

#1972—October 11, 2009—“Hall of Presidents”—15

[Gauger:] *Moody Presents* the Hall of Presidents.

[Easley:] Circumstances in your life can make you question the reality of your faith. It may not be a crisis; it may not be some terrible thing. It may just be sort of the course of life.

[Gauger:] With a legacy look at the men who shaped the school that Moody founded, this is *Moody Presents*, the Hall of Presidents, and I'm Jon Gauger, welcoming you to what promises to be a very special broadcast today, as we hear a message from Dr. Michael Easley, eighth president of the Moody Bible Institute. Maybe you heard him on his daily *PROCLAIM!* broadcast. Well, Dr. Easley came to Moody in 2005 directly from a pastorate near Washington, DC, just outside the Beltway. A fascinating point in his career of ministry, as many of his church congregates came from Congress, from the Pentagon, from the White House itself. Dr. Easley came to Moody with an enduring, lifelong love for the men and women of our armed services, but he also brought with him a wealth of scriptural background, knowledge, and experience, and a very special love for the Psalms. Just something about the Psalms ... You get the idea as you listen to Dr. Easley that this was home base for him. This is where he really seemed to come alive. In his weekly president's chapel he would often choose one of the Psalms as his text—Psalm 90 one of those messages, one of those texts, and it's a message that we'll hear today on *Moody Presents*. Walk with us now down the Hall of Presidents as we hear from Dr. Michael Easley on *Moody Presents*, the Hall of Presidents.

[Easley:] Midlife crises are for old, indolent, passionless people, not people who just turned thirty. As I started reading some in this area, I self-diagnosed and was confirmed by others that, yes, I was in a midlife funk.

Circumstances in your life can make you question the reality of your faith. It may not be a crisis; it may not be some terrible thing. It may just be sort of the course of life. You realize how quickly things are going and how bored you might be, how existential you might have become. From a theological lens, life is incredibly short because of sin, and God is yet eternal. These two tensions exist in the heart of a believer in Jesus Christ.

That's what Psalm 90 is about. It's about a short life because of our sin over against the eternity of God. “O God, our help in ages past”—Isaac Watts took the words from Psalm 90 and turned them into a beautiful hymn of the faith. “Our hope for years to come, our shelter from the stormy blast and our eternal home”—ripped from the page of Psalm 90 in your Book.

Now, God's eternity as you weigh it over against man's brevity is really sort of a silly study. That's part of what Moses is going to help us see. We deserve God's wrath because of our sinfulness. Life is short because of our sinfulness. Over against this is a holy and eternal God who cares for us.

If you look at your Bible it may have something at the superscription that says, “A prayer of Moses, the man of God.” It is attributed to Mosaic authorship. It probably occurred at some point in his life when he was sort of in this place of existential “what's it about?” Some believe it's when he buried Miriam, his sister, and Aaron, his brother, and he stands on the cusp of inhabiting the land but not yet inhabiting. Maybe it's at some depressing point in his life. We don't know for sure, but we can sure look at the story of the exodus and know there were ample times to be discouraged, ample times to be tired, ample times to be disappointed. Perhaps Numbers 20 is the backdrop for that. It's the oldest of your Psalms, written before any of the

other 149 as they're counted in your English Bible. It is the oldest Psalm in the Psalter. Let's look at it in some detail.

First of all, the psalmist makes a declaration of God's eternity, the weight of God over against the brevity of man, beginning with God's eternity. "Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God." Moses declares that God's been his dwelling place. God in a relationship with him has been the place where he dwells. The word *dwelling* here can be used for a place of protection or a place of shelter. If you keep in mind the wilderness wanderings, forty years in the desert, forty years in the sand, forty years of a parched mouth always dealing with issues of water, they've known forty years of a cloud by day from the oppressive heat and a cloud illumined by night with a blanket of warmth in the freezing cold desert nights. For forty years every day the cloud overhead. They don't move unless the cloud moves. When the cloud stops they stop. The very presence of God over them for all those years ... They have seen the protection and the shelter of God.

Secondly, Moses declares the eternal nature of God. "Before the mountains ... the earth ..." He's using an illustration for the ancient near-Eastern mind that would be very common to them. The ancient near-Eastern mind would see "'Before the mountains ... the earth ...' No one can think back that far!" That's how long God has been a shelter, because God has always existed, the psalmist says. He's always protected us. He's always been our dwelling place.

Now, the psalmist acknowledges that God, not a locale, is a place of dwelling. "You are our dwelling place." Now think about this for a moment. Isn't it amazing when you travel how your heart is tugged toward home? It's compounded if you're far away and you get sick. It doesn't matter how exotic or wonderful the care may be or the people might be; you want to be where? Home. Think about these people for forty years in the wilderness wanting a place to rest. God has sewn in your heart and mine the longing for a home, the longing for a dwelling place. Why is it when we get to these seasons of our lives we feel like we have to go back to our roots? "I'm going to go back to Texas," or "I'm going to go back to ..." "I was born in North Carolina. My kin are in North Carolina." "My family is in Oregon." We have this pull. Why is that? Have you ever wondered why you're pulled toward "home," whatever that might be in your experience? It's not just geography; it's relationship, or a combination of things.

Forty years of Moses' 120 years, he's not at home. He longs. He's developed in those tents and in the sand and the sun and the heat and the manna and the water issues and the grumbling Israelites the sense that "God, You're home. You're the place of dwelling. That's where I want to be." Isn't it interesting that they never entered rest? They never found home, because home was in God, and in God's provision, and following the Law of God, and they never found it.

God's eternal. Over against the weight of His eternity, the psalmist then compares God and man. It's a ludicrous comparison, but he wants the prayer, the song, the reader to understand that God is eternal; think about yourself in brevity for just a few moments (vv. 3–12). Follow as I read verses 3–6:

You turn man back into dust and say, "Return, O children of men." For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it passes by, or as a watch in the night. You have swept them away like a flood, they fall asleep; in the morning they are like grass which sprouts anew. In the morning it flourishes and sprouts anew; toward evening it fades and withers away.

Moses uses a few metaphors to show the brevity of man. He wants to compare the eternity of God over the short, fragile life of man. The first one we might call a material comparison. *Glory* is often described as the weight of God. The weight of God turns man back into dust. There is a wordplay in verse 3: turning back into dust/"Return, O children of men." You turn them into dust; You return them into men. It's a wordplay. You'll see it in a minute developed a little bit more. It's a unique word found in Genesis 3:19, about being pulverized or ground into something. Moses says, "You grind man into nothing. That's who You are against the frailty of man."

Secondly, it's time. He uses the metaphor we often think about: A thousand years is as a day or yesterday in God's sight. It's fleeting. A thousand years would be like ten-plus times a normal person's lifetime. "Even ten times a normal lifetime is nothing to You, God," Moses says. Any of us who've traveled with children know our own impatience with time. We're all like that. You get on the road, and it's "When will we be there? Are we there yet?" "We just left the house." "Are we there yet?" So we buy TVs and videos to occupy our children for ninety minutes, and as soon as it's off, "Are we there yet?" It's just like a day—no, it's like an eternity when you're driving that car, right? It's like an eternity when you're a child on those trips. Just a day—it's ludicrous to compare that with God.

Verses 7 and 8: "For we have been consumed by Your anger and by Your wrath we have been dismayed. You have placed our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your presence." Moses acknowledges that God's wrath comes because of man's sinfulness. God's wrath is partly due to the sin of man and partly due to God's grace to deal with man. If we live forever in a sinful estate, we would be forever miserable. Moses says, "God's wrath comes because sin came in."

He developed it a little more. The psalmist says, "We try to hide our sins." We carry out sin in clandestine locations. People don't have affairs in public areas or where they're going to be found out. They plan a clandestine location with their lover somewhere off the track of their normal life. People don't watch pornography at work where it can be seen; they watch it in the privacy of their home or on their computer or on their notebook computer when they travel in a hotel or in the hotel room, thinking they are not seen. If it were not a shameful thing, we'd do it at home in front of the children. We're very clever with the way we cover our sin. We do it in a shameless way.

Sin always leads to separation. Sin always leads to death. That's what happened to Adam. He was removed from a garden fellowship with God because of his sin. Sin separates us from those we love. It separates us from Jesus Christ. It separates our relationship and fellowship. The psalmist says, "Your sin is known to God." It will always be exposed. So he calls on us to understand that this is why the wrath of God comes. "You're consumed. Your anger has come. Wrath has come. You've placed our iniquities before You, and it is because of that that our days are so short."

There are two sides to that. One is that the wrath of God will deal with the sin; the other is it will end man's sinful estate. God places it in full view.

Verses 9 and 10: "For all our days have declined in Your fury; we have finished our years like a sigh. As for the days of our life, they contain seventy years, or if due to strength, eighty years, yet their pride is but labor and sorrow; for soon it is gone and we fly away."

[Gauger:] In case you've joined us midstream, that's the voice of Dr. Michael Easley, eighth president of the Moody Bible Institute. His message today from Psalm 90 is part of the eighteen

messages we've packaged together in our Hall of Presidents series. It's available at moodypresents.mbn.org. Eighteen messages on nine CDs—we're calling it the Hall of Presidents. Check it out at moodypresents.mbn.org. Now the conclusion of Dr. Michael Easley's message from Psalm 90.

[Easley:] If Moses wrote this after his eightieth year, which he most likely did, it would be interesting to hear these words through his voice. It says, "Man's a sinner. Since he's under God's condemnation and wrath, his days have been cut short." That was what moving out of the garden and the flood was all about, to shorten man's days so he didn't live forever in his sinful estate. So the metaphor ... Many of us know the old hymns about how we all fly away. It just goes quickly, and we fly away. It's a fleeting, quick life.

Verses 11 and 12: "Who understands the power of Your anger and Your fury, according to the fear that is due You? So teach us to number our days, that we may present to You a heart of wisdom." No one understands God's wrath. No one is really afraid of God the way we should be afraid of God. "Teach us these things. Help us understand Your anger. Help us understand Your awesome, reverential respect that is due to You so that we will live carefully in the days we have."

Our culture hates the idea of calling anything *sin* or pointing out anything as scandalous or shameful. It's interesting how it's pushed out of the corners into the light of day, isn't it? When we live in a shameless culture and a shameless context, we have totally forgotten that there's a holy God who wants something of us other than ... Our life is so brief. Our life is so quick. God is eternal. His wrath came to end the dilemma of man's sinful life. So the psalmist says, "Number your days." He implores us to wisdom to count our days; they're few.

So God's eternal, man's brief because of his sin, and thirdly, he appeals to God's compassion in verses 13 and following. "Do return, O Lord; how long will it be? And be sorry for Your servants. O satisfy us in the morning with Your lovingkindness, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days. Make us glad according to the days You have afflicted us, and the years we have seen evil."

The psalmist now appeals to God based on His loving-kindness. In light of man's brevity, in light of his sinful estate, the psalmist says, "God, there's nothing I can do. I need Your help. I can't fix the situation, so I need Your loving-kindness." A good counterpart for the New Testament mind is "I need grace here, God, Your grace on me, because apart from Your loving-kindness, there is no hope for me."

This part of the psalm is beautifully and structurally connected to the first part of the psalm, where he's comparing again this eternity of God, the desperate context of sin, and now he's pleading to God, "Give me loving-kindness." Look back in verse 3. It says, "You turn, You pulverize men into dust and say, 'Return, O children of men.'" Then we come to this verse, verse 13. "Do return. Don't just pulverize us back to nothing, God. You return. You come this way and in Your loving-kindness help us." That's the only way to reverse it. God exiled them from the garden because of sin; it will take God to remedy it again.

Not only does he ask for God's loving-kindness, for His *hesed*, but he asks for joy. Now, this is sort of interesting. It's one thing to ask God for His grace, mercy, and loving-kindness; it's another to ask God for joy. Why? It implicates that he's not joyful right now. You don't ask God for joy when you're happy and joyful; you ask God for joy when you're not joyful, right? He's asking Him to make him glad. Fully deserving of God's wrath, Moses says, "The only place I can

appeal is to Your loving-kindness. And while I'm at it, make me joyful, because I'm not. Help my days become joyful days, not just grinding out, laborious days."

The request to me feels anxious. "Return ... how long ... in the morning ..." There's this anxiety he has, and this compression of his time he understands. He wants joy to come in the morning. There's been a night of trouble; but "joy cometh in the morning," the psalmist writes. In the New Testament we have a balance of this request. This is a modest prayer in the New Testament, where Paul prays in 2 Corinthians 4:17 that "our momentary light affliction produces the eternal weight of glory." We are so consumed with our here-and-now pain that we don't understand the bigger picture of it, Paul and Moses say.

He continues in verse 16, "Let Your work appear to Your servants and Your majesty to their children. Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us; and confirm for us the work of our hands; yes, confirm the work of our hands." For forty years Moses had been given the assignment of taking them out of Egypt. Now in the wilderness on the cusp of the Promised Land for forty years ... I believe he lived to be 120. You look at his life in forties. This is the horrible forties. Under that he watches all those people over twenty die and all those younger people grow. Then he's on the cusp of the land, and he has got, I think, an existential view of his spiritual life right now. "Forty years of this? Confirm the work of our hands! Let us see something here."

The psalm is interesting because he says, "Your work appear to Your servants." Not our work—"Let Your work." What was Your work? To get us out of Egypt's slavery and into a land of our own based on the Abrahamic covenant. We'd be a blessing and we'd possess land and You would bless us if we were in You, followed Your Law, obeyed Your covenant, You would give us this rest that we've not yet attained. He says, "God, make that work happen. Let Your work appear to Your servants." "The days we've seen evil"—he wants this sort of compensatory blessing. "We've been afflicted in evil; let us see some good. Let us see some blessing." In verse 16 is a rare form of the word *work*, which is akin to grace. "Let Your grace, let Your accomplished work, appear to Your servants. Let us see the work of our hands."

So we're finite, and we need infinite help. We are brief; we need eternal assistance. Look at four lessons about this from a prayer perspective. The psalm is a prayer. The psalm is a hymn. It's to be read and sung. So the hymnology teaches us a number of things. Let's just look at four areas we can pray about.

Number one, pray for a broken heart toward your own sin. As a nation and as a people, we are in a strange and awkward and anxious and fearful time. Once in a while we can get so carried away by the course of the national and global events that we sort of lose our mooring spiritually. That's true for every one of us. I would caution all of us against pride or arrogance, and I would exhort us to be humble and repentant and take our sin very, very, very seriously. Beyond wars and waging of wars and right and wrong, the believer in Jesus Christ has one issue between him and his Lord, and it's keeping a short account of our sins. In reality, that's all you can "do" in your sanctification process—admit your sin. That's all you can really do. Confess it. We toy with it. We coddle it. We're proud of it. We hide it. We put it in a closet where no one can see. We'd be ashamed if it came out.

I don't want to sound like a prophet, but I think a lot of the times we're in a mess because the believer in Jesus Christ is living in the slums. It's not an indictment. It's simple to address. It's not that we lather up prayer and repentance and then God blesses us. That's not the point. But you've got to wonder sometimes. We look so much like the culture. More and more we act like the culture. We talk like the culture. We play like the culture. We hoard like the culture. We fear

like the culture. We celebrate what the culture celebrates, and we've become indiscriminate. How to be in the world and not of the world.

Weiser writes, "Part of the nature of sin is that men hardly ever realize the ultimate relationship between mortality and sin because they live for the moment." We don't understand that God is very concerned about your life and mine. He's very concerned about our sins being kept on a short leash. He's very concerned about our confession. He's very concerned about asking for help. He's very concerned about perhaps the accountability of a brother or sister in Christ who can hold us to some higher level. He's very, very, very concerned about your sin and mine. It put Jesus Christ on Calvary; that's how concerned He is about it.

Secondly, pray that we number our days. I love this passage, and I know many of you do who've studied the Psalms as well. What a great prayer: "Teach us to number our days," the brevity of life over against the eternity of God. It got me thinking about my own life and how I live and plan and dream and pray and hope and build and amass and think and project and all the things we do that we're so good at. We have a deadline coming, men and women. "Teach us to number our days." "This is the day the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it." We may not have one tomorrow. I don't mean you should live in fear; you should live in joy. This is the opportunity that He gave you and me. We count on so many things. We build barns, don't we?

Thirdly, pray for God's grace to make you glad. Verse 15: "Make us glad according to the days You have afflicted us." It's almost an imperative sense. "Make me happy. Make me glad." You know, so many people live in a tragic perpetual state of depression, pessimism, and Eeyore theology. I marvel at our propensity to live just dour! Sometime in your life and mine grace is understanding that nothing I do is any good apart from God, and my life is only good because of God.

I love the way Moses ends the Psalm. In my sanctified imagination, he is sitting on the mount where God has allowed him to see the land that he will not enter because of his disobedience. For hitting instead of speaking, he will not obtain the promise he spent his whole life trying to achieve. I see him scratching out these words, "Let Your work appear to your servants ... Confirm for us the work of our hands; yes"—two times—"confirm." Think of the people whom you respect and love in this life who are, in your estimation, making a difference. What is it about those people that compels you? Ask yourself and, more importantly, ask your Lord, "God, make my life count."

[Gauger:] Dr. Michael Easley, eighth president of the Moody Bible Institute, and a message from Psalm 90, one of the eighteen messages, incidentally, that's a part of the Hall of Presidents message series available at our Web site, moodypresents.mbn.org. You know, you get the sense as you listen to Dr. Easley that he really had something of an inside look at the Psalms, a way of taking them and making them applicable to our lives today, as if they were written yesterday. Again, this message from Psalm 90 part of the Hall of Presidents series available at moodypresents.mbn.org. You'll hear messages dramatized from D. L. Moody, James M. Gray, the voices of Will Houghton, William Culbertson, Dr. Sweeting, Dr. Stowell, and of course messages from Dr. Easley as well, along with a conversation from Dr. Paul Nyquist, our newly appointed ninth president, all a part of the Hall of Presidents series, all waiting for you at moodypresents.mbn.org. I'm Jon Gauger, saying thanks so much for listening. Join us again next week when Dr. Michael Easley returns with another message, right here on *Moody Presents*, the Hall of Presidents.