

The Timelessness of God (2LCF 2.1d)

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[0:00] In Tolkien's book, The Hobbit, there's a scene where Bilbo, the Hobbit, meets Gollum in a dark cave.

They engage into a back and forth of riddles. Within the riddles, it's really forced survival. And these riddles in the dark, Gollum eventually presents this riddle to Bilbo.

It says, These things, all things devours. Sorry, this thing, all things devours. Birds, beasts, trees, flowers. Gnaws iron, bites steel, grinds hard stones to meal. Slays kings, ruins town, and beats high mountains down.

And Bilbo is trying to process it. He's trying to think through it to think what the answer would be.

And while he's thinking through it, Gollum starts to get impatient with him. And in Gollum's impatience, Bilbo stammers back and he tries to say, he asks for more time. He needs more time.

But he ends up just stammering, time, time.

And the answer to the riddle is time. It's time that wears all these things down. And with time, beasts and birds and people and trees and plants and mountains all get destroyed with time and return to dust.

[1:26] Creation is ephemeral, but God is eternal. God is timeless. And as we've been looking at different specific parts or doctrines of the doctrine of God, this evening we will look at the timelessness of God or divine eternity.

So in your Bibles, in Psalm 90, we will read verses 1 to 6. A prayer of Moses, the man of God. Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.

Before the mountains were brought forth, wherever you had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, you are God. You turn man to destruction and say, return, O children of men, for a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past and like a watch in the night.

You carry them away like a flood. They are like a sleep. In the morning, they are like grass which grows up. In the morning, it flourishes and grows up.

In the evening, it is cut down and withers. For we have been consumed by your anger and by your wrath we are terrified. Lord, we thank you for your word that we have supernatural revelation as we seek to understand what your word tells us about your timelessness.

[2:54] We pray that you would illuminate your word to us and grow us in our understanding of your essence. That we would not seek to project our creaturely limitations on you who has created all things, but that we would be in awe of you as God.

Pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, from Psalm 90, we see that creation is ephemeral, but God is not.

God is eternal. God is timeless and not ephemeral like creation. So from Psalm 90, 1 to 6, particularly verse 2, from verse 2, we will see that creation is ephemeral, but God is eternal.

God is timeless. So creation is ephemeral. Notice how it says, starting in verse 2, Now it mentions mountains.

Before mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, these three things are things of creation. Mountains. What's something that we can think about mountains?

[4:07] What the firm steadfastness of a mountain? How many beasts or how many birds will live and die? And the next ones live and die, and the next ones live and die. Or people, or generations live and die, and the mountains seem to stay the same.

But yet, over enough time, mountains start to erode and to be brought down. But what is signified here by mountains is the firmness, stability, and antiquity of mountains.

But what's even bigger and even more firm and stable than mountains themselves is the earth. The earth as the inhabitable dwelling place for human beings.

What's even bigger than the earth? The whole world. More than mountains, more than the earth.

The whole world, which is yet still unstable and passing away.

But not so with God. And notice the language that's used. Mountains brought forth. The earth formed. These words that are used here, it's vocabulary of coming into existence.

[5 : 11] So even what seems firm and stable and old, mountains, the earth, the whole world, even that came into existence. And it's using temporal vocabulary to build up to something even more important than these things.

And it's before. Before mountains existed. Before mountains were brought forth. Before the earth and the world were formed. Now, without getting too in-depth into astrology, time has to do with astrology.

And before the very earth or the world or all things were created. So before all of creation. Before the oldest, most stable things of creation. Before time itself.

Is what we're getting at. Is building up to this. Before. It says, you are God. Notice how it doesn't say, before all things were created, you were God.

But you are God. It's because God is. Yes. The world is. The world is moved from one day to the next.

[6 : 22] But God remains unmoved in his timeless essence. And although this fallen world is unstable, God is not unstable. In his essence, he's not unstable.

And his providence, he's not unstable. And he providentially governs this world. And he is not unstable. Walter Chalmers Smith might not recognize the name.

But you probably recognize the hymn, Immortal and Visible. This line isn't. I don't think it's in our hymnal. It's not typically sung. But one of the lines in Immortal and Visible.

It's, we blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree. And wither and perish. But not changeth thee. So creation is ephemeral. Even that which is most firm and stable.

Such as mountains and the earth and the world itself. But before all of this was even created. God is timeless. Or God is eternal.

[7 : 20] We can even just say God is. And that gets to the point of God's timelessness. But it says from everlasting to everlasting you are God. And that strange vocabulary to say from everlasting to everlasting.

Because the words from and to indicate movement away from something. And movement towards something. And it's getting, there's, time is movement.

Time is the measurement of movement. It's the measurement of movement from a state of being from before to a state of being after. Time is the measure of motion between two states of being.

So it's an odd statement to say from everlasting to everlasting. To say it's movement from a state of everlasting towards a statement of everlasting. So what's it actually getting at here?

It's from the creature's perspective. The creature's perspective of all everlasting. From all of everlasting you are God.

[8 : 23] Now a quick distinction between time and eternity. What is time exactly? Time is succession. Time is motion. It's change.

It's finiteness. And it's limitation. That's important. And it's creation. Time is creation. Before all of creation, God is.

So that tells us that something about God's essence has absolutely nothing to do with time. Before time even existed. Before time was created. Before anything was created.

God is. So God's existence does not depend on time. Nor is it changed because of time. Nor is it limited by time. God cannot be limited by his own creation.

So what about eternity? Time compared to eternity. Boethius wrote, Eternity is the whole, simultaneous, perfect possession of limitless life.

[9 : 26] And he goes on to say, Which we can better understand perhaps by comparing it to temporal things. One who lives in time progresses in the present from the past and into the future.

There is nothing in time that can embrace the entirety of his existence. He has no idea about tomorrow. And has already lost his hold on the past. In this day-to-day life.

In this day-to-day life. He lives only in the transitory moment. And that's what we are limited to. And God's eternity isn't shared with us.

It's not something that we have that we can relate to. So we need to intentionally not see God as a creature. Because we're limited to the limitations of time.

And assume that God is limited by time. But creation. So God is not a creation. And creation is limited by time. That is, creation is subject to its limits.

[10:29] A limit is a border. It's a boundary to contain something. So a question for you. What is always coming but never arrives? Tomorrow.

Tomorrow is always coming but never arrives. So what about us? What about our existence? We could say that at one point we weren't. And then we began. And then we flourish.

But then we are swept away. We could say that we were yesterday. We are now today. We are not yet tomorrow. Tomorrow. Time is a limitation.

Time is a limitation for creation. Yesterday, for example, is out of our reach. We can't go back and change yesterday. Tomorrow also is out of our reach.

We can't reach ahead and change it. We're not there. We're just limited to this very moment. This now. And it's so limited. It's such a limitation that it's the fine edge of a razor.

[11:31] Of a moment of now. Which has already passed. If I were to describe this very present that we're limited to by time. By calling it now. By the time I define it by saying the word now.

That moment has already come and passed. And I can't go back and change my saying of the word now. That's how limited we are by time. And the successions of change. And what has already occurred yesterday.

We're limited by that. We can't go back. And what's in the future. We can't reach ahead. We, as creation, are finite. And have the limitations of time.

And we can't. It's difficult for us to get that out of our head. And when we think of God. Who created all things. And created even time. Is not limited by time. So we first need to recognize that we can't relate to eternity.

And then we have to intentionally not predicate that onto God. God's, if I would use words, days. As though yesterday, today, tomorrow. God's days.

[12:33] They're not coming and going. God's today does not give way to tomorrow. Nor does his today replace yesterday. But God's now is eternity.

So we already know that God is self-existent. And that God is without cause. That God is without beginning.

That God is without end. And that he is from everlasting to everlasting. And he is immutably the same. Immutably. There's no mutation. There's no change in God.

He's immutably the same. Not only that, but he's also the fountainhead of all being and all life. God existed before time. In fact, he created it.

He created time. And God is boundless. So what's boundless? What is boundlessness? It means being without limitation. And not subject to measure.

[13:31] To measure something, it must have a limit. It must have a boundary in order to measure it. So for example, taking a sounding to find the depth in fathoms.

If you were in a ship and you drop a sounding to measure the depth in fathoms, then you find it's 20 fathoms. And then a little bit longer, you take another sounding and you find it's 15 fathoms.

You wait a little longer, you take another sounding. It's 10 fathoms. You're measuring the bottom and you find the bottom is coming up. But God is unfathomable.

You can't measure something that has no depth. He has no bottom, no boundary. You can't measure God and what time is, is a temporal measurement.

So there is no temporal measurement of God who is boundless. Now verse 1 in Psalm 90, verse 1 it says, Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.

[14:39] God's dwelling place for his people is not for a time, but it's for eternity. And that's what it's getting at. When he says, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.

And then goes on to say, before all of creation, from everlasting to everlasting, you are God. What he's getting at is God as the dwelling place of his people for eternity, not for a time.

So God's God-ness, what makes God God, is not a temporary habitation for his people. But God as dwelling place, furthermore, he's not by, it's not, God is not our dwelling place because of his experience of creation.

But from before the mountains were brought forth, before the earth and the world were formed. Before creation, and because before creation, as far as we think of before and after, without

creation.

Without creation, God is. Without creation, God's godness is God. God remains God without creation. God is eternal.

[15:51] God as the dwelling place of his people is eternal. So a few more notes on, or comments on divine eternity. It's that God is timeless.

We've examined time. God is timeless. So it's not, when we understand the timelessness of God, it's not that God always was for as far back as a timeline can go, and always will be for as long as a timeline will go.

But God is without succession. There is no timeline for God. God unfolds his purposes in time on a timeline. But for God's very essence and existence, there is no timeline.

Just God is. God's transcendence is beyond time. And creation, we are creation. Creation is temporal. God is atemporal.

God is without beginning, without end, and without succession. And this, as I mentioned before, this attribute of God is not shared with his creatures. So it's not something we can relate to.

[16:56] Only God is timeless. God transcends the created realm. God created the created realm, and he transcends all that he created.

Creation is bound by time. God is absolutely transcendent. And while we know this in theory, God is not man.

So while we know it in theory, we need to really press that into our minds that God is not a man.

Because man is not worthy of worship.

So if God was bound by the limitations that man is limited or bound by, then God would not be worthy of worship. God is not bound by time. So let's reflect quickly on the classical doctrine of God, the things that we've gone over already.

We considered God's aseity, his absolute self-existence and independence. That is eternal. Or God's simplicity, that he is undivided without parts.

[18:05] That is eternal. Because God is without parts, God can't fall apart. So God eternally cannot fall apart. He is undivided without parts. Impassibility, that God is not moved, that God is not caused, that God does not suffer, that God doesn't fall into something.

God isn't lacking. That needs to be brought into perfection. He cannot decrease from perfection. So he can't fall out of love.

And that is eternal, eternal impassibility. And God is immutable. He cannot change. For all of eternity, God cannot change.

God's existence is complete, perfect, and at once. So there is no chronology in God. It's not that God has a before or an after, like I said, a timeline.

Or we can measure his change from one state to another state. God does not undergo succession of change. He's steadfast in life, steadfast in power, steadfast in truth, steadfast in righteousness, justice, goodness, and love.

[19:11] And he has been from the beginning. You know what else is from the beginning? From before time began? From before the world began is God's purpose of redemption and election.

That is, names that are written in the Lamb's book of life before the foundation of the world. God's purpose is just as steadfast and unbound as God's very essence and God's perfect will.

He is faithful. He is faithful. He will do it. Those he foreknew, he predestined. Those he predestined, he called. Those he called, he justified. And those whom he justified, he glorified.

One, from God, from this side of creation, we see the progression, the succession of change. But from the other side of creation, from eternity, it's one pure act without succession of time or change. But as far as our experience from creatures and how it's articulated in Scripture, as we experience it, is the unfolding in time on this side of creation of what is eternal to God.

[20:21] So what are some concluding uses that we can take from the timelessness of God? We understand that man is ephemeral, but God is eternal.

And we don't want to collapse those two. We don't want to collapse the creator-creature distinction and predicate our creaturely experiences and our creaturely limitations onto divine essence because it's all that we can comprehend.

It's all that we know, all that we can relate to. There's a distinction there, and we want to make sure that we make that distinction in our minds. And next is the importance of knowledge of our creaturely condition.

God is our refuge. God is our refuge.

And that's what we get from Psalm 91 to 2. But also in Deuteronomy 33, 27, it says, The eternal God is our refuge. There's a link between God's eternality, his timelessness, and our refuge.

[21 : 28] God being the refuge of his people. Because God, in verse 90, it says, Lord, you have been our dwelling place. God is our dwelling place. God is our refuge. It's not merely as a tent in a wilderness wandering of a broken world, but as a fixed dwelling and our eternal and unshakable hope.

And Augustine wrote, Behold then, the eternity that is our refuge, that we may fly there from the mutability of time, there to remain forever.

So compared to the eternal God, the whole world, all of the created realm, is but the lightest dust, which is blown away by the lightest breeze, and is not steadfast.

When we think of the eternality, steadfastness, unchangingness, timelessness of God, all of time and all of the created realm is but a speck of dust compared to God.

So when we compare those two, and we think about what this world has to offer, and we think about the eternal, unshakable refuge as our dwelling place, and the eternality of the one true living God, we must not turn aside from what is eternal blessedness in God to lust for the things of time as though things of the created realm are the highest good and an end to themselves.

[22 : 54] Earthly things that fade, that wither, and that are swept away. And Jerome, who's 4th, 5th century, he wrote, Our life, it's kind of significant actually considering how long ago he was and wrote this.

He has lived and died, and many people have lived and died, but he wrote, Our life hurries on at a great pace, and when at least we expect it, it slips away and we die.

But all who are in Christ, our refuge, our dwelling place, is in God's eternal being, his very essence, that his essence is timelessness.

And if we have our hope on anything in this world which flourishes for a moment but is swept away and is gone, it is not only shakable, but it is not a refuge, it is not a secure dwelling place, it will not satisfy, and it is not eternal blessedness.

But God is eternal. God is not only eternal and unchanging, but God is also the fountainhead of all blessedness. So God is our eternal refuge, is blessedness without end, because God is timeless, God will not change, and God is the only, the one and only, the living and true God, and anything else, anything in creation, is but creation.

[24 : 17] And creation God has made for mankind, and mankind to glorify God, to use creation to glorify God. So if we seek to set up anything in creation as our God, and sometimes we might be tempted to think of having a, you know, a little figure that we set up on a shelf somewhere, but anything that we see as the chief end of our existence and the highest good is an idol.

But if it's not God, it's but creation, and it's not eternal, and it's not lasting, and it won't satisfy, and it won't be, provide eternal blessedness. And any, any attempt that we might make to think that we can produce what's required to appease, a holy and righteous and just God, will not, because God is unchanging for all eternity.

He's not going to change so that he will set apart, set aside his righteousness or justice, but he is eternally holy, eternally righteous, and eternally just.

And the only way to be right before God is to be in Christ. According to Christ's once for all finished work on the cross. Once for all means for all time.

There's not a time, if we are in Christ, if we have turned from this world to Christ, and rested on Christ, and received Christ alone for salvation. And it's not just a clean slate.

[25 : 50] It's not that if I then sin tomorrow, then God's purpose for me is going to change. But Christ's once for all death on the cross was a payment for the sins of the people to appease the eternal justice of God.

From everlasting to everlasting, God is eternally unchangeable in his purpose, and in his covenantal disposition toward his people.

His eternal purpose of love, his eternal purpose of election, and his eternal purpose of redemption. Let's pray. Let's pray.