

Teach Us to Number Our Days

Psalm 90:12

Hymns: #53 God Moves In a Mysterious Way

Readings: Psalm 90

Should Old Acquaintance be forgot,
and never thought upon;
The flames of Love extinguished,
and fully past and gone:
Is thy sweet Heart now grown so cold,
that loving Breast of thine;
That thou canst never once reflect
On old lang syne.

CHORUS:

On old lang syne,
On old lang syne,
That thou canst never once reflect,
On old lang syne.

Tonight, at the stroke of midnight, all across the world millions will charge their glasses, give a kiss, take a drink and bid farewell to the old year singing these words. "Auld Lang Syne". Originally a Poem written by Robert Burns in 1788, it means "old long since", or we might say, "Long, long ago". The song begins by posing a rhetorical question: Is it right that old times be forgotten? IS IT RIGHT that "old times" be forgotten?

This morning I want to pose another question? Is it right, not only that "old times" should be forgotten, but is it right that "our time" be forgotten? Actually, it's not I who pose this question, but rather it comes directly to you from Moses. And Moses too poses this question in the form of a song. Specifically, in the Bible's Hymnbook of Psalms in Psalm 90. This Psalm is known as "The Prayer of Moses", which makes this Psalm the oldest of all the Jewish Hymns in this collection of Psalms. Here is the Bible's "Auld Lang Syne". And note that this ancient song is actually a prayer. The same Moses who met God in a burning bush, who witnessed the Passover, delivered Israel from slavery in Egypt and crossed the Red Sea; Moses who received the Law and spent 40 years of wandering monotony in the desert with a stubborn and faithless generation who should have known better; Moses who lost his temper, dishonoured God and missed the goal of entering the Promised Land. This Moses sang a prayer of "Auld Lang Syne" where he reflects on days gone by and the imminent end of days to come. Let us hear that prayerful song in full. **(Read Psalm 90).**

V. 12 "Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." It seems somewhat counter intuitive to focus on the termination of this life at the beginning of a New Year, but Moses says this is wisdom. What does it mean to "number our days aright"? Spurgeon references Thomas Dale's answer to this question, writing in 1847. Dale said, "It is to take the measure of our days as compared with the work to be performed, with the provision to be laid up for eternity, with the preparation to be made for death, with the precaution to be taken against judgment. It is to estimate human life by the purposes to which it should be applied, by the eternity to which it must go, and in which it shall at last be absorbed."¹

¹ Charles Spurgeon; *The Treasury of David*; Vol. 4; Baker Books; 1981; p. 222

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“As human beings, we have a terminal disease called mortality. The current death rate is 100 percent. Unless Christ returns soon, we’re all going to die. We don’t like to think about death; yet, worldwide, 3 people die every second, 180 every minute, and nearly 11,000 every hour...it means that more than 250,000 people every day go either to Heaven or Hell.”²

“Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom”. Towards that end, I want us consider numbering our days from three perspectives: From the divine perspective; the human perspective and the eschatological perspective, all with the goal in mind of gaining a heart of wisdom.

1. THE DIVINE PERSPECTIVE

The first perspective we must have if we are going to number our days aright is the Divine Perspective; in other words to know the certainty and sovereignty of God concerning our days. Turn over to Psalm 139: 13-16 and listen to the words of another song from Israel’s greatest song writer David.

“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. 14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. 15 My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, 16 your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”

If we were to read this whole psalm we would see that “God’s all-knowing omniscience, ever-present omnipresence and all-powerful omnipotence are the subjects of David’s meditations in this beautiful psalm...His first mediation is on God’s knowledge, that every aspect of his life was searched out and controlled by what the Lord knew. He then realized it was impossible to escape from such omniscient control, no matter how far or fast he might go, for God is everywhere. David then stated that God has such control over him because in His power He created Him secretly and planned his life with great care.”³

Like David, all your days too have been ordained by the One who thought about you and knew you before you were born. He then sovereignly watched over the knitting together of your very body in your mother’s womb. And God knows exactly how many days He has ordained for that body of yours.

God revealed a similar understanding to the prophet Jeremiah who wrote “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.” (Jer. 1:5). Notice the sovereignty of God in Jeremiah’s life; I knew you Jeremiah, I formed you, I set you apart; I appointed you. I, I, I, I, did this God says. And can I tell you that the God of Jeremiah is the same sovereign God who did the same things in your life.

You may have difficulty in reconciling the clear sovereignty of God over you days and life with your own free will. No doubt, it appears a paradoxical mystery, as are many things in the Christian Faith.

² Randy Alcorn; *Heaven*; Tyndale Publishing; 2004; p.xviii

³ Allen P. Ross; *The Bible knowledge Commentary- An Exposition of The Scriptures by Dallas Theological Seminary Faculty*; Victor Books; 1985; p.891

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But perhaps A.W. Tozer's illustration in his book "The Knowledge of the Holy" may help us picture God's Sovereignty and our free will.

"An ocean liner leaves New York bound for Liverpool. Its destination has been determined by the proper authorities. Nothing can change it. This is at least a faint picture of sovereignty. On board the liner are several scores of passengers. These are not in chains, neither are their activities determined for them by decree. They are completely free to move about as they will. They eat, sleep, play, and lounge about on the deck, read, and talk together as they please. But all the while the great liner is carrying them steadily onward toward a predetermined port. Both freedom and sovereignty are present here and they do not contradict each other...The mighty liner of God's sovereign design keeps its steady course over the sea of history. God moves undisturbed and unhindered toward the fulfilment of those eternal purposes which He purposed in Christ Jesus before the world began. We do not know all that is included in those purposes, but enough has been disclosed to furnish us with a broad outline of things to come and to give us good hope and firm assurance of future well-being."

Jesus Himself summed up this sovereignly based good hope and firm assurance of future well-being when He asked in Matt. 6:27 "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" Obviously no one. So stop worrying.

The Divine Perspective is the first the point of reference we need if we are going to number our days aright. And what it teaches us is that we have a Creator who knows us intimately, has lovingly decreed a certain number of days for us and is sovereignly guiding us toward His good eternal purposes, namely eternal life. When we get the Divine Perspective right on our days, we will stop worrying about our life and our death.

The day will come when our lease on the valley land in the far country will expire. Only Our Sovereign Landlord knows when the lease expires. But when it does, He will send His messengers to inform us and escort us off His property. For those of us who have accepted by faith the gift of His provided righteousness through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, we will be escorted into the city where our Sovereign Landlord lives, the New Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22). Having left the tents of our bodies behind, we will be provided intermediate bodies suited to the new heavenly city in which we find ourselves. And once re clothed we be shown into the most perfect and amazing dwelling place we could possibly imagine. One that has been personally designed and fitted for us by our loving Lord and Savior. Eternity will seem too short a time for us to express our gratitude and worship for His sovereign provision to us.

All your days have been sovereignly ordained for you and recorded in God's book. As George Knowles, a Brethren teacher and missionary in the land of Israel in the 1920's reminds us: "God has a bottle for my tears (Ps. 56:8); a bag for my sins (Job. 14:17); a bundle for my soul (1 Sam. 25:29) and a book for my name and all my days (Rev. 21:27)"⁴

2. THE HUMAN PERSPECTIVE

The second reference point we need to number our days aright is the human perspective. Turn with me to yet another song of David in Psalm 39:4-5 where he prays, "Show me, O LORD, my life's end

⁴ *Hand written note in the margin of George Knowles' personal bible.*

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and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life. 5 You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath”.

David understood and felt in his bones that his life was running out quickly. It was a “mere hand breadth” one of the shortest kinds of measures. His life was but a breath exhaled on a frosty winter morning; its cloudy vapour is visible for a moment then it quickly vanishes. And notice David’s response to this sense of brevity. He didn’t ignore it or deny it, but he asked God to show him the number of his days and how fleeting is life was.

Look back at Psalm 90:10 and look at the answer that God gave to Moses, when he asked God the same thing praying “Teach us to number our days”. V. 10 “The length of our days is seventy years- or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.”

From a human calculation perspective you and I have been given 70 years maybe 80 if we have the strength. That’s it. Have you ever numbered your own days from this human perspective and God given answer? I would encourage you to take some time today, before the sun goes down and do your own calculation. Go home and get out your calculator and crunch some numbers and look at them. It has a very head clearing effect on your priorities and problems. Here’s what I mean, and I’ll use myself as an example. Let’s assume the higher number of 80 years, which also happens to be the average life expectancy for Victorian residence. That equates to 29,200 days. I’m nearly 56 year old which means 70% of my fleeting life is behind me, leaving me a mere 8,675 days. That’s 208,200 hours. Assuming I sleep 8 hours a night, that leaves me a mere 137,412 hours left to be on about that for which I was known, formed, set apart and appointed to.

How about you? You may have considerably more time left than that. Equally, you may have considerably less time than that left. At the end of the day, like the Divine Perspective, there is a bit of mystery to this kind of calculation, from the Human Perspective. For the reality is none of us are guaranteed 80 years. As James 4:14 reminds us “Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” 14Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that.” We don’t even know what will happen in the next 10 mins.

So what will you do with the uncertain number of hours you have left? What will your priorities and New Year’s resolutions be for 2018? As the Apostle Peter exemplified (2 Pet. 1:15), what kind of legacy for Christ will you leave and be remembered for? Searching questions and ones that we must consider if we are to number our days aright. Hopefully when we look back we will see more than the Old Norwegian man I read of recently. This man had kept very careful notes on his life in a series of notebooks he kept on the shelf at his business. On his eightieth birthday he pulled the books off the shelf and began to compute his life. He was surprised to find that he had spent five of his eighty years waiting for people. He spent six months tying neck ties, three months scolding children, and eight days telling dogs to lie down and be quiet.”

This calculation and facing the fleeting reality of our remaining hours is not meant make us fearful, though I suspect to some degree it must, for we are not yet made experientially perfect in love. If you’re like me, fear moves along a sliding scale of greater and lesser impact at different times. When I’m more consciously aware of God’s love and I know I’m walking in the Light with Him, fear is hardly

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noticeable. But when His face is hidden or I have allowed distance to creep in-between me and Him through my sins, then fear of death raises its ugly head. It must be like this as Apostle John tells us in 1 John 4:18 "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love." So if you find yourself fearing to face your own mortality remember this promise of truth in Hebrews 2:14-15 "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death--that is, the devil-- 15and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death." What Jesus Christ has accomplished for you includes freeing you from the fear of death. Hallelujah! Thank you Lord! You see, if we are trusting Christ and walking in the Light with Him, then numbering our days should not result in fear. Rather, we can trust that He will give us just what we need just when we need it. Corrie ten Boom gives us a perfect illustration of this.

When Corrie ten Boom was a young girl, her first realization of death came after a visit to the home of a neighbour who had died. She was troubled and afraid so her father comforted her saying "Corrie, when you and I go to Amsterdam, when do I give you your ticket?" Corrie answered, "Why, right before we get on the train." "Exactly" said her father, "and our wise Father in heaven knows exactly when we're going to need things too. Don't run out ahead of Him Corrie. When the time comes that some of us will have to die, you will look into your heart and find the strength you need--just in time."⁵

3. THE ESCHATOLOGICAL PERSPETIVE

There is a third perspective we must consider if we are going to "number our days aright" and that is the eschatological perspective. In other words we take into consideration what God has revealed to us about the "last things" or "end times". When we take the eschatological perspective into our numbering we find that it provides two essential truths we must come to grips with, that is the Rapture and Reward.

God's word clearly informs us that the Rapture, the imminent snatching away of all believers to heaven, is a real hope, a blessed hope, a purifying hope and comforting hope.

Real Hope-John 14:1-3"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. 2In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am"

Blessed (Happy) Hope-Titus 2: 12-14 His appearing "...teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, 13while we wait for the blessed hope--the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, 14who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good."

Purifying Hope- 1 John 3:3 "2Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. 3Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure."

⁵ Michael P. Green 1500 Illustrations for Biblical Preaching; Baker Books; 1982; p. 95

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Comforting Hope- 1 Thes. 4: 13-18 “Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. 14We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 15According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. 18Therefore comfort each other with these words.”

We also know that the Rapture is imminent. There are no prophecies that must be fulfilled or any signs we are awaiting before this blessed hope suddenly snatches us away from this sinful and fallen world. It is THE next event on the prophetic and eschatological timeline. Is the rapture real to you? Is it a happy- blessed hope that you are eagerly looking forward to? Does the reality of His appearing purify your priorities and practice? When you are despised and depressed or lonely when loved ones have departed does the certainty of His coming for you comfort you? To exclude the Rapture from the numbering of our days is to squander much benefit and comfort to our lives in the present age.

The eschatological perspective also focus our attention on the future of Reward. Reward for the Christian is not salvation, for that is a gift of grace received by faith in Christ alone. Rewards are given based on how we live after becoming a Christian and what we have done with the gifts God has given us. 1 Cor. 3: 10-15 “By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. 11For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. 14If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. 15If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.”

The Bible speaks of many rewards which appear to be associated with our Millennial Kingdom participation, enjoyment and co-reigning administration with Christ Jesus. But they also appear to be associated with our eternal worship of Jesus Christ and gratitude to God for what He has done for us. The point is, that every day presents another opportunity to align our priorities and make choices that will lead to the gaining of rewards in our future and glory to God. If we are to number our days aright we must be crystal clear on the reality of Rapture and Reward, otherwise we will have no vision, cast off restraint, and perish in a comfortless world of illusion, depression and impurity.

But will you notice another aspect of this passage that we may have long overlooked. Paul says here in v. 14 “If what he has built survives... if what he has built survives”. This Bema Seat judgement is not just about our Resurrection and the Rewards that follow, it's about the continuity of our lives and the works of our hands being carried over into the Millennium, New Heavens and New Earth. Not only will our bodies be resurrected, but even our service for Christ has the potential to “survive”; to outlast this world and be carried over into the new one. Moses closes his prayer in Psalm 90:17 with the request “Establish the work of our hands for us, yes establish the work of our hands”. The Hebrew word translated “establish” can also be translated as “make permanent”, as seen in the margin notes of the NASB. Moses was asking God to give permanence to what he did with his life; to give permanence to the work of his hands. Have you ever contemplated the fact that who you are in this life is going to have continuity in the next? You are going to be YOU, albeit

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resurrected, augmented and glorified with additional attributes...but still you. And what you do in this life is going to be judged and if the works of your hands “survive”, because they were built with Gold, Silver and Precious Stones to the glory of God now, they too will be given permanence and continuity into the future state.

In his book “Heaven”, Randy Alcorn sums this thought up by saying: “God promises to resurrect not only our humanity but also the creation that fell as a result of our sin. Because God will resurrect the earth itself, we know that the resurrection of the dead extends to things that are inanimate. Even some of the work of our hands, done to God’s glory, will survive. I may be mistaken on the details, but Scripture is clear that in some form, at least, what’s done on Earth to Christ’s glory will survive. Our error has not been in overestimating the extent of God’s redemption and resurrection, but *underestimating* it...If we understand the meaning of resurrection, it will revolutionize our thinking about the eternal Heaven.”⁶

4. Gain a Heart of Wisdom

Finally, look back at Ps. 90:12 and notice what Moses says is the goal of numbering our days aright. It is so that we might gain a heart of wisdom (חַכְמָה – chokmah). The Hebrew word for heart here is לֵבָב -lebab meaning the inner man including not only the mind but the seat of our emotions and the resolutions and determinations of our will.

In other words, the prayer of Moses is that God would teach us to number our days from the Divine, Human and Eschatological perspectives so that we might gain a deep, deep seated inward conviction that Heaven is what we were made for and where we are going; this deep conviction being lived out in the resolutions and determinations of our wills in this short life we have.

The Apostle Paul said as much to the Colossians and to us saying “Set your hearts on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God” (Col.3:1). Literally he says to be diligent, active and single-minded about investigating and pursuing the things above- in a word Heaven.⁷ But unfortunately too many Christians have given up on this pursuit because the idea of Heaven is so obscure; it’s not concrete enough for us to even think about it. John Eldredge, in his book *The Journey of Desire* wrote, “Nearly every Christian I have spoken with has some idea that eternity is an unending church service...we have settled on an image of the never ending sing-song in the sky, one great hymn after another, forever and forever, amen. And our heart sinks. Forever and forever? That’s it? That’s the good news? And then we sigh and feel guilty that we are not more ‘spiritual’. We lose heart and turn once more to the present to find what life we can.”⁸

We’ve become like Huckleberry Finn who said of the Christian spinster Miss Watson, “She went on and told me all about the good place. She said all a body would have to do there was to go around all day long with a harp and sing, forever and ever. So I didn’t think much of it...I asked her if she reckoned Tom Sawyer would go there, and she said, not by a considerable sight. I was glad about that because I wanted him and me to be together.”⁹

⁶ Randy Alcorn; *Heaven*; Tyndale Publishing; 2004; p. 136

⁷ Randy Alcorn; *Heaven*; Tyndale Publishing; 2004; p. 21

⁸ John Eldredge; *The Journey of Desire: Searching for the Life We’ve Only Dreamed Of*; Nashville: Nelson, 2000; p.111

⁹ Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*; New York: Fawcett Columbine; 1996; p.6

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If we cannot truly, concretely and scripturally imagine what Heaven is like, we will not anticipate it and we will not number our days aright. But God has given us true, concrete and scriptural “glimpses of heaven in the Bible- to fire up our imagination and kindle a desire for heaven in our hearts. And that’s why Satan will always discourage our imagination- or misdirect it to ethereal notions that violate scripture. As long as the resurrected universe remains either undesirable or unimaginable, Satan succeeds in sabotaging our love for Heaven.”¹⁰

As we come to the end of this year and look forward to the start of a New Year tomorrow, I want to encourage you to number YOUR days aright. Remember your Sovereignly ordained days; do the human calculation of what you have left; expect His imminent return for you and do all this with a diligent pursuit of Heaven and with an imagination that flies not away from the truth, but an imagination that flies upon the truth. And to assist you and equip you to do this, Trinity Assembly & Fellowship will commence in January a dedicated season of Mid-Week Ministry, teaching and exploration of Heaven in conjunction with David Jeremiah’s 11 part series “Revealing the Mysteries of Heaven”. I have a growing conviction that for most of us Heaven, the New Jerusalem, the New Heaven and New Earth, our resurrected bodies, the continuity of our beings and service...all these things are not nearly so concrete for us and understood as the physical realities the Bible declares them to be. We have become “Platonic-Christians” and have hyper-etherealized our future state to the unbiblical point that the concrete realities of our future cease to truly motivate us.

“Is thy sweet Heart now grown so cold,
that loving Breast of thine;
That thou canst never once reflect
On old lang syne.”

At midnight tonight, when you hear these words sung, I hope you will reflect on the “old lang syne” of Moses and resolve to make 2018 a year in which you begin to number your days aright and gain a heart of wisdom- a comforting and concrete view of heaven...to come to earth.

Lord Jesus, please teach us to number our days aright that we might gain a heart of wisdom.

Let’s pray...

¹⁰ Randy Alcorn; *Heaven*; Tyndale Publishing; 2004; p. 16