

The Eternity of God

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 July 2024

Preacher: Jamie Gallacher

[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning. Love to see you all again. I bring blessings from Hamilton, although I have just come back from London yesterday, so please forgive me if I'm just a little bit tired.

But no, it's great to be back. And Cal had got in contact about a few weeks ago, and he said you were doing a series on the attributes of God. You were thinking about who God is. I think it's wonderful to really consider God as a person, as his divine nature, because I find that as I've done my studies, just a wee update for you, I've now completed my four years at Highland Theological College, so graduated about three or four weeks ago with my BA. And actually, when Cal got in contact, he said, I'd like you to talk about God as eternal. I'm like, that's great. I did an essay on the timelessness of God. I am not going to bore you with the intricacies of that. However, some things may be more pertinent than others. But since we are considering the person of God, I think it is only right that we pray and ask him to reveal himself as I speak. So let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have revealed yourself. We thank you that we have in your word, your self-revelation of your personhood, of who you are. God, you could have hidden yourself.

You could have kept in the darkness and kept us in ignorance. But instead, in your love and in your mercy and your grace, you broke into the world, not only by your creation, but by revealing yourself in your word and in your son. And Father, as we come and consider who you are, and we consider your eternal attributes, Lord, we pray that you would reveal yourself here, that we would leave here knowing that little bit more about you, that we would leave here knowing who you are and why you have revealed yourself as such. And Father, we pray that you'll come amongst us and your Holy Spirit will be here and dwell amongst us. In Jesus' name, amen.

Amen. If you have a Bible, can you turn with me to Psalm 90? I've often thought, if I could stop time, what would I do with it? How would I spend those moments in which everyone else was frozen? How would I spend those moments in which everything else was not moving?

[3 : 0 3] succession by succession. Psalm 90 begins, a prayer of Moses, the man of God.

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting, you are God.

thinking about the idea of eternity, of what does it mean to be eternal? Now, the wee thought experiment that I had of what would I do if time had stopped, perhaps it's helpful in one sense of speaking of a time that we think of not moving, but is it eternity? Perhaps the most famous verse that talks about eternity, or the one that we all know is John 3, 16, for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. I think we often have this idea of eternity as being the thing that happens when we die. So I want to consider God as eternal by looking at three headings. I want to have the idea of God's eternity, so looking at the concepts, then looking at the importance of God's eternity, and then finally looking at the impact of God's eternity.

So thinking of the idea of eternity as being something that we go into, you know, I'll pass into eternity, I'll go into eternity, it's something, it's a future idea, it's something that we pass into as a space-time continuum. I'm sure as Cal loves his space analogies, he will approve of using space-time, of using this idea of being located in a particular area, a particular part of space, as something that we move into as being eternal. But in order to understand eternity, I think we need to understand the opposite. We need to understand what time is. Now, we do understand time, it's a lot easier for us to understand time because we are time-constrained. We are to be here for 10.30. The service is to start at 10.30, thereabouts. It's to finish at some point in the future, some time in the future, we are going to have lunch at 1 p.m. And trust me, I won't speak for eternity, you'll be happy to know. Sorry, that's the last time I have that one. But we have to think of eternity in the concept of time. Because if we don't have a concept of time, then eternity just becomes another world. It still is, but it's a lot easier to understand when we understand time. There is a theory of time that talks about time as a succession of moments. Now, when we think about time, we think about hours. We think about minutes. We think, my train arrives at 12.33. We think of, I'm going to this place. It will take about an hour to get there. Now, if we take time in that chunks, those are the times and chunks that we deal with. But what the philosophy of time does is lowers those chunks to a smaller and smaller degree so that you have infinitesimal sizes of time. And what our experience of time is, is essentially a succession of those infinitesimal periods of time. Now, we may think the smallest thing we think of is seconds or picoseconds or nanoseconds. But if we take those small, small chunks, essentially what we think of as time is a succession of moments. Now, what moments also bring is change. The idea that time and change are irrevocably linked. They are linked in a sense that wherever there is time, there is change. There is movement from one to the other. There is movement from one thing to the other as we move through time.

And therefore, when we think about eternity, when we think of something which is outside of that rubric of time, we therefore have to think of something which isn't changing. We have to think of something which isn't moving along that continuum of time, but is actually outside of that continuum.

[8 : 01] Now, God, we claim, we say, is eternal. So what does that mean that God is outside of time?

Well, it means he's not impacted by those continuous moments. He's not impacted by the change in those moments. In fact, he is above and beyond those moments. It also gives us the idea that God, whilst not constrained by time, can interact with people in time. We will think about that just a wee bit later on. But you see that this concept of eternity, this concept of being outside of time, brings with it this idea that God is above and beyond.

And therefore, we have to think in terms of what God reveals about himself. Because we can't conceptualize this. While we can say that what eternity is is not this, what God is in eternity is only what we have revealed. Everlasting to everlasting. Those phrases, we often think of hymns, you know, the everlasting arms. And again, we definitely think of everlasting as something which happens in the future. However, when Cal had asked me to do this, he sent me a chapter of a book.

And in that chapter, there was a thought experiment that apparently Augustine had taken part in, where Augustine was asked, what was God doing in eternity before he created the worlds? Now, you've seen in our passage in Psalm 90, that it was before the mountains were made, before these gigantic things that we would consider as being there from time immemorial. Before that happened, what was God doing? You know, was God just sitting about twiddling his thumbs? Was he just, you know, sitting there in the ether, not doing anything? And actually, what we find is that Augustine was asked this question, what was God doing in eternity before creation?

And God was being God. God was existing and being God the same way that he would continue to be God after he had created. God did not change when he created the world. However, he brought into being something which did not exist beforehand. However, God still continued to be the same God that we have now. He still continued to be the God who loves. He still continued to be the God who has mercy.

[10 : 58] But instead of having a creature that he experienced that with, he had the Trinity. So in his Trinity, he had the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And for eternity, before the creation of the world, they were loving, they were merciful, they were keeping communion with one another before the creation of the world. God was not sitting there thinking, well, I don't have a creation. There's nothing for me to do. In a sense, that stopping of time, it wasn't just God was frozen in eternity past. Instead, God was active. God was active in loving. God was active in being God, being the only thing that he could be.

So we've thought a wee bit about the concept of eternity, of what eternity is. But what's the importance of God's eternity? What does it matter? Well, it's interesting that the authorship of this psalm is attributed to Moses. Now, I'm grateful that you have a wee thing for me here since I don't have a PowerPoint, but you have the name of God sitting in front of the communion table. And I noticed that when I came in. I thought, excellent. Because the most famous passage that we think of when we think of Moses is the burning bush. Moses is before the burning bush, which was burning but not consumed.

And during the conversation, Moses says to God, who shall I say has sent me? And what does God respond? He says, I am that I am. And that's where we get this from the Yod-Heh-Vav-Heh, or Jehovah, Yahweh, Adonai.

So why would God give such a response, and how does it connect to our idea of eternity? Well, the I am is the present, is the present first person. I am. It's not I was. It's not I am going to be. It's I am.

It's I am present. I am here. I am with you. But secondly, it tells us, as we've been thinking, that I am means that he's not affected by the changing times or the seasons. He has a firm foundation. It doesn't mean that in some point in time he's not going to be I am. So if this is how God describes himself, eternity must play a part of something in the very essence, the very makeup of God himself.

[13 : 42] And I want to consider how his eternity attaches itself to all of the other attributes. I know that Cal has been very adamant that these things are not in themselves parts of God, that, you know, God is loving or merciful or wrathful or jealous, but God is all in all. And therefore, his eternity is not just a part of God, but it's part of the whole. But his eternity also shines light on things like his self-sufficiency. If you've never thought about what God's self-sufficiency looks like, think of again, before the creation of the world, God was not in need of anything. He does not require anything. It often frustrates me when people will come and say, well, God just needs us to worship him.

God is in need of nothing. And in his eternity, he is more so in need of nothing because in eternity past, he had no one to worship him before he created the world. And yet he was perfectly capable of being self-sufficient back in eternity past. Secondly, it connects to his holiness. Now, there are some things that God has asked us to be, you know, be holy for the Lord is holy. Love just as the Lord loves.

But in his eternity, we cannot be like him. In his eternity, we are confronted with our creatureliness. We are confronted with the fact that God made time and we are bound by that time. And we are bound by those succession of moments. We are bound by the change that happens in those moments. And therefore, we are confronted with the fact that he is God and we are not. Again, in our passage, we see from everlasting to everlasting, he is God.

And thirdly, it confronts us with our neglect of God. Stephen Charnock, who I think Cal has been drawing on for some of his material, says, there is in the nature of every sin, a tendency to reduce God to a not being. And we're thinking about God as being the I am, the being. But he says that we tend to reduce God to a not being. He that thinks unworthily of God or acts unworthily towards him sullies and destroys these two perfections of his. Immutability, so the fact that God is unchanging, and eternity. Charnock continues, he that loves a perishing thing with the same affection he should love an everlasting God, despises his eternity. Strong words from Charnock, but it gives us this idea that if we have the greatest of all things, if God is the highest of all beings, and being the highest of all beings, he is eternal, if we should love something which is temporal, be that money, be that a relationship, be that our time, be that some kind of thing that we have here in this present world, more than the eternal God. How much are we selling ourselves short, never mind God?

Perhaps we would think of Romans chapter 1 in this instance, that his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world. If we stop there in Romans 1, we would think, wow, that's amazing. But Paul goes on, for claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals. They exchanged God for other things.

[17 : 55] And so the importance of God's eternity is that we are confronted with God himself. We are confronted with the only true God, with the only one that is worthy of our affection and our worship. And yet so often we exchange it for something else. And that's why Jesus came. That's why Jesus came and died on a cross to save us from that exchange. That we sullied and destroyed and despised the eternity of God.

Therefore, Jesus died on the cross for the very thing we did to him. So finally, the impact of God's eternity.

I want to think about just two things here, providence and peace. In Psalm 139, it says in verse 16, your eyes saw my unformed substance and your book written every one of them. And the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were, there was none of them. So in Psalm 139, we have the psalmist talking about before even any day had been experienced by the psalmist when he was still in his mother's womb. The days that were formed for me were written in your book. The idea of providence, the idea of that God has laid in front of us every single thing that will become of us.

The idea that because God is eternal, because God is outside of time, that he has placed before us what will happen. What will be tomorrow? What will happen the next hour? What will happen in the next year? And therefore, we should have confidence in God. We should have confidence because God has not left us to go our own way. God has not left us to simply just wander in ambivalence towards him, but in fact, has placed before us the path that we should walk in. Under that big umbrella of providence as well, we find the promises of God. You know, throughout scripture, we see that God promises these things near future and in the medium and longer future. For instance, we may think of the birth of Isaac, if we were thinking back in Genesis, that God says in a year's time, Isaac will be born, and Sarah laughed. She did not believe the promises of God. Maybe in medium term, we could think of the exile as the Babylonian exile happened over 70 years, and God said, you will return. And then we can think longer term things like the birth of the Messiah, the promise given to David in 2 Samuel chapter 7, that there will be a king on your throne forever. And that promise was fulfilled. Because God is eternal, he can make these promises, and he can fulfill them. Because he is not constrained by the times and the changing seasons, he is outwith time, and he has providentially placed everything in its pattern. God can fulfill the promises that he makes.

So what does that mean for us? Well, that means that we can have peace. If we're thinking about providence, I can think of no other person than John Calvin to speak into this particular subject. And he speaks when commenting on this psalm, the everlastingness of which Moses speaks is to be referred not only to the essence of God, but also to his providence by which he governs the world. Although he subjects the world to many alterations, he remains unmoved. And that not only in regard to himself, but also in regard to the faithful, who find from experience that instead of being wavering, he is steadfast in his power, truth, righteousness, and goodness, even as he has been from the beginning. The fact that God is providentially ordering our steps, the fact that we can trust that God has absolutely got our best interest at heart, means that we can trust him. And by trusting him, we can have peace.

[22 : 56] You know, so often it is that we worry ourselves because we think, what's going to happen tomorrow? We worry ourselves because we think, what will happen in the next year? What will happen if I don't get X? What will happen if I lose my job? What will happen if I can't get to the place that I'm going to?

In Philippians, we have those verses that when Paul writes to the Philippians, do not worry and do not fear. And worry and fear are the expressions of not trusting in the providence of God. Worry and fear are the expressions of saying, I don't think God knows what he's doing.

Worry and fear say, God, have you lost control? But dwelling upon the eternity of God, dwelling upon the everlastingness of God, gives us the sense that God is in control. God does know what he is doing.

God is providentially eternal, and he knows what he has placed in this time. And therefore, we should not worry. Therefore, we should trust in God. I was too late to ask, but I was going to ask if we could sing the old hymn of leaning, leaning, leaning on the everlasting arms. And that's what I hope that as we've thought about the eternity of God, not just about the concepts, but as we think about what it means for us, it means trust. It means trusting in a God who is not moved by the changing times and seasons, the wars that happen, the things that happen in politics, or the things that happen in economics. But a God who is outwith all of that, who is ordering all of that, and who is trustworthy to fulfill his promises and to bring us to the end. Do you trust a God like that? Do you trust a God who is like that? Do you trust a God who is the great I am? And do you believe in him? Shall we pray?

Father, we thank you that you are a God who orders our steps. Father, we thank you that every day in the book of our lives is written and is established by your providence, by your plan, and by your purposes.

[25 : 36] And Father, as we trust you, as we trust who you are and what you are doing, help us to rely on you, help us to be closer to you, help us to know you more. Father, we do pray this in our Lord Jesus' name. Amen.