

**Christ Presbyterian Church**  
**Edina, Minnesota**  
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**Petey Crowder**  
**Moses: Summary/Moses' Death | Psalm 90, Deuteronomy 30 & 34**

It's good to be with you all this morning. I'm Petey Crowder, one of the pastors on staff. As Kathleen said in the Children's Sermon, we are wrapping up a series on Moses this weekend. For several months we've been looking at the life of Moses—this Old Testament character, this titan of faith of the Christian story—and as we wrap up our series, I want to ask you a trivia question. I'd love for you to turn to your neighbor and take a stab at this question: Who buried Moses? Who buried Moses?

<sup>5</sup> And Moses the servant of the LORD died there in Moab, as the LORD had said.

<sup>6</sup> He (God) buried him in Moab, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, but to this day no one knows where his grave is. [Deuteronomy 34:5-6]

If you said God buried Moses you are correct. Now I won't judge you for this, I asked our staff these questions and they didn't know this answer. In true confession, until I was studying for this weekend, I didn't know the answer either, but God was the one who buried Moses and I started to wonder why. Why did God Himself want to bury Moses? They were close friends, they knew each other face-to-face, and yet to the best of our understanding, the reason that God Himself buried Moses is He wanted the people to appropriately move on from Moses. He knew that they would be tempted to idolize Moses, to build a shrine to him, to fixate on him, and He knew for the good of the people they needed to be able to move on from Moses. But, before they move on from Moses, before we move on from Moses this weekend, we want to pause and consider, *where do we leave him?* Where do we leave the life of Moses? And to do that we're going to look at Psalm 90. Psalm 90 is traditionally understood as a Psalm of Moses and it's attributed to the end of his life. There's a well-known line in Psalm 90 that goes, "Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom." Christians have often thought about this passage in a very positive and upbeat sense, so if you imagine a recent day you've had that's gone really well—it can be a wedding, it can be you got a phone call that you got the job you were waiting on, it can be a graduation, it can be the perfect vacation to the lake—whatever it is, think about that great moment when everything went right and you think, *gosh, this is so good, let us live in these moments forever, God. Teach us to number our days.* Sometimes when we detach a passage like this from its context, it can become sort of a general Christian sentimentality, but I think when we look at Psalm 90 in its totality, we'll see that's not actually what this verse is getting at. In fact, it's much richer and deeper and more meaningful than we can imagine. Psalm 90 is actually what is called a psalm of lament. I'll explain lament after we read this Psalm. We're going to read Psalm 90 and I want you to imagine Moses saying these things as he stands on the edge of the Promised Land knowing that his life

is coming to an end and that he will not make it to God's Promised Land with God's people. I want you to imagine his emotion and emotional state of being as we read Psalm 90.

- <sup>1</sup> Lord, you have been our dwelling place  
throughout all generations.
- <sup>2</sup> Before the mountains were born  
or you brought forth the whole world,  
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.
- <sup>3</sup> You turn people back to dust,  
saying, "Return to dust, you mortals."
- <sup>4</sup> A thousand years in your sight  
are like a day that has just gone by,  
or like a watch in the night.
- <sup>5</sup> Yet you sweep people away in the sleep of death—  
they are like the new grass of the morning:
- <sup>6</sup> In the morning it springs up new,  
but by evening it is dry and withered.
- <sup>7</sup> We are consumed by your anger  
and terrified by your indignation.
- <sup>8</sup> You have set our iniquities before you,  
our secret sins in the light of your presence.
- <sup>9</sup> All our days pass away under your wrath;  
we finish our years with a moan.
- <sup>10</sup> Our days may come to seventy years,  
or eighty, if our strength endures;  
yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow,  
for they quickly pass, and we fly away.
- <sup>11</sup> If only we knew the power of your anger!  
Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your due.

So at this point, I hope you've picked up on this is not a happy psalm, right? Not a happy psalm.

- <sup>12</sup> Teach us to number our days,  
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

He goes on to say . . .

- <sup>13</sup> Relent, LORD! How long will it be?  
Have compassion on your servants.
- <sup>14</sup> Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love,  
that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.
- <sup>15</sup> Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us,  
for as many years as we have seen trouble.

<sup>16</sup> May your deeds be shown to your servants,  
your splendor to their children.  
<sup>17</sup> May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us;  
establish the work of our hands for us—  
yes, establish the work of our hands.  
[Psalm 90 (ESV)]

Psalm 90 is a psalm of lament. The other word for this category of psalms in the Old Testament is psalm of disorientation. A psalm of lament is a psalm of disorientation. It is primarily saying, “God, this is not how the world is supposed to be.” And don’t misunderstand, it’s not about saying, “God, this is awful. How dare You!” It’s about saying, “God, this is awful. Help! Because You are the only one who can get us out of this. Please, show us the way.”

We aren’t going to dwell on this idea of lament this morning, but I wanted you to see that a lament is about being honest about life, about coming before God and saying, “God, here’s how we feel. Here’s how life is. Here’s where we are. Here’s what’s going on.” A lament puts us in proper posture and perspective before God. And in the same way, the idea of teaching us to number our days is not about clinging to good days, it’s not about the good ol’ days, rather it’s teaching us to say before God, “You are God. Help us, show us the way.”

For about a half a century, the people of God had known nothing but relating to God through the person of Moses, and now they were going to have to learn what life without Moses would look like. In Psalm 90, Moses is trying to help them understand what a way forward might look like when he departs the scene and when his days are done. He’s teaching them (and teaching us) to number our days, to make the most out of life and the future that we’ve been given, even when those days don’t turn out the way we expected. So, in light of Psalm 90, what does it look like for us to “number our days”? The first thing is this: God doesn’t need us, but He chooses to include us in His work. He doesn’t need us, but He chooses to include us. I find it crazy that Moses doesn’t make it to the Promised Land. Moses! Moses doesn’t make it to the Promised Land. The people of God have to be thinking, *if He doesn’t make it, if life doesn’t turn out the way Moses expected, where does that leave us?*

After the Exodus, the Israelite people wandered through the desert. They kept making a mess out of their relationship with God and their relationship with each other. They were practically inventing new ways to sin in the desert and because of this, God makes them walk in the desert even longer—for 40 years—before they get to the Promised Land. Forty years! When it’s written on paper it doesn’t seem like that long, but it’s longer than I’ve been alive. That’s a long time. They wandered in the desert wondering what their future with God would look like. If God doesn’t need people, if there’s anybody that God doesn’t need, it’s these Israelites, and yet for some reason, God decides that He loves

them and He chooses to use them. God does not need us; doesn't need anyone of us no matter how important we are, but He chooses to invite us into His family and into His work. One of the hardest things for us to get our heads and our hearts around is that if God invites us into His work, we're a part of His activity in the world. What's hard about that is we'd rather that God be a part of what we are doing, right? We'd rather just say, "God, here's what I have in mind. Would You bless it? Would You make it work?" But instead, God invites us into what He's doing. If we're honest, it sometimes feels like a demotion. We thought we were going to get to run the company, but it's God. Or, it's like we've been running for class election every year, and the same kid gets elected every time. It's God again, right? But that's not the way to think about it. I don't want you to think about submitting your life to God's work as a demotion or as a loss. I want you to think about it as getting something better than you could have ever imagined on your own. It is actually a promotion in life.

Take Moses. Take Moses on the edge of the Promised Land and ask, "Moses, if you could go back 50 years, would you spend your life as a prince and a ruler in Pharaoh's palace in Egypt OR would you take the Israelites, God's people, on this journey through the Exodus, through the wilderness with all of the heartbreak, and struggle, and thrills, and adventure? What would you choose, Moses?" What would you choose? I know it would be tempting to choose the comfortable life in the palace, but don't think for one second that Moses wouldn't choose to walk with God in obscurity in the desert for the last 50 years. He would choose it every single time. We know this because look at how he begins Psalm 90; look at verse 2.

<sup>2</sup> Before the mountains were born  
or you brought forth the whole world,  
from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

<sup>3</sup> You turn people back to dust,  
saying, "Return to dust, you mortals."

<sup>4</sup> A thousand years in your sight  
are like a day that has just gone by,  
or like a watch in the night.

Moses is saying, *I understand who God is. I understand who I am. I have numbered my days. I know who I am in relationship to God and there is nothing more important in the whole world.* Moses could have been a very important man in the eyes of the world, but instead he followed God through the desert to face hardships and frustration. At the end of his life, Moses reflected back and counted the days, and he understood his mortality. He knew that a life spent in Pharaoh's palace would have ended the exact same way as a life spent walking with God in the desert except for one thing: he wouldn't have been with God. He wouldn't have experienced the transformation and the challenges of a life in the presence of God. In Psalm 90, Moses is saying that even though life is short, and it's certainly not always easy, it is not meaningless because God chooses to use us.

To number our days means that the journey doesn't leave us unscathed, but it does leave us transformed. These days, people, myself included, post their best pictures on things like Facebook and Instagram, right? We took some fun family pictures Thanksgiving weekend that might end up on a Christmas card. We like to put our best pictures out there online for other people to see. And imagine what would it look like for Moses and the Israelites to have had social media. If they had Snapchat, Instagram, or Facebook, what would they have posted? Would we have seen beautiful family photos at the foot of Mt. Sinai? Would we have seen them gathered around a nice meal of quail and manna? Would we have seen them walking on their road trips across the desert? I've seen nice road trip pictures. What would we have seen?

We know that in our lives we are tempted to ignore the ugly, boring, and mundane days. The days filled with struggles. The majority of our lives are not picture perfect, and that was true for the Israelites as well. The majority of their lives were not picture worthy. They had a long, hard road, and I lives full of heartache, struggles, and failures. When we learn to number our days, we will not be numbering a bunch of perfect photo-friendly opportunities. They'll exist, they'll be great, but they'll be the exception. Walking with God is not intended to be an easy journey for perfect people. Consider how Moses ends the psalm as he has reflected how challenging life can be.

<sup>17</sup> May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us;  
establish the work of our hands for us—  
yes, establish the work of our hands.

Yes, establish the work of our hands. Moses has lamented how hard life can be, but then he goes on to say to God, "Make our work in our lives count." This isn't someone saying life is short, and hard, and worthless. This is someone saying *life is short, and it's hard. It's not always easy, but man, let's not waste it. Let's not waste it.*

On a lot of Monday and Wednesday mornings, I wake up at 4:45AM and I join some friends at a park in Edina at 5:15AM to workout. Let that sink in for a second; it's foolishness! So, 5:15AM I meet these guys for a 60-minute boot camp style workout—lots of sprinting, and burpies, and pushups, and honestly, I don't know why I'm there. Just kidding. They let me tag along. These guys are in incredible shape. They wear us out. It's the hardest thing. During the workout I feel like, *man, I may not make it off this field today.* My favorite part of the workout is when it's over. We gather around and we pray together and sometimes a friend will read Scripture over us, and the thing about it is, I never enjoy getting up at 4:45AM. I never think during the workout, *man, this is fun!* But at the end of it, I've never once regretted making it. I've never once regretted being there. I've never once regretted how challenging and difficult the workout was. See, the transformation comes when our days are full of sweat and toil and struggle and sometimes even heartache and heartbreak. Those days are hard, but they are not wasted. They're not wasted. Moses is showing us that when you choose a life with God, expect that there will be hard times and hard days and there will be good times, but regardless, the days will not be wasted when you're learning to number them.

The third thing that I want you to see is that numbering our days means expanding our capacity to see our lives as a part of something bigger. In the first section of Psalm 90, Moses laments how hard it is to be a human. In the last section he pleads with God: *give us some favor; life has been hard. Let us have some good days as well.* In between those two things he gives a challenge: teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom. For Moses, this is how the people of God will live into the future in the Promised Land that he intends for them. This is not just empty sentimentality. This is a man on the edge of a Promised Land looking bleary eyed into the future, and challenging the people to not settle for anything less than for who God intends them to be and what God has planned for them. For them and for us, to not settle is to have our capacity for seeing our lives as a part of something bigger, expanded. We have to see with great humility, like Moses, that our life is not about us. We're part of a much bigger story and this is how Moses handles such great disappointment and loss. When life isn't how Moses expects it to be, he understands his life is part of a bigger picture, and all of a sudden those disappointments are turned into all kinds of possibilities that he did not know were even there.

Several years ago I was in Dallas and I started volunteering with an organization called Back on My Feet. Back on My Feet starts running clubs at homeless shelters. There were runners like myself who didn't live at the shelter, and there were resident runners who lived at the shelter and came out to run with us. I was part of the very first group that ran with that organization there. When we began, we met these guys and we got them all outfitted with running shoes and running gear, and it just so happened there were some young homeless men, particularly this guy in the middle—his name is Mike—(shows picture) who had been athletes. They played basketball and football and they were fast, right? And so, we got there for our very first run, we huddled and talked about what we were going to do...we were going to run this 3 mile route through downtown. We were going to go here and there and here and back. It sounded really easy. So we take off, and Mike and a couple of other guys sprint out the gate. They are flying for one block, two blocks—we can't keep up with them—by the third block they were out of breath because they knew what it was like to sprint, but they had never run distance. They couldn't even look at what it would look like to run a mile, or three miles, without stopping, much less a 10k, or a half marathon, or a marathon. And so, we got to work with these guys and with lots of homeless people in Dallas on what would it look like to start running longer distances and to get beyond that sprint, right? They learned that running can be about so much more than just running as hard as you can for a few blocks. And when it comes to life under our own power, our own strength and our own imaginations, all we can see is the short sprint. Sprinting to get everything done, sprinting to make as much as possible, sprinting to keep up with everyone around us... numbering our days teaches us to slow down, to open up our perspective, to look around, and to see that bigger thing, the thing that's not even in our imagination, yet. When the sprint of life wears us out, hang on and slow down; there's something more.

Number your days. Understand who you are.

How many of us spend our days, spend our lives, sprinting from busyness to busyness, from chaos to chaos, without ever slowing down to take stock? How many of us are constantly looking for the next best thing, pursuing greener pastures while ignoring and missing the beautiful, everyday ways that God desires us to pay attention in the here and now? Moses would say those are not ways to live wisely. For Moses, a wise life, a life well lived, was not an easy life, but it was a life spent before God with our hands out saying, "God, You are in charge. I am not. Teach us to number our days."

Let me speak for just a moment to Moses' hopes and dreams for God's people. Moses laments the lot of humanity; he laments the brokenness of life in the way the world is working for them. The way a lament worked was they would say, "God, this is awful, but You are the only one that can help us." Right? So, when Moses said, "This stinks. This isn't working. This is broken", the Israelites proper response to a lament would be, "Yes, Moses, EXCEPT, don't forget . . . God is with us." And so, for us, on this side of the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, we can lament and say, *life is not how we expected. Life did not turn out well. Things are broken, things are messed up. This stinks.* And then we can say, "Yes, except don't forget that Jesus has redeemed us and offered us hope in this life and in the next. So, when you and I have said yes to Jesus as our Lord, as our hope, as our present and our future, then we have the calling on our lives to number our days so that we can live wisely and well. This is not just about personal spirituality; this is about taking stock of our lives and acting accordingly. Numbering our days means making the most of the time we've been given, especially when life doesn't go our way, when life doesn't turn out how we expected or intended.

Moses's life does not end how he expected. We've spent the last couple of months looking at all of the amazing things Moses did and experienced, and yet here's where he ends up on the outside of the Promised Land, on the edge. He doesn't even get to go in, but I don't want us to shed a tear for Moses. Don't shed a tear for Moses. What Moses has been doing there, what he's been doing all along has been numbering his days. Moses understood that God didn't need him, but he's thankful that God chose to use him. He's seen that life has not always been easy, but God has always been at work transforming him. And Moses has seen that his life was a part of something bigger, something that God was doing. It was never about Moses. So, all along the journey and even now on the edge of the Promised Land, Moses has been doing something amazing and beautiful; he's simply been pointing the way. Moses has been pointing the way to God and pointing the way to the Promised Land. Oh man, that you and I would have such a glorious fate to live and die pointing the way to Jesus and His kingdom.

In just a minute we are going to stand and say a prayer together in closing this series. There will be some lines that I say, and some that we say in unison. It's from a book by

an Old Testament scholar named Walter Brueggemann called, *Prayers for a Privileged People*, and this one is about Moses and the Exodus journey. It's called *On Leaving Bondage . . . Yet Again*. We tell this story. As Christians we tell this story of Moses because it's the story of who we are. It's the story that we want to tell over and over because it gets deep in our bones and helps us understand as Christ followers in our day and time what it looks like to be people like Moses and the Israelites—on our way from slavery to glorious life under the care of the God who redeems us, and loves us, dwells among us, and has a future for us.

Brueggemann Prayer  
On Leaving Bondage . . . Yet Again (181)

Leader: Now we depart, as our ancestors always departed.

**Unison: We leave, some of us encouraged, some of unscathed, some of us energized, all of us weary.**

Leader: We leave to depart to a better place...

**Unison: Home . . . where we will be welcomed with varying measures of eagerness, resentment, responsiveness, or anxiety.**

Leader: We pray for good departures, in the way our ancestors left Egypt, that we may leave the grind of productivity...

**Unison: . . . and the hunger of craven ambition.**

Leader: That we may leave for a place of wondrous promise...

**Unison: . . . visited en route by bread from heaven and water from rocks.**

Leader: We pray for big departures, like those of our ancient parents...

**Unison: . . . that we may leave where we have been, and how we have been, and who we have been.**

Leader: To follow Your better lead for us . . .

**Unison: . . . You, who gives new place, new mode, new self.**

Leader: We pray, each of us, to travel in mercy . . .

**Unison: . . . that we be on our way rejoicing, arriving in wonder, love and praise.**

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.