

**How Many Shopping Days Left?**

JRR#10

November 19, 2023

**Psalm 90:1-12**

<sup>1</sup> Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. <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 turn us back to dust, and say, "Turn back, you mortals." <sup>4</sup> For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night. <sup>5</sup> You sweep them away; 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 consumed by your anger; by your wrath we are overwhelmed. <sup>8</sup> You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your countenance. <sup>9</sup> For all our days pass away under your wrath; our years come to an end like a sigh. <sup>10</sup> The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong; even then their span is only toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away. <sup>11</sup> Who considers the power of your anger? Your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you. <sup>12</sup> So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.



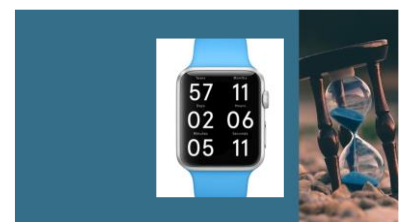
Perhaps as you heard or read the title of today's message, you were curious. During this worship series we have been covering of the good news about death. So maybe you

thought it odd to think about shopping or about how many shopping days there are left until... Christmas! For many of us, as we turn from about mid-October into the Christmas season, it is inevitable that the shopping and event calendar begins to take over. In our connected world, we are reminded again and again of how little time we have to complete our necessary purchases and to plan our busy holiday event calendar.

Knowing that we only have a certain amount of time left brings a sense of urgency. For others, though, there is not a “felt” pressure surrounding the holiday season. Yes, December 25<sup>th</sup> is out there. It will come at some point. And, yes, there are gifts to buy and events to plan or be a part of. But there is not a sense of urgency or pressure for some people. I believe that these two mindsets or approaches to the holiday season represent most of us. And I think that these two mindsets also reflect our faith’s and our culture’s thought processes concerning the impending approach of our last breath. As we prepare to spend this time together, let us begin with a word of prayer...

The idea of a countdown of the shopping days left until Christmas brings to my mind thoughts about how many days we each have left to walk this earth. The average life span for a ‘normal’ American is 78.56 years. Of course women tend to live longer, on average, than men. On average, though, we can each expect to live 28,647 days. 78.56 years is a lot of days, and we can spend a significant portion of them however we want. We can, in this season for example, spend many of our days shopping and waiting in line, often wondering why that lane is called the express lane. Tis the season! We have to spend some of our allotted days waiting in traffic, eating, sleeping, and working or going to school. And we also have at our disposal a significant amount of time to do with it as we wish. For me, I enjoy gardening and hiking and camping and projects and watching sports and cooking shows. We all have some discretionary time, so to speak. We tend to fill this portion of our days with things that bring us joy and fulfillment.

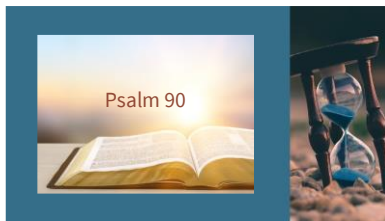
This all leads me to wonder, what would life be like if we woke up every day and knew how many days we had left?



How would life be different if there were a digital countdown clock on each of our watches or cell phones giving us the days, hours, and minutes that we have left to live?



Now, I am not personally afraid to die, but I sure hope that it is not tomorrow. Even so, the big question that looms in my head right now is this: Would I live each day any differently if I knew how many days I had left? The ‘correct’ faith answer would be “no.” But unfortunately, for a large percentage of us, myself included, the real answer is “yes.” At least for me, if I knew how many days I had left, I would live them differently, especially as that number began to creep closer to zero. Is this true for most of you?



Turn with me to our main passage for today, to Psalm 90. Amazingly, the psalmist is spot-on in terms of the years that we are typically given by God. In verse 10 he writes, *“The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong.”* That is close to 78.56! Pretty amazing.

The Psalm begins by recognizing God’s eternal and everlasting presence. This Psalm is attributed to Moses and it is his only contribution to the Psalms. The Psalm acknowledges God as our dwelling place – *“in all generations.”* For Moses, God was always with him and with the Israelites, especially during the wilderness years. God was there in the parting of the sea, in the pillars of cloud and fire, in the tent of meeting, in the tabernacle, and on the mountain. These words would remind the Israelites that God is the dwelling place of God. God does not reside in a particular land or place.

The very fact that God stands outside of human time and space allows God to be a place of belonging and of safety for each and every generation in all places.

The Psalm also recognizes how we see time differently than God sees time. From our viewpoint, “*a thousand years*” for us is like “*a watch in the night*” on God’s timeline. When we consider the 40 years wandering in the wilderness, one can better understand the perspective given by Moses in the Psalm. Those 40 years must have felt like an endless stretch of time. As later generations read these words, whether in the exile or in the long period of recovery after the exile or during the Roman occupation, they would find comfort to know that their season of struggle and challenge was but a moment in God’s time. Moreover, because God stands outside of time, the believer can find comfort in seeing the bigger picture through God’s eyes. The believer can relax in the knowledge that God was there long before his or her journey through this world begins and that God will be there long after it ends.

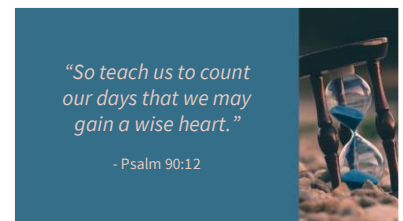
When the Psalm was written, there was no Jewish theology concerning life after death. There was no concept yet of a bodily resurrection. That is why, overall, this Psalm has a depressing feel to it. Seeing life as an insignificant blip on God’s radar is a bit depressing. To think that we “*turn back to dust*” or are like the grass that is new in the morning yet withers by evening, well, that is pretty saddening. And, again, going back a couple of weeks, there are many people today who live with this understanding and framework for death. They live without hope in the face of death. For them, death is simply the end.

The middle section of our passage deals with the reality of sin and suffering. In verses 7-9, Moses recalls the anger and wrath of God that the people of God experienced during the exodus journey. The iniquities and sins of the people were ever before God, raising up God's anger and wrath again and again. This anger and wrath was God's just and righteous response to the disobedience and sin of the people. At times in our lives, we too will experience the consequences of our sins. At a minimum this is felt in a breaking of our relationship with God and in the accompanying sense of separation from God. In other more "serious" instances, there is healing work required and we often must offer repentance and reconciliation that leads to a mending of damaged relationships.

The reality of our sinful nature can lead us to see life as one of toil and trouble. Yet, there is also a deeper truth revealed at the end of our passage. Even though life is relatively short and is filled with *"sin... toil... and trouble,"*

the Psalm closes with these words, *"So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart."* Even though life is not easy, even though it is downright hard at times, and even

though we often fall short of the glory of God, life can have meaning and purpose and joy and contentment. Even though we are like dust in the wind, we are precious and beloved by God. That is the deeper truth of our faith.



Perhaps that I why I find great comfort in being just a blip on God's radar. It speaks to me of the bigger picture, of God's grand design that stretches out way before me and way after my little blip on the grand timeline of God. And even though I am but a blip, I believe that God knows me personally and that God loves me unconditionally.

The same is true for you, my friends. You are personally known and loved unconditionally by the God of all creation. This knowledge draws us into sitting at God's feet, into being taught by God, into developing a wise heart.

Ironically, though, it is our fragility, so easily forgotten, and our very limited time here on earth that makes our living so precious. It is the urgency of our mortality, and it is the ticking of that proverbial countdown clock that makes each moment matter, that guides us to count each of our days. To flesh out how to make each day count, we now turn to this week's Epistle lesson, to 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5.



Last week Kristin taught from 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 4 and GPS question #3 invited you to read the passage that connects last week's text to this week's themes. The text that was "homework" offers assurance and hope to those living with faith in Jesus Christ. In 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5:2 we are warned that "*the day of the Lord comes like a thief in the night.*" This is reiterating what Paul said in the previous chapter and what Jesus himself said about his return in last week's parable of the ten bridesmaids. Jesus will come at a time that is unknown and unexpected.

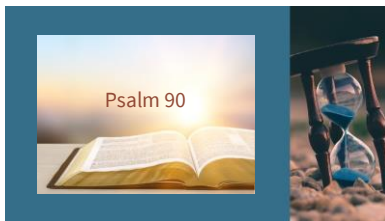
As Paul continues, he tells those in the church in Thessalonica that Jesus' second coming won't surprise them. This is because they are living daily as "*children of the light*" and "*as children of the day.*" This was Paul's way of saying, do not worry about the time of Christ's return, do not worry about that ticking clock. The ticking is not for the believers. These words remind the Thessalonians that they know all they need to know, so they should not be at a loss about how to behave or about what to believe.

In other words, he is telling them that they do not need to worry about the day of the Lord because they are living in such a way that their salvation is assured. So, in another sense, it is as though the day of the Lord has already arrived for those who have received the gift of faith. This understanding would put the Thessalonians at peace, knowing that they already belong to the new day that is yet to come. These can be encouraging words for us today as well. In our current world it can be a struggle to hold the assurance of eternal salvation in the midst of the worldly calamity that is all around us. It is as if Paul is echoing the words of the psalmist to the Thessalonians and to us: *“Be still and know that I am God”* (Psalm 46:10). Paul is calling on all believers to trust in the promises of God and to be at peace.

In practical terms, this call is important because with the return of Christ now delayed and the date indefinite, the Thessalonians could be tempted to become too comfortable in the present age. Pointing to those political and religious leaders who have found *“peace and security”* in the things of this world – wealth, status, privilege – Paul warns those in the church, urging them to not fall into this trap. He invites them first to continue to walk the walk, to *“keep awake and be sober.”* This encouragement would work against the Thessalonian believers desire to settle for living in *“peace and security”* in the here and now, with little thought for the end of time. This peace and security of the world – they are just temporary. Judgment will come, so the Thessalonians must live in the present with an eye toward that future judgment. We too must live this way too.

The issue of judgment also lies behind Paul's contrasts drawn between the children of light and those who are in darkness found in verse 4-8. The distinction was common in much of the Jewish thought of the day. Jewish scholars tended to drastically separated the world of earthly power and might from God's power and reign, placing them in hostile opposition. In these verses Paul invites the believers to *"put on the breastplate of faith and love... a helmet for the hope of salvation."* Paul uses military terms to underscore the spiritual battle that is constantly being waged in this world. It is a battle that we all face. As followers of Christ, yes, the Spirit fights for us, but they and we also need one another in this battle against the powers of this world. Accordingly, Paul closes this passage by once again calling the believers to *"encourage one another and build up each other."*

For Paul and his contemporaries and for us today, the best evidence believers have of the assurance of God's forgiveness and salvation is each other. The promise of Christ's return sustains and builds up the church in whatever circumstance it finds itself. When we encourage and build one another up, we often do so by living out or by modeling the promises and truths of God in our daily lives.



Returning to the Psalm, as Moses closes he does so with words of promise, hope, and encouragement. At the end of the writing, the psalmist turns to prayer in verse 12, asking

God to teach us to receive the days that we have been given as a gift from God. Perhaps for Moses this is a nod to the manna that the Israelites received in the desert. We recall that they could only gather enough for that day. To take more than necessary meant that some would spoil. Through obedience the Israelites learned to depend on God and to value each day.



Moses' prayer asks that we would be able to learn to "count our days," to live day by day, to see life as the gift that it is. This, in turn, will enable us to live those days with wisdom, as we acknowledge our human limitations and turn more and more to depend upon our everlasting God. Thus, the overall message of Psalm 90 is pretty simple and straight forward: life is short, but life is also significant, meaningful, and joyful.

We all know that our faith is not simply a head thing. It is not just a set of beliefs that we hold to be true. Faith is instead a way of living, a way of being in the world. Our faith and hope and trust should be shown in our daily living. Our faith should be shown in what we do and say. It should be shown in the choices we make and in the priorities that we set. It should be shown in our habits and in our approach to the challenges of life. It should show in how we face death and in how we move through the pain and grief that accompany loss. It should show in the joy and peace that we have even in the midst of hardship and pain. As we learn to count our days, holding each one as a blessing from God, we will bring meaning and purpose and joy to each day. Doing so we will be a blessing to our world and to the lives that we brush up against. May it be so for you and for me. Alleluia and amen!

### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) *Grow*. In recent years, how have you become better at faithfully living each day?  
What is your next step?
- 2) *Pray*. As you consider the powers of this world, where are you most vulnerable?  
Pray for the Holy Spirit to strengthen you.
- 3) *Study*. Read Psalm 90:13-17. How do these verses extend the idea of counting our days wisely? How do they add to the wisdom already given in Psalm 90?