

"How Many Shopping Days Left?"

November 19, 2017

Psalm 90: 1-12

¹ Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. ² Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. ³ You turn us back to dust, and say, "Turn back, you mortals." ⁴ For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night. ⁵ You sweep them away; they are like a dream, like grass that is renewed in the morning; ⁶ in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers. ⁷ For we are consumed by your anger; by your wrath we are overwhelmed. ⁸ You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your countenance. ⁹ For all our days pass away under your wrath; our years come to an end like a sigh. ¹⁰ The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong; even then their span is only toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away. ¹¹ Who considers the power of your anger? Your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you. ¹² So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.



Before we begin today, before you start counting in your heads, there is the answer. No, it is not six times six. No, that is not how many openings the Nomination Team has left to fill for our church's various teams and ministries. No, that is not how many points I predict the Vikings will score today against the Rams. This is THE answer to THE question: How many shopping days left until Christmas? After all, that is the question of the day today. Let us pray.



Today's Psalm begins by recognizing our place in God's family, our mortality, and God's eternity. The opening verse reads, "*Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations*".

This is an eternal truth. God has always been, is, and always will be our dwelling place. While God is from "*everlasting to everlasting*", we as mortals will turn back to dust one day. The psalmist then relates God's understanding of time to our understanding of time, saying that a thousand years for us is like a watch in the night for God's sense of time. Like the grass of the field, it is new in the morning but fades and is gone by evening. While God's time is never-ending and far beyond our understanding, we have a firm grasp on our understanding of time and how limited time can be for us.

Christmas is just around the corner, you know. In fact, it has been Christmas since before Halloween according to all the stores here in town. As each of our 35 days left ticks down towards zero, we become more and more aware of the precious few days we have left to find that "just right" gift for that extra special person in our life. As the number of days clicks down into the single digits, our sense of urgency will really ramp up, won't it? Maybe a scene like this is not too far outside the realm of possibilities as it draws ever closer to December 24th.



As we begin to think about how many days left until Christmas and how time is always ticking down, we can easily make the leap to the eternal question: how many days do we each have

left on this earth? Our reality is that we all have a limited number of days. Well, there is good news for the ladies because, on average, women live longer than men. And speaking of averages, the average American lives to be 78.56 years. On average, that is 28,647 days to spend however we wish as we live out our life on this wonderful planet. We can shop, stand in line, wait in traffic, wonder why the express line is taking so long – whatever brings us a sense of enjoyment and joy and pleasure in life. All of this about times finite quality begs the question: what if we woke up in the morning and knew exactly how many days we had left to live? It is a rather sobering question to ponder. It is a question that I would guess most of us would not even like to consider.

Mike was a good pastor who had been suffering with diabetes and its ill effects for most of his life. He was a middle-aged, single dad with two young sons. Mike had lost an eye and was undergoing kidney dialysis once a week. That eventually became almost twice a week. After a couple years of that, the dialysis treatments needed to be more frequent. Mike was getting pretty worn down – dialysis is extremely hard on the whole person and it is harder and harder to bounce back after each successive treatment. It would not be long before the dialysis team would be telling Mike that continuing the treatments was no longer ethical.

One day Mike started letting the people in his life know that he had told his doctors that he would not be back in for dialysis again. He had prayerfully considered everything and he decided that being lucid and dying quickly would be far better for everyone concerned than a prolonged deterioration that would be grim and painful all the way around.

Mike then spent a lot of time with his boys, with his folks, and with his sisters and with his brother. He also invested a lot of time with different members of the church staff, and especially with different teens of the church. You see, Mike was also the Youth Pastor, and the kids loved him. When we would do lock-ins at the church for the youth, Mike would play in the all-night Monopoly marathon game. He always used his false eye as his game piece – the kids thought it was wonderful that he could be so real and so accepting of his infirmities. It was just a part of the humble and gentle spirit that made him a good pastor and a great Christian man.

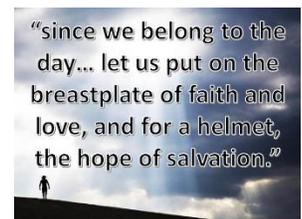
Mike's last two weeks on this earth taught me a lot about death and dying – how to do it, how to minister in the midst of it, and what a godly end to a life could look like. He spoke very clear and honest things into people's lives, and he did so with a real heart of love and a desire for whomever he was speaking to know that, as well as he knew them and as much as he loved them, that the Lord knew them so much better and loved them so much more.

As we consider the question, "what if we woke up in the morning and knew exactly how many days we had left to live?", this story of Mike's last days on the earth give us pause. It makes us wonder how would be spend our last twenty days or seven weeks or three years or whatever amount of time we had left. I have a sneaky suspicion that we would all hope to live out our last few days as people who shine our faith out into the world right up to our last moment. Like Pastor Mike, we too would want to love others well, to make a positive impact upon those in our world, and to let others know that Jesus loves them dearly.

Loving others, being a humble servant, seeking to make a positive impact on our world – these are all things that Jesus and others modeled throughout the scriptures. Jesus calls each of us to live out our faith in the world. Paul writes of living this life of faith in 1st Thessalonians 5. There are echoes of last week’s message in these words as well. In verses one and two Paul writes that they know very well that Christ could come at any moment, comparing this again to His coming like a *"thief in the night"*. This reinforces the idea that because the day is unknown we must make each day count. Paul reminds them and us that we are *"not people of darkness"* but that we are all *"children of light and children of the day"*. Paul goes on in verse six to encourage us to *"be alert and self-controlled"* as we live out our days.



In verse eight, Paul speaks of how we are to live alert and self-controlled lives as a child of the light. He writes, *"since we belong to the day... let us put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet, the hope of salvation"*. When we begin our day by covering our hearts in faith and love, then all we do and say will reflect the light of Christ to those we encounter, especially those living in the darkness. When we begin our day with prayer, asking God to cover all we say and do and think with faith and love, then we will surely walk as children of the light. The breastplate also protects our hearts from the evils of the world, guarding us from the slings of the evil one. This is a protection I dearly need each day and I assume you do as well. And on top of our head, Paul invites us to put on the hope of salvation. It is when the hope of salvation is right on the

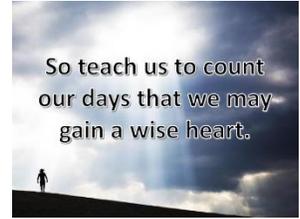


top of our minds, then we live each day with a quiet assurance of God's presence with us in the daily living of our lives as well as in the promise of life eternal. When we live with faith, love, and the hope of salvation at our core, we indeed live and love well. May we each pray faithfully that these three – faith, hope, and love - cover us daily. The walk is not always easy and the road is long, so we need to seek God and His presence often and sincerely.



Returning to our Psalm for today, it speaks of our span of life, this long road that we walk, numbering our years at seventy or perhaps eighty years, if we are strong. The Psalm itself is rather melancholy and somber, saying, *"our days come to an end like a sigh"* and *"their span is only toil and trouble"*. It also speaks of God's anger and wrath that come as a response to our sins and transgressions. The psalmist tells us that it is an anger that is as great *"as the fear that is due"* God. The solemn mood of the Psalm reflects the thinking and the theology of the day. The Psalm was most likely written prior to the development of the Jewish theology that came to believe in a bodily resurrection. It was written within the understanding that death is the end. From the Psalm's perspective, life here on earth is but a small blip on the big radar screen of life. The Psalm is not written from the perspective that we have today - with the hope and promise of eternal life that we cling to as Christians who grieve with hope during our times of trial and loss.

The Psalm concludes with these words: *"So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart"*. We seek to gain a wise heart so that we can live into the deeper truth that we are each precious to God. We are not an insignificant blip on the radar. We each are invaluable to God. When we count our days, when we live them as if each were valuable and special, then we are living into the correct answer to the question, "How many shopping days left"? The correct answer is that it should not matter. We should live each day like it does not matter how many days we have left. Each day must be lived as if it counts like no other day. If tomorrow were my last day, I should live it just like I lived today. Knowing our final day should not change how we live each and every day of our life. We should count each of our days as if that day, those people we meet, what we say and do, were counted as if it were it were the only day we had to live.



Part of considering how we live out our days brings to mind thoughts of our bodily limits, of our humanity frailty, of the tenuous nature of life. It is precisely our fragility that makes our living so precious to us. It is the ticking of the clock and the other reminders of our mortality that makes each moment matter. We can take no day for granted. Each is precious. Each is important. When we live as if our days were limited or numbered, then we live each day well. We live as if each day mattered a great deal. We live each day closely connected to God and to our family and to our neighbors. We live well and we love well. We focus not on the temporal things of this earth but on the eternal things like love and hope and forgiveness. We see life as a precious gift, as a gift freely given by God. We

value each day and hour and moment as a sacred gift from our Creator. We live and love well as our grateful response to the wonderful gift of life from God.

As we come to a close, I would like to share a video that illustrates the thought process that I think would come to each of us if we knew the number of our days. The clip is called "Eighteen" because the woman in the video comes to find that she has eighteen days left. It does not matter if we have eighteen days or twenty days or seven weeks or three years or whatever amount of time we had left. The video reinforces the idea that life is precious, that each day is precious, and that we should live each day accordingly. Enjoy the video.

[Play video.]



Would you still sweep the house, do the laundry, finish that photo album? Would you live each day the same or would you do something new? Would you sing just a bit louder in church next Sunday if you knew it was your last Sunday? Would you savor each moment a little deeper and hug your children a little tighter? Would you offer forgiveness sooner and apologize quicker? Would you make that phone call? Our reality is that we should live each day as the precious gift from God that it is, loving and serving one another as the precious child of God that we each are. Each moment, hour, and day are gifts from God. In all we think, do, and say, may we bring God all the glory and honor and praise that He is due. May it be so for me. May it be so for you. Amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) How could your life be lived differently to better reflect the precious gift of God that our lives truly are?
- 2) We could all honor God better with the however many days we have left. Pray for God and the Holy Spirit to lead you to a more faithful daily life.
- 3) In what ways do you “count your days” as holy and sacred? How is the way you live your life an act of service to God and to your faith?