

## Psalm 90: 17-12, Mark 10: 17-31 “Treasure in Heaven”

Psalm 90: 17-12

So, teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.

Turn, O Lord! How long?

Have compassion on your servants!

Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love,

so 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 manifest to your servants,

and your glorious power to their children.

Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us,

and prosper for us the work of our hands—

O prosper the work of our hands!

It is said that Psalms collectively express a full and wide range of our emotions, longing, lament, thanksgiving, complaint, praise, joy, despair and hope... baring them all to God, knowing God is listening. A Psalmist may not speak for God as prophets do, but in the words of the Psalm, we can see the reflection of God as the psalmist engages God in conversation.

The psalm we just heard is presented as a prayer of Moses, the man of God. When God called Moses to be the one to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt, Moses was not at all confident. Moses trusted God whom he revered deeply, and he cared for his own people deeply, but he did not trust his own ability to be all that God needed him to be. So, when God called, all Moses could focus on was his own inadequacy, his “not-enough-ness.”

You may recall the excuse Moses gave God. “Me? Oh, no, they won’t listen to me, for I am not skilled with words.” God said, “okay, that’s true, and I’ll take care of that problem by giving you an assistant in Aaron. I’ll make up for where you fall short. Trust me.”

Once Moses stepped up and out on the journey through the wilderness, he had to deal with the whining and complaining bunch of ungrateful Israelites. They were not happy campers and blamed Moses and threatened his life. Moses had it tough. Being keenly aware of his own lack of ability and facing the enormity of his responsibility, he had to trust in God’s intention to save the people and God’s power to make Moses with his imperfection a perfect vessel to accomplish it.

The time and circumstances may be vastly different, but doesn’t Moses’ situation feel vaguely familiar to you? Have you ever been in a position where the responsibility you were given felt disproportionately heavy in light of your ability to meet it. It can be overwhelming if

not outright scary, paralyzing, even. Moses was someone who knew that feeling very well; Moses lived it and experienced God's constant help firsthand, every time he faced a challenge or stumbled.

Moses witnessed God's faithfulness and the psalmist has this Moses pray this prayer: Our days, when we "count it," living each day with attentiveness to where God might be at work, our days can make our hearts wise, but we need to be taught that by God. So we ask God to have compassion for us.

Moses' prayer teaches us God is a sustainer, and we can ask God to begin our days with all that we need for that day, so we can rejoice and be glad all our days, trusting in God's faithfulness day to day. We also remember what happened to God's daily provision of manna, when the people wanted to "be secure" and tried to hoard it to last.

Moses' prayer teaches us God knows our afflictions are real, and that all is not well with our world, and that we suffer evil, and we can ask God to overcome our suffering with joy. Moses' prayer teaches us, trusting in God's goodness, we can ask, even dare tell God to make God's work visible to us, and even cause our work to be fruitful.

The God we see reflected in this prayer of Moses is God the doer. It is God's to do all this for us for God's good pleasure. What is ours to do is to offer our imperfect, limited selves and the work of our hands to God in full trust. Yes, we have work that is ours to do, and yet, it is God who makes it fruitful and prosper when we offer our efforts for God's purpose.

When we feel the task is too hard and the responsibility is beyond our ability, whether it's because the problem is growing beyond control, or because our ability is shrinking for whatever reason, this prayer of Moses comforts us and gives us hope that God's faithfulness and will make us "enough" or even "perfect," as we are.

With this image of God in our minds, hear how the Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Mark, 10: 17-31.

As he was setting out on a journey, a man ran up and knelt before him, and asked him, 'Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' 18Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. 19You know the commandments: "You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; You shall not defraud; Honor your father and mother." ' 20He said to him, 'Teacher, I have kept all these since my youth.' 21Jesus, looking at him, loved him and said, 'You lack one thing; go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' 22When he heard this, he was shocked and went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

23 Then Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, ‘How hard it will be for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!’ 24And the disciples were perplexed at these words. But Jesus said to them again, ‘*Children*, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! 25It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.’ 26They were greatly astounded and said to one another, ‘Then who can be saved?’ 27Jesus looked at them and said, ‘For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.’ 28 Peter began to say to him, ‘Look, we have left everything and followed you.’ 29Jesus said, ‘Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, 30who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields, with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. 31But many who are first will be last, and the last will be first.’

In contrast to Moses who was so aware of his lack of ability to serve God and had to shift his focus from his inability to God’s ability to make him a “good servant,” what is striking about this man is that he seems to have it together, or at least he seems to think he does. He’s certainly a seeker, who knows, even with all that he has done and all that he possesses, his life is still somehow incomplete.

So, he seeks out Jesus to asks him what he must do to receive eternal life, to seal the deal. Little did he know he was asking Jesus who was starting back on his journey to Jerusalem, where his death awaited. When we hear this man knelt before him, it first sounded to me like he is humbling himself, but imagine him catchin up with Jesus who had started out on his journey and knelt before Jesus, he’s practically blocking Jesus from going, until he answered the man’s question. His move suggests “control.” He may seem humble but he may actually be manipulative here, controlling Jesus’ movement.

The man calls Jesus “Good Teacher.” To this man at that momnt, Jesus is not a son of God or God’s anointed Messiah but simply a “good teacher,” an accomplished mortal. He is thinking, he would find out from this good teacher what he did, and he would do the same to secure his eternal life.

When the man calls Jesus “Good teacher,” Jesus realizes that the man believes the key to eternal life is something a mortal person can achieve if he were “good.” So, Jesus immediately tells him only God is the bestower of goodness.

Then Jesus reminds him of the commandments, the work that that we are to do. When the man tells him he got them all covered, Jesus lovingly invites him to go deeper. Jesus does

not give him “more things to do” but tells him that he lacks One Thing; not one more thing but One Thing that is needful: to take his possessions that are giving him a false sense of security, and sell it and give the money to those who truly need them, those who, unlike him, suffer from material lack, and then his heart would be open to appreciate the Treasure in Heaven; the treasure he doesn’t have to worry about guarding because it’s God’s gift, the treasure that truly frees him and affords him eternal life. But you must let go of your earthly treasure first, for it is occupying the space where should be saved for God.

One Thing the man had to do was to shift from trusting his ability and his possessions to trusting Jesus who promises heavenly treasure and life of true value and meaning, the eternal life, now. And the man found himself unable to let go; he is not able to trust “heavenly treasure” that takes complete trust in the king of heaven to see, more than the earthly treasure that is in front of him.

By the way, this man was the first and the only person, when Jesus extends his personal invitation to “come and follow me” doesn’t. How tight is our grip on the earthly treasure, our earthly possessions, even though they burden us with worry of losing and infect us with greed to have more and more and more of it; it has power to make us miss what’s really important and valuable, even essential to our life, our eternal life.

In the culture Jesus lived in, material wealth was seen as God’s favor, so when Jesus said it is near impossible for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, even the disciples were surprised. If the rich person cannot be saved, who could? Rich or poor, anyone who relies on God can, but our possessions have power to make us believe possession can save us, buy us security and happiness.

The same can be said about our ability; our ability to do or create something can trick us into believing that’s what gives us our value, not God who uses us as we are. When we are young, our inability might motivate us to grow and learn and acquire skills. At the same time, we learn to put our trust in it. Unlike the children who have no power or status on their own, we grow up and start imagining we have power and status that are at our disposal.

When later, after we’ve lived some numbers of years and start to lose these abilities, we think down with them goes our value, forgetting God is the doer who make everything happen and the sustainer of our lives.

Whether you are one who laments the lack of gifts or skills and feel small, or one who is having hard time separating our accumulated wealth and honed skills as a mortal, from God-given value and God-given usefulness in God's kingdom, the Good News is, God is working on us, so we are able to make that shift to put God at the center of our heart and mind and soul. Then we have Treasure in Heaven.

Good and gracious God, thank you for the many blessings and gifts you have given us, especially the gift of grace in Jesus Christ. Forgive us when we hoard what you have given us because we are worried we won't have enough. Forgive us when we believe we have lost value in the world when we have lost abilities we once had. For you want so much more for us and nothing less than the treasure in heaven. Help us trust in your promise of eternal life here and now, that we may live obedient, joyful, and faithful lives as your children in your kingdom. Amen.