

12-31-18

Richard Overton passed away last Thursday. If you're wondering who Richard Overton is, let me tell you a little about him. Richard Overton served in the U.S. Army during WWII, fighting at places like Pearl Harbor, Okinawa, and Iwo Jima, surviving them all unscathed. He lived out the rest of his days in a house he built himself in Austin, TX. Every day, Richard ate butter pecan ice cream, and smoked 12 cigars. He liked whiskey, either straight, or in his coffee. And yet, when Richard Overton passed away on Thursday, he was the oldest living World War II veteran, and the oldest living man in America, at 112 years old.

But as we near the end of another year, I'm certain we can look back on the last 365 days and think of people whose lives ended much sooner than expected. Stillborn babies. Teenagers, young people, and adults lost to suicide, tragic accidents, or fatal diseases. People we weren't ready to say goodbye to.

When we're talking about life—whether it's an unexpectedly long life, or an unexpectedly short life-- the prayer needs to be the same. "Teach us to number our days aright!" As we get ready to cross the threshold into another new year, I think that's a prayer for us to reflect on. But since our prayer asks God to "teach" us to do this, we'll need God's help.

You see, numbering our days aright requires us to do more than just count. It's a matter of our minds and hearts. As we explore Psalm 90, we'll see that ***Numbering Our Days Aright*** requires us to do two things: 1.) ***Be realistic about your days*** 2.) ***Be purposeful with your days***

First, be realistic. God's servant Moses wrote Psalm 90 during the 40 years the Israelites wandered in the wilderness as punishment for their sin, as they traveled to the Promised Land. Because of their lack of faith, and rebellion against God, God swore that none of the men of that generation would cross into the Promised Land, Moses included. All of that death in the desert would have kept mankind's mortality very prominent in people's minds. That's why Moses begins his prayer with six verses contrasting God's immortality with mankind's mortality.

Moses prays, "***Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or your brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.***" We can't number God's days, because as Moses explains, God is eternal. Before he created the world, God already was. From eternity, and through eternity, God was, is, and always will be!

Moses then compares the immortal, eternal God with mortal mankind. He says, "***You turn men back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, O sons of men...you sweep men away in the sleep of death; they are like new grass of the morning—though in the morning it springs up new, by evening it is dry and withered.***" It's a reminder that God holds complete control over life and death. It's also a reminder why everyone's earthly lives will inevitably come to an end. Moses references God turning men back to dust, because that's what God said would happen after Adam and Eve brought sin into the world. God had formed Adam out of the dust of the ground, but sin death comes hand in hand with sin, one day Adam would die, and his body would return to the dust it came from. And because of our sin, all people can expect that same fate.

When we hear that Richard Overton was 112, our jaws drop! But to God, 112 years is barely the blink of an eye. As Moses states, "***For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.***" It's interesting that Moses uses "a thousand years" as the high benchmark for time. Even though many people lived into their 900s in the time before the Flood, the Bible doesn't record a single person that reached 1,000 years. Even man's longest lifespan is like a day, or a three-hour watch in the night to God.

These reminders help us be realistic about our days. Because we're sinners, we can expect to die. And because God's time is different than ours, we don't know when exactly our days on earth will end. You can number every day as a gift from God, but you can't assume you're guaranteed to live a really long life on earth.

That's why it's important to be realistic about numbering our days. Being realistic helps you to be ready. If I head into the new year thinking realistically that our baby could come at any moment, I'll be better prepared—bags packed, car seats installed, grandmas on speed-dial—whenever he does come. But if I'm convinced "There's plenty of time! Take it easy!" I end up unprepared when the time comes.

Being realistic as we number our days will help us be better prepared for it whenever God calls our final day. But if we're unrealistic about the number of my days, we end up with a false sense of invincibility, or an "I can worry about that stuff later" mindset when it comes to my spiritual life. If we're unrealistic, we won't be ready for our last day, whether it comes at 12 years, or 112.

But here's the beauty. God doesn't compare his eternal, immortal nature with our fragile mortality to rub it in. God points to his eternal immortality as the answer to our mortality. If God is eternal, then he truly can be our dwelling place throughout all generations!

And that's why, as we're realistic about numbering our days aright, we also want to be purposeful with those days. As Moses prays, ***"Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."*** In order to gain a heart of wisdom—about life, and death, and eternity—we need God to teach us. And that's why my challenge, my resolution for you and me in 2019 is this—to spend more time at God's feet, letting him teach you to number your days aright. But more on that later.

As you reflect on the past year, what was your greatest accomplishment? Take 10 seconds to think. Did that accomplishment help you wake up every morning, feeling completely satisfied with your life? Feeling like you could burst out in a song of joy and gladness? If you're like me, then no. That's not to say that those accomplishments are bad, or unimportant, or that you should be proud of them!

But it does lead us to reflect on what the priority of our day is, and what action we're most purposeful about each day. Because Moses does lay out in this Psalm the one thing that can daily fill us with a song of joy and gladness. ***"Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days."*** God's unfailing love will satisfy you, every single day. God's unfailing love bringing a song of joy and gladness bursting from your heart, every day. Yes, our God is the God who holds the strings of life and death, but he is also the God of unfailing love who is our eternal refuge!

That's what drives us to be purposeful with our days. If we're realistic about our mortality, we'll do everything we can to be ready, and to make the most of our days, by having a heart of wisdom, through faith. That's where the resolution I mentioned earlier comes in.

Think how different your life would be, if every morning you woke up, not stressing, fretting, or worried. But satisfied with God's unfailing love. Every evening before bed, instead of feeling dejected about your job, marriage, kids, or health, you were filled with joy over God's unfailing love. It would change the way you reacted to everything in life, wouldn't it?

That's why I want to challenge our congregation to join with me in carrying out a resolution for 2019. A resolution to be daily satisfied with God's unfailing love, as you're daily reminded of God's unfailing love, by reading some of your Bible, every day.

I know it's hard to hold yourself accountable and stay on track. I know how difficult sections and questions can make it hard to stay consistent reading your Bible. That's why I want us to join together in reading your Bibles daily for the next year. Here's how it will work.

If you have a smart phone, go to your App store, and download the app, **Bible**. Or, if you have a computer, go to **my.bible.com**. On both places, create a free account. From there, I'll send you an invite to join a private Mount Olive group with a customized one-year Bible reading plan, and also the opportunity for group discussion. That way, you can ask questions, and we can help keep each other accountable to reading some of the Bible each day. I'll be daily reading along, answering questions and posing a few discussion questions to the group. If you're planning to do this, and I REALLY am encouraging you to do so, please sign up on the sheet in the Atrium tonight. If you have a smart phone and will follow along on the app, please list a cell number, and I'll text the link the group invite to you. If you'll use your computer, list an e-mail address, and I'll e-mail the invite to you. If you'd just like to follow the plan offline, let me know and I'll print off the reading plan for you.

If we're realistic about our days, then we'll want to be purposeful with the days God's given us. I guarantee, if you take the time to read and take to heart God's unfailing love from the Bible this year, you will be more satisfied, more joyful, more glad. Please join me!

Richard Overton jokingly talked about eating ice cream, smoking cigars, and drinking whiskey as the secret to his 112 years. But what Richard Overton truthfully said was this: ***"I'd ask them to stay busy and talk to the Lord, and live with the Lord. Live with the Lord. Let him take care of you."*** Lord, teach us to number our days aright...whether they be 12 years or 112. Lord, satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all the days of 2019, and all the days of our lives.