

OUR ETERNAL DWELLING PLACE

Psalm 90

When I was a boy, my dad taught me the phrase *TEMPES FUGIT*. *TEMPES FUGIT* is Latin for “time flies;” though a more literal translation is “time flees.” *FUGIT* is related to our English word fugitive. Hence, time is a fugitive, an escapee, a bandit. Time runs, runs away, and eventually runs out. “Mark,” dad said, shaking his head wistfully, “one day you’re young and the next day you’re old. And the older you are, the faster time flies. Just wait. You’ll see.”

Of course, I had to wait. Back then, I was too young to see. I was at an age when every school day lasted an eternity; and my conception of flying time was an alarm clock with wings. But now, decades later, I do understand. “Dad, you were right. *TEMPES* does *FUGIT*. The years have flown past in a blinding blur. I don’t know where they went or what I did with them.”

Perhaps you would admit the same. This experience is the human experience; and the human experience is one of *TEMPES FUGIT*, flying time, undeniable mortality. It may be a particular birthday, and the sudden realization that more time lies behind than still lies ahead. It may be paging through a family photo album or attending a fortieth high school reunion or walking through a cemetery and reading dates on tombstones. Whatever the cause or occasion, eventually every discerning person recognizes the brevity, futility, and heartache of human existence. And for those too young or too inexperienced for this recognition, my dad’s prediction still applies: “Just wait. You’ll see.”

Moses wrote about the ‘human condition’ in Psalm 90; and much of what he said could be summarized in two simple sentences: “Life is short. Life is hard.” In Psalm 90:5-6 Moses compared human life to a brief nap; to grass that grows in the morning and is cut down that same evening. In Psalm 90:10 he described the human lifespan to seventy, perhaps eighty years, though “soon cut off.” In Psalm 90:15 he characterized the human experience as ‘days of affliction’ and ‘years of evil.’ In other words, life is short. Life is hard.

Moses likely wrote Psalm 90 near the end of his life, perhaps at the age of one hundred and twenty. And as an old man, Moses did what old men do; he reflected—in this instance, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In part he reflected on his own life and mortality, youth and age, successes and failures, happiness and heartache.

Imagine his memories. Infant Moses drawn from the waters of the Nile by

Pharaoh's daughter. Middle-aged Moses killing an Egyptian slave-master, then fleeing to the land of Midian. Elderly Moses leading the exodus from Egypt at the age of eighty. The Ten Plagues. The Ten Commandments. The parting of the Red Sea. The quaking of Mount Sinai. The Golden Calf. The Brazen Serpent. The manna from heaven. Moses, who repeatedly interceded for the transgressions of the Israelites. Moses, who was not permitted to enter the Promised Land because of his own disobedience. Moses had many things to reflect on—like you, like me.

In Psalm 90, however, Moses also reflected on the sad experiences of the Israelites. Many Bible scholars believe that Moses wrote this psalm after the wilderness wanderings; that is, after the forty years in which an entire generation of Israelites died in the desert because of their rebellions against God. As God Himself stated in Numbers 14: “Because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it.”

More than two million Israelites may have perished in the wilderness. For perspective, imagine two million burials; an average of one hundred and thirty seven funeral services each day over forty years. Charles Spurgeon, the renowned theologian and orator, once observed: ‘It is possible to track the travel route of the Israelites by the location of their graves.’

But in Psalm 90 Moses also reflected on us—the brevity of human lives; the labor and sorrows; the sickness and death; the frustrations and failures; the “Why did this happen to me?” and the “What difference did I make?” In fact, in Psalm 90 Moses reflected on the condition of all people as they are by sinful nature; saying of God: “You turn man to destruction, and say, ‘Return, O children of men.’ ” Return to what? To the ground from which Adam was formed. What do we often hear at funerals? “Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.”

Life is short. Life is hard. This is the human condition. And this is why, from the outset of Psalm 90, Moses directed his readers to the one and only Answer for the human condition; namely, the one and only God. “LORD,” he said, “You have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God,” Psalm 90:1-2.

“LORD, You have been our dwelling place.” What is a dwelling place? The Hebrew word, MAON, is used elsewhere in the Old Testament to describe God

dwelling in heaven; God dwelling in the temple of Jerusalem; lions dwelling in dens; serpents dwelling in ruins; and, as in Psalm 90, believers dwelling in God. A dwelling place, therefore, is a home. A dwelling place is where we live.

Moses used this beautiful picture in Psalm 90 to remind us that, when we mortal, finite human beings dwell in the eternal God by faith, we have true life of eternal proportions. True life. True shelter. True safety. True rest. True salvation. And what a welcome message this is in view of the sad human condition described in the remainder of Psalm 90, particularly verses 3-12. Opposed to the fleeting time and stark mortality of human life and human solutions, God is our eternal dwelling place; the place where we truly and eternally live.

So, what encouragement does Psalm 90 offer us—those who are struggling with the harsh realities of life: hurt, disappointment, depression, illness, aging, failure, financial difficulties, troubled marriages, broken hearts and broken homes?

First, when we dwell in God, we are dwelling in the right place; the only safe dwelling place. Our hopes of deliverance, healing, and salvation are in the right place. For only of God can it be rightly said: “And whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame,” Romans 9:33. Can the same be said of anyone or anything else?

How many people do you know who have turned to other ‘dwelling places’ for a sense of safety, happiness, purpose, and self-worth? “Oh, money will make me happy. Fame will make me happy. Alcohol and drugs will make me happy. Pornography will make me happy. Revenge will make me happy. Affairs will make me happy.” No, none of these things will bring happiness. They may tease, tempt, numb, and eventually destroy; but they will never bring true happiness or safety or refuge.

Psalm 90:2 presents God as the Creator of all things, including us: “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.” And therefore, because God created us for Himself, only when we dwell in God by faith can we find true meaning, purpose, healing, and belonging. This is why Moses, from the first verse of Psalm 90, declared: “LORD, *You* have been our dwelling place in all generations.” And in verse 2: “*You* are God.” There is no other God. There is no other solution for the human condition. There is no other eternal dwelling place.

Second, when we dwell in God, we have a personal relationship with God. “LORD, *You* have been our dwelling place.” You. You are where we live. And this verse speaks volumes about misplaced trust in external organizations or personal

righteousness.

I've lived in several states over the years; but I've always thought of Winter Haven, Florida as home—the place I grew up. When I returned to Winter Haven in 2010, I often drove past the houses I lived in and loved as a child. Doing so brought a thousand memories. Dad mowing the lawn in his floppy straw hat. Mom calling me inside for dinner. Grandma baking homemade apple pie. Grandpa standing on the porch steps, smoking his pipe. My best friend David Shaffer and I fishing along the canal or camping in the woods or eating fresh blackberries smothered with sugar and condensed milk.

Such memories delighted me, but they also hurt me because of TEMPES FUGIT, the passing of time, and with it, the inevitability of changes. Yet, the memories also taught me a valuable lesson. I finally realized that it was never the houses or locations that made Winter Haven my home. It was the people. It was my family. It was the personal relationships.

At times, people confuse dwelling in a church with dwelling in God. But the two are not the same. Yes, it is very important to attend church; but not to be seen by others or to receive acclaim for perfect attendance. The importance of going to church lies in hearing the Word of God; that Word which is the power of God for salvation, Romans 1:16; that Word that brings faith, Romans 10:17; that Word that equips for every circumstance in life—from worry to depression, from a broken heart to a troubled marriage 2 Timothy 3:16; and most importantly, that Word that saves, James 1:21.

To those Israelites who trusted in the temple of Jerusalem instead of trusting in the God who dwelled within the temple, the LORD Himself said this: “Do not trust in these lying words, saying, ‘The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD,’” Jeremiah 7:4; as if the building itself were all that mattered. Salvation does not come from buildings or external affiliations, but from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior; and from trusting in His blood and righteousness for redemption.

This is why the New Testament repeatedly uses the phrase “in Christ;” because only in Jesus Christ, our eternal dwelling place, are we eternally saved. John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Or Romans 8:1, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.” Or Ephesians 1:7, “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace.”

Oh, how these Bible verses should comfort you! They should fill you with joy, hope, strength, and an overwhelming sense of victory no matter what your personal circumstances. Yes, life is short. Yes, life is hard. But in Jesus Christ you are eternally saved. You have something and Someone of eternal value that no one and no thing—no problem, no adversary, no disease, no personal inadequacy—can ever snatch away from you. But don't take my word for it. Take the word of Jesus Christ Himself, who said in John 10:28, "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand."

Third, when we dwell in God, we must continue to dwell in God. If you've ever taken the time to read through the small print of a residential lease agreement or the boring words of a legal dictionary, you may have noticed the term "dwelling place." You may have also noticed that the legal definition of a dwelling place is generally a place where one lives and remains; not a place one visits.

The same is true of our eternal dwelling place, the LORD. We're not in Him by faith to visit but to stay. And the reason for our staying in the LORD is clear. In John 15, the illustration of the vine and its branches, Jesus said: "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing," John 15:4-5.

Abiding in Christ certainly implies abiding in His holy Word—implies building our lives and the lives of our children; our endeavors and marriages, our faith and behavior, on the Holy Scriptures.

Think of how careful we are when searching for an earthly dwelling place, an apartment or home. Just the right location. Just the right space. Just the right color, design, landscaping, and neighborhood. Just the right realtor, lender, and title company. Just the right price. If we are that careful when searching for a temporary dwelling place, how careful should we be to continue in our eternal dwelling place, the Eternal God? And frankly, if dwelling in the LORD is the only source of true life, true hope, true happiness, and true salvation, why would we want to live anyplace else?

Fourth, when we dwell in the eternal God, we have eternal blessings from God. Human beings are creatures of cause and effect. Our mortal minds are simply incapable of fathoming a God who has no beginning and no ending. Yet, what kind of God would God be if He were subject to our human reason and human limitations?

No, we cannot begin to grasp the wisdom, power, and majesty of our eternal

God. We can only bow before Him in heartfelt humility and wonder, confessing with Moses: “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God,” Psalm 90:2. Indeed, the eternal nature of God means eternal blessings for us.

Consider this carefully. That God is eternal means that He will always love you. He will always be with you. He will always be for you. He will always deliver you at the right time and in the right way. He will always provide for you, protect you, and shelter you. He will always display His infinite power in your life, forcing even the worst of circumstances to serve the best of purposes.

And what guarantee do you have for each of these eternal blessings? You have the guarantee of God’s own Word; a Word which, according to Jesus, is as eternal as God is. Eternal. Unbreakable. Irrevocable. Jesus said in Luke 21:33, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.”

Finally, when we dwell in the eternal God, He adds eternal significance to every endeavor undertaken in His name. Think about that for a moment. When you share the Word of God, you are sharing something of ETERNAL significance. When God uses your Gospel witness to lead another person to faith, is He not doing what Moses described in Psalm 90:17 as “establishing the work” of your hands? When you turn to Scripture to repair and enrich a troubled marriage, is God not thereby “establishing the work” of your hands—that is, accomplishing what you could not otherwise do? One of the first things I often tell a husband and wife in a troubled marriage is this: “I can’t save your marriage. But God can.”

And in a sense, this leads me back to where I began this morning—to the loving father who not only taught me that time flies, TEMPES FUGIT, but that Jesus Christ saves. My parents gave me a home. But when they led me to Jesus Christ, they gave me a permanent dwelling place.

Yes, life is short. Life is hard. But our loving God, our dwelling place, is eternal. May these realities leads each of us to pray daily with Moses: “So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom,” Psalm 90:12.