

“Wise Beyond Our Years” – Pr Jim Sprengle – New Year’s Eve December 31, 2023

- I. **Psalm 90:12** – “So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.”
- II. **They say wisdom comes with time.**
 - a. Tonight, we reflect on the time God has given us, and just how quickly things can change.
 - b. It reminds me of E.J. Smith, the captain of a large passenger liner, who led his passengers in a Sunday morning devotion.
 - i. The worship service included the song, “Our God, Our Help in Ages Past,” which has one line in it that says...
 1. Time, like an ever-rolling stream, Soon bears us all away; We fly forgotten, as a dream, Dies at the op’ning day (LSB 733).
 - ii. About 16 hours after that worship service, 1502 people from among the passengers and crew of that ship experienced how quickly life can end after the Titanic sank in the freezing waters of the Atlantic.
 - iii. That hymn is based on our Psalm we read tonight, Psalm 90... and they were written to remind us how fast time can go... and how short our lives can be.
 - c. I suppose we all have stories of people who died to soon, or who were doing great one day and gone the next.
 - i. In fact, here at Ascension, that seems to be a regular occurrence as we see the gaps and spaces that were once occupied by our members in these very pews.
 - ii. None of us should take for granted the gift of time we have, because in a moment’s notice, everything in our world can change drastically.
 - d. I’m not sure if it comes with age, or if it’s wisdom that shows us how short and fragile life can be... but it does seem like the older we get, the more we recognize that life is too short.
 - i. Verse 10 says that the “years of our life are soon gone, and we fly away.”
 - ii. I know that our lives seem important right now, but how many of us can name our great-great-grandparents and talk about their lives in detail?
 - iii. Even the headstones at our graves will break down and go away over time – and they are supposed to be there so people don’t forget us!
- III. **Our psalm tonight reminds us of how quickly our lives come to an end.**
 - a. Moses writes this psalm after seeing an entire generation of people die in the desert, wandering for forty years after being freed from Egypt.
 - i. He is even considering his own life and how it will come to an end too
 - ii. He describes life like it’s something that can be washed away by heavy rains, or like falling asleep and just waking up without realizing

how much time has passed... or like grass that gets cut and grows back before we know it. (vs 5)

- iii. Moses knew God from a different perspective than probably any other person in history – as he spent time on Mt. Sinai with God, spent time in the Tent of Meeting with Him, and experienced a closeness that we can only imagine.
 - 1. Moses knows God, and so he tries to give a little picture of the eternal nature of the Lord.
 - 2. A thousand years might go by, and it's like a few hours to God... or like looking back on a few errands we ran yesterday.
 - a. For us, a thousand years is hard to comprehend – yet for God it's just a short time in the scheme of His eternal nature. (vs 4)

IV. **We don't like to be reminded of how quickly time passes.**

- a. It usually takes the form of slowly seeing our bodies change... our health change... or others in our lives that pass away... and then we recognize that time is going too fast.
- b. We might try to forget about our impending death by killing time, by filling it with all kinds of stuff that doesn't matter.
 - i. Today is especially bad with time wasters like social media and the Internet to lose hour after hour.
- c. Some people try to cheat death – taking every supplement known to man... exercising... or getting procedures to make them look a few years younger.
- d. Others try to make the world remember them forever by leaving behind a legacy.
 - i. We had a Jewish friend who gave us money to buy a tree in his honor... and yes, we remember Dave when we look out back at our tree... but how long does a tree last?
 - ii. Others will donate to an institution or project and get their name on it... or maybe a plaque on a wall... but again, how long do buildings last?
 - iii. Sometimes people just realize death is coming and they throw up their hands and just do whatever they feel like doing...
 - 1. I'm gonna die anyway, so who cares if I get drunk all the time, waste money, and live selfishly? It's all pointless anyway...
- e. But Moses helps us to have a heart of wisdom... knowing that all our efforts and hard work to avoid death have no impact in the end.
 - i. The sand is flowing through the hourglass no matter what you do... or what you think... and it doesn't slow down for anyone.
 - ii. He says that we might live 70, or even 80 years... and okay, today's medicine and technology might get you past 100... but not much more.

- iii. It's just Moses being honest... in the big scheme of things, we cannot cheat death... because death is a part of the human condition.

V. **Death is in our lives because sin is in our lives.**

- a. Moses knows God, but he is also intimately aware of sin and its destructive nature on people.
- b. The sin that Adam and Eve passed down was abundantly clear in the lives of the Israelites who were led out of Egypt – as time and time again they turned their backs on God and His love for them.
- c. Not only does sin lead to disobedience and rebellion, it leads to death.
 - i. That's why Moses seems so hopeless in this psalm... our lives are all the same... broken by sin and end in the grave.
 - ii. Moses knows that no matter how we spin it, we can't put on a happy face and pretend we are fine.
 - iii. Well, we are not fine... and that is why God had a plan to restore and redeem us – even our death.

VI. **God loves us too much to let us simply return to dust.**

- a. The wonderful Christmas story that we've been talking about all last week is the key to having a life with meaning.
 - i. In Jesus, we have an answer to all the problems of death and sin.
 - ii. Not that they don't harass us and cause us trouble while we are in this life... but they don't win!
 - iii. The victory is in the Christ Child who grew up to die for our sins and rise again to conquer death forever.
 - iv. He gives us a reason to live... He gives us a purpose... and He gives us the meaning of life.
- b. With Jesus, our actions and choices do have eternal consequences.
 - i. Though we might not be remembered forever by those around us now, in the eternity called heaven, all those we touched with the love and power of Christ will know us.
 - ii. Whenever we love people with an eye for eternity and the power of Jesus, we are living with a heart of wisdom.
 - iii. God gives us a whole new lease on life – not because we are pretending that death isn't there – but because we know in spite of death that our lives have great significance in the kingdom.
- c. Yes, we might only live to 70, 80, or who knows, but with Christ, we are always wise beyond our years. Amen.