

Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham  
at Galeed Chapel Brighton  
on Sunday evening 4 November 1934

PSALM 90 v 12

"So teach us to number our days that we may  
apply our hearts unto wisdom"

This prayer is not to be taken as if the Psalmist prayed to know how many days or years he had to live. This had already been confessed in the Psalm, our mortality, our fragile lives occupying much of this Psalm, and the tenth verse tells us the number of our days. "The days of our years are three score years and ten". One hundred and twenty were the days God fixed after the flood. After that He reduced them to three score years and ten, and if, by reason of strength He should lengthen out the days to four score years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow, for it is soon cut off and we fly away. Who knoweth the power of Thine anger against fallen humanity, against fallen man. God is angry with fallen man. I wish you all believed it; I wish it were a truth fixed indelibly in the heart of all of you, as well as of myself, that God is justly angry with fallen man. But this petition - "So teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom - is a deeper matter. We must go back, as enabled to the reason, the cause of mortality. We all know we must die and probably we all, in some way, confess that we have sinned, but to believe in our hearts that it is a just thing that God should take away our life. We live and move and have our being in Him as His creatures, but as fallen men it is otherwise for that sentence took place when Adam partook of the fruit of the forbidden tree, and he ate. In the day that thou shalt eat thereof, dying thou shalt die. This is the cause of our mortality. Why you must die is because you are a sinner. When you must die is absolutely at God's disposal. Adam, after his fall, we are told lived 930 years, and he died; and that is a wonderful chapter in Genesis ending each verse, "and he died", and the day is coming when it will be said of you, of me, and he died; and he died, and the seat you occupy here now will be vacant in regard of yourself, for you will die. Sin procured our death, sin brought mortality. God

fix this in the hearts of those of you who, as yet, do not realise it. Of course, you wont say you are not to die, but you do not know experimentally and painfully the reason that you must die. You may say, O such and such a disease came to so and so, and that is why they died. Only in a secondary sense; the first sense is sin. You may not like the mention of sin by me so frequently, but I can do no other; I must as enabled vindicate God in your hearing. And when you come to this great subject, death, it must be said sin procured that, sin brought that. All diseases, pains, afflictions to which our frail bodies and minds are subject have one cause - sin. One says, O so and so contracted such a disease by coming into contact with it; sin brought that disease. Listen sinner, God help you, cause you, to believe it, sin is the cause of our mortality. Look then at the prayer - "So teach us". So instruct us in the nature of the law given to Adam; of every tree in the garden thou mayest freely eat but of the tree of knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat of it, for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. Dismal sound, is it not? What is religion? The world says, something cheerful, music, short sermons, plenty of singing, good choirs, solos at the end of a service; all those kind of things. Let them have it; God keep you from it. What is real religion? The life and the fear of God. So teach us therefore that we, being sinners, must experience that awful sentence, most just - In the day that thou eatest thereof dying thou shalt die. Death is two-fold, first physical, second the death of the soul. Every pure faculty that God endowed man with in Adam, sin, as to its proper action, killed. Love fixed on the Creator was turned by the fall into hatred. Knowledge of God who walked in the garden in the cool of the day, that sin killed. A knowledge of evil came and the presence of God was a terror to him to whom it had been a delight. The will, straight with God's will, was turned into rebellion and man now says - and some here practically say in their lives and in their thoughts - Depart from us. You do not like to retain God in your knowledge. O man, one day, if grace come not to you, you will have the knowledge of God; necessarily you will know His anger, you will know His punishment, you will know what hell is. Sin-killed faculties bring men cause men, to turn their back on God and not the face. Lord teach us to know this. We do not ask how many years are to be added to those we have already attained

to, but teach us to know why we are mortal. Get to the root of things dear friends - God bring you to it - even this, to number our days. To number our days is to redeem the time because the days are evil. We need teaching and God is the teacher. "Who teacheth like Him?" The reason of this prayer - "That we may apply our hearts unto wisdom". That there may be in us, in our hearts, an application to God, an application made lively, sincere, and more or less constant, in seeking God. What a prayer. Wisdom is in one Person in the Scripture in regard of salvation - Christ is the wisdom of God - and to apply the heart to wisdom is to be seeking Him and asking Him to bestow on us the blessings which His Father gave Him to give to the men who had been given to Him to redeem. To apply your heart unto wisdom is then to apply for life. "Quicken me in Thy righteousness" prays the Psalmist, that I may escape every danger and all death. To live the life of God is an amazing thing; to live the life of God is to be crucified to the world, for the life of God is contrary to the life of the world. The world lieth in wickedness. You who are in the world lie with it in wickedness. I do not mean merely being in the world as creatures, as subjects in a kingdom, as occupied necessarily in business in some way that is a necessity. The Apostle tells us that if we are not to do with the world, we must get out of it. You must have to do with it; that is not what is intended when it is written that the world lieth in wickedness - you have to do with the world - but it means this, that the world is just an enemy to God, and if you have His life you will come out of it. Yes, you will be seeking the life of Christ, which is holiness, and that will separate you from all sin in open practice, from all sin in regard to your spirit, from all sin in regard to its prevalence in you. This life of Christ moves naturally after its source. You understand that; when I say it moves naturally, it moves just according to its nature. Being heavenly you go after heavenly things; coming from Christ, you are attracted to Christ and want to know Him and love Him and be found in Him. This life is a holy life. You say, then I have not got it. Why do you say that? Because I am an unholy person. Are you content with being unholy? Is unholiness your delight? Are there no moments when God is your delight, when Christ is your delight, when, if you had the Holy Ghost in you, you would feel yourself the most favoured person in the world? To be in the

world, to be unholy, is to a child of God a crucifixion, a pain  
inexpressible. So to apply to Christ for life is to apply your  
heart unto wisdom.

Secondly you apply your heart unto Him for the grace of godly  
fear. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" and by  
that men depart from the snares of and paths of death. O it is  
great to have the fear of God. Temptation and opportunity came to  
Joseph, but, blessed by God, he could say with the temptation and  
opportunity there was not the desire. The fear of the Lord kept  
him. "How shall I do this great wickedness and sin against God?"  
The fear of the Lord is clean and it endureth for ever and where  
it is in exercise there a man says, Lord keep me from evil that it  
may not grieve me. Keep me from vexing and rebelling against the  
Holy Spirit. Keep me from hardening my heart. Keep me from the  
path of the tempter. The fear of God is a tender spirit, and one  
of its greatest exercises is to walk so in the truth and in the  
ordinances of God and in the ways of God as that you may not give  
offence; to offend God, the very thought of it when the fear of  
God is in exercise, is a pain to you, and it takes you to the  
throne of grace; Lord keep me. "Hold up my goings in Thy paths  
that my footsteps slip not" I am a poor, dying creature; Lord  
grant me Thy holy fear. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of  
wisdom and a good understanding have all they that have it, and by  
it they depart from the snares of death and from hell beneath".  
Bless God, those of you who fear His great Name. Sometimes it is  
so powerful, so sweet in you, that you would not sin on any  
account; you would rather suffer than sin. "That we may apply  
our hearts unto wisdom" is to apply to Christ for love, that we  
may have love to Him. It is an awful, a terrible thing, to be  
under that Scripture - "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ,  
let him be Anathema Maranatha; let him be an accursed person.  
Some of you could not declare honestly that you love Christ, and  
if you do not you are under that Scripture; let him be an  
accursed person. O, says one who has been brought to number his  
days, and to attribute his mortality to his sin, Lord may I love  
Thee. It is not obsolete yet to sing

'Tis a point I long to know  
Oft it causes anxious thought  
Do I love the Lord or no  
Am I His or am I not?

It is sweet to love Christ because if you love Him you love His ways, His word, His teachings, His rebukes, His chastenings, His dealings with you in providence. You love Him in this particular also, namely that He has now the rule of the universe. Angels, and powers, and authorities, are subject unto Him. Providence is in His hand; the wind is in His fist, the waters are in the hollow of His hand. O what a Christ He is, and you love Him. If it were given to a child of God in some sweet moments of his life to choose for himself, he would say, No, I am too foolish and wicked and ignorant to know what is for my good; choose Thou the way O Lord and lead me on. Choose what burdens I must bear, what trials I must have, what afflictions Thou wilt send; choose for me. And if He has chosen your inheritance for you, is it much, is it too much, that you should submissively pray to Him, choose the way to the inheritance.

"That we may apply our hearts unto wisdom", that is ask Christ to give us strength. Says Paul to Timothy - "My son be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus". Weakness is in us, we are weakness itself in regard of godliness and faith in the heart says Lord I cannot stand, I cannot resist temptation, I cannot overcome the lusts of my nature; hold me up. "Hold up my goings in Thy paths that my footsteps slip not" We do need strength my friends. We need strength to hold fast to the inspiration of the Scriptures. If we knew fully how denial of inspiration rules the religious world today, it might give us a fright, even a shock. Leading men, called theologians, deny this Book as being inspired. A great religious teacher, much thought of in Germany today, says the Bible is just like any other human document; it is only inspired when you believe it inspired to you. O, says a child of God, realising that he is liable to fall into that heresy, Lord keep me believing in the Scriptures. Keep me believing that every word of God is pure; nothing wrong in this Book. Well then, dear believing friends, you will be applying your hearts unto wisdom, that is Christ, that He would

give you strength to hold fast to this guide of your youth, to this girdle for your loins, to this lamp for your feet, to this light for your path, to this instructor, this teacher of all that is good and right. Why should we cleave to this Bible if it is not inspired? If we believe it to be inspired, the Lord help us to hold fast that. This Book is infallible because every word of it was inspired by God.

"That we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" to redeem the time. To redeem the time is to buy the time, is to buy an opportunity. As if, for instance, you should be injured; what saith the Scripture to you? Why, that you are to bless when you are despised. "Bless them that persecute you". And when, through grace, you apply your heart to Christ for grace to do that, then instead of retaliating, instead of the law prevailing in you - An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, hand for a hand, foot for foot, life for life you say, Lord help me to pray for that person, and in doing that you redeem the time in an evil day. Who can give this? Christ alone. He gave the instruction, He can give the grace to obey it, to follow it.

"That we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" in our difficulties. You may be saying sometimes, I do not know what to do; I am perplexed. Here I am in a path out of which I cannot get and if I could get out it may not be lawful for me to do so, yet I am surrounded with difficulties. I do not want to walk in the world, but here I am in it. My business, my circumstances, keep me in it in a certain way. Well, dear brethren, God has set an open door before you - "That we may apply our hearts unto wisdom". Seek grace, seek grace. Are you perplexed? The Urim and the Thummim, Christ has all wisdom and all guidings. Seek Him, He is sufficient for everything. The Apostle, speaking of himself and others, said, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God". That is the blessed fountain of all goodness. He says, I will lead the blind by a way that they knew not; I will make crooked things straight and rough places plain. Every valley shall be exalted and all mountains shall be levelled. So teach me to believe that this circumstance and that perplexing thing are in Thy hand, and that I may apply my heart unto Thee to give me

wisdom and grace to order my steps according to Thy word.

Well, dear friends, a few more words and I close. "That we may apply our hearts unto wisdom" respecting two matters. First that we may have grace to be exercised, as the Apostle said he was, always to have a conscience void of offence toward God. The greatest aim a believing child of God can have - when he is under the teaching of the Spirit he possesses it - namely this, to live unto God. What is that? "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10 v 31) That is to say, God is first. You say - myself is first. Well it is a sad truth; there is no child of God who would say he never was in that case. O what selfishness is in us. When I look back on my long life sometimes I do not know how to hold my face up to anybody, so selfish, so self-centred have I been. Yet the Lord does sometimes come and say "Seek the Lord and His strength, seek His face evermore", and with saying it in your heart He gives you power to do it. My friends that is the grand object of faith when it stands in its motions in the power of God. Is He first? Is He first when you read Holy Scripture? Does He help you to join prayer with each inspection? Is He first in your afflictions? Lord, sanctify them to me and do not let me struggle to get out of them in any way. Is He first in your temptations? Do you ask Him to grant that, as Christ overcame the tempter, Christ will give you strength to stand and overcome by faith? "Who is he that overcometh the world but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" Is He first? Does He come before your family sometimes? Does He come to you in your afflictions? Does He come to you in your perplexities, in your business? Is He first my friends? That is the law of heaven, God first, and that is the law of grace in the heart, God first. Sin says, No. Pharaoh said, "Who is the Lord?" I wish I did not know Pharaoh; I wish you did not. Pharaoh lives today. "Who is the Lord that I should obey Him?" What profit is there if I should pray unto Him? Pharaoh - he is in this chapel, and some of you may say, alas for us, we know it, we know it. But if we can say he is not with us prevailing, may we bless God. Well, that is the first thing, and the second is this, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom in this great, this important particular, a particular which to us is inescapable, namely to die the death of the righteous, to sleep

in Jesus. That is a beautiful word - O what it has been to me at times for years, just occasionally - "And David served his generation by the will of God and fell on sleep," A beautiful word - "fell on sleep". Stephen the martyr fell asleep; he sleeps in Jesus; so do all the saints who have died. Lord, I am mortal, says a saint; I do not know when the day of my death shall come, nor am I concerned about that. What I am concerned about is that I may die in the Lord; that that word may be mine - "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord". O blessed death, sweet death. I am frightened at the thought of it, some poor child of God may be saying. Well, that is no great harm to you. What does it do? It does this, does it not? takes you to the throne of grace. I am afraid of dying Lord, I am afraid even of the article of death; I am afraid, that river has chilled me through even at the thought of reaching it. But then you have said, perhaps, Lord when I get to that bridgeless river, take me across. Let me not go across in a ferry boat. I remember soon after I came to Brighton one member of the congregation was near to the end and I visited her and she said please do not put me into a ferry boat. She was honest and just wanted to have a certificate and to find the bottom good as she passed that river, and it was so I believe. Well now may the Lord help us to pray this prayer - "So teach us to number our days", to believe in our sin-procured mortality, to have revenge against ourselves, repentance and a clearing of God in our consciences. "So teach us", so put it upon us, so put it into our hearts, that we are sinful and therefore must die, as that we may again and again and daily, through the Holy Spirit, seek unto wisdom which is Christ. Seek His righteousness, seek His blood, seek His Spirit, seek His holiness, seek everything that He, as Jesus Christ, has to bestow upon His people.

AMEN.