

SONGS OF THE SAVIOUR

Late on a Sunday evening, BBC Radio 5 ran a fascinating weekly show called “Brief Lives.” The show looked at various people – famous and significant folks – who had died during the preceding week. Each segment was 6-7 minutes in length and there was a sense that a long life could be summed up in a few minutes. Life is brief.

Imagine your life being summed up in a few minutes. I re-read my grandfather’s obituary this week and was shocked how short the summary was:

Kenneth Ray Perry was quietly promoted to Glory on Tuesday January 28, 2020 at Riverview Gardens in his 92nd year. He was the son of the late Kenneth and Ethel Perry. Husband for over 72 year to his wonderful ‘bride’ Eva (nee Biden). Father of Marjory Hall (Joe), Wendy Beasley (Bob) and Susan Perry. Grandfather of eight and great grandfather of seventeen. He is survived by his sister Tillie Bell (Tom) of Parry Sound. Predeceased by his siblings.

Ray spent his entire career working for Great Lakes Paper in Thunder Bay, Ontario. He pioneered the computer department as the manager of data services, bringing in the first ever IBM mainframe computer. He began his Christian life in The Salvation Army and later became part of the Christian & Missionary Alliance Denomination. Ray was known for his love for His God, his family and his kind and generous spirit.

Life is short. Life is hard. And one day, your life is going to be summed up in a few sentences. That can cause you to despair or you can get a better perspective. And Psalm 90 is intended to do just that: see that our lives can be lived in light of God’s promises being kept when we orient our lives in the right way. So how do we do we orient our lives the right way?

Get the Eternal Perspective

Because our lives are short, we don’t have a very good perspective on history. We judge history by what is going on right now. We can despair that life is hard because we are stuck in this moment, and we can’t get out of it. And when we get stuck in this moment, we will despair. But the Psalms are intended to move us from lament to praise. The way they do that is by changing our perspective. Pss. 88 and 89 ended with great despair on an individual level and on a national level. So dark is the despair at the end of Psalm 89 that Ethan the Ezrahite wonders if God has forgotten his promises to David. He looks at the destroyed temple and the broken walls of Jerusalem; he sees that there is no king of David’s line on the throne (Ps. 89:38-42, 49). This is what our short view of history does to us. We look at our moment and question God’s faithfulness.

The right perspective begins by looking to God. God has always been the rest and comfort for his people regardless of the circumstances of life. And for this reason, it is important that Psalm

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90 is a prayer of Moses, the man of God. Psalm 90 is the response to the despair at the end of Book 3. God has always been faithful, even when his people have not been. Moses prayed for Israel when they had worshipped the golden calf; Moses had been faithful when the people had not been. And Psalm 90 is a call to remember that your life is short. You will be tempted to judge the present by your experience.

But God has always been the rest and comfort of his people. Even before there was a temple, Moses prayed, “Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations.” Ethan the Ezrahite may have lamented and questioned God because Jerusalem was in ruins, the temple was destroyed, and there was no promised king from David’s line on the throne. But the right perspective is that the Lord has always been the true king. He was the king in the days of Moses – before David was born; he was king before the mountains were created, and he is still King now after all these losses. He is the everlasting King.

When we look to God, we get a right perspective of who we are. We were created. We had a beginning. God took Adam and made him out of the dust of the ground, and we will return to the dust. Our human experience is limited. And because of that, we should be repenting people. Martin Luther said that the entire Christian life is one of repentance – and we repent by not judging our circumstances by our perspective. We return – this language of repentance – by returning to the perspective that we are children of Adam. God’s view is long – a thousand years are like a day in his sight, but we are swept away in a moment like a flood that destroys something so quickly or like grass that grows and then withers under the heat of the sun.

Our perspective is short. God’s is eternal. Our perspective judges the moment. God rules history. So what is required of us? Just like Moses was a man of God in an unfaithful time, we are called to be faithful. And faithfulness begins by getting the right perspective. God has always ruled and reigned.

Number Your Days

But what do we make of the trouble around us? Attention shifts from God’s eternal work to God’s anger. God is angry at sin. God will not leave sin alone. He will not let the evil that people do carry on without consequence. For these reasons, Israel had experienced the loss of their rest and security – Jerusalem was destroyed, the temple in ruins, and there was no king from David’s line. The people had gone into exile.

God cannot live with his people when they are in sin; he will not dwell with people who live in secret sin (v. 8). And living in sin only adds to the trials of life. Sin makes our days to be like a sigh (v. 9), full of trouble and sorrow (v. 10). Is that how you want to spend your short life? Life is hard enough. Do you want it full of difficulty and sorrow, groaning until the day you die?

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Life's frustrations come so that you will get perspective. And when you get perspective, you have two ways to respond. You can either become bitter or you can seek to be better. You can complain against God, you can complain about this life, and you can sigh at how full of the trouble and sorrow there is. Or you can seek to be better. Consider the Lord's anger at sin, v. 11 says. And what should be your response? Like Moses, when he came down the mountain with the Ten Commandments and saw the people breaking all of the commandments, Moses lamented and turned to the Lord. He prayed for the people. He responded not in sin but in faithfulness. He prayed for the people. His perspective was not selfish, but eternal.

This is why we need a Godward perspective: life is hard. Life will tempt us to despair. Life doesn't get easier the older you get – it is filled with trouble and sorrow. And those 70 or 80 years find that the troubles only increase. It doesn't get easier. Today might be easy for you because you are young. But then you grow older and the troubles seem to continue to pile up on top of one another. Will you seek to be better?

The way we seek to be better is by keeping that Godward perspective. God is eternal. God sees the beginning from the end. But for me, I may have 25-30,000 days. I have already lived 16,793 days as of today. My life is short, and I don't know how many more days I have. Do I want to live in despair and sorrow, or will I gain a heart of wisdom that looks at life and learns to live in the ways of God? Will I only increase my sorrow by living in sin and pain, or will I live better by knowing my life is short and God has history under control?

When I number my days, then I look at the everlasting God, the God who existed before the mountains were created, and I think, "Who's got things under control?"

Number your days. Pull up google. Ask it how many days since your birthday. And look at that number. How are you going to spend the rest of your days? Let that number sink in, and think about how you will spend your days.

Seek the Lord

The best way to spend your days is to seek the Lord and his ways. Life is hard. So why not cry out to the Lord like Moses did? When Moses saw the sin of his day, he prayed, and he sought the Lord. And what did the Lord do? He took Moses to a rock cut, placed him there, and passed before him, showing him all of his goodness.

And the Lord said, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving iniquity. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished, he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation" (Exod. 34:6-7). This is the cry for God's faithful love.

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So how do you seek the Lord? Three things that this prayer of Moses seeks:

First, seek your satisfaction in God. Verses 14-15 speak about the desire of the Lord to give an equal number of days of joy to the days of affliction. When our perspective shifts from ourselves to the Lord, what we find is that our lives are reoriented from transitory and temporal circumstances to eternal things. And so Moses' prayer is the prayer for all faithful people: in the midst of sin and suffering, help me to see your work. Restore to me the joy of my salvation. Help me to remember that I only see things from a human perspective. And help me to see that you are at work doing more than I could ever ask or imagine. Help me to remember that you are faithful to your promises. Just because life is hard and there is suffering, help me to remember there is more going on than I can see.

Second, seek the favour of God. If life is so transitory and temporary, if it is filled with sin and suffering, help me to live by grace. Help me not to live a life that is always seeking the approval and acceptance of others, but to seek your approval. The only way I can enjoy life is if I learn to live with the knowledge that I am accepted and welcomed not by what I have done but by what God has done. And what has God done? He sent the true king, and that king was nailed to a cross. Above his head was the inscription "King of the Jews". And that is where he ruled and reigned. It looked like all had been lost. It look like God's purposes had failed. But the king was on his throne, ruling and reigning, bearing the wrath of God for sinners. He was taking the sin of sinners upon himself so that they might live not by their performance but by his perfect performance. And when you look to the cross and see the King suffering for you, when you hear him say, "It is finished!" then you can be free from having to live for the approval of others. Suddenly you are free to live with the favour of God upon you.

Finally, seek the Lord's blessing in your work. When you live by what Christ has done, when you seek his ways, suddenly your daily chores will be infused with purpose and joy. Whether it is preaching a sermon, milking cows, filling out paperwork, caring for a suffering patient, teaching a student, or defending a legal matter, your work isn't just about you. It is about doing the good works that God has prepared for you. It is your opportunity to love your neighbour as you love yourself.

And then, when it comes to the end of your life and that obituary is read, it isn't about you. It isn't about the life that you lived, but the life that was given to you as a gift so that you would know God and enjoy him; that you were part of something larger and bigger than just your momentary happiness that was always slipping through your fingers like sand.

When my grandfather's funeral was over, what gave me the greatest joy was knowing that this was not goodbye. His life had been filled with sorrow. But he could only thank the Lord. He could see how God had been so good to him. And even when his mind was going, he could sing

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with joy to the Lord. So at his funeral, we sang. And the Lord wants us to sing even now – that we would know he keeps his promises because he sees the beginning from the end.

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