

Imagine if you knew you'd die within the next 40 days. If you could see your death approaching like that, what would you be thinking about – what would be on your mind?

You'd undoubtedly think of some memories from life. And you'd probably channel from that – or extend from it – a list of the things you'd like to still do in what time remains. "What's truly important?" I doubt if working more hours or making more money would make the list of things to do at that moment. Spend time with spouse, children, parents, friends. Yeah! Suddenly, from all the activities of life that are possible, what is most important comes to the surface and separates from the rest which are fine but aren't that significant.

There would be also - I'm sure - time spent thinking about "what is to come after." And I think on your mind would not only be where you stand with God- that issue of knowing if one is at peace with God -, but also a desire to communicate to the ones you love the importance of the same issue for each of them.

Now think of this change. Switch the scenario...

Instead of knowing you're the one who is going to die, what if you knew: everyone else in the group around you – your family, your friends, those in your church – *their death* is approaching. You know how long *they have* to live. What would be on your mind? As you see them begin to die, knowing the same will happen for each as you watch, what would you want to say to them?

That's the backdrop for our Psalm. Think about Moses as he walked day after day leading the children of Israel. It was not a 40 day window, but over a 40 year period in the wilderness. And the Lord had made known: all those 20 yrs old or more – at the time the reconnaissance mission took place into the Promised Land – would die (except Caleb and Joshua). They would die before the nation arrived into the promised Land. And in the midst of it the Lord used Moses to do just what a leader – a spiritual leader – is meant to do.

Moses in this Psalm lays out the issue of true importance for each of them. It's the same thing that Moses then would face himself just before Israel entered the Promised Land. And it is the issue of highest importance for each of us. Give attention here.

Moses does not tiptoe around when he comes to the problem we face. In his prayer, Psalm 90, he says to the Lord: (vs.3) "You grind people to dust." Death approaches. For each of us.

It does no good to avoid this truth just because it is something one doesn't like. I know that's what people often do: they try not to think about it. Sometimes that is by so busying themselves that there isn't time for the brain to think about it. Build houses, and take care of vehicles, and work at careers, and go to the gym, and hit the practice field, and attend the games, and get dressed up, and go out, and hold those we love tight. And all those things are fine in and of themselves, but when the outcome is – whether it is intentional, or not – that the big D-word is ignored, that isn't healthy. Moses song, Psalm 90, says: "Stop. Don't spend life ignoring death."

Someone might say: "It's not fair!" Death, that is. But Moses gives an answer to that. He lays everything "out there" in his prayer: vs.8 "You have laid out our guilty deeds in front of you." The primary cause of death is God's judgment against sin. God didn't create us, human beings, to die. Death came into our world – it comes to each of us – because of sin.

Some might feel: "Oh, even if I admit my sin, this seems too harsh!" But Moses again answers. Take a deeper look into this. Moses prayed, here in his song, the truth (vs.7): "We are consumed by your anger, and by your wrath we are terrified." Some who hear about God's wrath over sin, like the description here in the Bible, protest: "I think that's simply a terrible thing to suggest! Moses, Man of God, you shouldn't talk like that!" Actually, it would have been a terrible thing if Moses had done just the opposite. If he ignored the whole subject in this Psalm, what then? Leave people to ignore death and the reason why, and where do people end up (without ever addressing the spiritual problem)? Moses knew He had to be honest about the reality of sin and the reality of the death that comes as a judgment on sin. It hurts to hear that? Oh, yes. It makes us sad? Most certainly. But it's just. And it's true.

People hear about God's wrath against sin and might think: "Well, that sounds unreasonable and excessive to me." But the answer is: (vs.11) "Who can understand the power of your anger? But your fury is consistent with the fear that is owed you."

God's punishment matches – it is consistent with – the seriousness of sin. Sin is an offense and stench to our completely holy God. Sin must receive a punishment that fits the facts: a completely holy God cannot live with sin in His eternal presence. So the person with sin still staining them from their lifetime can't be with God, and must be cast away from God's presence forever. That's hell. It's existence apart from God, apart from good, where there is no joy, no peace and no hope of that changing. It is eternal death.

Moses leads us through this intensely personal, emotional topic: death, its cause (sin), and how God justly feels about it. But he takes us through this all for a reason. This is leading us somewhere.

Psalms 90 helps us remember how brief our days on this earth are. They are like grass that grows – gets cut down – and withers. Wise people know this about life. In the big picture of things, it is short. AND days are often full of trouble. This world is broken, and infested with evil. It has been ever since human beings brought sin into it. This understanding of life actually helps. If you think that God should give you great health and wealth and just joy and only good should fill your days, you will be disappointed or angry at God when your life is difficult and painful and ultimately when people die.

Oh what perspective we gain from understanding we live in a broken world! That understanding says: Don't be so foolish as to revolve your joy around the brief things and days that life in this world has to offer. Enjoy with thanksgiving the good things you are given as gifts from God. But also keep in your heart the understanding: your days on earth and your hold on the things here will come to an end. Death is approaching

Don't try to run from the thought of it. Listen for the way – in spite of death – to have joy and gladness all your days, and to have God's kindness rest upon you – even for days beyond your days upon this earth. There is an eternal refuge place. The glimmer of that truth was held out right away by Moses at the beginning of his prayer in vs.1. "Lord, you have been a dwelling place *for us*." And now we come later in the Psalm to the revelation of how that can be: namely, that we can be at home and at peace in God's presence, even sheltered in Him.

[Show vs.11 and vs.12-14] Look how closely situated the wrath & justice of our God are to the compassion & mercy of our Lord. The one follows right on the heels of the other. Moses previously had heard God reveal Himself as: (Exodus 34:6-7) the God who punishes sin, but at the same time – in the same breath He revealed – He is "compassionate, gracious, about in love and faithfulness, forgiving..."

So Moses calls out, and thereby teaches us to join him: "Turn, Lord, your anger – turn it away from us. Have compassion." How can Moses ask this? How can we? Moses takes us to fly to the Lord for mercy. But how can we be so bold to go to the One who is so angry – and justly so – over sin? To where can His punishment and anger be turned, and be satisfied, and compassion instead then be turned upon us?

God couldn't simply try to get around the need to give out the sentence of death (that couldn't be, because His justice/holiness is part of His very being). Instead, to be faithful to His justice and to His mercy, He poured out the fury and punishment for sin, but turned that sentence upon Himself. Jesus didn't overcome death for us by keeping it from happening. He allowed it to happen to Him. He conquered death, and took sin's punishment, by going through it – by suffering it all in our place. Then, He came back from death, proving that He holds forgiveness and life eternal in His grasp. God the Father looked at this – what Jesus had finished – and turned & looked at you and me and declared: "Everyone who believes in Jesus has forgiveness of sins. For your sins have been paid for. Therefore, there is no more condemnation for you who are in Christ Jesus."

A heart of wisdom is a heart that looks at death and its cause, and that looks to Jesus and rejoices. Think about what this means for you as one who trusts in Him. Think about what it means for the way you get to number your days. Now try to count up the days you have left to live, and you can't. And that's not because you don't know how few they are. You can't tally up a number because the days you have to live are without end. You'll spend some of them enjoying God's gifts here, and then the rest will be spent with God (after your death here) – enjoying far greater peace and satisfaction – in heaven.

Let's use something to get a reminder of this. Picture this strand of yarn representing time (like a timeline). I've got a ribbon tied on here. This represents the length of your life here on earth. And the rest of the strand of yarn... (start pulling – and pulling – and pulling) ... the rest of this represents how much time you'll have to look forward to after this life. Point: see how small your lifetime is here compared to the eternity ahead for you, who have peace with God through trust in Jesus.

You have this assurance, as God's child through faith. When life here on earth is through, you will enter and enjoy life with God in the land of the living where life goes on and on and on – without end.

That view will then guide how you answer: What's most important in life? Oh you'll do your work, and provide for your family. You'll take care of your home and stuff as gifts from God. You'll enjoy activities, sports, games, events and those most special moments – holding your loved ones tight. Those are all goo things. But all the while you'll have the perspective of the most important issue. And with that in your grip, in your heart, you'll gather to this place. You listen to God's truth. You'll praise Him. You'll pray. You'll support the mission to get His Word out. And when you face death, you'll be able to do it with peace. And you'll share with your children how Jesus brings this peace, so they too can have the joy to face their own death with the assurance of knowing Jesus and that we'll be united with Him forever. That is numbering our days with a heart of wisdom. God grant ti to each of us. Amen.