

Lesson 11 12 October 2014

The Frailty of Man

Lesson Scope: [Psalms 39 and 90](#)

Lesson Focus

Frailty is one of the most verifiable qualities of humanity. One generation replaces another at a 100-percent rate. Present health can crumble in a moment. Accidents claim victims in the prime of life. "Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth" (Proverbs 27:1).

Psalm 39 is attributed to David and Psalm 90 to Moses. Both writers understood well the stresses of life, the limitations accompanying mortality, and the futility of trusting in finite man. They also understood God's abhorrence for sin and His abundant mercy in providing a means of forgiveness.

Fallen humanity desperately needs a worldview that transcends time and space to find coherence, purpose, and hope for this short span of time we call life. Centuries ago, one writer said it so well: "Thou hast made us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee."

Few things revolutionize one's life more than pondering one's frailty and death. Both writers of these psalms call us to humbly accept our mortality and to fall prostrate before our great God, who is sovereign over all things.

"Every man at his best state is altogether vanity." Enduring value is found only when man places his hope in God.

Lesson Aim: To portray man's needy position before his everlasting God.

Theme Verse: [Job 7:17](#). What is man, that thou shouldst magnify him? and that thou shouldst set thine heart upon him?

Lesson Text

"My Hope Is in Thee"

Psalm 39:6-13 ⁶ Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up *riches*, and knoweth not who shall gather them. ⁷ And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope *is* in thee. ⁸ Deliver me from all my transgressions: make me not the reproach of the foolish. ⁹ I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst *it*. ¹⁰ Remove thy stroke away from me: I am consumed by the blow of thine hand. ¹¹ When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth: surely every man *is* vanity. Selah. ¹² Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear unto my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears: for I *am* a stranger with thee, *and* a sojourner, as all my fathers *were*. ¹³ O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more.

"Teach Us to Number Our Days"

Psalm 90:1-17 ¹ Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. ² Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou *art* God. ³ Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men. ⁴ For a thousand years in thy sight *are but* as yesterday when it is past, and *as* a watch in the night. ⁵ Thou carriest them away as with a flood; they are *as* a sleep: in the morning *they are* like grass *which* groweth up. ⁶ In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth. ⁷ For we are consumed by thine anger, and by thy wrath are we troubled. ⁸ Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret *sins* in the light of thy countenance. ⁹ For all our days are passed away in thy wrath: we spend our years as a tale *that is told*. ¹⁰ The days of our years *are* threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength *they be* fourscore years, yet *is* their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. ¹¹ Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, *so is* thy wrath. ¹² So teach *us* to number our days, that we may apply *our* hearts unto wisdom. ¹³ Return, O LORD, how long? and let it repent thee concerning thy servants. ¹⁴ O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. ¹⁵ Make us glad according to the days *wherein* thou hast afflicted us, *and* the years *wherein* we have seen evil. ¹⁶ Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. ¹⁷

And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it.

Questions for Study

"My Hope Is in Thee"

1. Why is man prone toward vanity, materialism, and show?
2. What is the remedy for this proneness?
3. Discuss the figures of speech in Psalm 39:10-11.
4. What are some façades we may be tempted to hide behind?

"Teach Us to Number Our Days"

5. What do the facts of God's infinitude and immortality do for finite mortals?
6. Verse 8 is a terrifying thought. What was the solution for those of Moses' day?
7. How do we number our days (Psalm 90:12)?
8. How are frail man's deepest needs met'?

Analyzing the Passage

Vain shew (Psalm 39:6) reveals unregenerate man's proneness to hide his true self with all its weaknesses and to put on a front, an untrue image of himself. To wait (Psalm 39:7) is "to look for eagerly" or "to expect." God alone brings hope to life; no wonder David "waited" for Him.

The thought of man's beauty being consumed like a moth (Psalm 39:11) emphasizes the weakness and brevity of mere physical beauty. A moth is beautiful, but its beauty is short-lived. Likewise, the physical beauty of a person is short-lived, no matter what salons and plastic surgeons may try to do.

Moses' lofty expressions in Psalm 90 inspire awe and wonder. "Our dwelling place"—to think that such a great God would dwell with mortals! "From everlasting to everlasting"—no beginning and no ending is beyond human comprehension.

There is a great contrast between the beauty of God (Psalm 90:17) and the beauty of man (Psalm 39:11).

Principles and Applications

"My Hope Is in Thee"

1. Unregenerate man makes a show of being self-sufficient, capable, and successful (Psalm 39:6). In man's thinking, to admit weakness is to become vulnerable. David hints at the reason for this human fault at the close of verse 6—"he heapeth up riches." Man experiences inner emptiness without God. Many try to fill this void with material things, but they do so in vain.

2. A man's own transgressions make him wretched (Psalm 39:6-8). Sin may promise instant gratification, but at the end of the day, its victim is left unfulfilled, empty, and miserable to the point of despair.

3. Man is speechless before God's sovereign acts (Psalm 39:9). Whenever a person gets a glimpse of the Almighty, he feels a sense of insufficiency accompanied with fear and trembling. Consider Moses at the burning bush, Israel at Mt. Sinai, Isaiah (6:5), and Peter (Luke 5:8). All strutting and putting on of airs vanish in the presence of God.

4. God is able to reach men's consciences and dismantle their façades (Psalm 39:11). The life of every person is completely open and transparent to God. He understands our hearts better than we do ourselves (Jeremiah 17:9, 10). We should welcome God's scrutiny so that we can improve.

5. The righteous recognize their need and cry out to God for mercy (Psalm 39:12-13). Every honest person admits that he has failed to come up to God's standard. In fact, he often fails even to reach his own standard. This problem is universal. The difference between the righteous and the unrighteous is what they do about this. The righteous turn to God for mercy. The unrighteous either give up and continue in their sins or else attempt to compensate for their failure. All false religions are an attempt to do this in some way. All the efforts of the unrighteous fail, for they have no Saviour.

"Teach Us to Number Our Days"

6. God is the only source of security (Psalm 90:1-2). Death was a common experience for all Israel as they wandered in the wilderness. Moses knew he would die and not enter Canaan. Knowing a God who transcends death gives comfort and hope to all who face their mortality.

7. God's infinity stands in sharp contrast to man's frailty (Psalm 90:2-10). Our time-bound, finite minds are stretched at the thought of eternity, both past and future. Perhaps we can envision an endless life in the

future, but to think of a God who has no beginning staggers human comprehension. Though we may not be able to explain it, we can and must believe it.

8. God is fully aware of man's sinful condition and conduct (Psalm 90:8). By nature we are much too shortsighted. Sin may be hidden from our fellow men but never from an omniscient God. And it is He to whom we will ultimately need to answer. The only reasonable way to deal with our sinful condition is to admit the problem, repent of sin, and receive the redemption provided in Christ.

9. Man is powerless before God's acts of judgment (Psalm 90:9-11). God is not only omniscient but also omnipotent. There is absolutely nothing we can do on our own to counter His wrath. "For our God is a consuming fire" (Hebrews 12:29). All sin is a violation against the person of God and will be judged. We choose whether this judgment will be now or later (1 Timothy 5:24).

10. Man can have his needs met only through God's mercy (Psalm 90:13-17). As the sinner recognizes his spiritual bankruptcy and lifts his eyes to God in faith, then and then alone will he become what he was meant to be. Apart from God, we are all spiritual paupers destined to eternal death. God's mercy in giving His Son and in calling us back to Himself is the answer to our need. But He will not force it upon us. We have our part to do in responding to His call and looking to Him in faith.

Important Teachings

1. Unregenerate man makes a show of being self-sufficient, capable, and successful (Psalm 39:6).

2. A man's own transgressions make him wretched (Psalm 39:6, 8).

3. Man is speechless before God's sovereign acts (Psalm 39:9).

4. God is able to reach men's consciences and dismantle their façades (Psalm 39:11).

5. The righteous recognize their need and cry out to God for mercy (Psalm 39:12, 13).

6. God is the only source of security (Psalm 90:1, 2).

7. God's infinity stands in sharp contrast to man's frailty (Psalm 90:2-10).

8. God is fully aware of man's sinful condition and conduct (Psalm 90:8).

9. Man is powerless before God's acts of judgment (Psalm 90:9, 11).
10. Man can have his needs met only through God's mercy (Psalm 90:13-17).

Answers to Questions

1. Why is man prone toward vanity, materialism, and show?

Man's fallen nature caters to what is natural—what can be seen, touched, and enjoyed with the senses. These three things require no faith; they provide instant gratification, and they promise so much. Yet they deliver so little.

2. What is the remedy for this proneness? The remedy is to hope in God (Psalm 39:7). Accept the Bible evaluation of the human dilemma – its frailty, its need and the remedy God provides in salvation through Jesus Christ. We must resist our fallen nature which insists upon independence and self-sufficiency. We need God more than anything else to give meaning, purpose and hope to life.

3. Discuss the figures of speech in Psalm 39:10, 11.

Childhood, youth, middle age, and old age clearly reveal the aging process. Physical beauty wanes with age. Youthful facial contours sag, and wrinkles appear. At any stage in life, bacteria or viruses much smaller than a moth may invade and cripple or destroy these temporal bodies. All that is physical is so temporary. This fact ought to teach us the need to cultivate a hunger for the eternal.

4. What are some façades we may be tempted to hide behind?

Adults are not beyond falling for the lure of physical beauty at the expense of the spiritual. This is readily apparent in the amount of time and money the world pours into salons, gyms, and spas. Though we do not patronize those places, we may still be infected by the spirit that drives people to them.

How much we speak about ourselves and our accomplishments says much about the object of our trust. Try going for one week without defending yourself, criticizing others, and touting your good deeds. We all are prone to hide our real selves behind one or more of these three things.

5. What do the facts of God's infinitude and immortality do for finite mortals?

These facts bring a sense of desperation to those who refuse to acknowledge God. Therefore they try to convince themselves that He

does not exist. In the case that He might exist, fallen man attempts to evade accountability to Him by trivializing sin, renaming it as mere addiction or sickness. Man-made religions bypass the need to admit spiritual bankruptcy and to come to the cross of Christ. Some seek to escape judgment through cremation and having the ashes scattered to the four winds or in the ocean.

To the child of God, His infinitude and immortality give hope in a world of chaos and uncertainty. At least He is unchanging and absolute. Recognizing God and submitting to Him bring stability and hope.

6. Verse 8 is a terrifying thought. What was the solution for those of Moses' day?

In Moses' day, all needed to acknowledge their sin and make the required sacrifices. No amount of human good works could merit their salvation. Their works and sacrifices revealed the recognition they felt within that their own sin needed atonement. They needed to recognize and rely upon God's mercy (Psalm 90:14) to find forgiveness.

7. How do we number our days (Psalm 90:12)?

Numbering our days involves keeping in mind that life is short. We will soon be taken from this life, either through death or through the coming of Christ. It is recognizing our frailty. Another aspect of numbering our days is to recognize God's sovereignty and to humble ourselves before Him. It is the opposite of the attitude James addressed in James 4:13-16.

8. How are frail man's deepest needs met?

We today, like those of Moses' day, must acknowledge our sins (1 John 1:8, 10). In our case, the sacrifice has already been made in Christ. Our being forgiven is an act of mercy on God's part. Nevertheless, we have our part to do too. Forgiveness, rest, and hope for the future are found only as we recognize our frailty and cry to our infinite and omnipotent God for mercy and allow Him to direct our paths from here on.

Summarizing the Lesson

"Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else" (Isaiah 45:22). This is God's call to a fallen race bent largely on looking elsewhere for meaning and purpose in life. We were meant for God, however, and will never be satisfied apart from Him. The words finite and frail aptly define us. Infinite and omnipotent describe God. We can be brought together in Christ.

Research Guide

1. Using a concordance, make a study of the question: What is man?
2. Find Bible metaphors describing human life (a vapor, grass, and so forth). the human dilemma—its frailty, its need, and the remedy God provides in salvation through Christ. We must resist our fallen nature, which insists on independence and self-sufficiency. We need God more than anything else to give meaning, purpose, and hope to life.