



# Be a Wise Man Who Numbers His Days

Psalm 90 | May 24, 2020

English Translation for Rev. Jeremiah Cheung

On average, the Chinese place an emphasis on math education. And when you are good with numbers, you have a better chance of being good in business. It is a pity, though, how often this skill with numbers is used only in business. Many fail to use it beyond the pursuit of material riches. It's no wonder that someone once said, "Some

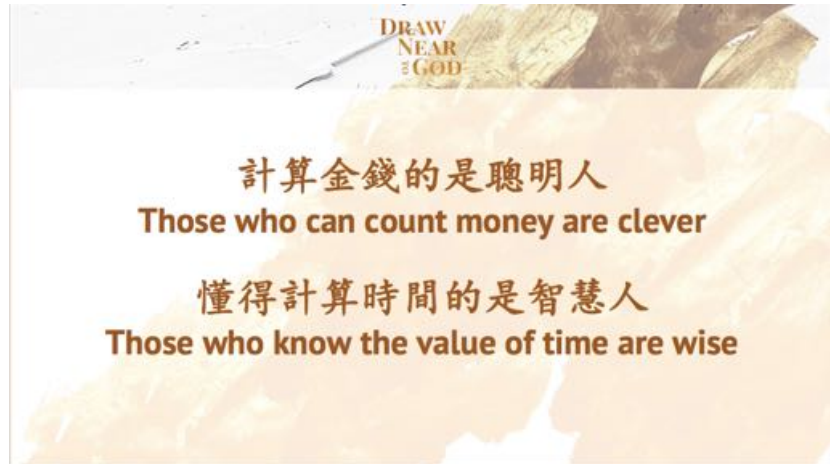
people are so poor that the only thing they have is money". How can we have money and still be poor? We are poor when we have money but have no health, no relationships, no friendships, and no eternal life. Such a person is truly poor. Those who know how to count money may be clever but those who know how to number their days are wise.

Psalm 90 is the oldest psalm in the Bible. This is the prayer of the man of God, Moses. It is a psalm about Moses' life experiences. Many poems about life have been written inside and outside of ancient and modern China. However, there is a difference between these poems and the psalms found in the Bible. Many of these poems write about how fleeting and miserable life is, they end in hopelessness. But the psalms in the Bible invariably point to a way out. The same is true of Psalm 90, the psalm we will reflect on today. Although life is short and bitter, there is a way out.

Here, in brief, is the structure of this psalm:

- Psalm 90:1-2 talks about God's eternal nature;
- Psalm 90:3-11 - man's brief and bitter life;
- Psalm 90:12- life's turning point;
- Psalm 90:13-17 - the new direction of man's life.

Psalm 90:1-11 shows a strong contrast between God's eternal existence and man's brief and bitter existence. However, the psalm concludes by showing how this bitter and short life can





be linked with eternity. Verse 17 reads, “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.”

Twice, Moses says “may the work of our hands be established by God”. How can the work we do in our brief life on this earth be established by God eternally? Verse 12 says, “Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” Verse 12 is the turning point in this psalm. It changes this bitter, short, and



meaningless life and connects it to eternity. How? This is what we will learn today. Let us go back to the scriptures and examine it:

## I. God's eternal nature – v.1-2

“<sup>1</sup> Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. <sup>2</sup> Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.”

Moses says that God is our dwelling place, our eternal home, because the Lord is eternally unchanging, He alone is our eternal dwelling place. Billy Graham, the famous evangelist, left this world at the age of 99. When he was still on earth, he said, “Someday you will read or hear that Billy Graham is dead. Don't you believe a word of it. I shall be more alive than I am now. I will just have changed my address. I will have gone into the presence of God.” He said he would not be dead but will simply have changed his address. He would not be on earth but instead would be in heaven, an eternal address.

David wrote Psalm 23. In verse 1, he says, “The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing” and in the last verse, he says “I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” David declared this, Moses said the same thing, and Billy Graham also declared the same. How about you? Do you know where your eternal home is? Do not be afraid, this is a path that everyone will have to go



through. Only open your heart and with a sincere faith receive Jesus as your personal savior, then you will have an eternal dwelling place. There is no other way. Acts 4:12 says, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

## II. The brevity and bitterness of man’s life – v.3-11

As Moses reflected on God’s eternal nature, he realized how short and bitter man’s life is in contrast. Verses 3-11 can be divided into two sections: verses 3-6 talk about life’s brevity and its temporal nature; verses 7-11 talk about how life is full of suffering and bitterness.

### A. *Life’s brevity and temporal nature – v.3-6*

“<sup>3</sup> You turn people back to dust, saying, “Return to dust, you mortals.” <sup>4</sup> A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night. <sup>5</sup> Yet you sweep people away in the sleep of death— they are like the new grass of the morning: <sup>6</sup> In the morning it springs up new, but by evening it is dry and withered.”

Moses used two analogies to describe life’s brevity and temporal nature.

**The first analogy is ‘returning to dust’.** In verse 3, he writes: “You turn people back to dust, saying, “Return to dust, you mortals.” God made man from dust and we will return to dust. This physical body will one day return to dust. But we are more than just our physical bodies. We also have a spirit. This spirit will return to its Creator. Church, one day we will have to face our Creator, are you prepared?

**The second analogy is that of ‘time’.** In verses 4-6, Moses used time to illustrate life and its brevity. He says a thousand years are like a day that has just gone by. No one lives to a thousand years old. Even if you do, he says a thousand years is like a day that has just gone by. Life is like one day and one day only has 24 hours. “They are like the new grass of the morning: In the morning it springs up new, but by evening it is dry and withered.” The span of a day from morning to evening is only 12 hours. Life is compared to a 12-hour span of time. “They are swept away in the sleep of death” – a night’s sleep is about 8 hours. Life is again compared to an 8-hour span of time. “Like a watch in the night” – a watch in the night is just 2 hours. Life, says Moses, is just like a 2-hour period. They are “swept away” by a flood. A flood sweeps away everything. Nothing remains in its path. How fast does a flood rise? Too fast, in the blink of an eye, everything can be swept away. It can happen in just a few minutes!



In this psalm, life is compared to a period of 24 hours, 12 hours, 8 hours, 2 hours, a few minutes. Life is so short and what is frightening is – time is beyond our grasp. No one can hold time in his hands. This quote describes it well, “We go to sleep in the evening, wake up in the morning, and a day is gone. We go to sleep in the evening, fail to awaken in the morning and life is gone.” I came to the Philippines in 1988. It has been 31 years, going 32 this year. It really is like a blink of an eye! I am also entering my senior years now. Church! Because life is short, we should seek wisdom and know how to number our days. We must not let time pass us by while we live without purpose!

## **B. *Life's suffering and bitterness – v.7-11***

“<sup>7</sup> We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation. <sup>8</sup> You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. <sup>9</sup> All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan. <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> If only we knew the power of your anger! Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your due.”

These five verses mentioned God's wrath 5 times: v.7 “your anger, your indignation”; v. 9 “under your wrath”; v.11 “the power of your anger, your wrath.”

This is most pitiful; life is already inconsequential in its brevity and yet we live it under God's wrath. Moses said in v.8 “You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence.” Our sins are the reason we live under God's wrath. Our sins cause us suffering. Moses can understand this well from experience. After leading two million Israelites out of Egypt, he still had to live in the wilderness for 40 years. Why? Because of sin. The Israelites often sinned in the wilderness. They grumbled against God again and again. The Lord himself said ‘ten times’ they sinned against him, meaning they were completely corrupt. God in his wrath was about to slay them all, but Moses interceded with God, asking for His forgiveness, and the Lord relented. But He did not allow them to enter Canaan. All the men 20 years old and above had to die in the wilderness. So during those 40 years, more than 1,500,000 died. Everyday about a hundred people died. It was more frightening than Coronavirus today. Is it no wonder that Moses said, “All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan.”

Church, in this short, painful life, in this sin-laden life, we need wisdom to number our days. During Moses' time, they lived under the wrath of God, and they lived in vain! Moses said,



“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.” Nothing is left behind. How about us? Thank God for the salvation of the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus said on the cross: “It is finished.” Salvation has been completed. As long as we accept the salvation that the Lord Jesus had accomplished for us, we no longer need to live under the wrath of God, and our hearts need no longer be empty.

Friends, if you do not yet know the salvation of the Lord, the blood of the Lord Jesus can cleanse us of all our sins! There is no sin that the blood of the Lord cannot cleanse. Isaiah 1:18 reads “Come now, let us settle the matter,” says the Lord. “Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be

like wool.” Scarlet and crimson are the reddest of reds yet they can become as white as snow and as white as wool. This is the whitest of whites. The reddest of red becomes the whitest of whites. The blood of the Lord washes away our sins.

Brothers and sisters who already know salvation, let us stop living under sin’s condemnation. Satan is called the accuser. When we are weak and frail, Satan will come to accuse us, but as long as we confess our sins and repent, the blood of the Lord Jesus will wash away all our sins. 1 John 1: 9 says, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

According to church traditions, Martin Luther experienced an attack from the devil in a vision during the Reformation. Satan showed Luther a list of sins that the latter had committed, saying to him, “What kind of servant of God are you? Look at all these things you have done!” At first glance, what the devil wrote was true, he had really committed those sins in the past. But Luther took a pen and wrote, “The blood of Jesus Christ has cleansed away all of them!” Suddenly all the sins disappeared and Luther threw the ink at Satan. Now if you visit Martin Luther’s study in Germany, you will see ink blot on the wall.

Whether or not this story is true, we do know one thing: the blood of Jesus Christ purifies us from all sins. Do not let Satan accuse you any longer, throw away all the filth from your heart.





The day the Lord Jesus died for us, our sins, whether past, present, or future, have been forgiven by the Lord. Sin makes us live under pain and emptiness, but thanks to God's salvation, we can overcome sin and death.

## C. *The new direction of a man's life – v.12-17*

<sup>12</sup> Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. <sup>13</sup> Relent, Lord! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants. <sup>14</sup> Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. <sup>15</sup> Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble. <sup>16</sup> May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their children. <sup>17</sup> 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.”

While Moses saw the eternity of God, he also grasped the brevity and bitterness of man's life, and he uttered a prayer to the eternal God. These six verses contain the four requests and four desires of Moses

### The four requests of Moses

1. He asked the Lord for wisdom 2. He asked the Lord to turn back 3. He asked for the Lord's love 4. He asked for the joy of the Lord. When we put these four requests together, we find one common theme: Moses asked that man may return to the Lord.

Life is bitter and short, stop going on your own path, return to your Creator and live in His presence. Ask the Lord to turn back and forgive you, repent and confess your sins to the Lord that love and joy may come upon you.

The most important of all these four requests is found in verse 12. “*Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.*” What does this mean? I am already in my 50's; in a few years, I'll be 60, then seventy. How should I live out the rest of my days? To number our days is to value our time and not waste our life away. These four requests together simply mean that we must return to God.

### The four desires of Moses

1. He desired for God's works to be revealed 2. He desired for God's glory to be shown 3. He asked for God's beauty to be seen 4. He longed for God's work to be established. Put these



four together and we conclude that there is only one thing he longed for and that is for God to fulfill His purposes in his life. The value of a life is not in how much you have done but by how much you have stored or saved for eternity.

A great missionary, Jim Elliot, once said, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” But there are many clever fools in this world; these people use their time, energy, and ability to pursue things they cannot keep and end up with nothing in eternity. What kind of person are you?

How then, should we number our days? Let me suggest these methods:

1. **Subtraction.** If you will live up to 80 years of age, how much time do you have left? With every birthday that comes, one year of life is taken away from your total years. This is not a negative exercise but actually a positive one, because it serves to remind us how many days we have left so that we will not waste our time. If you still live on after eighty, that is a bonus. Consider how differently you would live your life if you knew it were your last day on earth.
2. **Multiplication.** Find ways to increase your useful time. People used to spend their free time watching TV, but now we use our time scrolling on Facebook, our cellphones, etc. I am not opposed to Facebook and such things, but we must exercise moderation. Time is a precious commodity. And most importantly, we must make sure that the way we use our time bears eternal fruit.
3. **Division.** Division is the method of sharing. Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” A full life is a shared life, it is a life of sharing. There are two kinds of people in this world: the first are those who want to get everything. They need to snatch up everything and the slogan of their lives is ‘gimme, gimme, gimme’. The second kind are those who want to give away everything. They want to share everything with others and the slogan of their lives is ‘give, give, give’. The Lord Jesus has said that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Do not be a selfish person who only wants everything for himself. We must remember that if we want to receive, we must first give.

***Church, let us ask ourselves: How do I use my time?  
Do I spend my time on the purposes of God's kingdom?  
What have I done for the kingdom of God?  
Let us be wise and number our days.***