

07/06/25 - Psalm 90:1-17 - "Toil and Trouble? Or Eternal Reward?"

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 July 2025

Preacher: Rick Deschenes

- [0 : 00] Please turn to Psalm 90, 1 through 17. Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, wherever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.
- You return man to dust and say, return, O children of man. For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.
- You sweep them away as with a flood. They are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning. In the morning it flourishes and is renewed. In the evening it fades and withers.
- For we are brought to an end by your anger. By your wrath we are dismayed. You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence.
- For all our days pass away under your wrath. We bring our years to an end like a sigh. The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength, eighty.
- [1 : 06] Yet their span is but toil and trouble. They are soon gone and we fly away. Who considers the power of your anger and your wrath according to the fear of you?
- So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom. Return, O Lord. How long? Have pity on your servants. Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.
- Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us and for as many years as we have seen evil. Let your work be shown to your servants and your glorious power to their children.
- Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us and establish the work of our hands upon us. Yes, establish the work of our hands. This is the word of God.
- Thanks be to God. Amen. Well, good morning again, everyone. Good morning. I am Pastor Rick, in case you don't know me. And we will be beginning our Summer in the Psalms today.
- [2 : 12] So if you've been part of Steel Valley Church for a while, you know that every other summer we dive into the Psalms. And maybe you're not aware, but the book of Psalms is broken into five books.
- That was actually something I learned not that long ago. I wasn't aware for many years. But Psalm 90 that we will be looking at today is the very beginning of book four.
- And just a little bit of context, the books of the Psalms, the Psalms were written over generations, but the books of the Psalms were arranged, most likely during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, and they were arranged to tell a story.
- So like the Bible, the book of the Psalms tells a story. And so we will see in the fourth book that there is a dominant theme in the book.
- But Psalm 90 is where we will start. And this Psalm is written by Moses. It's the only Psalm attributed to Moses.

[3 : 25] It's in your Bible. If you look at the ESV, it probably says, A Prayer of Moses, the Man of God, before verse one. And so we believe it is in fact written by Moses.

Now, being that it's written by Moses, the setting of this Psalm, the context of the Psalm, would be during Israel's time of wandering in the wilderness.

So as we read these words, we can imagine as Moses was writing them, as he was inspired to write them, that the wandering in the wilderness is what was going on in his mind.

Now, James Montgomery Boyce, a commentator who wrote on the Psalms, he believed that Psalm 90 specifically was about the events of Numbers 20, which if you go back and look at Numbers 20, is when first Miriam died, and then Moses sinned against the Lord by striking the rock twice, by not upholding the holiness of God before his people.

And then this was followed by the death of Aaron. So Moses' sin bookended by two deaths in his near family are a good likelihood to be the context for this Psalm.

[4 : 41] But other commentators, they believe this took place earlier in Psalm, or rather in Numbers 14, when the people rebelled. The spies came back and reported about the giants in the land, and the people were too afraid to take the promised land.

And so they rebelled, and God cursed them and said that that generation would not inherit the promise, only their children would pass into the land. Either way, the point is, when Moses was writing this, fresh on his mind was the death of people that he loved, and also his own sin, and the sin of those around him.

And so the theme of this Psalm is a lament. If you're not familiar with that word, a lament is a prayer of sorrow. He was sorrowful over what had taken place.

He was sorrowful over sin. He was sorrowful over man's weakness. Now, we should be clear, it's not a complaint. He's not complaining in this Psalm. He is merely expressing his sorrow, which is a healthy way to grieve, to express our sorrows.

And this Psalm, as we get towards the end, we'll see is also an intercession, that the Lord would pardon his people, and that he would forgive their sins according to the greatness of his steadfast love, as we will see.

[6 : 10] Now, going back to the arrangement of the Psalms, and this being the fourth book, the beginning of the fourth book, we should remember that the Psalms were arranged in the time when God's people had rebelled against him, and they had been exiled into Babylon.

And so the book of the Psalms is arranged such that in Psalm 89, there is a lament complaining that the Lord has perhaps forgotten his people and his promise to David.

And so as we begin book four, we start with another lament, a reminder of the previous exile to hopefully remind the people of God in Babylon that this has happened before and that God has faithfully delivered his people before, and so he will do so again.

And so it starts with a cry to the Lord for mercy, and then as we spend the rest of the summer in the remaining Psalms, we will see a proclamation of Jesus Christ and God as the true ruler and king of the universe.

And that is the main theme of the book, the fourth book of the Psalms, is that God is king and ruler of creation. But we start with a lament.

[7 : 32] I think it, based on that context, would be not only a lament, but an encouragement, right? It would be an encouragement to the people in Babylon as they trusted the Lord to send his promised Messiah, his promised king, to free them.

And it would be an encouragement to us today as we wait upon the Lord's return in our own time of dwelling. It's also a reminder that the Lord redeems our time.

He redeems the time that we spend in this life, and he redeems the work of our hands, so that is, to borrow from Moses' words, we no longer toil in trouble, but our work in this life has an eternal purpose.

And so as we study this Psalm, I believe the main point that we should take away from this is that life is filled with toil and trouble unless we live for the glory of God.

And so I've titled this sermon Toil and Trouble or Eternal Reward. Those are our choices. Before we dive into the sermon, which I've broken into three sections, I do want to pray that the Holy Spirit would guide our time and give us wisdom.

[8 : 57] And I'm going to borrow an acrostic from Pastor John Piper, I-O-U-S. And it's lifted from the Psalms, so I'll lift it from Dr. Piper.

And it actually quotes part of Psalm 90. So let's pray. Incline our hearts, O Lord, to your testimonies. Unite our hearts, O Lord, to fear your name.

Open our eyes to see wonder in your word and satisfy us early each morning with your steadfast love. Lord, we thank you for your word and pray that you would bless this time to our nourishment.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. I'm going to make many references back to Psalm 90 as we go through these words. And so I pray and ask that you would keep your Bible open to Psalm 90 and follow along because I'm not going to always read directly from the Psalm, but I'm going to point to it many times.

So please keep your Bible open. I've titled this first section Everlasting Lord, and I want to look at verses 1 through 6.

[10 : 15] Starting in verse 1 and 2, Moses reminds us of two simple truths. Remember, Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible. He wrote Genesis 1, and so I think perhaps he's calling us back to Genesis 1.

Before creating the mountains or the earth, God has been from eternity past, and he will be to eternity future. How does the Bible start? In the beginning, God created.

There's no explanation of where God came from. He's simply from everlasting to everlasting. It is the truth that the Bible is founded upon. In the second truth, with all generations, for all generations, the Lord is the dwelling place for his people.

It may also be translated the refuge for his people. From these truths, we're reminded of Genesis 1. We were created by God, not only for his glory, but we were created to keep the garden.

We were created to tend the garden, a place where humanity and the work that we did would flourish, and through this work, God would receive glory. Our purpose was to dwell eternally in the presence of God.

[11 : 35] That is why he created us. Reflecting on that and moving into verse 3, we see, you return man to dust and say, return, O children of man.

We see that the good times didn't last very long. We know that when Adam and Eve sinned, they were cast out of the garden. The Lord promised in Genesis 3.19 that the work of their hand would become toil and sweat until they returned to the dust.

Their punishment, what the New Testament authors might say, the wages of their sin was death. A question was once asked of R.C. Sproul, why was God's punishment so severe?

To which he famously answered, what's wrong with you people? And they laughed, and he replied, I'm serious.

What's wrong with you people? If we have any understanding of our sin, any understanding of God, of who he is, we should ask, why wasn't the punishment more severe?

- [12 : 56] God said in Genesis 2.17, in the day that you eat of it, meaning the fruit, you shall surely die. That same day, death.
- And yet God did not kill him when he took of the fruit and ate of it. Although Adam and Eve dismissed his promises, his goodness, they followed after their desires.
- Instead of killing them on the spot, what does God do? He covers their sin, clothes their nakedness, and promises to crush sin once for all.
- But as we see in verse 4, the promises of God do not always come to pass quickly. Some take months.
- Some takes years. Some take millennia. I want you to imagine for a moment you're 10 years old. Probably not hard for Micah.
- [13 : 53] It wasn't that long ago. For the rest of us, maybe feels like a longer time, right? You remember when your birthday was coming up? Maybe you were reminded it's a month away.
- How long did that month take to pass? Felt like an eternity, right? Now imagine you're a bit older, maybe 60, and your first grandchild is just born.
- How fast does the first year of their life pass? Gone in a moment. Barely a memory. Why does time pass faster as we get older?
- You ever think about that? Why does time pass faster as we get older? Well, when you're 10 years old, maybe you remember the first five years of your life.
- One month is the 60th of your life. When you're 60 years old, one year is the 60th of your life.
- [15 : 00] By comparison, it's the same amount of time. Now imagine God. He already lived one eternity.
- He's got another one to go. What is 100 years in God's eyes but a breath or a millennia but a day?
- Time passes very quickly in God's eyes. As Peter says in 2 Peter 3, 8-9, do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, a thousand years as one day.
- The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promises as some count slowness, but he is patient towards you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should reach repentance.
- Every day that the Lord passes over sin, that he covers sin, is another day for people to turn from their sin and to turn to God.
- [16 : 06] In light of the reality of the passing of time in verses 5 and 6, Moses reminds us of how short our lives are in light of eternity.
- He says, the years of our lives are swept away like a flood and when they are over, they are like a dream. I imagine he had Noah's flood in mind when he wrote this.
- It took Noah 120 years to build the ark. Throughout that time, all those people had 120 years to repent, to believe, to get on the boat.
- Not one did, only the family of Noah. God's patience lasted 120 years and yet no one save for Noah and his family returned to God.
- Moses reminds us or rather, yes, Moses reminds us, trying not to mix up Moses and Noah, Moses reminds us that like grass that is renewed by the morning dew only to wither and fade in the evening suns, our lives are gone before we know it.
- [17 : 19] A lifetime may feel like a very long time when you're 10 years old, but as you lie on your deathbed, it will feel as though it was over as quick as a dream. And so moving into the next section, we'll see that Moses laments the futility of a life lived in rebellion.

And I've titled section two Fragile Humans and we'll look at verses 7 through 12. Thinking back on my own past, there's more than a few seasons of my life that I feel as though I wasted away.

and of which I am ashamed. And so I wonder, are there seasons in your own life that you wasted, that you resisted the will of God, that you lived in rebellion or sin?

Are you living in one of those seasons today, resisting the call and the will of God? I know in the midst of these seasons it's very easy to say, tomorrow is the day.

Tomorrow I will change. But the truth revealed in this psalm is that tomorrow is never promised. Today is the day. This life will pass away like a breath and all those wasted seasons will be burned up in a moment.

[18 : 43] moment. If we die in our sin, if we die as enemies of God refusing to come to him as our true and only lasting dwelling place, our greatest accomplishments will be burned up in a moment.

And more tragically, we will spend eternity apart from God. And so in the next two verses, seven and eight, Moses lamented the sins that brought about the anger and the wrath of God.

He knew that the Lord was justified in his anger and wrath because he knew that their sin was clearly visible before God. Looking at Hebrews 4.13, the author of Hebrews says, no creature is hidden from his sight.

But all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. He sees every sin. He sees all that we do wrong.

Our iniquities and even our secret sins are clearly seen in the light of the Lord's presence before his holiness as this psalm might be translated.

[19 : 58] In the light of his holiness, every sin becomes like a crimson stain on the whitest of wool. And so Moses lamented the endless march of time and the certainty of death.

He says in verses 9 and 10, the years of our life are 70 years, maybe 80 by reason of strength, and the best of them are toil and trouble.

They are over as quickly as they begin. I'll remind you, Moses is not complaining. He's not blaming God for being unfair or uncompassionate.

Instead, he's sorrowful that man is so weak, that he is so weak, and that because of sin, there is death. This reminds me of Romans 5, 12.

sin came into the world through one man, meaning Adam, and through one man, death through sin. And so death spread to all men because all sinned.

[21 : 06] Death is the reality and the consequence of sin. Even for those in Christ, we will die, but we trust in the resurrection, destruction, but we know that death, physical death, death of our dreams, they're all a consequence of this fallen world that we live in.

Now, death is not always on our minds, and sometimes that's a good thing. We don't like to dwell on death, but when a loved one, a close friend, a co-worker dies, it always seems to awaken us to reality.

This life will not go on forever. Sometimes it's in those moments that we feel most alive, most reminded of our frailty.

When we awaken from the toil and trouble by the death of someone close, our eyes are suddenly open to this reality. for those who don't know the Lord, death is a rude awakening.

You can see this on display throughout our culture, but the truth is life will end and everyone will stand before the perfect holiness of God with their sins laid bare.

[22 : 28] For those who deny Christ, who die in rebellion, they will be cast out of God's presence for eternity. But there is hope for those who trust in Jesus.

We know that death is not the end, it is merely the beginning of our rest, where we will return to our true dwelling place and refuge, our God.

And so as Christians, when a friend dies, when a family member dies, or someone in our church family dies, we do not grieve like the world, instead we hope in the resurrection and the quick return of our Lord.

But like Moses, we lament for those who do not know Jesus, who waste their life in toil and trouble. Moses lamented for his fellow Israelites because they lived in toil and trouble.

And many, a whole generation, missed out on the promised land and the promised rest because they doubted God. He lamented for their hopes and their dreams that were shattered when he and his own family and this entire generation were barred from the promise.

[23 : 45] And so he prays in verses 11 and 12. Who considers the power of your anger and your wrath according to the fear of you? So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.

If God did not punish sin, would you not call him unjust?

But God is holy and God is just, so he pours out righteous anger and wrath against sin. In reverent awe and fear of the power of God's anger, the stubborn blame God, the righteous cry out for pity.

As we see in the next verses, Moses saw the holiness of God. He saw the sinfulness of his people and seeing the insurmountable chasm that separated the two, he did what he could only do.

He cried out for mercy. In this third section, as we look at verses 13 through 17, I've titled this section, A Redeemed Purpose.

[25 : 12] In verse 13, Moses says, Return, O Lord, how long have pity on your servants. This word return could also say relent, let up on the anger and wrath.

We can bear it no longer. Thinking back on the previous verse, he's asking that instead of the anger and wrath of the Lord, that the people would learn a heart of wisdom, that we would learn to stop wasting our lives, resisting the will of God, and that we would learn to live each day as though it were our last to live each day as though this is our final day, our final opportunity to turn to God.

And so Moses says in verse 14, Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

I think maybe that's the most famous verse from this psalm. satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.

But why specifically the steadfast love of God? Why not his mercy or his grace or his faithfulness? I imagine in Moses' mind was that moment where he saw God on Mount Sinai, as recorded in Exodus 34, 6, God introduced his holiness and what does he say?

[26 : 55] The Lord a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation.

The Lord is merciful and he is gracious. He is incredibly patient and slow to anger beyond anything we can imagine. sin. But it is his steadfast love, sometimes translated, his loyal love.

It is his faithfulness to his word, to his promise, to his son, and to his children, which restrain the wrath and anger of God that we deserve.

Recognize that our sinfulness and inclination to grumble, to complain, to grow impatient, to resort to our own ways. It is the steadfast love of God alone that gives us peace each morning.

The sun rises as the faithful reminder of his steadfast love. He has blessed us with another day, whether we deserve it or not.

[28 : 07] We awaken to the perfection of his love expressed in mercy and grace, rather than the purity of his holiness expressed in anger and wrath.

If you cannot see the extent of God's hatred for sin, I believe it's difficult to imagine the extent of his love. And I think that's really what the cross displays.

God's perfect anger and wrath against sin poured out on the sun. rather than us. And his mercy and grace poured out through the blood of Christ on everyone who accepts him.

The final covering for sin promised all those millennia before came to pass at the cross. But 1,500 years before that promise came to pass, Moses still trusted in the steadfast love of the Lord.

He trusted that God would keep his promise and that he would bring his people into the land he promised them. And so he continues in verse 15.

[29 : 24] Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us and for as many years as we have seen evil. This reminds me of Psalm 30, verse 5.

His anger is but for a moment and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.

There is a time and place for the just anger and wrath of the Lord against sin. And I know it can feel like hell when the magnifying glass of God's holiness is pointed directly at you.

And when it is, it certainly brings weeping that may last for the night, but we know joy will come in the morning.

And so I think it is only fitting to quote Lamentations 322 through 323. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.

[30 : 29] His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is thy faithfulness. When you cry out to the Lord for pity and mercy, trust in his steadfast love.

He will answer every time. In the last two verses of this psalm, verse 16 and 17, Moses says, let your work be shown to your servants and your glorious power to their children.

God will be to God to will to God to the God parted the Red Sea, as he freed them from Egypt, right?

As he provided water and food in the wilderness. Because of sin, we know that this generation of Israel would not enter the promised land, but Moses still trusted, as this verse says that God would show his glorious power to their children.

The people of God would still receive the promise, because God is faithful to his word. All those who trust in the Lord will see his miraculous wonders and glorious power.

[31 : 45] Perhaps not the parting of the Jordan River, the crumbling walls of Jericho, or all the people fleeing before God's people, but we will see his glorious power in the redemption of those around us.

Perhaps a more glorious power than any that the Israelites saw. And so finally, at the end of these verses, Moses prays, let the favor, or perhaps the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us.

Yes, establish the work of our hands. What do you think this word establish means? Establish the work of our hands.

It's translated many different ways, but here establish. I think what Moses had in mind when he wrote this was that all of his time, 40 years wandering the wilderness, would be toil and trouble if the work that God called him to failed.

And so he says, establish the work of our hands. Despite his weakness and the weakness of the people, it is the Lord alone who can establish this work.

[33 : 13] This same word establish is often translated to make steadfast, to make our work eternal rather than temporary.

And it is in the same way that the Lord redeems the work of his children, that he redeems our work. We no longer toil at things that will be burned up in the light of God's presence.

Rather, we work in the good works that he has prepared for us, works that he establishes and makes steadfast that will last eternally.

And so having our minds fixed on eternity, we continue in the work that he has prepared for us, knowing that there is an eternal reward. And more than that, that God receives glory.

And so in closing, I have one final question. Do you ever wonder if I already believe in Jesus, what work remains for me?

[34 : 16] What work does he call me to? Well, first, I think he calls us to share the good news of the gospel. In this, we lament sin, we call people to righteousness.

The gospel work that we do in our families, in workplaces, in our church, they have eternal purpose, not temporary purpose. Each person who receives the good news of the gospel, who joins the family of God, as Paul says, they become our joy and our crown of boasting.

Second, we no longer labor for temporary things. We labor to see the kingdom of God grow. The Lord redeems all the work of our hands.

If you work in IT or software development, if you work in construction or an auto mechanic, maybe you work in health care, raising children, teaching, ministry, whatever the work God has called you to, it has eternal purpose and brings glory to God, so long as it is done in the name of Jesus Christ.

Everything that we do is given a redeemed purpose in Christ Jesus. And lastly, we are surrounded by people who toil and trouble after earthly possessions, sins, and so we must resist the temptation to join them.

[35 : 46] We must recognize that there is no lasting gladness or joy to be found in any of these things. Instead, we must keep our eyes fixed on the holiness of God, no longer seeking comfort or security or things.

We must learn to count our days, to live every day as if it is the last. We must pray for a heart of wisdom from God that would free us from this toil and trouble and prepare us to continue in the work that he has prepared us for, called us to, and equips us for.

Let's pray.