

Psalms and Proverbs Lesson 18
Old Age and Mortality Psalms 39, 49, 71, 90
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In preparing for this lecture on Old Age and Mortality, I reflected on the first time a young man bagging my groceries asked me if I wanted help taking them to my car; and when I was given a discount for being of “that age” to receive discounts. Both occasions surprised me a little. After all, this is the first time I’ve ever been old and it just sort of crept up on me.

The Lord gave us these psalms to prepare us for what every human will experience. From the moment we’re conceived, we are all aging. Don’t you agree? Do you actually **feel** the same, **move** the same, **remember**, **see**, **hear**, and **taste** as well as you did 5 years ago; a year ago? How about since yesterday?

As we look at the first of the two topics this week, “Old Age”, the Bible presents aging as a normal, natural part of life. “People are like grass; their beauty is like a flower in the field. The grass withers and the flower fades.” (1 Peter 1:24) I don’t know about you, but my grass is definitely withering and my flowers fading.

Our lives were intended to experience perfection, but when sin entered the world, perfection changed to **imperfection** and we age. For God’s most loved creation, aging occurs gradually from the first gray hairs to the creaks in our joints. Honestly, if I woke up in the morning and nothing hurt, I’d think I was in heaven.

Look in the mirror; do you cherish your laugh lines? Do you remember why you got them? The Bible doesn’t hide the visible signs of getting older and there are aspects that aren’t much fun.

About aging, King Solomon had a few blunt things to say: “Your body will grow feeble, your teeth will decay, and your eyesight fail.” Oh vey! That’s depressing! But wait! There’s more! “You will be afraid to climb up a hill or walk down a road. Your hair will turn as white as almond blossoms. You will feel lifeless and drag along like an old grasshopper.” (Ecclesiastes 12:3,5) I admit “almond blossom” colored hair doesn’t sound so bad. Gray hair should be worn proudly because Scripture says it’s special:

- “Gray hair is the splendor of the old.” (Proverbs 20:29)
- “Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained by living a godly life.” (Proverbs 16:31)
- God commanded respect for those graying: “You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man.” (Leviticus 19:32) (And I might add, woman).

Our bodies will be affected by the passage of time, but the Lord doesn’t leave us all alone when we experience it. Through the prophet Isaiah, God said, “Even to your old age, I am He, and even to gray hairs I will carry you! I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you.” (Isaiah 46:4)

To prepare us for the experience of old age and the glory that awaits us, the Apostle Paul wrote, “Do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that will far outweigh them all.” (2 Corinthians 4:16,17)

Older believers have the privilege of gaining wisdom and understanding: "Wisdom belongs to the aged and understanding to the old." (Job 12:12) And what are we to do with that wisdom and understanding? Share it with the generations that follow: "Those who are older should speak, for wisdom comes with age." (Job 32:7) The more years we live, the more experiences we're given, the more wisdom we gain, and the more opportunities we have to testify of God's faithfulness.

As long as we have breath, we can tell the greatness of our God to the next generation as we age in His grace. God will use older saints to teach the generations behind them about the Lord, to be examples of faith-filled and spiritually obedient lives.

Have you been to a Cracker Barrel Restaurant? The outside front porch of the restaurant is lined with rocking chairs. Now, I love to rock in rocking chairs, but I don't want to **stay** in one. I want to be active until the end of my life yielding spiritual fruit which is evidence of a life lived for God. Even, and **especially** in older age, we can bring glory to God. "They will still yield fruit in old age; they shall be full of sap and very green." (Psalm 92:14) Ok so, being full of sticky sap and the color green doesn't sound that appealing, but the fruit of righteousness—the outward evidence of a transformed life—is the fruit of which the psalmist was referring. The fruit of the Spirit doesn't just disappear when we begin entering into our golden years.

Age didn't seem to be a deterrent to God in recruiting older servants. Abraham was 99 and Sarah was 90 when Isaac was born. Moses was 80 when God commanded him to lead the children of Israel. Caleb was 85 when he asked to be given the land where he could fight the giants. Zechariah and Elizabeth were advanced in years when God chose them to be the parents of John the Baptizer. Anna, a prophetess in the Temple was 84 years old when she saw newborn Jesus and proclaimed Him to be the "redemption of Israel." The Apostle John was at least 90 when God gave him the responsibility to write the Book of Revelation.

For you older Christians who find that ageing is difficult at times, I'd like to offer some advice:

Recognize that not everyone lives as long as you. Enjoy the blessing of the long life. You have learned and experienced so much. You're wiser and have great stories and you lived when the world wasn't as messed up as it is today. You wouldn't really want to trade any of that for smoother skin, would you? And going forward, the Lord promises, "I will rescue those who love Me. I will protect those who trust in My name. When they call on Me, I will answer; I will be with them in trouble. I will rescue and honor them. I will reward them with a long life and give them My salvation." (Psalm 91:14-16)

You've received many opportunities to experience and share God's love. It's been said, "The great thing about getting older is that you don't lose all the other ages you've been." God's mercies have been available for you with each passing day. "Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fails not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness." (Lamentations 3:22-23)

God is not done with you yet. The fact that **any** of us are still alive today means God is not done using us for His glory and His kingdom. He has kept you on earth for a purpose which Paul reminded us is: "The good work God has begun in you, He will finish it in the day of Christ Jesus. He will bring it to completion." (Philippians 1:6)

Age isn't an excuse to not be productive, or not to be socially active, or to not be involved in Bible study, or to lose your sense of humor. Walt Disney said, "Growing old is mandatory, but growing up is optional!" I heard of a witty senior who was filling out a form that asked for her street address, city, state, etc. After the word "zip," she firmly printed "normal for my age."

The following are excerpts from a prayer said to have been written by a nun several hundred years ago and I think it speaks to growing old with grace:

"Lord, thou knowest that I am growing older. Seal my lips on my aches and pains. The love of rehearsing them is becoming sweeter as the years go by. Release me from craving to straighten out everybody's affairs. Make me thoughtful but not nosey; helpful but not bossy. Teach me that occasionally I may be mistaken. Keep me reasonably sweet; I do not want to be a saint — some of them are so hard to live with—but a sour old person is one of the crowning works of the Devil. Give me the ability to see good things in people. And give me, O Lord, the grace to tell them so. With my vast store of wisdom, it seems a pity not to use it all, but Thou knowest Lord, that I want a few friends at the end. Amen."

Now, to those of you who are **not yet** in your golden years, do you know of an older person who **is**? I'd like to offer a few suggestions of how to be sensitive and involved with those we consider "older saints" who would love to have someone:

- Offer to help them shop, or with some housekeeping, or perhaps with preparing or organizing legal paperwork.
- Ask their advice. Let them be involved in **how** and **when** you help.
- Take them out to eat, or better yet, bring them to your home for a meal.
- Assist them with handy-man type tasks. I know of elderly women **and** men needing help with some minor tasks. And I heard of a couple who leave their Christmas tree up all year long because they don't have anyone to help them put it away.
- Check in with the elderly you know – often - so they know you **really want** to help.

One of the strengths of this Bible study is that those of various ages are involved. Younger believers have said they enjoy being in groups with us "older ones" because of what they learn from us and the support and wisdom they receive. Likewise, older saints, men, and women, enjoy the younger ones' enthusiasm and hearing of **their** experiences.

Lastly some sage advice from Andy Rooney: "The best classroom in the world is at the feet of an elderly person." They grew up in a different world, a different time, and have experiences to share which will often make history come alive.

Psalm 71

In reviewing our psalms this week, Psalm 71 contains the most about old age. Charles Spurgeon called Psalm 71 "the prayer of the aged believer" who trusted in God throughout the various stages of his life.

"From birth I have relied on You", he proclaimed. (Psalm 71:6) From his youth: "For You have been my hope, Sovereign LORD, my confidence since my youth... You have taught me, and to this day I declare Your marvelous deeds." (Psalm 71:5, 17) And in his old age: "Even when I am old and gray, do

not forsake me, O God, till I declare Your power to the next generation, Your might to all who are to come." (Psalm 71:18)

So close was he to the Lord, the psalmist told Him about his fear: "Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone." (Psalm 71:9) Are you afraid of getting old? Corrie ten Boom said, "Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God." And the Word of God tells us:

- "God will renew your life and sustain you in your old age." (Ruth 4:15)
- "My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." (Psalm 73:26)
- "God is our God forever and ever. He will be our guide even to the end." (Psalm 48:14)

Billy Graham said, "Old age is Satan's last chance to blow us off course." Yet, the psalmist had steadfast endurance because God was faithful to him throughout his lifetime. He had reasons to rejoice:

- In the Lord he had taken refuge. (71:1,7)
- The Lord was his rock and fortress. (71:3)
- The Lord was his hope, his confidence since his youth. (71:5)
- He relied on the Lord; he would praise Him forever. (71:6)
- In the Lord he would always have hope; He would praise Him more and more. (71:14)
- He would tell of the Lord's righteous deeds, of His saving and mighty acts. (71: 15,16, 24)
- He said God's righteousness reaches to the heavens; He has done great things. (71:19)
- God brought him into troubles then restored his life again. (71:20)
- God was his source of comfort. (71:21)
- He praised God for His faithfulness; shouted for joy when he sang God's praises and was delivered by God. (71:22,23)

Our second topic this week is "Mortality" and the brevity of life. which we read about in Psalms 39, 49, and 90. This sinful world of disease and disobedience means that no longer are lifespans like those in Genesis. We are mortal, which means, destined to die. Oh, we **may** prolong our stay with healthy lifestyle, and good genes **may** help, however, obituaries remind us none of us will live indefinitely.

I read about a man who had remembered a card his kids thought would be funny to give him for his 64th birthday. The front of the card said, "Inside is a message from God." Excitedly, he opened it to read, "See you soon!" (By the way, he lived well into his seventies!)

Authors throughout Scripture wrote about theirs and mankind's mortality:

- The psalmist said to God, "Remember how short my life is." (Psalm 89:47)
- "For [mankind] is like a breath of air; their days are like a passing shadow." (Psalm 144:4)
- "We are here for only a moment, visitors, and strangers in the land Our days on earth are gone so soon without a trace." (1 Chronicles 29:15)
- "For we were born but yesterday and know nothing. Our days on earth are as fleeting as a shadow." (Job 8:9)

- “How do you know what your life will be like tomorrow? Your life is like the morning fog—it’s here a little while, then it’s gone.” (James 14:4)

With age, comes the realization that life is brief. In Romans 5 and 6 we learn the reason for the brevity of life is that everyone has sinned and the consequence of sin is death. Scientists have made progress in delaying death but God’s Word says death will come to everyone: “It is appointed for man to die once, after that comes judgment.” (Hebrews 9:27) “For as in Adam, all die.” (1 Corinthians 15:22)

Before I continue, I want to clarify about earthly death being inevitable for everyone. 1 Corinthians 15 and Philippians 3 teaches that if one believes in Jesus Christ as their Savior and is still alive at the Rapture, they will be “changed.” In Greek, the word for “changed” means an “exchange of one thing for another.” Without the earthly body dying as we know it, believers will be given a resurrection body and be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. A new, incorruptible body is necessary because we will be immediately escorted into the presence and the perfection of Almighty God. We believers should be comforted knowing that with every passing moment, our “exchange” is closer than ever before!

Psalm 39

King David was usually singing, or giving an order, or rejoicing in the Lord, but Psalm 39 opens with his silence. He wrote, “I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth while in the presence of the wicked. I remained utterly silent, not even saying anything good.” (Psalm 39:1,2)

David was tormented knowing that life was short but he didn’t want his enemies to think he was criticizing God, so he kept silent. Yet, suppressing his feelings aggravated his suffering and he wrote, “But my anguish increased; my heart grew hot within me. While I meditated, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue.” (Psalm 39:2,3)

David broke his silence and said to God, “Show me, Lord, my life’s end, and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is. You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before You.” (Psalm 39:4,5) David measured the length of his life using the measuring device of ancient times – a handbreadth – the width of four fingers. He knew his earthly life wouldn’t be lengthy so he asked the Lord to let him know when he would die.

David then wrote what I think is the key verse of Psalm 39. “But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in You.” (Psalm 39:7) Because his hope was in God, perhaps his question could have been asked this way, “My hope is in You. Why should I look for anything or anyone else?”

In Romans 12:12 it says, “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.” (Romans 12:12) The Christian’s hope is sure because God is its object. Our hope is built upon trust in God, His faithfulness, and confidence that He is in control of our future.

Psalm 49

In Psalm 49, the psalmist wanted everyone to hear the insight God gave him about the wicked wealthy, who “Despite their wealth, do not endure; they are like the beasts that perish. This is the fate of those who trust in themselves.” (Psalm 49:12,13)

In the tragedy of the ocean liner, The Titanic, a billionaire was one of those who was lost at sea. His family member was asked how much his billionaire relative left. The family member answered, "He left everything."

When we die, we leave it all. The tombs of the wealthy wicked will be what they leave behind, the "princely mansions" and "lands named after them." (Psalm 49:11,14) The wicked wealthy, "take nothing with them when they die" (Psalm 49:17) and they cannot be redeemed by their own doing. "The ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough—that he should live forever and not see decay." (Psalm 49:7-8)

In ancient Israel, anyone sentenced to death could pay a large sum of money to save their life. That money was called, "a ransom of life." Man cannot pay the "ransom of life": "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all people." (I Timothy 2:5,6) And the Apostle Peter said that we're not redeemed with silver or gold, "but with the precious blood of Christ." (1 Peter 1:18,19) The decision to accept Jesus as Savior, not the possession of wealth, will determine one's eternal destiny.

It's been said that death is the great leveler. It spares no one. Everyone, "both low and high, rich and poor alike" (Psalm 49:2) strong, weak, famous, or infamous – **all** are predestined according to God's plan for the number of our days. Only God can create, stop, extend, or cease one's life.

Psalm 90

Psalm 90 is the third psalm in our lesson to address mortality. Moses is considered the author and it's believed to be oldest of all the psalms. Moses reflected on life, that it was fleeting and temporary. He made several observations about the nature of God – His power, eternalness, and sovereignty which he contrasted with the brevity and the impermanence of mankind:

- **God is eternal:** Before He created the world, God already existed. "From everlasting to everlasting, You are God." (Psalm 90:2) Hebrew for "everlasting" means "from the vanishing point in the past to the vanishing point in eternity." Eternity has no beginning and no end. God's nature is that **He** has no beginning or end. He is self-existent and un-created.
- **God exists outside boundaries of time:** God created time, governs the passing of time, exists outside of time and is not subject to it. "A thousand years in Your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night." (Psalm 90:4) 2 Peter 3:8 says, "With the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years is as one day." Man exists within the boundaries of time such as in minutes, days, months and years.
- **God is sovereign over life:** According to His sovereign will, God calls man into eternity: "You sweep people away in the sleep of death— they are like the new grass of the morning. In the morning it springs up new, but by evening it is dry and withered." (Psalm 90:5,6) God controls the curse of death in that the body returns to dust: "You turn people back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, you mortals." (Psalm 90:3)

- **God determines the duration of life:** “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.” (Psalm 90:10)

Thousands of years ago when Psalm 90 was written, human life expectancy was 70 or 80 years. For all our advances in medical science, gifted physicians (gifted by God, I might add), our lifetimes are roughly the same now as they were then. God sets the limits to lives. Viewed in light of God’s eternity, our years fade away and Psalm 90:9 says, “we finish our years like a sigh.”

The Number of Our Days

In two psalms this week, each psalmist asked the Lord about numbering their days. David asked, “Show me, O Lord, my life’s end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life.” (Psalm 39:4) Moses asked, “Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” (Psalm 90:12) When each psalmist asked God about the length of their lives, they were acknowledging that **only** God, who has **unnumbered** days, can tell man how many **numbered** days he has.

And each psalmist asked for different reasons. David wanted to know how long he would live, possibly because he was tormented by his enemies. Moses’ reason was for his people to “gain a heart of wisdom” or as the Living Bible says, “to help us to spend [the remaining days] as we should.”

God has given each of us a finite number of days: “All my days were written in your book and planned before a single one of them began.” (Psalm 139:16) If you knew the “number of your days”, would you change anything in your life? Regardless of one’s age, God entrusted us to live with the purpose He gave us. Warren Wiersbe said, “The main concern is not how **long** we live but **how** we live.”

Moses closed Psalm 90 by praying for, “The favor of the Lord our God be upon us and establish the work of our hands.” (Psalm 90:17) Moses was asking God to prosper all that God’s people did so their life’s labor would not be in vain but meaningful and lasting. In Psalm 71, the psalmist prayed for the Lord not to abandon him when he was old because he wanted to tell the next generation about God’s power and mighty acts. Are you leaving a spiritual legacy, a witness to your children, your family, about your faith in Jesus the Savior?

In preparing this lecture on old age and mortality, I was reflecting that our “tents” are declining, and that we’re being ushered closer to the presence of God, and that our address will change for eternity to the dwelling place Jesus promised He’s preparing for us.

Some of you may be familiar with the song, “Because He Lives.” The chorus is:

Because He lives
I can face tomorrow
Because He lives
All fear is gone
Because I know
He holds the future
And life is worth the living
Just because He lives

If that were not true, old age and mortality would be depressing and frightening, yet, because it **is** true, look beyond old age, beyond the grave, and to your future with Christ because:

“For all mankind, life is a journey - from *birth to death*.

For believers it is a journey from *earth to heaven*.”