

## Psalm 90

*Teach us to number our days aright, that we might gain a heart of wisdom*

Living in the West can have domesticating effect on our understanding of God. As we look up to the skyline we see monuments to man's greatness – we see skyscrapers dwarfing the spires of churches that once dominated a town, and high overhead a jumbo jet proclaims our mastery of the heavens. On the ground we see testament to our progress and introspection as people walk busily past engaged on their mobile phones or palm pilots or mini disc players. Where in all this is the God who created the heavens and the earth?

Of course he is still there, but it can be hard for us to see him. It can be hard to see beyond our own lives to the God who is from everlasting to everlasting. When we are removed from our protective technological bubbles and forced to see the reality of our frailty we see what sophistication has hidden from us; that life is so transitory... full of promise one moment and swept out of our hands the next; that death is a reality that comes to us all and that it comes at the hands of a God from whom nothing is hidden. We may try to persuade ourselves that we are 'ok', but God sees our 'secret sins', he knows our iniquities and his wrath is upon us. As the psalmist says, 'who knows the power of your anger? For your wrath is as great as the fear that is due to you.'

We cannot hide from God's wrath but we do our best to hide the knowledge of his wrath from our eyes. We take refuge in the safety of our world and do not fear the one from whom no secrets are hid, yet how dangerous and myopic a perspective this is when God can, 'sweep men away in the sleep of death; they are like the new grass of the morning – though in the morning it springs up new, by evening it is dry and withered'.

However death retunes our vision and reorients us back towards God. The psalmist goes on to say, 'Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom'. As we contemplate our humble beginnings and our dusty endings we are reminded that God is sovereign, and that he is more awesome and terrifying than we could imagine. We are reminded that death is the penalty we pay for having rejected him and that trouble and sorrow are the hallmarks of living in a fallen world – the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

We cannot fear the God we do not know, yet as we get to know him and see his awesome might, so also we know him as our refuge and our dwelling place. There is joy to be found in the sorrow and toil of our fallen lives for the Lord is compassionate. His love is unfailing so even though life is full of trouble and strife still yet his love satisfies us, fills us to the very core, that we may be able to sing for joy and be glad all our days – no mean feat given what we have seen of the depth of his wrath at our sinfulness and the tyranny of death. Yet is that not the splendour of the cross? As we look at our own death we are terrified by God's wrath, but as we look at Jesus' death we rejoice at his unfailing love. Death is truly the key to life.

## Questions for Discussion

- **In hospital death is mostly regarded as defeat. In what ways does this attitude:**
  - **Demonstrate that we haven't understood vs3-6?**
  - **Give people a realistic hope?**
  - **Provide an unhelpful environment for the dying?**
  - **Mean many people are even more poorly prepared for the inevitable?**
  
- **Many people fear death. Discuss some of the reasons this might be. How can you offer these people comfort?**
  
- **Many people say they do not fear death. If these people are not Christians how can you show them that there might after all be something to be afraid of?**
  
- **The psalmist seeks to balance a right fear of the Lord, with a knowledge of his compassion and love. How might this be part of the answer to the psalmist's plea in v12?**