

The Word of Our God Stands Forever

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[0:00] The grass withers, the flower fades, the word of our God will stand forever.! In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

So the writer G.K. Chesterton once said this, Certain new theologians dispute original sin, which is the only part of Christian theology which can be really proved.

Now I think typically of Chesterton, he often overstates his point, and he certainly did here, but it remains true that when we look at the world around us, the effects of original sin and the effects of the fall are fairly obvious, are they not?

Recently in our Christianity Explored course, in the session on sin, we heard this, The world is not the way it's supposed to be because we are not the way we are supposed to be.

And that is true of every single one of us. Because the hard truth is that we are sinners, not just by choice, not just by the things that we do, but by nature, by what we are.

[1:35] Our hearts are sinful, so the things that we do are sinful, and the world is an absolute wreck because of it. Recently our family was all piled onto Mia's bed for evening prayers.

And Elaine looks down at cute little Lucy and says, Lucy, you're a little bottle of original sin. And Mia jumps in immediately. We all are. That pretty well sums it up.

But what does that mean? We think about hope, especially. Well, it means that putting our hope in the things of this world is always going to lead to disappointment.

To put our hope in the people of this world is always going to lead to disappointment. Even if it's the people we're supposed to look up to.

Case in point. Look at how many of our elected leaders, some of the most prominent people in our culture, have gotten themselves into very serious trouble recently.

[2:44] The people that we're supposed to look up to, the people that we hold up on pedestals, guess what? They're just as messed up as the rest of the fallen world. And before we tempt ourselves into thinking, well, yeah, things look pretty bad.

A lot of people are bad. But here's the deal. I'm one of the good people. And I just need to be true to myself. Before we fell into thinking that, let's think again.

See that thought expressed by Ralph Waldo Emerson, who once said, to be yourself in a world that's constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment.

So is that the answer? Is it to be yourself? Is that the great accomplishment? To say things around me might be bad, but I just need to be myself.

Our reading from Isaiah this morning just proves that notion pretty quickly, doesn't it? Look with me in Isaiah 40 where we read, All flesh is as grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.

[4:00] The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Lord blows on it. Surely the people are grass. So to make this personal, I'm grass.

Any beauty that I have, and I assure you I don't think I have all that much, but what there is, it's going to fade. I am bound to wither.

I am bound to fade. I am like grass. What good is it going to do me to be true to myself? I am going to die. I am going to die because I am a sinner.

And guess what? So are you. So is everyone you know. And on one level it gets even worse.

We find Paul citing in Romans 3 about the human predicament. None is righteous. No, not one. No one understands. No one seeks God.

[5:04] All have turned aside. Together they have become worthless. No one does good. Not even one. Their throat is an open gash.

They use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood.

In their paths are ruin and misery. In the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes. Who is Paul talking about?

Everyone. So much for being true to myself being the answer. That won't turn out very well. The reality is that I am not righteous and neither are you.

The hope for the world can't be the good people because we could look and look and would never find them. It is not simply a matter of doing better and trying harder. Paul tells us quite forcefully that we are worthless.

[6:22] That stings a bit, doesn't it? We are not righteous, none of us. Our flesh is like grass. Is there any wonder that the world is in the state that it is in?

We can't put our trust in the things of this world. We can't put our trust in other human beings. We can't put our trust in ourselves. Because we fade like the flower of the field.

And our flesh is as grass. That's a sorry state to be in, isn't it? If everything fades, if everything withers, what hope do we have?

Fortunately, as we see in Isaiah, that's not where we're left. It's true, the grass withers. It's true that the flower fades.

That's the grass withers and the flower fades. But, and we have to emphasize that, but the word of our God will stand forever. If you want to know what doesn't wither and what doesn't fade, if you want to know what is good and what we can trust, here we find our answer, and it could not be any clearer, could it?

[7:40] The word of our God will stand forever. That is our trust. That is our hope.

If that is our refuge, we can be certain that we will never be put to shame. In that classic hymn, Abide with Me, we hear these words.

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day. Earth's joys grow dim, its glories pass away. Change and decay in all around I see.

Well, that pretty well sums up our situation, doesn't it? Because even for me, I'm a pretty young guy, and let's assume I live for a really long time, my life is still coming to a close pretty quickly.

And if we understand that rightly, that it's true for all of us, we've got to realize that the joys of Earth, that the glories of this world, are dimming and passing away day by day.

[8:41] There's change and decay in everything we see. But the key point comes in the final line of the verse.

Oh, thou who changest not, abide with me. There is one who doesn't fade. There is one whose glories will never pass away, and he is our God, and his word abides forever.

In one of my favorite movies, it's not specifically a Christian film, but I think it's certainly insightful, one of the characters is a bit bummed out that his girlfriend has grown tired of him and dumped him.

So he has this to say, as he's reflecting. Somehow everything comes with an expiration date.

Swordfish expires, meat sauce expires, even cling wrap expires.

Is there anything in the world that doesn't? Is there anything that doesn't? There is. At that point, when I'm watching the film, I kind of wish I could jump into the screen and say to the guy, yep, it's true that swordfish and meat sauce are going to expire on you.

[9:56] And clearly your relationship with your girlfriend just expired. Sorry about that. But the word of our God never expires.

There is something that doesn't expire. And here's what I want us to understand. Our God's word never expires, which means that his promises never expire.

And that means that they never fail. So what do we trust? And where can we confidently place our hope? In our God, in his word, in his promises.

Which brings us to the focus of this Advent season. Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is our hope and who is our salvation. Because when you boil this Advent thing down to its core, it's all about our hope in Jesus Christ.

We think about that baby born in the manger, that long expected Jesus, born to set his people free from sin and death, just as God promised. And we see that he had been promised for a long time.

[11:09] Because no sooner than in the garden, when Adam disobeys God and he eats the fruit he's commanded not to eat, no sooner than that happens. And the world and the human race are plunged into sin and death and darkness.

What happens? God promises that salvation would come. See it in Genesis 3 when God says to the serpent, the devil, who tempted mankind into sin, I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and her offspring.

He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel. Now in these simple words, we realize that what is being promised is profound.

Because this seed of woman that God is talking about is the son of God who became man who would be bruised by the devil on the cross.

who would crush the devil, who would defeat death. And it's this promised one, Jesus, who would save his people from their sins.

[12 : 25] And just a cursory glance at the Old Testament will show us that it's promised again and again. We see it, for example, in God's promise to Abraham.

Abraham. He's told that through his seed, through his descendant, every nation of the world would be blessed. We see it in God's promise to King David that a king of his line would reign forever and ever.

We see it in God's promise given through the prophet Isaiah that the Savior would be a suffering servant who would justify and save many by bearing their sins.

Where do all of these promises find their fulfillment? Our Savior Jesus. The one who has rescued us from death and the devil by trampling them under his feet through his cross and resurrection.

The king of David's line, the son of David who has come and is coming again to reign forever and ever. The suffering servant. The one who lived a perfect life in obedience to the law of God to rescue the disobedient.

[13 : 33] The one who died the death that we deserve as our substitute and our place. When we look to the fulfillment of the promises of God, we look to Jesus who will stand forever as our Savior and as our King.

We think about hope. We think especially about hope during this Advent season. We think about that baby who was born in a manger who would go on to die for us, to ransom us with His blood, to wash us in His blood, to set us free from sin so that we now have peace with God and the promise of eternal life.

We remember that He is coming again. We remember in hope and in joy and in peace that the world cannot give. Looking back again at our text in Isaiah 40 this morning, we read, Behold, the Lord God comes with might and His arm rules for Him.

Behold, His reward is with Him and His recompense before Him. He will tend His flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs in His arms. He will carry them in His bosom and gently lead those that are with young.

So our hope, our joy, our peace is that the Lord Jesus tends us like a shepherd. The good shepherd who gives His life for the sheep.

[15 : 00] He will carry us and He is coming back again to gather us in His arms. Praise the Lord. And so as the Christian looks to that day when He comes again, the Christian looks to it in hope rather than terror.

Now it's true that that day will come like a terror to those who don't know the Lord who aren't washed in His blood and aren't clothed in His righteousness.

We read about that this morning in 2 Peter 3 where we read that the day of the Lord will come like a thief and then the heavens will pass away with a roar and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

Well, that sounds kind of scary. How can we look to that with hope? We who have been sinners who will stand in judgment before our righteous judge when the heavenly bodies are burned and the earth and all the works that are done on it will be exposed.

How can we look forward to that with hope? The only real answer to that question is that the judge who is coming is also our Savior. The only answer to that question is that our sins are nailed to His cross, that our sins are forgiven through faith in His blood so we can greet that day in joy not because we're worthy of eternal life, but because He is worthy of eternal life and He has purchased it for us through His obedient life and His death on the cross.

[16 : 41] So on that day, I can look forward to it and hope because it will not be my righteousness, thank God, that answers for me before the judgment seat of God, but the perfect righteousness of my Savior, Jesus Christ.

John Newton once said in one of the stanzas of Amazing Grace that's often omitted, The earth shall soon dissolve like snow the sun forbear to shine, but God who called me here below will be forever mine.

Flesh is grass, the heavens will be dissolved, the earth and all the works done in it will be exposed. And that sounds pretty bleak until we stop to consider what will remain.

Our God and His promises. Our God who called us to Himself, our God who redeemed us, He will stand forever and if we belong to Him, if our trust is in Him, we will stand forever with Him.

He will be forever ours because we are His. Not because of what we have done, but because of the extravagant, and undeserved mercy to us in Jesus.

[18:05] I want each of us to consider this morning. Where am I placing my hope? Am I placing my hope in the things of this life? that's not going to work out very well.

It will fade, it will be dissolved, and in the end we will be left disappointed and empty-handed. Or am I placing my hope in myself that I'm a pretty good person and I just need to act like a pretty good person.

It needs to be clearly said that there is no salvation to be found in ourselves. None of us are righteous, none of us can withstand the coming judgment on our own merits or through our own good deeds.

We need to be rescued. So where then can we place our hope and our trust? There is only one answer to that question.

His name is Jesus Christ. He will never fade. The promise of eternal life found in Him will never fail. He will stand forever even as the grass fades and the heavens are dissolved.

[19:20] And if our hope and our trust is in Him, we can be certain of this, that He who called us will be forever ours.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.