

October 9, 2016

Eternity

From time to time, I find myself in deep inner terror. It is usually in the wee hours of the morning. Perhaps it is part of the wrestling Paul described that we do with **the rulers of the darkness of this world.** (Ephesians 6:12). It is a sensation like no other. It is a fear that cannot be fully described with words. They are thoughts that are unlike any others.

It happens when I think of eternity. I simply cannot wrap my mind around it. The idea that time never ends, that days and years go on and on, that my being never stops is, at times, scary stuff! It overwhelms me and eventually I shrink from it.

While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:18).

A subject which stands out on the face of this text is eternity, a subject which is one of the most solemn and heart-searching in the Bible. The text tells us we “look”, and that’s not a passing “look” or glance; that’s a frequent, studious and sober assessment of things we don’t now see.

Eternity is a topic which the wisest man can only take in a little at a time. We have no eyes to see it fully and no mind to grasp it completely; and yet, we must not refuse to consider it. There is an existence of stars in the heavens which the most powerful telescope cannot pierce; yet it is well worth it to look into them and learn something, even if we cannot learn everything (or even a small part of it). There are depths and nuances to the world’s oceans that have never been explored or understood, but there is wisdom to obtain by contemplating that unique part of God’s creation. Similarly, there are heights and depths and lengths about the subject of eternity which mortal man can never comprehend; but God has spoken of it, and we would therefore be most unwise to turn away from it.

I deeply feel my own insufficiency to address this subject matter, but I hope I can offer a few words and thoughts today that help the saints gathered at this church in these last days. As is often my habit, let me present points.

1. *We live in a world where all things are temporary and passing away:*

A man must be blind, deaf and dumb not to realize this truism. Everything around us is decaying, dying and coming to an end. A good description of all things on this earth is found at Matthew 6:19: **Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal.**

There is a sense, probably, in which “matter” is eternal. Once created, it will never entirely cease to exist, although it will likely be changed. But in a practical sense, everything about us is corrupting, rusting and dying -- except our souls. No wonder the poet says: “Change and decay all around I see; O Thou who changes not, abide with me!”

Every member of Adam’s race, whether eminent or unimportant, gentle or cruel, rich or poor, old or young, male or female – all are going and will soon be gone.

Beauty is only temporary. Sarah was once the fairest of women, yet a day came when Abraham, her husband, said **I am a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a burying place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.** (Genesis 23:4). **Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.** (Proverbs 31:30). We read in Job 42:15 that **in all the land were no women found so fair as the daughters of Job: and their father gave them inheritance among their brethren,** but both they and their inheritance have been gone now for centuries.

Strength of body is only temporary. I recently saw a story about a 95-year-old man who set a world record: He broke a 10-minute mile. He is the best in the world for his age. He is an oddity, to say the least. Few even live to be in their 90s.

Most aged in their 60s and 70s can't run like that (or run at all). Yet a few days or weeks will go by, and that unique old-timer will be dead and gone.

David was once a mighty man of valor, the slayer of **the lion and the bear** (1 Samuel 17:36) and the champion of Israel against Goliath. But a day came when David could not retain heat in his body and even though his servants found a **fair damsel** that **ministered to him** he didn't even recognize she was there. (1 Kings 1:3, 4).

Wisdom and power of brain are only temporary, too. Solomon was once a marvel of knowledge, and all the kings of the earth came to hear his wisdom, yet **when Solomon was old** he played the fool to the point that **his wives turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God.** (1 Kings 11:4).

These are humbling truths, and it is good to realize them and take them to heart. The houses we live in, the homes we love, the riches we accumulate, the professions we follow, the plans we formulate, the relations we enter into – they are all only for a time. What is seen is temporary and **the fashion of this world passes away.** (1 Corinthians 7:31). **Surely every man walks in a vain show: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heaps up riches, and knows not who shall gather them.** (Psalm 39:6). **Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away.** (James 4:14).

So, knowing this, we should be awake to this reality in our daily living. The pleasures, the amusements, the recreations, the profits, the earthly callings, which now absorb much of our time and drink up our minds will soon be over. They are poor fleeting things that cannot last. Do not love them too much, do not hold them too tightly, and do not make them your idols. You cannot keep them, and you must at some time leave them. Seek first the kingdom of God and then everything else will be given to you. **Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.** (Colossians 3:2). **And the world passes away, and the lust thereof: but he that does the will of God abides forever.** (1 John 2:17). So, **lay up for yourselves**

treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. (Matthew 6:20).

The flip side of this brings cheer and comfort. Our trials, crosses and conflicts are also temporary. They will soon come to an end, and even now they are working for us a **far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.** (2 Corinthians 4:17). Receive them patiently; bear them quietly; look upward, forward and beyond them, well-knowing they are here for but a little while.

2. *We are all moving towards a world – or a condition – where everything is eternal:*

By “eternity” we mean infinite duration or existence; a state of being which is infinite and everlasting. Eternity is alluded to in Exodus 15:18 – **The Lord shall reign forever and ever.** Often in scripture the concept of eternity goes hand in hand with the attribute of God generally referred to as the eternity of God. So, for instance, we read in Deuteronomy 33:27 – **The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: . . .**

In the midst of the burning bush event, **God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.** (Exodus 3:14). We see here one of the distinguishing names and characters of Jehovah. This solemn name demands our greater veneration and reverence because it is the very name which the Lord was pleased to reveal Himself to Moses at the bush. He that is I AM is and must be always and eternally the same.

In this regard, please consider the words of Dr. Gill: “*The eternity of God belongs to His infinity; for as He is not bounded by space, so neither by time, and therefore eternal. He is often called the everlasting God, and the King Eternal. * * * Eternity, properly so called, is that which is without beginning and end, and is without succession, or does not proceed in a succession of moments one after another; and is opposed to time, which has a beginning. * * * Eternity, in this sense, is peculiar to God; as He only has eternity.*”

With these general concepts in mind, let's take a look at that condition or state of existence where we head. That great unseen state of existence, which lies beyond this life we presently experience, is forever. Whether it is happy or miserable, whether it is a condition of joy or sorrow, we know that in one respect it will be utterly unlike anything in this world. There will be no decay, no end, no goodbyes, no mornings and evenings, no "time" and no annihilation.

The contrast between now and then, between this world and the next, is so very great that our feeble minds cannot grasp it all. But, we can settle one thing firmly in our minds, and that is that the future happiness of those who are saved is eternal. It is something that will have no end: it will never cease, never grow old and never die. Once they arrive in paradise, the saints of God will never ever leave that wonderful place. Their inheritance can never perish, spoil or fade. They will receive a crown of glory that will never fade away. Peter describes it as an inheritance that is **incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.** (1 Peter 1:4). In closing that same epistle, Peter again talks of a **crown of glory that fades not away.** (1 Peter 5:4). You will see from these writings of Peter the term "fade" is twice-used. Looking at that word, we learn that this promised eternal condition and state of affairs will never –

- Become dim or lose its brightness;
- Lose its freshness, vigor, strength and health;
- Lose its vividness of color; or,
- Disappear or die gradually.

The best commentary I found on this portion of scripture is that of Barnes, and he says:

"And that fadeth not away - Greek ἀμάραντος amaranton. This word occurs nowhere else in the New Testament, though the word ἀμαράντινος amarantinos occurs in [1 Peter 5:4](#), applied to a crown or garland. The word is properly applied to that which does not fade or wither, in contradistinction from a flower that fades. It may then denote anything that is enduring, and is applied to the future inheritance of the saints to describe its perpetuity in all its brilliance and

splendor, in contrast with the fading nature of all that is earthly. The idea here, therefore, is not precisely the same as is expressed by the word "incorruplicable." Both words indeed denote perpetuity, but that (i.e. "incorruplicable") refers to perpetuity in contrast with decay; this (i.e., no fading) denotes perpetuity in the sense that everything there will be kept in its original brightness and beauty. The crown of glory, though worn for millions of ages, will not be dimmed; the golden streets will lose none of their luster; the flowers that bloom on the banks of the river of life will always be as rich in color, and as fragrant, as when we first beheld them." [Parenthetical comments added].

Man has tried to describe eternity, but their best efforts fall short. Here is one sample from an old tale entitled “How Long Eternity?” --

Then the king had one more question of the child: "How many seconds are there in eternity?"

And the boy replied: "In the hinterlands of Pommerania, there is a mountain made of the hardest diamond. It's one hour deep into the earth, one hour up toward the sky, one hour long and one hour wide. To this mountain comes a little bird, once every hundred years, to sharpen its beak. And when this bird has worn away the whole mountain, the first second of eternity has passed."

Close, but no cigar! But you get the drift, and beyond what I have said I am at a loss for any more helpful words.

3. *Our future state in the unseen world of eternity depends, at least to some degree, on what we are in the present:*

As I have mentioned, the life that we live on this earth is short and soon gone. **For all our days are passed away in thy wrath. (Psalm 90:9). For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time, and then vanishes away. (James 4:14).**

But, short as our life is here, and endless as it will be in eternity, the life we now live will have a tremendous impact on eternity. **(God) will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile.** (Romans 2:6-9).

So, we see from those emphasized words that there is a connection between “deeds” during this earthly life, and “eternal” life.

Let us look at a few more proving examples. Pharaoh spent his life famously mistreating the Lord’s chosen people. He ended up at the bottom of the Red Sea where scripture tells us he was covered by the depths and sank **as a stone**. (Exodus 15:5). This account speaks to the suddenness and thoroughness of Pharaoh’s destruction. And as Barnes tells us, the language used here suggests that those who become famous in this life as the enemies of God “are suddenly destroyed, and their hopes, and joys, and triumphs put out forever.” So we see here the eternal condition of Pharaoh and his like.

And what about Nabal of Carmel, who was **churlish and evil in his doings** (1 Samuel 25:3); words that described Nabal’s performance in this life? Nabal scornfully rebuffed David’s peaceful approach, proclaiming: **Who is David? And who is the son of Jesse?** (1 Samuel 25:10). In other words, according to Nabal, God’s chosen people are nobodies and nothing, suited only for mistreatment. Not long after that his heart turned to stone, **for the Lord hath returned the wickedness of Nabal upon his own head.** (1 Samuel 25:39).

And finally, a classic example would be Judas Iscariot, who famously betrayed Jesus. Contemplate what scripture tells us of this man: **The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man (Judas) by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born.** (Matthew 26:24). Clearly, we see here that the activities of Judas on this earth greatly impacted how he would spend eternity.

Therefore, I submit to you there are eternal consequences to our life's thoughts, words and actions, which is something we need to often remember. Christ spoke to this while here on earth: **But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.** (Matthew 12:36). And consider Paul's writing to the Galatians on this topic: **For he that sows to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.** (Galatians 6:8).

Now, before I conclude this point, let me be clear: I am not here saying that we get to heaven because of the kind of life we lead. In other words, we are not saved by our life's works. And obviously, I'm not saying we need to be perfect, or that anybody is perfect or could be perfect. That's nonsense! I am, though, saying our station and status in eternity will be impacted by the life we live here, if Scripture is to be credited. As Christ told members of the church at Thyatira, **I will give unto every one of you according to your works.** (Revelation 2:23). And in Matthew Chapter 16, Christ is talking to his disciples and about those who take up their cross daily (that is, the Lord's people), and in that context says: **For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.** (Matthew 16:27).

4. *The Lord Jesus Christ is the great Friend to whom we must all look for help, both for now and eternity:*

In the midst of all this heavy drama, we need a friend; in a word, someone who will help us. **And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.** (Exodus 33:11). It's good to have friends. The Bible is filled with dozens of passages talking about the Lord's people and their friends.

But when we start talking about our eternal hopes and stations, we need a really, really powerful, loyal, trustworthy and effective friend, and that friend is Jesus Christ! Earthly friends fail and falter. **My kinsfolk have failed, and my**

familiar friends have forgotten me. (Job 19:14). Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me. (Psalm 41:9). But the Lord is our everlasting, forceful, functioning and all-powerful friend. He calls his chosen people his friends. **And I say unto you my friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do.** (Luke 12:4). **Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.** (John 15:14, 15).

And, get this, not only is our Lord our friend, but he names (or labels) us His friend. **And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness; and he was called the Friend of God.** (James 2:23).

And what can we expect from this mighty friend when it comes to these deep and profound matters of life, death and eternity; these matters of temporary things which are seen and eternal things which are unseen? Well, here's a flavor of what our mighty redeemer has for us: **But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.** (2 Timothy 1:10). **And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.** (Hebrews 2:15). So we see from these potent verses, our Lord Jesus has abolished death and shown us (that is, enlightened us as to) life and immortality through his glorious word, and has guaranteed us deliverance, though we spend our lives imprisoned by the fear

of death. This is great comfort as we pass through these temporary things and look forward to eternal things.

So, it seems fit to end this with Paul's powerful concluding comments of his writings to the church at Corinth regarding death and the resurrection of the human body, where he exclaims: **O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?** (1 Corinthians 15:55). Matthew Henry says on this:

All the saints should not die, but all would be changed. In the gospel, many truths, before hidden in mystery, are made known. Death never shall appear in the regions to which our Lord will bear his risen saints.

And Matthew Poole writes:

Where is thy sting? What hurt canst thou now do unto believers, more than a wasp, or hornet, or bee, that hath lost its sting? **O grave,** or O hell, (the same word signifieth both), **where now is thy victory?** The conqueror of all flesh is now conquered, the spoiler of all men is spoiled; it had got a victory, but now, O death, where is thy victory?

I love you!

Amen.