

New Year's Eve

Friday, December 31, 2017

Psalm 90:12, **"So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom."**

Dear Christians,

New Year's Eve has never seemed to me to be a time for wild celebration. Instead I think of it as a time for quiet reflection. Another year has passed. Another year is beginning. Sadly, there are those who are not here with us to say "goodbye" to 2017 and "hello" to 2018. For some, the numbering of their days stopped during the past year. There are those who lived many days—thousands, even tens of thousands, of days. There are those who only lived a few days, some just a few hours. Then there are those who never numbered even one day outside the womb of their mother.

Haven't you ever sat up late on New Year's Eve reflecting on the year just past and wondering about the year just beginning? Haven't you ever asked yourself, "Could this be my last year on this earth?" "Will this be the year when the number of my days comes to an end, when the counting stops for me?" "Will this be the year that my name is read on Memorial Day at the cemetery, the year when the bell is tolled after my name is spoken on All Saints' Sunday?"

It may be! You and I don't know. That's the point! The point of the Psalmist is that our days ARE numbered! We don't know what the number of our days will be. But whether they are many or few, the number of our days on this earth is a finite number. Our days here will come to an end. Ever since God said to Adam, **"Dust you are and to dust you shall return"** man's days have been numbered. Adam's days were numbered. The day came when he returned to the dust. Even though Adam lived a long time, still Genesis 5 records these sobering words, **"Altogether, Adam lived 930 years, and then he died."** The same will be said of you and me one day.

The rest of Holy Scripture bears witness to this same truth—that our days are numbered. Psalm 90 echoes Genesis 3 when it says of the Lord, **"You turn men back to dust saying, 'Return to dust, O sons of men.'"** Isaiah wrote these words in his prophecy, **"All men are like grass, and all their glory like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass."** Moses speaks that same language in Psalm 90. He writes, **"You 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."**

Moses does give us a ballpark idea of the number of our days, an average life span that we may exceed or perhaps fall short of. He writes, **"The years of our life are seventy, or eighty if we have the strength...they are soon gone, and we fly away."** Death is a personal reality for each of us. Death is the elephant in the room that nobody wants to talk about—especially on New Year's Eve! It's time to party; time to clink our

glasses of champagne together and kiss our sweethearts and sing “Auld Lang Syne” as we tally another year for our world, another year for ourselves.

We make our resolutions and establish our goals; we plan our years and review our investment portfolios as though our days are numberless, as though our lives on this earth will never end, as though things will continue as they are forever. But God’s Word in the book of James warns us against such a mindset, **“Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.’ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.”**

So why all this morbid, depressing talk about death? Why cast a pall over what should be a happy night, a night of celebration? It is important that you and I think about death, about OUR deaths, about the passing of OUR numbered days. The Church in its wisdom has determined that Psalm 90 is exactly what we need to have in our mouths and our ears and our hearts as we cross over into the New Year.

Moses prays, **“Teach us to number our days...”** Why? For what purpose? To what end? So we can become sad and depressed? So we can become despondent and despairing? So we can be filled with fear and apprehension? No! Moses prays to the Lord, **“Teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.”** Numbering our days makes us wise. It fills our hearts with wisdom—God’s wisdom.

So what is the wisdom of God that fills our hearts as we number our days? We are again made wise to the reality of our sin and to its wages of death. We are once more confronted by the uncomfortable fact that we are sinners who deserve God’s temporal and eternal punishment. That wisdom is undeniable. Sinners die; I am a sinner; I am going to die. But that wisdom—the wisdom that we are dying sinners is not an end, but a means to an end. Sin, numbered days, and death is not the final conclusion that we are to draw for ourselves. It is a necessary step on the way to the final conclusion that God, in His grace and mercy, has drawn for us in Christ.

A heart of wisdom that embraces the reality of sin, of numbered days, of death is a heart that is ready, eager, even desperate to embrace God’s saving wisdom—namely the forgiveness of sins in Jesus, the gift of eternal life in Jesus, the promise of resurrected and renewed bodies for those who are in Jesus. That is the final conclusion that God has drawn for you and me. That wisdom of God, the wisdom of the Gospel, the wisdom that is Jesus Himself and the salvation He gives is also undeniable. Christ forgives sinners and gives them eternal life; I am a sinner; Christ forgives me and gives me eternal life.

As we begin this New Year we find ourselves smack dab in the middle of Christmas! The words of the Christmas angel to the shepherds are still ringing in our ears, **“Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ, the Lord.”** We are still celebrating the blessed reality that the Word became flesh and

dwelt among us full of grace and truth. That Mary gave birth to a Son and He was given the name Jesus because He would save His people from their sins.

On Christmas Eve long ago Jesus, the eternal Son of God, was born and began to number His days. After 30 years of numbering His days, He undertook His mission to save us from the sin that numbered our days and limited our years. After 33 years of numbering His days, Jesus allowed Himself to be arrested and condemned and crucified. There on the cross, on one very important day, Jesus assumed to Himself our sin and its wages. There on the cross, on that Good Friday, Jesus bled for our sins and died our well-deserved death. There on the cross, Jesus' numbered days came to an end and His body was laid in a grave, just like ours will be some day.

But three days later, Jesus rose again from the dead. Three days after His days ended, Jesus began numbering His days again. Better yet, Jesus stopped numbering His days because, having conquered death and the grave, His days are no longer numbered. His days are everlasting. His days stretch on forever. His days will never end.

That's our comfort as we begin a New Year. We are in Christ. When we were baptized we began counting our days as redeemed children of God and heirs having the hope of eternal life. At the font we were united with Jesus in His death AND in His resurrection. Our risen Lord speaks to us each day, THIS day, His Words of eternal life, words that have caused us already to pass from death to life. Our festal food and drink this New Year's Eve is the very body and blood of Jesus who is the Resurrection and the Life for dying you and dying me. Jesus promises, **"Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life and I will raise Him up at the Last Day."**

Sin—YOUR sin--is forgiven. Death—YOUR death--has been defeated. The grave—YOUR grave--has been rendered a temporary resting place. On the Last Day Jesus will raise our bodies from the dead. And we, like Jesus, will leave death and the grave behind us. We, like Jesus, will resume numbering our days. Better yet, we will stop numbering our days because our days too will no longer be numbered. Our days will be everlasting. Our days will stretch on forever. Our days will never end.

We face this New Year, which may or may not be our last year on this earth, with the comfort and the confidence that only Christ, our Savior, can give us. We ring in the New Year tonight with the words of Moses and Psalm 90 on our lips, **"Satisfy us in the morning with Your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days."** We will wake up tomorrow and greet January 1, 2018, knowing that in Christ our days are NOT numbered.

In Jesus' name
Amen