

GUNGAHLIN UNITING CHURCH AND COMMUNITY CENTRE

SUNDAY, 25 OCTOBER 2020 (PRE-RECORDED AND DISEMINATED)

MESSAGE:

“20/20 VISION: FROM EVERLASTING TO EVERLASTING YOU ARE GOD”

[Introduction]

In Psalm 90, verse 2 we read:

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.
Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth
and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

What was your vision for 2020? To put it another way did you have 20/20 vision about this year? If you are not familiar with the expression, 20/20 vision, at least in common usage, often refers to the ability to see perfectly or at least the ability to see clearly without wearing glasses.

For me, the year 2020 promised to be as poetic as the round number and symbolism the number 20 twice over suggests. In literature, art and culture 20 is often taken to symbolise empowerment, maturity, approval and perfection. Even in Biblical theology 20 is often taken to symbolise wholeness or completeness.

I hoped 2020 would be much like the year 2000 – an important Olympic year when we'd even be able to watch the main events in prime time, and an anticipated time of celebration on the cusp of a new decade and all that this might promise.

I did not have 20/20 vision about this year.

One of the many unexpected faith reinforcement lessons I have stumbled across this year is how powerfully relevant the Bible remains for us today even thousands of years after it was written. The lectionary Psalm for today, Psalm 90, is a tremendous example of this and shows that God has always had a vision for 2020 or in other words, that He has always had 20/20 vision about this year in every sense.

Today I explore what Psalm 90 says about the differences between humanity and God, what it says about God's anger and what it says about God's loving compassion, particularly for us living through this year.

[Context]

Psalm 90 is entitled “God's Eternity and Human Frailty: A Prayer of Moses, the man of God” and is the only psalm attributed to Moses. As we will see, the link to Moses is illustrative of the differences between God and mankind and the human experience of His anger and His compassion.

[Comparison between humanity and God]

The opening verses of Psalm 90 stress the relative insignificance of human life when compared to God.

GUNGAHLIN UNITING CHURCH AND COMMUNITY CENTRE

SUNDAY, 25 OCTOBER 2020 (PRE-RECORDED AND DISEMINATED)

Verse 2 describes God being present from everlasting to everlasting, since before He had formed the earth and the world. In contrast, verse 3 describes God turning humans back to dust when our mortal life ends.

Similar comparisons are made in verses 4 and 5. Firstly, a thousand human years are described as being like yesterday to God or perhaps only the equivalent of a watch in the night (that is, four hours). Secondly, humans are considered similar to the brief flourishing of new grass or flowers at the beginning of a day that may be swept away by God as easily as one might sweep away a troubling dream.

Later in verse 10, the temporal extent of human life being limited to seventy years (or perhaps eighty, if we are strong) before it ends is described as akin to a mere instant or sigh from God's perspective.

As the attributed author of Psalm 90, Moses' life also demonstrates the frailty of human life when compared to God. Moses was rescued by Pharaoh's daughter when he was a helpless baby boy. He displayed the limitations of human emotion in his deep anxiety about his role as spokesman for his people when so instructed by God. In contrast, Moses knew the all-powerful nature of God through supernatural experiences like witnessing God's presence in the burning bush or living through the plagues upon Egypt whilst the Hebrews remained in captivity.

[God's anger]

The Scriptures consistently reveal God's love, mercy and compassion to us, but also reveal His anger and wrath when He is disobeyed. Psalm 90 includes a number of references to this aspect of God's character.

Verse 7 reads "[f]or we are consumed by your anger; by your wrath we are overwhelmed". Verse 9 mentions that "our days pass away under your wrath". Further on, verse 11 even more powerfully asks "[w]ho considers the power of your anger? Your wrath is as great as the fear that is due you."

So what is it that has led to God's anger in these verses? In verses 7 and 8, the psalmist describes God's anger in connection with human iniquities being set before him and our "secret sins" being placed in the "light of His countenance". Of course, these few verses do not provide the complete biblical picture of God's response to human wrongdoing. But it is important to explore things a little further rather than overlooking the significance of God's anger and quickly moving to the remaining verses.

It can be uncomfortable for us to consider God's anger when the Christian message rightfully emphasises the good news that our sins are forgiven through the gracious and sacrificial love of Christ. Perhaps, if we are able to flip this understanding a little in a minds, at least for a brief moment, God's anger can be characterised as an aspect of His love for us in that it comprises an active response by God to sin. Different to the anger we exhibit which is often tired, irritable, self-indulgent and perhaps unjustified, God's anger in response to human wrongdoing is righteous and

GUNGAHLIN UNITING CHURCH AND COMMUNITY CENTRE

SUNDAY, 25 OCTOBER 2020 (PRE-RECORDED AND DISEMINATED)

necessary given His eternal sovereignty and perfection. God's character means that He must act justly and judge sin.

To mention Moses again, he personally experienced God's anger in response to sin on a number of occasions. In response to his own secret sin, when he killed an Egyptian who he had seen beating a Hebrew, there was arguably a component of God's anger and righteousness in the way Moses finds himself fleeing into the desert – instantly transformed from an Egyptian Prince to a criminal Hebrew slave struggling in the wilderness. Moses also saw God's anger against other people such as the destruction of the Egyptian army following the Hebrew crossing of the Red Sea and later the bloodshed amongst the Hebrews themselves after they erected the Golden Calf as their new god.

[God's compassion]

Let's turn now to the beautiful way Psalm 90 demonstrates the link between God's anger and His compassion and love.

In verses 13 and 14 there is a cry of "Turn, O Lord! How long? Have compassion on your servants! Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days." Then in verse 16 we read "Let your work be manifest to your servants and your glorious power to their children."

Importantly, God's love and compassion in these verses arises following a change in the mindset of His people. In verse 12, the people ask God to teach them to count their days that they may gain a wise heart, they impliedly ask for forgiveness in their petition for compassion in verse 13 and the psalm concludes with a desire for the favour of God to be upon his people in order for the work of their hands to prosper."

Once more, we can reflect on the life of Moses, this time in relation to God's compassion. Despite his imperfections and mistakes, God showed compassion on Moses – in the blessings of his success and family prosperity in the land of Midian, in God guiding His people under Moses leadership out of slavery and even in his dying days being shown the land that would be given to the Hebrews, even though he was not able to cross over the Jordan to Canaan himself.

[So what?]

We have looked at the profound differences between human life and the sovereignty of God along with aspects of God's anger and God's compassion arising from Psalm 90. But we now have to ask ourselves the "so what?" question. What practical guidance does Psalm 90 give to us as we continue on our faith journey, in this year of 2020 when human frailty became all too evident to us once again?

There is no point denying that we are currently living in troubled times. Each of us has new concerns this year in addition to the expected toil and trouble of human life mentioned in our psalm. In many cases, our 2020 vision may well have played out more accurately as a torturous nightmare.

GUNGAHLIN UNITING CHURCH AND COMMUNITY CENTRE

SUNDAY, 25 OCTOBER 2020 (PRE-RECORDED AND DISEMINATED)

However, just as it says in the opening words of Psalm 90, our God has been our dwelling place in all generations. The eternal Master of time and the entire universe cares deeply and personally for each one of us and is aware of our every thought and action. The favour of the Lord Almighty is upon us, His people, and despite our many challenges he abundantly cares for us through His perfect peace and with tangible blessings including our family, friends, medical professionals, stable government, social security safety net, the beauty of nature, books, films, music, virtual ways of interacting and human inspiration, ingenuity and endeavour to prevent and solve ongoing challenges for humanity.

Now, I also don't want to overlook God's anger in this part of my message. And so the best answer to the "so what" questions arising from Psalm 90 is this. The Almighty God, from everlasting to everlasting with his 20/20 vision sent His only son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sin and in doing so once and for all satisfied God's anger forever. And so we are saved if we but believe in this abundant grace and respond by simply loving God and loving our neighbour as Jesus himself summarises in the passage from Matthew 22 also set for today.

[Conclusion]

I had a limited, typically human vision for 2020 but certainly did not have 20/20 vision about this year. However, there is great peace and reassurance in God's 20/20 vision. From everlasting to everlasting He is God and His vision for 2020 comprises His almighty power continuing to control and sustain the entire universe whilst He upholds His love for each of us profoundly, demonstrated through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ.

To conclude I'll read the original words of the hymn "Our God, our help in ages past" written by Isaac Watts. Incidentally, I challenge the Christian music buffs out there to find a hymnbook with all nine original verses included (most hymnbook editors find six verses to be sufficient). The hymn paraphrases Psalm 90 providing a different but helpful perspective as we continue to ponder our relationship with God and His 20/20 vision for us all:

Our God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home.

Under the shadow of Thy throne
Thy saints have dwelt secure;
Sufficient is Thine arm alone,
And our defense is sure.

Before the hills in order stood,
Or earth received her frame,
From everlasting Thou art God,
To endless years the same.

GUNGAHLIN UNITING CHURCH AND COMMUNITY CENTRE

SUNDAY, 25 OCTOBER 2020 (PRE-RECORDED AND DISEMINATED)

Thy Word commands our flesh to dust,
Return, ye sons of men:
All nations rose from earth at first,
And turn to earth again.

A thousand ages in Thy sight
Are like an evening gone;
Short as the watch that ends the night
Before the rising sun.

The busy tribes of flesh and blood,
With all their lives and cares,
Are carried downwards by the flood,
And lost in following years.

Time, like an ever rolling stream,
Bears all its sons away;
They fly, forgotten, as a dream
Dies at the opening day.

Like flowery fields the nations stand
Pleased with the morning light;
The flowers beneath the mower's hand
Lie withering ere 'tis night.

Our God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Be Thou our guard while troubles last,
And our eternal home.

AMEN