

Eternity

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[0 : 00] Now we're going to read two passages of Scripture. We're going to read first of all from Isaiah, Isaiah chapter 57. We're going to read verses 14 to 21, this section of Isaiah that speaks of God, restoring God, healing his people, his wayward people.

We read from verse 14, it shall be said, build up, build up, prepare the way, remove every obstacle, every obstruction from my people's way.

For thus says the one who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy. I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite, the humble.

For I will not contend forever, nor will I always be angry, for the spirit would grow faint before me in the breath of life that I made. Because of the iniquity of his unjust gain, I was angry.

I struck him. I hit my face and was angry. But he went on back, sliding in the way of his own heart. I have seen his ways, but I will heal him.

[1 : 27] I will lead him and restore comfort to him and his mourners, creating the fruit of the lips. Peace, peace to the far and to the near, says the Lord. I will heal him.

But the wicked are like the tossing sea, for it cannot be quiet. And its waters toss up mire and dirt. There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked.

Then in Matthew's gospel, Matthew 25, 31 to 46, we're going to be considering, in fact, we're reading in Isaiah 57, the whole matter of eternity.

And we read here of the final judgment in relation to eternity. When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.

Before him will be gathered all the nations. And he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on his left.

[2 : 30] Then the king will say to those in his right, come you who are blessed by my father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

For I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you clothed me.

I was sick and you visited me. I was in prison and you came to me. Then the righteous will answer him saying, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you?

Or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you? Or naked and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?

And the king will answer them, Truly I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these, my brothers, you did it to me. Amen.

[3 : 28] May God add his blessing to these readings from his holy word. And we return to Isaiah 57 and the whole matter of eternity.

And it's certainly the case that, you know, so many events, a large number of events really that have happened in recent times have really brought to the fore the whole matter of eternity.

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic really that's happened throughout the world has really brought to our generations the reality of the brevity and fragility of life.

And, of course, the corresponding reality of eternity. And it's that reality that none of us can bury our heads in the sand over.

Because death is all around us. Eternity has to be addressed. And that eternity that, yes, God has set in the hearts of every person, whether every person admits to that or not.

[4 : 35] So we have the general, the pandemic that has brought to our, very much to the fore, the whole aspect of eternity. But then there are the individual cases that really bring home the reality of

the promise of eternal life to all who are in Christ, to all who believe in the Lord Jesus by faith.

The news of Tim Keller, the American preacher and writer, who's now undergoing chemotherapy for pancreatic cancer, that really has shaken so many in the Christian community.

That shock that certainly has resonated throughout the denominations and amongst so many believers. And yet knowing that all who are in Christ, all who are in Christ by faith, that death is not the end.

And even those within our congregation for whom that truth, that death is not the end for those who are in Christ, that certainly has resonated and brought so much comfort in recent times, recent weeks, recent months, even recent years.

So whether the global sense of the imminence and reality of death, whether the individual cases that we come up against and come across, death can't be ignored.

[5 : 57] And if death can't be ignored, then the whole matter of eternity can't be ignored. And so we really have to do what we might say is an expression, but a real expression that we really do have to take the long view of life.

Your life, my life, our life in God that's rooted in eternity. And, you know, the events that are happening all around us in so many ways really bring to our hearts this whole matter of eternity.

C.S. Lewis made that very clear when he wrote about the crisis of World War II, when he wrote in that context. And what he said we can equally apply in the current coronavirus crisis.

C.S. Lewis said these words. He said, I think it's important to try to see the present calamity in a true perspective. The current crisis creates no absolutely new situation.

It simply aggravates the permanent human situation so that we can no longer ignore it. Human life has always been lived on the edge of a precipice.

[7 : 12] In other words, nothing has really changed. Coronavirus or no coronavirus, nothing has really changed. Whether we're talking about a pandemic, whether we're talking about a natural disaster, whether we're talking about war, these things don't change reality.

They don't essentially create a new situation. What they do is they highlight in a greater sense the human condition so that we can't turn a blind eye to how fragile life is.

And so what we've got at the moment in this current crisis, whether it be globally, or as we said, even in individual cases, what we've got at this present time, if you like, is a heightened reminder that we have to live with an eternal perspective in our lives.

And, you know, not to be sidetracked by all the trivia, all the joys of life without, the so-called joys, without the one true God.

Because we're just passing through. This world is not our home. Yes, of course, God's given us his creation to enjoy. There's so much in what God has gifted to us to enjoy and to appreciate and to thank him for.

[8 : 35] The joy of his creation is there all around us. God's given you life. He's given you life that's been formed in his providence. Always have that eternal perspective before you.

That life is not the end. That there is that eternal perspective to consider. What of you who still remain outside of Christ?

Then what of the reality of eternity? Surely the present crisis even has brought you to consider your life.

That you can't simply confine to X number of years and then, well, then what? Are you going to just take your chances? In October 1946, an American chaplain, a Lutheran chaplain called Henry Gerica, he was assigned to, in Nuremberg, to the Nazi Hermann Goering.

And Goering was in prison, awaiting his, well, the carrying out of the sentence of death on him. And Gerica sought to preach the gospel to Goering, even in Goering's final moments.

[9 : 52] Gerica sought to bring home to Goering the reality of eternity and eternity with Christ for all who would repent of their sins.

And the chaplain even said to Goering, he said that, well, Goering's daughter, Edda, that she'd said that she wants to meet her father in heaven.

But Goering remained hardened to the end. And he said these words that have become really quite famous to many. He said these words to the chaplain. He said, she, that's his daughter, she believes in your saviour, but I don't.

I'll take my chances my own way. And later that evening, Goering committed suicide and entered the darkness of an eternity without Christ. taking my chances.

Taking your chances in the light of eternity really is the testimony of fools. But taking the word of Jesus, taking his word as truth, when he says that all who come to him by faith have that promise of eternal life, that's the testimony of wisdom.

[11 : 03] And are you those who are wise or are those who are foolish? Trust in the Lord Jesus with all your heart. Trust him for your life. Trust him now.

Trust him for all eternity. That's what all the saints who are in the glory of heaven even now are praising God for the salvation that they know.

Because they've given their lives to the Lord Jesus, even as the saints on earth who come to him by faith know the reality of that eternal life lived even now.

And it's that eternal security that every believer of the side of eternity knows, that has the promise of, that surely should rejoice your heart.

Some of you will have known the story of the Australian Arthur Stace. He was once a homeless alcoholic. He lived in the streets of Sydney, Australia. After his conversion, he quit drinking.

[12 : 03] He spent the rest of his life writing one word on the streets of Sydney. One word. One word sermon. And that word was eternity. He wrote it in yellow chalk.

He began to do that in 1935. He did it until his death in 1967. And Arthur Stace, he spent his early morning hours writing the word eternity.

It's a very distinctive style. Every doorway, every street, every major entrance to every public building. And for years, the citizens of Sydney wondered who on earth this was who was writing the word eternity on their city streets, on their city doorways, everywhere.

And then one day in 1956, the pastor of the church where Stace was a member, the church was called Burton Street Baptist Church, the pastor came across Stace when he was writing the word eternity in a pavement.

And the mystery was solved. And Stace said to the pastor after his conversion, he said this to the pastor, he said, after my conversion to Christianity, that he'd heard a sermon, in which the evangelist kept saying, and speaking of eternity, eternity.

[13 : 27] And the pastor, this preacher saying, eternity, eternity, oh, that this word could be emblazoned across the streets of Sydney. Well, that passage that that to pastor from Burton Street Baptist Church preached, we're going to look at that passage this evening.

The passage from Isaiah 57, verse 15. Now, we're going to have a short time to do this. It's a short passage. But in many ways, even though it is short, this may well bring an eternal perspective in your life.

That you might see that what Stace so rejoiced in, what so many so rejoice in, and this whole matter of eternity with God, I pray that will rejoice your heart this evening.

Let's read again, Isaiah 57, verse 15. This passage that so enthused Arthur Stace. For thus says the one who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy, I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.

Three things to consider with regard to eternity from what we've read there. First of all, the eternal dwelling of God. Then secondly, the eternal being of God.

[14 : 55] And then thirdly, the eternal love of God. And let's first of all consider the eternal being, not rather the eternal dwelling of God. For thus says the one who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy.

And the way that it's written in the original Hebrew language, it gives us really a perspective, both on who God is, and who God is in his eternal being, and also on where God dwells, in his eternal residence in heaven.

Now, as we consider, as we're doing, as we're worshiping God, of course, we worship him for who he is and his eternal being. But first of all, we need to consider his eternal residence, where he is in eternity.

Then consider who he is, his eternal being, to lead us on to his eternal love, his eternal love for sinners. God inhabits eternity.

Eternity is God's residence, God's heavenly realm. In Isaiah 66, verse 1, we read these words, heaven is my throne.

[16 : 11] So if God's heavenly realm is eternal, then the promise that he gives you, for you to dwell in eternity, is a promise that gives you that sure hope, of your residence, in eternity, when you pass

into glory.

The current pandemic, the news of the scale, the shattering scale of death, whether it's, as we said, on a global scale, or a local scale, it does bring home the reality, of an eternal dwelling, for all who are God's people, for all who are God's, to be with him, where he is, to be with him, in that house of the father, that Jesus spoke of, when Jesus spoke of, in my father's house, there are many rooms. And no wonder, Arthur Stace, that Australian, was so enraptured, by the word eternity. Because Arthur Stace realized, that from having a home, in the streets of Sydney, he had the promise, of a heavenly home, awaiting him.

He had that promise, of being with his Lord, and Savior, in the eternity of heaven. What about you? Because if God, inhabits eternity, if the eternal heaven, is God's eternal dwelling place, then God's promise, of your eternal dwelling, with him, that is true, it must be true.

And if it's true, then it's to be rejoiced in, as you await your residence, your eternal residence, in God's eternal home, God's eternal residence.

[17 : 56] Remember this, for any who won't receive, the Lord Jesus as Savior, there is another eternal dwelling. There is another dwelling place. And as God's word tells us, it's that eternal dwelling place, of hell.

For Jesus tells us, for there'll be weeping, and gnashing of teeth, that eternal separation, from God, that speaks of an eternal suffering, will never end.

And so the question, has to be asked of you, where will you be, in eternity? Will you be with God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? Will you be, in the eternity of heaven?

Will you be, with the eternal one, in that eternal joy, exercising that eternal praise, to God? Or will you be, in the eternal fire of hell, separated eternally, from the presence of God?

Because you see, the reality of death, brings you to the reality, of life in Christ, life in him, for all who receive him, by faith, and repent of your sins.

[19 : 05] Of course, the reality of death, brings also, the reality of hell, for all who haven't, surrendered your life, to the Savior, and repented of your sins.

So where do you stand, in relation to eternity? You surrender your life, to the Lord Jesus, and you will know, the blessing of an eternal, relationship with God, God, who is eternal, eternal, in his being.

Our second point, is remember, we're here, to worship, the living, and true God. We're here, to worship, the eternal God, the one and only God, the one true God, the one who inhabits eternity, the one who is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable.

It's what we do here, every Lord's Day. That's what we do, whether it's a Lord's Day morning, a Lord's Day evening. We worship him. We dwell, in his eternal presence.

We give him praise. We give him glory, the glory that's due to the one, who is eternal. Yes, the one who's worthy, even of our feeble worship.

[20 : 17] So we do what we do, to know God, and in knowing God, to rejoice, in his exalted majesty. Father's made himself known to us, by his creation.

He's made himself known to us, as Lord and Savior, through his word. And here in Isaiah 57, God's revealed his supreme majesty, he's revealed his supreme authority, he's revealed his eternal being, as the high and lifted up one, the high and exalted one.

There's no other God, before God. There's no other God, one true God, but God. So this is the one, whom you are worshiping now. He's the sovereign one.

He's the one, in whom you call on in prayer, whether it be your short arrow prayers, whether it be longer prayers, whether it be your continuous prayer. You're calling upon the eternal being, the one true God.

You're calling upon the one, in whom you've trusted for your salvation. You're calling upon the eternal one, the one who has no beginning, and no end. And that's something that our finite minds can't comprehend.

[21 : 33] By faith, you believe in his infinity, in his eternal being. It's that eternal being that God speaks of when he speaks of himself, as inhabiting eternity.

You know, the more we explore that, that God is eternal in his being, the more we marvel, the more that we truly wonder, and are lost in that wonder, at who God is.

Because God exists. God's always existed. But he exists without any confinement to his being. He's not restricted by his created realm.

He's not restricted by time. He's the eternal one. And that means he's so infinitely different to his creation. God created what he created in time.

And that creation is restricted in time. God's beyond time. We read in Psalm 90, verse 4, For a thousand years in your sight, our, but as yesterday, when it's passed, was a watch in the night. [22 : 43] But so many restrictions. Even this current lockdown, in many ways, teaches us about the restrictedness of our lives. Because we're restricted in the fact that we are created.

We've got limited knowledge. We're restricted in what we know. We're restricted in our very movements. We're restricted in that we have to depend on others.

We're restricted because we're confined to time itself. God's got no restrictions. God's eternal. That's something really we need to spend time to dwell on, to meditate upon, to worship him for that truth that he is the eternal one.

And in his being eternal, that brings us to the wonder of what we read further in Isaiah 57, 15, the wonder of his eternal love for his own.

Because the eternity of God's being means that God's love for you has no restrictions. God's love for you is an everlasting love.

[23 : 54] It's an eternal love. You know, we hear singers when they sing of everlasting love, love you forever. Well, at base, that's restricted love.

Isn't the perfect love of God for others, for sinners. But God's love has no restrictions. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God declared to his people that I have loved you with an everlasting love.

In other words, there was never a moment when God didn't love you. In the realms of all eternity, even before you were born, God loved you. That love, that love so intense, that love so deep, that love so real that you were in God's heart before time.

And that you'll be in his love as time continues and then beyond time in the timeless heavens, new heavens and new earth. And surely then we can, you who know him, you who love him, who are loved of God, that you can echo the words of Psalm 103.

The words that the psalmist wrote when he said that the steadfast love of God is from everlasting to everlasting and those who fear him and his righteousness to children's children.

[25 : 17] And so in the current restrictions that the current pandemic presents to us, remember that there's no restriction on God's love for you.

And surely that's cause enough to rejoice even at this time. And it's, you know, that love of God, that eternal love of God that we read off in the latter part of the verse that we're focusing on in Isaiah 57, 15.

God says these words, I dwell in the high and holy place and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit to revive the spirits of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.

God's transcended. God's above all. God inhabits eternity. You might say he's the supreme holy one. We're sinners.

We're finite. We're limited. None of us deserve anything of God's steadfast love. And yet the wonder of God's eternal love is this. God should be willing to condescend and to dwell with those who have a humble heart.

[26 : 29] As we read there to those who have a contrite repentant spirit. Of course, that dwelling of God with man seemed ultimately in the coming to earth of the Lord Jesus.

Jesus who made his dwelling with humanity. Jesus who came from heaven to earth to enable man, sinner man, repentant sinner man to have that eternal relationship with God.

The sinless saviour who came to live amongst sinful man. Jesus who became sin for us so that we might be made right with God and be found in his presence safe.

Safe, secure, eternally. And so even as you contemplate the eternal love of God for sinners, and as this passage shows us, the difference couldn't be greater between God and man.

And yet, yet the eternal love of God reaches down to sinners such as you, such as me. You see then the greatness of that eternal love of God.

[27 : 40] That love that never lets you go. That love that's never, ever abandoned you. And that love that will never leave you nor forsake you.

It's that love as we've seen, that love that's rooted in eternity. It's that love from the one who's eternal in his dwelling, eternal in his being. And it's the reality of eternity that Arthur stays and every other believer in the Lord Jesus can't get enough of, couldn't get enough of the side of eternity.

So I pray that yes, the reality of eternity will be before you now and always. Yes, always in the side of eternity. You might not see the word eternity chopped to the streets of Livingston or in Scotland. I pray that the reality of an eternity with God is written in your heart, indelibly written in your heart. as you live with eternity in mind, eternity as you walk on that road that leads to the eternity of the dwelling place of God so that you have that confidence, so that you have that prospect, so that you have the reality before you of being with the eternal God and his eternal presence so that you will know that eternal life lived before God who has loved you with that everlasting love.

Amen. Let us pray. Lord, you brought before us even today the reality of eternity. We praise you, Lord, for the comfort that you give to us of that promise, that sure promise of everlasting life for all who put their trust in you.

[29 : 37] we pray, Lord, that truly we will be living in the light of eternity, that we will have done with lesser things and know that before us lies that great eternal residence that you promised to all who are yours, even in your house, your house of many rooms.

We thank you, Lord, that your promises are sure and eternal in the Lord Jesus. Continue with us now, Lord, we pray and we pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Now, we're going to close this part of the service in Psalm 25. Psalm 25, the first version of the Scottish Psalter, the version from verse 12 to verse 15.

What man is he that fears the Lord and doth himself? whom shall he teach the way that he shall choose and still observe? His soul shall dwell at ease and his posterity shall flourish still, and of the earth inheritors shall be.

12 to 15, Psalm 25, to God's prayers. What man is he that he is the Lord and doth himself?

[31 : 02] serve? He shall he teach the way that he shall choose and still observe?

own and still ■■ kaef Be treated still. Want world and still he War and still meet in the hill for the munis che shall be.

With those that we live in is the secret of the Lord, the knowledge of his covenant he will to heaven afford.

My nights upon the Lord on tinder thee are set, for he in tis that shall bring forth my feet out of the net.

Those with a benediction, may grace, mercy and peace from God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, rest upon and remain with you, both now and eternally.

[33 : 14] Amen. and amen.

And I am that