“From Everlasting to Everlasting” Psalm 90:1-14

Psalm 90 is all about time. We could almost say this ancient psalm is about the “relative” nature of time because Moses struggles to make sense of the temporariness of our existence. The one undeniable fact that every person must face is not merely the reality of death but also, as we hurtle toward the end, how fleeting and brief life is! In the first fourteen verses of this poetic prayer, Moses frames our brief lives from God’s perspective and then helps us lament our dismaying experience of living under God’s wrath, with all the futility and sin-produced death that entails. But Moses also helps us give voice to the deepest desires of our souls—desires that God promises to grant us in full when *“creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God,”* as Paul writes in Romans 8:21.

Verses 5&6 of Psalm 90 are in a sense an exaggeration or hyperbole as Moses compares life to the swift 24-hour cycle of certain kinds of grass. I’ve talked with enough nonagenarians personally to know that even those who look back on ninety plus years of life say that, all things considered, the grassy image in verses 5&6 is pretty much how life feels in retrospect. They say, “Why, it only seems like just yesterday when I was sixteen years old. Life was all ahead of me then. I just don’t know where the time went!”

Few things amaze me more than what Albert Einstein discovered about time. Every year on New Year’s Eve we briefly pay attention to the ticking of the clock, counting down the minutes and seconds until midnight. Generally, we don’t spend much time watching time pass us by. The watch on my wrist, the clock in my living room and the illuminated clock beside my bed all tick away constantly and steadily. **But seldom do I stare at a clock while it ticks.**

Whether or not we pay any attention to the passing of time, we assume it is constant. One minute is the same here in this room as in a room say down in Australia. Sixty seconds is the same for us now as it was in Jesus’ day 2,000 years ago. But despite that constancy, we all know that our minds can play tricks on us where the passage of time is concerned. That’s why we agonize

over the way time "drags on" in the family waiting room at the hospital, yet we say an entire day just "flew by" when we we're having a wonderful time with the kids at an amusement park. **Even Einstein once humorously defined his theory of relativity this way: He said,** "An hour sitting on the sofa with your girlfriend seems like just a minute whereas a minute sitting on a hot stove seems like an hour!"

But Einstein's great innovation did not involve any psychological tricks. After all, next time you're sitting in the surgical waiting room, just look around. Some people seem highly anxious and clearly uptight. For these nervous folks, the minutes seem to be crawling by at a snail's pace. Yet only a few feet away in the same waiting room, we may see someone who is clearly not very worried as she chats away on her phone with friends, sipping her Starbucks latte. So, in the same room we can see two people, both of whom experience the passing of time very differently. But the clock on the waiting room wall is going no slower and no faster for either one of them. Both the person for whom time is dragging and the one for whom it is passing quickly are still aging at the exact same rate.

But Einstein discovered that time is the "fourth dimension," as real as the spatial dimensions of up and down, forward and backward—even though time is not constant. Time can be affected by movement. The faster someone travels, the slower time passes. So, if someone were to take a round-trip journey in a spaceship that travels exceedingly fast, upon returning to earth that traveler might discover that whereas they'd aged only a year, their friends back on earth would be twenty years older. Believe it or not, this has been proven here on earth. If you take two very sensitive nuclear clocks that can record even the smallest decay of an atom and place one clock at the top of a skyscraper in New York or Chicago and another in the basement of the skyscraper, the clock on top of the building will run more slowly. These two competing forces break down this way: Because the top of a skyscraper moves faster through space than the basement, motion slows its time down slightly. **This is the *Velocity Effect or Special Relativity*.** But time moves slower when you are closer to a massive object (like the Earth's core) because the gravitational pull is stronger.

This is called the *Gravity Effect or General Relativity*. So as the earth turns, objects that are higher travel faster than those nearer the core of the earth and this movement affects the actual passage of time.

The swift passing of years, however, is something all of us humans have experienced. I have heard it gets worse as you get older. Time goes faster precisely in that season of life when we are slowing down! So, we can identify with that part of Psalm 90. But this psalm writer (Psalm 90 is attributed to Moses) is not merely *observing* that this is so. He is trying to position this experience in the wider context of God's eternity. **Throughout all generations God is the same, we are told in the opening verse.** God existed before anything else did. **Furthermore, it's not merely generation to generation as we mark such things on a family tree, it's also *"from everlasting to everlasting."*** God's longevity, if you want to put it that way, makes time a fleeting phenomenon for him, too, but in a very different way. *"A thousand years in your sight are like a day gone by"* says verse 4. Scientists now say that the universe is estimated to be as old as 13.8 billion years—give or take a billion! But compared to eternity, even that huge span of time isn't much!

Of course, you could take this part of Psalm 90 and make it into a piece of dismal news. If a millennium is nothing to God, then how can we creatures who do not typically manage to eke out even a century's worth of life, possibly matter to God? If centuries and millennia of time are to God nothing but a blip, then how could you or I or any mere mortal person matter? How could we be even noteworthy? **Psalm 90 is something of a two-edged sword.** The psalm wants us to pray for God to *"satisfy us in the morning,"* but if we're not careful, that prayer could make us feel infinitesimally small and insignificant.

But, of course, Psalm 90 is **not** trying to do that. **Like the wonderful poem from Psalm 8, so also here the vastness of time and space is not highlighted to make us conclude that we don't matter.** Instead, seeing ourselves in such wide-open spaces is intended to make us marvel over the fact that despite the spatial and temporal odds stacked against us, **somehow, we do matter to God!**

Astronomers say that the Milky Way galaxy that we call home contains a billion stars, of which our sun is only one and not one of the more impressive stars, at that. **They now also think that in addition to this galaxy there may be another billion galaxies, each of which may also contain a billion stars.** The vastness of it all, and the plus 13-billion-year cosmic history that appears to have brought the universe this far, makes it exceptionally easy to conclude that despite all we humans have achieved and despite the nobility of our finest aspirations, we have no choice but to accept the humbling fact that it just doesn't matter. The vastness of the space-time continuum and the fleeting nature of our lives forces the conclusion that it's "here today and gone tomorrow." The apostle James writes in his short letter to the early church that there is no reason for boasting about tomorrow. He asks, *"What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes"* (5:14).

Should we only live for the moment because that is all we will ever have anyway? Take away my faith, take away my Bible, take away my Creator, take away my Savior, and I honestly don't know what would prevent me from embracing that view, too. But it is precisely because the Word of God **does not ignore** the shortness of life that **I find hope**. The fact is that we are **not** the center of the universe, we are **not** living on an evidently singularly impressive planet so that no one could help but notice the Earth when scanning the depths of space. The Bible admits that is true. **But the Bible also confesses that God has zeroed in on us. He has gone so far as to send his only Son to become one of us.** So, when we pray to this God, when we place the times of our lives into his everlasting hands, we get God's attention and we receive his *hesed* mentioned in verse 14, that is, **his lovingkindness, his unfailing love.** When by faith we receive that, we find our lives, our times, and the annoying brevity of life placed into an everlasting context that somehow helps us to relax.

As it turns out, we don't have to pack all the meaning we yearn for into a span of seventy, or maybe eighty, years. If there are things we've never done, a level of existence we always wanted to achieve but never had time for in this life, **it's all right because death is not the end—not if the God who has *"been***

our dwelling place," **our home, throughout all generations is the God in whom we trust.** Moses writes in verse 12, *"Teach us to number our days so that we may gain a heart of wisdom."* Just what *"wisdom"* do you suppose he has in mind? Is it the conventional wisdom that concludes we are no more than a cosmic speck of dust? **Certainly not!** In this case, "wisdom" means a prudent discerning that if we matter at all in the grand scheme of things, it is only because of God's grace and because of his *"unfailing love"* that's given to us new every morning as life goes on.

The eternalness of God *"throughout all generations," "from everlasting to everlasting,"* could dauntingly cause us to despair, if we placed our seventy or eighty years **on one side of the cosmic scale** and God's everlasting nature **on the other side**. It would appear so lopsided as to make us either weep over the tragedy of our short lives or crack up over the ridiculous absurdity of it all!

But Psalm 90 doesn't want us to stack ourselves up against God! The image here is **not a scale** but rather **hands reaching out to us. We place the times of our lives into the very hands of God where we are preserved, kept, and endowed with meaning and hope for an eternal existence in God's kingdom that goes well beyond anything we could ever see just by looking at the universe around us in this lifetime.**

Time is relative, so Dr. Einstein taught. Motion affects it. Speed and the direction you are going make a difference. Every time we gather in this place, we experience it too. By faith, this time together launches us forward, as we fall back into the arms of our *everlasting and loving* God, who is our true home throughout all generations. But whether we hurtle backward or forward in time, **it is always Godward that we go**. And time is affected by this movement.

It is a holy theory of relativity as we realize that relative to God, the times of our lives end up mattering very much to God himself. If you have even the smallest doubt about that, please note that the hands into which we place the times of our lives are hands pierced by nails for our sake. **If that doesn't tell you how much your life matters, nothing will!** Amen.