

Numbering Our Days
Psalm 90:12
By Rev. Keith Davis

Psalm 90:12 *Teach us to number our days aright that we might gain a heart of wisdom.*

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, this past Monday night the passing of the Old Year and the coming of the New was cause for great celebration. There is something exciting about ushering in the New Year, about making a new beginning.

I didn't watch any of the festivities on television, but I am sure that the usual crowd gathered in Times Square to watch the ball drop, signaling the New Year. I imagine that many of you here in the Midwest also celebrated with family and friends.

We were down in Naples, Florida over the New Year, and I discovered that they greet the New Year a little differently than we do. They had an outdoor concert at the toll of midnight they set off fireworks. We didn't see any of it, but we sure could hear it from where we were staying.

Yet, for all the fun and festivities on New Year's Eve, there's something *bittersweet* about the passing of the Old Year and the coming of the New. While it's exciting to see the dawning of a new year, it necessarily means that last year (2007) belongs to our past. It's in the history books.

While we look forward in hope to what God has in store for us in 2008, the truth is the New Year will make us one year older. When we're nine or nineteen we kind of like the idea of growing another year older, but when we get to be 49 or 69 or 79, the prospect of growing another year older isn't all that glamorous or exciting. We wouldn't mind skipping a birthday or two!

For the older we get, the more keenly aware we are that (if the Lord should tarry) the New Year brings us one year closer to death. It's entirely likely that someone from our own family or our church family will go to be with the Lord this very year. This may be the last year of their life.

If you think this sounds a bit fatalistic or pessimistic, keep in mind that this is the way Psalm 90 calls us to look at life. In our text, the Psalmist pleads with God to teach him to see his life from this very vantage point, to teach him to *see*, to *understand* the brevity of life (its fleeting nature), so that he will determine to make the most of his years, his days, the moments of his life.

That's what verse 12 is all about. Through the words of the Psalmist, **God calls us to number our days aright**. This morning I want to draw your attention to three aspects of this call:

1. Its Godly Perspective

2. Its Grand Pursuit

3. Its Glorious Prize

1. Its Godly Perspective: In just a few moments, congregation, we will consider what it means to 'number our days aright', but for right now we want to gain some perspective on what this life really is, on how we ought to view our days and our lives here on earth.

In this regard I'm reminded what Dr. Joel Beeke said in his lectures with us last year. When speaking to us about the Puritans, he said something along these lines: that if one word could sum up, or characterize the Puritan mindset, the Puritan passion, it would be the word *eternity!*

The hearts and minds of the Puritans were absorbed (preoccupied) with thoughts and concerns (not of this earth, but) of *eternity*. They realized that this life was not all there was. They realized that this life was but a preparation, a testing ground, a foundation for the life to come.

In this way, the Puritans exhibited a very Biblical and Godly perspective of life. The Puritans used to say, *Time ends with the letter 'E' and that's where ETERNITY begins!* The great mistake people make is that they think of time without eternity. They treat time as if it ends with this life.

Thus they see life, this world as little more than a harvest to be reaped. Their only thoughts, their only concerns, their only appetites are for the pleasures of this world, the pleasures of this time; they live to see what they can get out of this life, for what this life can offer them!

I imagine that we're all somewhat familiar with this mindset. We see it lived out all around us; we hear it in the world's clichés. Life is short so don't get cheated; you only go around once so you better make the most of it. For man, life is about results. Life is about taking all we can, and spending all we have.

But when we look at time and life from a Godly perspective, we see that this life is not a harvest to be reaped; rather, it's a seed to be sown. It's not about results and getting what we want here and now; rather, life is about patient planning and investing; it's about storing up for the future.

You see, the Bible teaches us that this life is but a small unit, a small fraction of time; there's something much greater beyond this life, and that 'something much greater' is *eternity*! That's the perspective we gain from Psalm 90.

This entire Psalm 90 is about **time** and **timelessness**. The first two verses address the timelessness of our everlasting God. It tells us that God is not bound by time and distance. God was there before time began—before the mountains were born or the waters covered the earth. God will be there when time itself is at an end—from everlasting *to* everlasting you are God!

In other words, boys and girls, God is not a creature of time as we are. God is not subject to the passing of years, and days and hours. God does not grow old, or tired or weak. God transcends time. And the timelessness of God stands in stark contrast to what we find in the rest of this Psalm, namely, the **fleeting nature** of man.

From the third verse forward, it's as if we can hear the ticking of a clock. The rest of this Psalm describes the days of the years of our lives. And what is written here is not flattering or complimentary. This speaks of the inescapable affects of sin on man's life.

As far as our life goes, the sands in the hour glass continue to fall; the hands of the clock never stop turning. All too quickly our days and years fly by, and then very soon we are no more. So, when viewed from the perspective of eternity, the days of our years are but a brief moment.

The Psalmist also makes the observation that our days (though certainly not without a measure of joy and happiness) are filled with trouble and sorrow. We finish our years with a groan. Today we may feel young and strong and spry, the strength and vigor of youth does not remain. In that way time is the great equalizer. *Time* (as we say) *catches up with all of us*.

The prophet Isaiah declares a similar message in Isaiah 40:6-8: *A voice says 'cry out.'* *And what shall I cry? "All men are like grass and their glory is like the flowers of the field...Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever. Man falls and fades, while God is timeless and eternal.*

At the close of the same chapter we hear these familiar words: *Even youths grow tired and weary and young men stumble and fall, but those who hope in the Lord shall renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not be weary, they shall walk and not be faint.*

While man is fixated on this life, on hiding our age, on covering our bald spots, on washing that gray right out of our hair, on having age spots and wrinkles removed, on trying to find ways to turn back the hands of time, or at least giving others the impression that we are much younger than we really are, the Bible tells it like it is.

The Bible strips away the façade, it puts an end to the masquerade. Man cannot cheat death; there's no such thing as the fountain of youth. All the tummy tucks, face lifts and all the makeup that money can buy cannot reverse the dying process.

The point of Psalm 90 is that only a fool lives his life without regard for eternity. Only a fool clings to this time, and has no regard for the everlasting God. Only a fool lives his life outside the *shelter* and *security* and *salvation* provided by the eternal, almighty God of heaven and earth. I came across this brief poem and I thought it summed up perfectly the point of Psalm 90:

ETERNITY, time soon will end,	ETERNITY! but Jesus died
Its fleeting moments pass away:	Yes, Jesus died on Calvary;
O sinner, say, where wilt thou spend	Behold him thorn-crowned, crucified
Eternity's unchanging day?	The spotless One made sin for thee,
Shall thou the hopeless horror see	O, sinner, haste! for refuge flee -
Of hell for all eternity?	He saves, and for eternity!

Your time, my time spent here on this earth (the time that we call *our life*) is not all there is; it's not all we have. This life is but a beginning. It's not a time to reap, but a time to sow. God calls us to lift our heads and look above this life, and look beyond this life, and look unto eternity!

2. Its Grand Pursuit: That's what we consider next. Having looked at the Godly perspective of this calling from God, we now consider its *grand pursuit* ... what it really mean to *number our days*. Now I'm sure we can ask any toddler here how old he or she is and they could probably answer us, "I'm three years old or I'm four years old". But congregation, numbering our days

means something more than merely being aware of how old we are. Numbering our days has to do with self-evaluation.

In this regard I'm reminded of the account in Daniel 5 where Daniel is called upon to interpret the hand writing on the wall for King Belshazzar. During a great feast the king saw what looked like a human hand writing these words on the wall: *mene, mene tekel, parsin*.

Only Daniel could interpret those words, and this is what they meant. It meant that the king's days were numbered; the days of Belshazzar's reign had reached their end. In fact, that very night, both *his life and his reign* would come to an end. (Darius the Mede would be king).

But also included in Daniel's interpretation of that handwriting was the fact that Belshazzar's life had been weighed, it had been evaluated. Daniel says to him *your his life has been weighed on the scales and it has been found wanting*.

The Bible records that Belshazzar did not humble himself before God and acknowledge that the Most High God was sovereign over the kingdoms of man. Instead of praising God, Belshazzar set himself against God and praised the gods of silver & gold, of bronze & iron, wood & stone.

So it would seem then, that numbering our days consists of those two key elements: realizing that our time is short (our life could literally be taken away in a moment's notice, even this very night!), and secondly, there's the idea of having our lives weighed on the scales of eternity.

Here in Psalm 90, the author (Moses) asks God to *teach us* to number our days. He's asking God *give us the ability, the insight, the self-discipline to measure our life, to assess our life, to evaluate our life right here and right now*.

The Psalmist is asking God to teach us how to take a personal inventory of our lives. This necessarily requires some serious self-reflection, contemplating every aspect of our life in relation to eternity. This self-evaluation must begin with our past.

What have we really done? What have we really accomplished? *What have we done this past year that is truly lasting, that will contribute to eternity, that will reap a harvest in eternity?*

As many of you know, Laura and I (like many of you) we like to 'publish' a year end Christmas letter. Although it's a chore (it's hard to find the time to write, much less to find something

interesting to say!), but if nothing else, it forces us to reflect on the past 12 months of our life; to consider what we've done, to consider where we've been, to consider where God has taken us.

As Christians, we are subject to the same problem as everyone else – we can get so wrapped up, so caught up in this life that we miss the forest through the trees. We get so caught up in our everyday affairs that we have little time to number our days, little time for self-evaluation, little time to stop and praise God along the way, little time to seek our His guidance and wisdom.

And it never fails, every time we write one of those letters we're struck anew at how God is so good to us; how God is faithful to us; at how God has led us every step of the way. And every time we sit down **to read** the Christmas letters we receive, we're blessed to find family and friends doing the same thing: giving thanks to God for bringing them through another year, for bringing them through various trials and difficulties. They praised God amidst it all.

That's the whole point; that's the key. As we look to our past, do we recognize, do we acknowledge the sovereign hand of our everlasting God in our every activity? Do we confess and acknowledge that we lived this past year under the divine control, guidance, and protection of the everlasting God of heaven and earth?

Now it may be that this past year was not a particularly "good year" for you. Maybe last year was marked by sickness or illness; maybe last year was marked by the passing of a loved one; or maybe this last year was very difficult for you financially; maybe you faced a difficult trial or maybe you struggled spiritually and found yourself backsliding, falling back into old sins.

Regardless of the problems or struggles you faced (and may still be facing) you still must call out to God, "Teach me Lord to number my days aright; teach me to look back over my struggles and trials and adversities and acknowledge and discern your Hand in my life.

Teach me to see how your strength is made perfect in my weakness! Teach me to see how my struggles and trials served to draw me closer to your side! Teach me to see how my sin and my backsliding -- how following after my own ways and my own desires -- caused you grief, and it brought upon me only sorrow and pain and sadness and drew me further away from You!

Surely we're capable of that, aren't we? As this New Year dawns, take the necessary time to sit quietly and reflect and pray about last year, praising God for His faithfulness, and asking Him to lead you once again faithfully in the year to come.

But then we are also called to number our days in the present. How do we do that? We do that by evaluating and assessing our present circumstances. We weigh our life on the scales and see if, in our vocation, in our activities, in our earthly pursuit we are investing in eternity.

Here we might be tempted to think that only pastors and missionaries and seminary professors work in a vocation that invests in eternity, but that's not entirely accurate. Parents, for example, invest in eternity everyday as you raise your children, as you discipline them, as you teach them to pray, and to share, and to say thank you and I'm sorry, as you teach them to forgive.

You husbands and wives invest in eternity everyday in your marriage as your marriage tells the world about Christ and His love for His bride, and about the Church's fear and respect and obedience to her husband. You invest in eternity as husbands exercise spiritual headship and leadership, and wives exercises virtues that are worth far more than rubies.

And whether we're students in school, or teachers, or employers or employees, we make an investment in eternity everyday as we determine to dedicate our labor, our homework, and the fruit of our labor to the Lord. In this way, even the most basic and menial of tasks are done unto the glory of God. We work with a Godly attitude, toward a Godly goal, with Godly ambition.

And if you're retired, the opportunity to invest in eternity is very real as well. *Perhaps you need to be reminded today that there's no such thing as retirement in eternity.* We never retire from the Lord's service. Those who have retired from full time labor in this world now have much more time and talents and resources to dedicate and invest in work for others.

Maybe you can volunteer to give elderly people rides to the grocery store or the doctor's office. Maybe you can volunteer a few hours at the Thrift Center or the Holland Home or at PASS, giving counsel and advice to young mothers. Maybe you can volunteer several weeks a year to travel here and there and do volunteer work at a Christian mission or Aid Center.

And if that is beyond you, you can commit yourself to calling on shut-ins over the phone or simply commit yourself to praying each day for your congregation, for your office bearers, for

the missionaries we support, for the churches and pastors in our Federation. You see, there's a great deal of work to be done, and a countless number of ways in which we can invest in eternity even amidst the ordinary circumstances of life.

I'm reminded of what Paul wrote in I Corinthians 3:12ff. Although he is explaining how the church can only be built with the pure Gospel--not with man's wisdom or eloquence, these verses can also apply to man's life: *If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood hay or straw, his 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.*

One thing is for certain congregation, and it is this: our lives will be weighed in the scales. God will weigh them on the final day. Then the real substance of our life will be revealed. Then it will be made clear whether we lived for eternity all our life, or only lived for the moment. Then it will be manifest whether we had a heart of wisdom or a heart of folly.

3) Its Glorious Prize: That's what the third and final point of our text is all about. We plead with God: *teach us to number our days aright, so that we might gain the glorious prize...a heart of wisdom.* And what is a heart of wisdom? We've basically been talking about it all along.

We're asking God to grant us the wisdom to **not only reflect** and **assess** and **evaluate** our past and our present, but we're asking God to enable us, to equip us, to empower us to **APPLY WHAT WE'VE LEARNED** to our future.

After all, that's wisdom, right? Applying knowledge rightly! We know that we have gained this glorious prize when (as we've already said) we can look back over last year (and over all the years of our life for that matter) and discern the Hand of God leading us and guiding us.

We know that we have gained this glorious prize when (looking back at last year's sins and failures) we're determined all the more to pray harder, to walk with the Lord more closely, to drink of His Word more deeply, to put on the full armor of God more earnestly!

In connection with this, I want to relate to you one of the points the minister said in the church where our family worshipped last week Sunday. He said something along these lines, our past may be darkened and blemished by sins filled with failures, but our future is spotless. Our future

is unblemished. That is not only true of a New Year; it's true for each new day. In His grace, God gives us an opportunity to go forward into tomorrow with a fresh start, with a clean slate.

That gift is ours when we sincerely confess our sins before God, when we turn to and trust in Jesus Christ alone for our forgiveness and our salvation, and when we resolve steadfastly to live a life of gratitude before God, turning from sin, and living in righteousness. That's what a clean start is all about. That's what it means to have a heart of wisdom.

Just think about it a moment, what good is self-evaluation and self-assessment if we don't learn anything from where we've been, if we don't learn anything from the tests and trials and failures of the past. What good is it to weigh ourselves on the scales, if after seeing that we are deficient, we simply decide to go back and indulge our deficiencies and disregard the God of eternity?

You know what Proverbs calls such a man, don't you? Such a man is a fool. He is a fool who after being shown the right way, refuses to apply his heart to such knowledge, and instead happily returns to his folly, much like a pig prefers to wallow in the mud, (as Paul writes) much like a dog returns to his own vomit.

I like the point made by the Rev. Gerrit Vos who wrote concerning this verse: *And what is wisdom? Paul will tell you. He says: Christ, the power of God and the Wisdom of God. Wisdom of God is the best way and the best means to attain the highest glory of God.*

And this is what we been talking about all along -- living for eternity, and not for this life. What a comfort and blessing it is to know that by grace, through faith we have been united to Christ, and He with us! We have been engrafted into Christ, so that He is our Head and we are His Body. We've been joined together with the very One who is called the eternal Wisdom of God.

Thus, as we live and breathe, as we walk and talk, as we work and play, as we sleep and as we rise, we do so with a heart and spirit and mind of Christ (of wisdom) within us. Thus, it should be natural that everyday our thoughts and words and deeds, our desires and ambitions should rise about this earthly existence and should dwell ultimately on our *eternity* with God.

That is where Christ calls us; that is what our hearts ought to yearn for; that is what we're preparing for; eternity. Teach us Lord to number our days aright, that we might gain a heart of wisdom, that we might yearn for and live for eternity in our hearts and lives here and now Amen.