty years he spent in Pharaoh's palace, but the second forty years he spent on the backside of a desert learning how to lead sheep in preparation for leading God's people. Then he had to lead God's people through the wilderness and those were difficult times. He's describing some of that that's there.

Notice it says in verse 11 *–If only we knew the power of your anger! Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your due.*

What he's saying is that we need to understand this part of who God is. Without Christ we'd be in big trouble. That's why we talk about the cross. That's why we emphasize the cross. That's why we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior because when you ask Jesus Christ to come into your life then God does not look on you with anger because the wrath was taken for us on the cross of Christ. So the cross is this focus of God's wrath and we are spared that. So we are able to enjoy that personal relationship with God and not have to be the focus of that anger. That's why the cross is so important and that's why Jesus Christ is so important to each one of our lives.

And then we come to the application verse in verse 12. It says, *Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.*

If we just recognize the power of God and the holiness of God, there's a right way and a wrong way to live, then we would do things different. We would *number our days*.

You could make more money, but you can't make more time. Have you ever heard the expression "time is money"? It's not true. It's hard to make money. But it's impossible to create time.

A.W. Tozer wrote this: "Time is a resource that is non-renewable and non-transferable. You cannot store it, slow it up, hold it up, divide it up, or give it up. You can't hoard it up or save it for a rainy day—when it's lost it is unrecoverable. When you kill time, remember that it has no resurrection." We should treasure time as an asset.

One time a time management expert was with a bunch of executives and he was trying to illustrate a point. So he took a large wide mouth glass jar and he put seven or eight large rocks in it and he couldn't fit anymore in. He says, "Is it full?" They nodded in agreement, yes, it's full.

But then he took a bag of pebbles and he poured the pebbles in and shook the jar. The pebbles started moving all around the rocks and they were able to go in. Now he asks the question "is it full?" Now everybody was quiet because they knew something was going on here.

Then he took a bag of fine sand and put it on top and really shook the jar as the fine sand was going in. It went in and around everywhere and filled up the jar with sand.

Then he took a pitcher of water and he poured that in. There was still room for the water and the water was able to come up to the top. And then the jar was full.

He said to the executives, “What is the lesson we learn from this?”

The executives said this: “The lesson we learned from this is that there’s always room to do more.”

The guy said, “No, that’s not the lesson here. The lesson is if you want to make sure you get the big rocks in, you have to put them in first.”

The same thing is true in our lives when it comes to managing our lives and our time. If there’s some things that are important, you’re going to count your days then you’ve got to put the big things in first. What are the most important things you want to make sure you get on the calendar before other things? Otherwise all the pebbles and the sand and the water start taking up our lives and we miss the most important things. What are those most important things that we want to have in our lives so that we can move forward? Time management is a misnomer. You can’t manage time; you can only manage yourselves.

This study of the book of Psalms will hopefully allow you to carve out some time or some margin in your life. Margin is having breath at the top of the staircase after you’ve done the exercise, money at the end of the month, and sanity left over at the end of the day.

Marginless is not having time to finish the book you’re reading on stress. Margin is having enough time to read it twice. Margin in your life allows you to do many things. It allows you to build into people, to strengthen relationships. Not rushing past the people you love, but able to go deeper with them.

If you’re going to work on your health you’re going to have to put that rock in first, otherwise everything goes to the sides. What are the most important things you want to put in the jar? If you want to be useful in ministry you’ve got to block that out. It requires time. If you want internal peace in your heart you’ve got to set aside margin in your life in order to make that happen.

Notice as you finish the verse it says why do we want to *number our days so that we can gain a heart of wisdom*. The idea of a heart of wisdom, wisdom is *hakam*. Skill in life. We want to have that skill in life and it takes some learning, it takes some time. Establishing our life and counting our days, measuring, taking control of our lives is going to be so important. Putting in the large rocks first.

Now as we go into the next illustration in verse 13 you can imagine the pain that Moses was feeling forty years wandering in the wilderness before going into the Promised Land. So he’s crying out to the Lord in verse 13 and I can imagine some of you may feel the same way, feel like you’re wandering around in the wilderness, and so you cry out the same prayer to the Lord.



*Relent, Lord!* Notice that's the word *Yahweh*, the personal name of God. I think when we come to God asking for such things, we're coming in a very personal way to Him saying, "God, I need that personal relationship with you. I want you."

*Relent, Yahweh! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants.*

*Yahweh*, The personal name for God. At the burning bush experience when Moses was given the instruction to go to Pharaoh and tell him that he needed to "let my people go," Moses had a question. Moses said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers sent me to you,' and they asked me his name. Then what shall I tell them?"

God said to Moses, "*I Am Who I Am*. This is what you are to say to the Israelites. *I Am has sent me to you.*" That word *I Am* is *Yahweh*. That's his personal name.

*Relent, Lord.* I need a break. I'm at the end of my rope. Or maybe a better illustration is my tank is empty. If you feel like your tank is empty then you need to come to the Lord. He's the one who fills it up.

Which brings us to verse 14, and this is what I think we all need. Verse 14: *Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.*

There's a Hebrew word here you've got to get. Do you see the word *unfailing love* there? Some of your versions say *loving kindness*. Now that word I want to share with you the Hebrew word because this is such a valuable word for the Hebrew people. I want you to understand this.

When they're mentioning it here it's not just "I love you" kind of love. This is *chesed*, which means the covenant love that's relentless love. It's the pursuing love. I'm coming after you, I want you, I want to have close relationship with you kind of love. Built on the covenant of God and His faithfulness, not on our actions. That He's coming after us over and over again. That *chesed* is what we so long for in our lives.

You've heard the verse quoted in the Ten Commandments where it says in Exodus 20 that *the sins of the fathers will be passed on to the third and fourth generations*. Sometimes people ask me that as I'm parenting and they say, "Wow, I feel like I'm messing up my kids and it's passing onto third and fourth generation." They really don't realize the rest of the verse.

Let me quote the whole verse for you first of all. *The sins of the fathers will be passed on to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.* I say to those people, "Do you hate God? Well this isn't referring to you." If you don't hate God then that verse isn't referring to you.

But the next part is so much more important. The next part says that God visits the *chesed* for a *thousand generations of those who love Him*. It says *chesed*. He pursues us continually.

When the prophets were written it's the *chesed* of God, the pursuing of the people who had come away from the Lord. If you had moved away from the Lord even a little bit, you've got to know that this *chesed* is what you long for. That's why it says, *Satisfy us in the morning with your chesed*. We need it. It just fills us up. This is the word satiate. Not just to the top but overflowing

is the idea. *Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love.* Why, what's going to happen. When you're overflowing you then have something to give – *that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.* We have something to share.

Verse 15: *Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble. May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their children.*

I pray regularly for people when I'm praying for them – “Lord, will you reveal your power to this person this week who needs that power.” So often I'm praying for people in need. They come to me and say, “Will you pray for me?” And I continue – “Lord, will you reveal your power?” That's what's being said here. Because when we see God's power, we see how great He is, then it just does something to us on the inside. It rejuvenates us and moves us forward.

And then we have the last verse, which I think is a prayer for us every day. You could put it on the wall. It's something that you could pray for yourself every morning when you get up. *May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us; establish the work of our hands for us— yes, establish the work of our hands.*

The idea is “Lord, I want to ask you to bless the work of my hands.” We have a lot of work that we do everyday and sometimes we don't view God involved in that work. What this prayer does is it says “Lord, I want to ask you that you would bless the work of my hands today.” It may not be reading the Bible or witnessing to someone, but it may be taking care of different things that seem not spiritual. But there's this sense in which we're asking God to bless the work of our hands today. *May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us; establish the work of our hands for us— yes, establish the work of our hands.*

I want to encourage you to number your days. Count them. Be grateful for what you have. Enjoy them. Put the big rocks in first. Ask God to bless the activities of your life, the work of your hands. And then in the midst of that God will do something inside of you. He'll produce in you this something you'll have, something to give to others, the joy and the gladness that's spoken of in these particular words. It starts as we find our rest in God. Find Him as our home. He is our dwelling place, as verse 1 says.