

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

February 28, 2021

Soundtrack

“One-A-Day Prayer”

Psalm 39

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Have you ever heard of or seen the wristwatch called Tikker? It is a very unique watch in that the creators designed it to not only tell time but also to count down your life so you can make every second count. Your estimated time and date of your death is counted down on the watch. Of course, it is only an estimate. Tikker uses an algorithm like the one used by the federal government to figure a person's life expectancy and then converts that into a countdown of the years, months, days, minutes, and seconds you have left on this earth. The effect is sobering, a sort of incessant grim reaper reminding you that time is running out. Tikker's inventor is a 37-year-old Swede named Fredrik Colting. He says he invented the gadget not as a morbid novelty item, but as an earnest attempt to change his own thinking. Colting, who was a former gravedigger, said, “The occurrence of death is no surprise to anyone, but in our modern society we rarely talk about it. I think that if we were more aware of our own expiration I'm sure we'd make better choices while we are alive.” That's why he calls Tikker “the happiness watch.” It's his belief that watching your life slip away will remind you to savor life while you have it. I don't know about you, but I don't want something like that on my wrist. There is a better way that the Psalmist helps us understand how precious our life is and how we can make the most of the days of life we have. Let us here what the Psalmist has to say.

PSALM 39

*¹ I said to myself, “I will watch what I do
and not sin in what I say.*

*I will hold my tongue
when the ungodly are around me.”*

*² But as I stood there in silence—
not even speaking of good things—
the turmoil within me grew worse.*

*³ The more I thought about it,
the hotter I got,
igniting a fire of words:*

*⁴ “LORD, remind me how brief my time on earth will be.
Remind me that my days are numbered—
how fleeting my life is.*

*⁵ You have made my life no longer than the width of my hand.
My entire lifetime is just a moment to you;
at best, each of us is but a breath.” Interlude*

*⁶ We are merely moving shadows,
and all our busy rushing ends in nothing.*

*We heap up wealth,
not knowing who will spend it.*

7 *And so, Lord, where do I put my hope?
My only hope is in you.*

8 *Rescue me from my rebellion.
Do not let fools mock me.*

9 *I am silent before you; I won't say a word,
for my punishment is from you.*

10 *But please stop striking me!
I am exhausted by the blows from your hand.*

11 *When you discipline us for our sins,
you consume like a moth what is precious to us.
Each of us is but a breath. Interlude*

12 *Hear my prayer, O LORD!
Listen to my cries for help!
Don't ignore my tears.*

*For I am your guest—
a traveler passing through,
as my ancestors were before me.*

13 *Leave me alone so I can smile again
before I am gone and exist no more.*

OVERWHELMING FRUSTRATION (vv. 1-3):

Evidently, when King David wrote this Psalm, he was dealing with something pretty frustrating. We don't know exactly what it was. It could have been a family problem, or something challenging he was dealing with in leading a nation as a King, or maybe he was frustrated with the way people were living their lives, or maybe he was dealing with some sort of sickness, or possibly he may have been older at this time and was struggling with the effects of aging, or maybe he might have been struggling with life in general and wondered where God was in all of it and why God had not stepped in and fixed things or made them better, or it could have been any number of things that we all struggle with in life. How does David try to handle it at first? He says that he first tries to handle the struggle by just keeping his mouth shut and not say a word. But then the longer he does this he gets more and more frustrated and feels like he is just going to explode with frustration. As David was getting more frustrated he seemed to become somewhat philosophical watching the busy rushing around of people in his kingdom and he was wondering what the meaning of life was and was all this really worth it? How do you handle life's frustrations?

Forgive me if I have shared this with you before, but if you lived in Canada, you could take your frustrations to an amusement facility that has created what they call a "Rage Room" in which guests can relieve stress by smashing things. Thundrdome Amusements in Calgary provides golf clubs, sledgehammers, pipes, and baseball bats to guests so they can release their frustrations by breaking office equipment and other items. The director says that you go in and get to smash stuff and they provide full-

blown protective gear for you to wear such as a face mask, chest protector, coveralls, and gloves. In addition to providing stress relief and anger management, spending time in the Rage Room can also help promote a healthy lifestyle according to the director who said, "You're in the room for 45 minutes, smashing all these items. You come out of the room, and you'll be sweating. And you'll feel better." Guests are also welcomed to bring their own items to smash. Sounds like fun, doesn't it? David handles his frustration in a different way.

TURNS TO God (vv.4-6):

Finally, when David couldn't handle it any longer and was about to explode with frustration, he poured out his thoughts and feelings to God in prayer. David here utters a prayer that if we prayed it every morning when we wake up it would transform how we handle the highs and lows of the day to come. In verses 4-6, the heart of this Psalm, David reflects with God about life and asks God to remind him of just how short, precious, and frail life is. David asks God to continue to remind him that our days are numbered, and that life is so fleeting. When David says that life is no longer than the width of his hand, David was using a familiar expression in his day where the width of the hand was one of the smallest units of measurement in ancient Israel. It was the equivalent of us saying today just "a couple of inches." David also says in this prayer that our lives is but just a breath. The Bible also says similarly in *James 4:14*, "¹⁴ 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." One thing you do learn as you get older is that time flies by so quickly. This was brought home to me at my son's wedding a couple of weekends ago. Numerous times during the wedding rehearsal, the rehearsal dinner, the wedding, and the wedding reception I became nostalgic as I remembered my cute little boy who I used to carry around on my shoulders, coached in sports, played video games together, and so much more who is now a man. It is so true that as we often hear people say, "It just seems like yesterday..." and now here we are today. Life does fly by so fast.

On the one hand the Psalmist was saying that he felt like he was running in a never-ending marathon through the struggles of life, and he turns to God and asks God to remind him that life actually goes by so fast. As I've also learned in life the phrase, "this too shall pass," is very true about the tough times. Hang in there when going through difficult times. You will get through it. Life goes on and if you persevere you can come out on the other side of the challenges stronger. Also, the same is true about the good times in life. Enjoy the good times while they last because even they are not permanent. We've all heard the expression and it is so true, "You Only Live Once," better known as YOLO. We get one and one only shot at life. What are we going to do with this ever so short, fragile life where every day is a gift from God? Are we going to selfishly live it for ourselves or are we going to make our lives matter the most by living it to serve God and others or as Jesus taught His disciples that the highest form of life, the most meaningful way to live our lives is to do what Jesus said in *Matthew 22:37-39*, "*You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.*"³⁸ *This is the first and greatest commandment.*³⁹ *A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'*"

Every time I conduct a funeral or memorial service I am reminded of how frail and short life is and I am challenged to make the most of this short life that I have. I hear families and friends get up and talk about their loved one who passed and what they meant to them and I wonder what will my wife, my children, and my friends say about me at the end of my life? That puts life into perspective that makes how I live life today much more meaningful. I then am reminded that life is not its best based on how much money I make, how much prestige or notoriety I have, what possessions I have, how much power I have, or how popular I might be, but a life well-lived is much more than that. Living a life that really matters is found in my relationship with God, myself, and with others. This short, frail life is a gift that God gives us to create something beautiful. We are to do as David says here to live our lives in this world as temporary residents which will then lead us to hold loosely to the things of this world that we cannot take with us when we die and give our best to those things which we can take with us when we die, our relationships with God and each other. Jesus words then in *Mark 8:37-38* make sense to us as it asks us, "³⁶*'And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?'* ³⁷*'Is anything worth more than your soul?'*" Praying David's prayer puts this life in perspective and leads us to give our lives not to the temporary stuff of this world that we cannot take with us when we die but to things which we can.

For 11 years, Mary Leonard of Louisville, Kentucky, has dealt with polymyositis, a rare inflammatory tissue disease that invades the muscles. There is no known cause or cure. Mary's case turned deadly when the disease invaded her heart. In fact, in March of 2010, Mary was told by doctors that she had 24-48 hours to live. But after 20 days in a hospice center, another 51 days in rehab, and a number of days at home, Mary is still alive. She's now reflecting on the changes that take place when you learn your time is short. "I call myself an average Christian," Mary says. "I don't know exactly why God has done this for me, but I do know that life looks different now." Mary offers five life lessons she learned through the ordeal: **1) Know that prayer is powerful. 2) Mend fences now. 3) Release the reins of life to God. 4) Know that God is able—more than able. 5) Put your focus on what really matters.** It is amazing how facing the end of life helps us most clearly see what is most important in this life. That's what makes David's prayer so powerful.

HOPE IN GOD (vv.7-13):

When David turned to God in prayer with all his frustrations and poured out his heart to God and reflected on the brevity of life he came to a powerful, transformational conclusion. The conclusion was that in the end what makes a difference for him, what makes all this we do in life manageable and meaningful is putting hope in his life in God and God alone, not in his family, his possessions, the stock market, government, his health, his job, his health, his church, his friends, his family, or anything else. Only God is the one who ultimately makes life meaningful and is worthy of our full hope and trust. When David took the time to think about the meaning of life, he realized more than ever just how much he needed God more than anything else. God is the only one who truly gives life full meaning and purpose. God is the only one who offers us defeat of even death which makes this life so short. God is the resurrection God, who through Jesus defeated death once and for all so that we have the promise of eternity, we have

promise of new life to come so that when we do face death one day, we know that this life is not all that there is and that we have a life far greater yet to come.

This then gives us strength to face whatever life has to bring our way. We now live in the light of the most hopeful eternity to come. Living our lives in the light of a most hopeful eternity gives even more meaning to our lives today. If God can defeat death and give us an eternal hope how much more can we make it through whatever we are facing today?

Phil Cooke and Jonathan Bock share in their book, *The Way Back*, saying that “author and speaker Francis Chan has the best illustration of eternity that they've ever seen. During his message, he brings out a very long rope. We're talking long! The rope winds around and around the stage, and it eventually runs off the stage to who knows where. At one end of the rope is a one-inch section painted red. The rest of the rope is white. In his talk, Chan explains that the short, one-inch red section of the rope is our life, while the rest of the rope is eternity. His point is clear: we spend so much time planning and worrying about such a short span, and we give remarkably little thought to what really counts—eternity.” This physical, temporary, frail, short life is not all that there is. There is a much better eternity that God has in store for those of us who follow Jesus.

One of things that Missy and I love to do is to travel on vacation together with just the 2 of us or with our families. We will look ahead each year and plan those trips and then we have to wait patiently to go on that getaway. It can be hard to wait, but wait we do in hopes of what is to come on that trip together or with family and the memories we are going to make and the places we are going to get to visit. Knowing that vacation is coming sometime in the future can make getting through a tough day or the mundane parts of life more manageable. Knowing that something special is just around the corner makes the challenging times of life more manageable. We are people of resurrection hope who cling to the hope we have for eternity that God has given us as gift through Jesus. I love the words of hope found in *Lamentations 3:19-24* which says, “¹⁹ *The thought of my suffering and homelessness is bitter beyond words.* ²⁰ *I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my loss.* ²¹ *Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this:* ²² *The faithful love of the LORD never ends! His mercies never cease.* ²³ *Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning.* ²⁴ *I say to myself, ‘The LORD is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in him!’” The writer here realizes that no matter what he faces his hope is put in the faithful love of the Lord whose mercies never cease. When David turned to God in his frustration, he found in God hope for a better tomorrow and God's deliverance, protection, and strength to face whatever life brings his way.*

Sometimes life can be frustrating or at times we may reflect on our busy rushing of life and wonder is it all worth it. That's a great time to pray this prayer of David in verses 4-6 that put life in proper perspective and lead us to give best to this short time God gives us and while doing so to continue to put our hope in God and God alone and in so doing we will find true, lasting, meaning, purpose and eternal significance in this one life God gives us.

Let us receive this prayer from *Romans 15:13* as our benediction as we go out into this world this week, "*I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.*"

Icebreaker I – What do you think about the “Tikker watch?” If you had the ability to know the time of your death, would you want to know?

Icebreaker II – Name an item you’d like to smash in a “Rage Room.”

1. If you only had two weeks to live, what is one thing you must do and why that one?
2. Why does David ask to know the “number of my days.” What does this say about his mood?
3. Who imposes David’s silence: David, God, or both? Why?
4. What do you think are David’s burdens? What are yours?
5. What would David prefer from God, silence, or severity?
6. Why does David ask God to “look away from me.” What does he think the Lord’s “departure” will do for him?
7. How is David’s shame like Peter’s “Depart from me” in Luke 5:8? Have you ever felt ashamed before God?
8. Perhaps David is angry when God seems unfair. Do you ever feel like God “gangs up” on you? Can you express hard questions or doubts about what God is doing?
9. Does life sometimes seem short and empty? How does that awareness affect your priorities?
10. When have you felt God was demanding “too much” from you? What happened to push you to the brink? Will this psalm give you hope in God when hard times next occur?
11. How can this group pray for you this week?