

Eternity

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: 04 April 2015

Preacher: Alex J MacDonald

[0 : 01] Could you turn with me now to that passage that we read in Revelation chapter 22, and particularly words that we'll find in verse 5. And night will be no more, they will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

They will reign forever and ever, especially the word forever, or we may say eternally.

At the beginning of the new millennium, the year 2000, there was a great fireworks display in Sydney, because it was probably the first big city where the dawning of the new year began.

And in that firework display, the single word, eternity, was lit up in 50 foot high letters on the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

It was very spectacular. You might wonder why the word eternity was put there at such an auspicious occasion.

[1 : 20] The word eternity had become a kind of motto of the city of Sydney. But how had that happened? What's the story behind it? Well, from the 1940s through to the 1960s, the word eternity mysteriously appeared, written in chalk, on buildings and pavements throughout the city.

Who was responsible for it? Nobody knew. Eventually, however, it was discovered. It was a man called Arthur Stace. He was a rather poor man.

He'd been brought up in a brothel. He became a petty criminal. He returned from the First World War, gassed and shell-shocked. He slid down into alcoholism.

Then one day, he was at a meeting for down and outs in a church. And he saw the difference between himself and the Christians who were there.

He prayed. And he became a Christian himself. And was able to give up his drinking. He subsequently heard a preacher say, I wish I could shout eternity through all the streets of Sydney.

[2 : 36] And Arthur Stace said, He repeated himself and kept shouting, Eternity! Eternity! And his words were ringing through my brain as I left the church.

Suddenly, I began crying. And I felt a powerful call from God to write eternity. I had a piece of chalk in my pocket and I bent down there and then and wrote it.

Now, he was barely able to write his own name. But he found that he could write the word eternity beautifully, two foot wide on the pavement.

And from then on, for the rest of his life, he walked the streets of the city at night, writing the word eternity. Now, I don't know how many people that word eternity meant something and had a great effect on them.

But it was an amazing, unique witness, wasn't it? Eternity. Thomas Chalmers, the great preacher and philanthropist and founding father of the Free Church in 1843, He was once criticized before that time, while he was still in the established church, he was criticized at the General Assembly, because on that occasion, he was arguing against what were called pluralities.

[3 : 53] That was the idea that a parish minister could do other things apart from his parish ministry. He could become, for instance, he could hold a post like a professorship in the university as well, as supposedly doing his parish duties.

Well, he was arguing against that. But the criticism was that in his younger days, actually when he had been unconverted, although he was in the ministry, in his younger days, he'd argued the very opposite, when he himself wanted to continue as a parish minister in the rural parish of Kilmeny in North Fife, and at the same time be a professor of mathematics in St. Andrews.

So how did he answer that charge of inconsistency? Part of his reply was this. He said, What is mathematics? It is the study of magnitude.

But then, I thought not of two magnitudes, the littleness of time and the greatness of eternity. And we can take that as our kind of motto or theme for our service this morning.

The littleness of time, the greatness of eternity. As I mentioned last night at the fellowship meeting, I've recently been rather conscious of this because I've just recently retired from the ministry after over 40 years in the ministry.

[5 : 14] And that seems a kind of long time, and there's all sorts of things happened in that time. But then when I look back on it, it seems to have all passed in a flash. The littleness of time, and yet the greatness of eternity, which concerns this message of the gospel that we've got to make known.

But of course, time is little in another sense. Many momentous things have happened over those past decades in the world and in the church. Yet most of these things shrink into insignificance in the light of eternity.

So many things that we live for and value and treasure, they're just rubbish of the passing years in the light of eternity. Only these things that are eternal ultimately matter.

So what is eternal? What is forever? Well, we're told here in this book of Revelation that only the city of God, only the new Jerusalem that Jesus is building, only the new heavens and the new earth that he will recreate, is eternal.

And at the heart of that new universe, that new heavens and new earth, will be a renewed people. Because you see, human beings are eternal too.

[6 : 36] At the end of that great parable that Jesus told in Matthew 25, parable of the sheep and the goats, he said there'll come a time of division at the end. And those who had opposed him and rejected him, they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.

So whatever our destiny, it is eternal. It is forever. That's the emphasis of Jesus' teaching. So it stresses to us that although we are creatures of time, here and now, we were not made ultimately just to be creatures of here and now, but have an eternal existence.

C.S. Lewis has a wonderful passage where he reflects on this fact that we are eternal beings. He said, It's a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses.

To remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature, which if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else, a horror and a corruption, such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare.

All day long, we are, in some degree, helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It's in the light of these overwhelming possibilities.

[8 : 04] It is with the awe and circumspection proper to them that we should conduct all our dealings with one another, all friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people.

You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations, these are mortal. And their life is to ours as the life of a gnat.

But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit. Immortal horrors are everlasting splendors.

I've never come across a passage that so brings out that reality that we are created for an eternal existence and heading to one or other of two destinations.

So I'd like to think with you this morning about one or two things suggested by this word forever or eternal or eternity.

[9 : 03] The first emphasis that we find in the New Testament is this, that those who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ will live forever, will live eternally.

Apostle Paul says in Romans chapter 6 verse 23, the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus, our Lord.

Eternal life is something that is repeated time and time again in the New Testament. Life in this world is for such a short time, no matter how long it might be.

Psalms 90 verse 10 reminds us, the length of our days is 70 years or 80 if we have the strength, yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass and we fly away.

I heard, I think it was just this past week, that the oldest woman in the world, who was 117, just died. Now that meant that she was born in the 19th century and her life spanned more than a century.

[10 : 15] And yet I'm sure as she looked back at that life, it had all gone so quickly. Where had all those years gone? No matter how long we live, time is passing so quickly away.

There was a song from the 1960s by the Incredible String Band called October Song that reflected on this. I met a man whose name was time. He said I must be going, but just how long ago that was, I have no way of knowing.

Sometimes I could murder time when my heart is aching, but mostly I just stroll along the path that he is taking. And isn't that so true, that we alternate between those two feelings, wanting to murder time because time is passing so quickly when our hearts are aching, and yet we just kind of resign ourselves to the passing of the days and the months and the years, things just roll on.

Maybe sometimes it's in the middle years of life when we talk about maybe a midlife crisis that we suddenly realize life is slipping away, things didn't turn out as we had dreamed.

Van Morrison has a song. Hey, Sarah, whatever will be, will be. But then I keep on searching for immortality. She's so beautiful, but she's going to die someday.

[11 : 32] Everything in life just passes away. Precious time is slipping away. You know she's only queen for a day. It doesn't matter to which god you pray. Precious time is slipping away.

And if our hope is just for this life only in time, then it doesn't really matter to which god you pray. But if we are eternal, then it does matter.

Caesar Borgia, who was a notorious member of the notorious Borgia family in Renaissance Italy, he said, When I lived, I provided for everything but death.

Now I must die. And I'm unprepared. What a terrible situation to be in. And what a terrible situation so many people are in today. Are you sure that you're prepared for eternity?

Have you got this gift of eternal life? Contrast what Caesar Borgia said with what the evangelist D.L. Moody said. He said, Some fine morning you will see in the newspapers, D.L. Moody is dead.

[12 : 40] Don't you believe it? I shall be more alive that morning than ever before. Because he knew the gift of God. And he knew that he had eternal life. This is the confidence that the Christian can have because of this word forever.

This word, The gift of God is eternal life. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Jesus himself said in John chapter 6, verse 51, I am the living bread that came down from heaven.

If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. This weekend, we are focusing on remembering the death of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And the purpose of that death was to give us eternal life. To remove the barrier between us and God, our sins. And to give us that new resurrection life that the Lord Jesus Christ has.

He said also in John chapter 10, verse 27, and what follows, My sheep listen to my voice. I know them, and they follow me.

[13 : 55] I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish. No one can snatch them out of my hand. This gift of eternal life is certain and sure, and it is irrevocable.

He's not going to recall it, and nobody can destroy it. So if our faith is in the Lord Jesus Christ, if we know the meaning of his death and rising again for us, and we trust in him alone for that salvation, we have this gift of eternal life.

The most famous verse in the Bible states it so beautifully, For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Yes, there will be a decay of ourselves here in this world, our bodies and so on, but we will have that gift of eternal life. So make sure of this one thing, that you've accepted this gift of eternal life.

It's a gift. It can't be earned. It's to be received as a gift. We receive it as needy sinners who need to be cleansed and renewed, who need this gift, and all we have to do is to accept it.

[15 : 13] Jesus has done it all. But there's a second aspect of this word forever, or eternity, I would want to think about, and that is, even in this very passage here, we're told that we will never thirst forever.

We will never thirst eternally, if our faith is in Christ. In verse 17 of chapter 22 here, the Spirit and the bride say, Come, let him who hears say, Come, whoever is thirsty, let him come, and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

And that's reminiscent, isn't it, of the words of Jesus prior to that in his earthly ministry, recorded in John chapter 4, verse 14, part of his conversation with a Samaritan woman.

Remember that he met by the well of Sychar. Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. We could translate that literally, will never thirst eternally.

Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water, welling up to eternal life. Now that changes the picture or the figure somewhat, doesn't it?

[16 : 24] Because we spend our lives looking for that deep and lasting satisfaction, but we seldom find it. Reminded of the famous words of the Rolling Stones, I can't get no satisfaction.

And that reflects that feeling that we so often have, of frustration, of not really being able to achieve that lasting satisfaction we're looking for. Robert Burns has some beautiful lines in the middle of that rollicking poem, Tam O'Shanter, which is a wild kind of tale, but in the middle of it there's these beautiful, very reflective words.

But pleasures are like poppies spread. You seize the flower, its bloom is shed. Or like the snow falls on the river, a moment white, then melts forever.

No lasting satisfaction in the pleasures of this life. Some people think that if they can get on in life, if they have enough money and so on, they'll be satisfied.

The former Mrs. Onassis, who was married at that time to the richest man in the world, she said, wealth has not made me happy, nor as the world knows, has it made my husband happy.

[17 : 39] And that testimony could be repeated thousands of times. Of people who thought that by getting enough money, by getting enough power or influence or whatever it is, they would be happy, they would be satisfied, that this thirst within them would be quenched.

But it never is. What about ambition? Ambition is a good thing, to have a good ambition, to achieve something in life. Well, Jack Higgins, who's the author of numerous best-selling thrillers, including *The Eagle Has Landed*, he was asked what he would like to have known as a boy that he now knows.

And he said, I'd like to have known that when you get to the top, there's nothing there. In other words, he had great ambitions and great success, but it wasn't satisfying.

Now, long before that, thousands of years before that, the book of Ecclesiastes explored all these issues. And there, Solomon expounds how he tried in so many ways to find lasting satisfaction, but could find none of it under the sun.

And he came in the end to say, remember your creator in the days of your youth. What Jesus has to offer is lasting satisfaction.

[19 : 07] Augustine, the great early theologian of the church, said, God has made us for himself. And our hearts are restless until they find rest in him.

We will never find that quenching of our thirst, our thirst for satisfaction until we know Jesus. There's no satisfaction, no lasting satisfaction, until we find God or are found by him.

Psalm 63, the psalm that we sung from, says, Oh God, you are my God. Earnestly I seek you. My soul thirsts for you.

My body longs for you in a dry and weary land where there is no water. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods.

That's the testimony of David who came to realize that there was no lasting satisfaction in anything but the Lord in knowing him and his love.

[20 : 12] In Psalm 16, the end of that Psalm, verse 11, it speaks of this eternal satisfaction. You have made known to me the path of life.

You will fill me with joy in your presence with eternal pleasures at your right hand. You see, sometimes people have a great misunderstanding of Christianity and the gospel.

They seem to think that God wants us to be miserable and maybe as Christians we've maybe given that wrong impression sometimes. But God's plan for us is eternal pleasures at his right hand.

And just as the gospel of John emphasizes that eternal life begins here and now, so does a foretaste of those eternal pleasures. Yes, we may have to pass through the valley of the shadow of death.

Yes, there may be a veil of tears here. But underneath there is this everlasting joy that we know the source of our salvation. We know the Lord Jesus Christ.

[21 : 14] And we know that deep and lasting satisfaction that will be brought to perfection in glory. we were made by God for relationship with God himself.

And God has done everything necessary in Jesus Christ to restore that relationship with him. And it is an eternal relationship because he himself is eternal.

So again, do we know that lasting satisfaction and are our hearts filled with thanksgiving to God this weekend particularly as we remember the death of the Lord Jesus Christ that he's given us this lasting eternal satisfaction.

The third thing suggested is quite clearly here on the face of our text. They will reign forever and ever. Those who trust in the Lord Jesus Christ will reign forever.

Now you see, this is referring back to the fact that the human race originally were created to rule and to have dominion. In Genesis chapter 1 verse 26, then God said, let us make man in our image, in our likeness, let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth and over all the creatures that move along the ground.

[22 : 39] But, since we rebelled against God, the creation has rebelled against us. In Genesis chapter 3 from verse 17, cursed is the ground because of you.

Through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat the food until you return to the ground since from it you were taken for dust you are and to dust you will return.

the fall of man, the rebellion of man against God brought in this fact that our rule over the creation as originally intended by God was disrupted and now instead of that rain being as it ought to be having everything in order and everything satisfying is now utterly frustrating.

It doesn't matter what aspect of life we think about. we're not able to achieve what we set out to do whether it's in science or technology or in politics or whatever there is frustration.

The purposes even good purposes that we have are so often thwarted. We live in a fallen world. In Romans chapter 8 the apostle Paul reflects on this in verse 20 for the creation was subjected to frustration not by its own choice but by the will of the one who subjected it in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

[24 : 19] We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. You see things are not now as they ought to be.

A lot of people misunderstand this again you know when we talk about the fact that God is the creator and God is sovereign they think well everything should be perfect but they forget about sin they forget about the fall they forget about rebellion and the present state of the world is one in rebellion against God and there is the frustration there is the decay there is the groaning but Paul in that passage is revealing a glimpse that God has a purpose even in that that is like the pains of childbirth there is to be a revelation there is to be a transformation in Hebrews chapter 2 from verse 6 the writer there is quoting from Sami to begin with what is man that you are mindful of him the son of man that you care for him you made him a little lower than the angels you crowned him with glory and honor and put everything under his feet speaking again of the dominion the rule of man over creation in putting everything under him

God left nothing that is not subject to him yet at present we do not see everything subject to him again that fact that our rule our reign our dominion is disrupted destroyed it's not what it ought to be but this is the fascinating thing he immediately when he says at present we don't see everything subject to him but we see Jesus we see Jesus why does he say that because Jesus is the perfect man he is the son of man who was made a little lower than the angels brought down into this world took human flesh he's the one who humbled himself so that we with him may be highly exalted he was made a little lower than the angels but he's now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone again through his death there is the restoration of this reign and rule so that we will reign forever in revelation chapter 11 verse 15 says the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his

Christ and he will reign forever and ever the kingdom of the world has become his kingdom that's what is happening at the present time and what will be brought to completion at the end of time and he will reign forever and ever and then our text here says they will reign forever and ever in other words his people those who trust in him they along with him will reign forever so all of the frustrations of this world will pass away in the perfect kingdom of Christ now this is not just something to say well that's going to happen in the future everything that is promised concerning the future has got a root back here in time and we are to be seeking to implement that reign of Christ over the whole of life because Christ is Lord he's Lord of all and he is calling all the kingdoms of the world into his kingdom and we are commanded to go out into all the world with the gospel to all nations to all communities to all kinds of people calling them to recognize

Christ as king the final thing suggested by this word forever is that we will be with Christ forever in 1st Thessalonians chapter 4 verse 17 says and so we will be with the Lord forever if the Lord Jesus Christ will reign forever and ever and we will reign forever and ever it is with him that we will reign forever and ever in other words we will be with Christ forever and that is really at the heart of the gospel that we will be with Christ forever great catastrophe of the human race is that we are estranged from God as it says in Isaiah your iniquities or your sins have separated you from God Isaiah chapter 59 and in Ephesians chapter 2 Paul reflects on that same idea when he says remember that at that time you were separate from Christ excluded from citizenship in

[29 : 13] Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise without hope and without God in the world by our sin we're on the outside we're away from Christ we're estranged from him do you know that experience do you know that that's where we are by nature on the outside excluded from Christ because we are sinners and yet the very fact that we are sinners means that we are candidates for this great salvation that he has come to achieve the good news is that God himself has done everything necessary to bring us back to himself that passage continues in verse 13 but now Christ Jesus but now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ in other words you once were estranged but now you're brought near you once were far away but now you're brought into fellowship with the Lord Jesus this salvation this redemption this reconciliation is not a temporary thing it is forever in John's gospel we're told in verse 14 by the Lord

Jesus himself in my father's house are many rooms if it were not so I would have told you I'm going there to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am it's put in such simple words isn't it a child could understand you'll be where Jesus is to be with Christ forever that's at the heart of what eternal life is Paul expressed that same desire in Philippians chapter 1 verse 23 I desire to depart and to be with Christ which is better by far even the smallest glimpse of Jesus even a moment in his company would be heaven enough but we are to be with Christ forever that's the amazing promise of the gospel so today make sure that your faith is in the Lord

Jesus Christ make sure that you love the Lord Jesus and all who trust in him will be there in his presence so there is a now and a forever there's time and eternity I want to finish off by reading a poem that I find really expresses this perhaps better than anything certainly the passage of time the shortness of time it's called playing out time it's written by a man Gordon Bailey who came from Liverpool and it pictures life as it were being lived in an amusement arcade you know one of these where there's all the machines and people just wasting their money in it he's picturing us wasting our time in the same way at birth they wheel you into life's great slot machine arcade at death your epitaph describes the kind of game you've played but gravestones hide not just a corpse they cover countless sins and lie about achievements in a game where no one wins a man sits in the change kiosk the kind of change he pays is months for years or weeks for months or moments for our days some games cost just a moment others cost a day per try we pay out carelessly and watch the years go tumbling by the younger punters act as though each year was worth a dime and fail to see death waiting for the fools who play with time a jackpot here a small wind there two lemons and a bell a time confusing mind confusing one way street to hell this one arm bandit's not one armed

I hold the arm I see but what about the arm it's got that has a grip on me the arm that blinds me binds me finds each moment that I've got and forces me to pay my precious time into the slot I've often thought I'm such a fool but then see other folks who seem content to act as though they haven't seen the hopes I've seen a few folk leaving here not dead like most folk go but still alive just let me tell you of one bloke I know a mate of mine this fellow was he'd lots of time to play was playing for a jackpot happened on a Saturday he'd paid out many hours but didn't seem to mind his losses three oranges he yelled but then he said I've got three crosses he called for an attendant then he asked him what he'd won I'd never seen the man who said eternal life my son they left the place together and I don't know where they went I heard the man explaining but I don't know what he meant perhaps one day I'll see those crosses maybe then someone will tell me what they mean and take me where my mate has gone

I wondered where the living go outside of this arcade I'm told I'd dreamt it yet I'm sure it happened I'm afraid that soon I'll play my final game then hear the bandit laugh as he pays out my winnings one gravestone one epitaph my life paid out my death to buy a summary of the cost here lies a man a normal man who played for time and lost it's a very thought-provoking poem isn't it playing for time and losing in the end in contrast with all that there's a hymn called the sands of time are sinking it was written by Anne Cousin in 1857 and she took some of the ideas of Samuel Rutherford the great covenanter and composed a song based on his notes on this very passage Revelation 22 and the idea of the sands of time is the idea of the hourglass remember how they used to keep time not with a clock but with an hourglass and the sand would trickle down to the bottom in the period of one hour the sands of time are sinking the dawn of heaven breaks the summer morn

[35 : 31] I've longed for the fair sweet morn awakes dark dark has been the midnight but sunrise is at hand with glory glory dwelling in Emmanuel's land with mercy and with judgment my web of time he woe and every Jew of sorrow was glistening with his love I'll bless the hand that guided I'll bless the heart that planned when in his glory dwelling in Emmanuel's land the bride eyes not her garment but her dear bridegroom's face I will not gaze at glory but on my king of grace not at the crown he gives me but on his nail pierced hand the lamb is all the glory of Emmanuel's land the littleness of time and the greatness of eternity let's pray our loving heavenly father we pray that you would deliver us from the foolishness that is all around us and is within us of simply living for time and we see time slipping away so quickly and not achieving what we would want to achieve enable us to place our trust firmly in the

Lord Jesus Christ and to live for eternity with eternal values so that that reality that is promised to us then would work backwards into our lives now that we would so live in line with that trajectory on which we are on leading to glory Lord our God give to us a desire to communicate that love to others that truth to others for whom time is slipping away so quickly but gracious Lord we pray that also here this weekend we might know your loving presence with us that we might rejoice in the great things you've done for us in Christ and so we ask all these things in his name and for his sake amen to today we need to to hour to Ihrer to harmony and to madam in this is because it helps to crumble in to tell to to