

Eternity

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[0:00] We go into a bedroom and lying in a bed is an old man shriveled, but perhaps you can see some traces of what he once was handsome and rugged.

! He once was a bear killer, a lion slayer, a giant, the feller of giants. He was a successful general. He was a singer of songs. He was a guerrilla fighter. He was a great king. He was a legend in his own time.

He was a man after God's own heart. And he was a great sinner, but he was a great saint by God's grace. But now he's old and he's shivering and soon he's going to fade away.

We go into a different bedroom and in this bedroom, there's only a corpse. And there perhaps are traces of what she used to be. But what she is now is very, very old and dead.

In her day, she could turn the heads of all of Pharaoh's courts and kings tried to woo her. She was very beautiful, but now she is old and shriveled and dead.

[1:41] And her husband negotiates a price for a cave and in her body goes to wait for the resurrection of the dead. Well, David and Sarah are pictures of our world. They're pictures of us.

We're all fading away. We're all passing into eternity. Some are old. Some are withering away. Some are dead. And their bodies have gone back into the ground where they return to the dust from which they came.

And some here, some in this world are young and they'll have 50, 60, 70 years to go. And then they'll go the way of all men. They'll go into the ground. And Paul says, we are wasting away for what is seen as temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Eternity is what we want to talk about tonight or today, this morning. It's our last lesson from the book Practical Religion. Next week, Sunday school class is going to take a different route.

The younger people are going to leave and start learning about parenting. And the older people, I believe, are going to start learning about glorifying God as they get older. But eternity, like everything Ryle has said, has practical relevance for how we live today.

[3:11] So where we're going to be a thousand years from now, where we're going to be a million years from now, where we're going to be a hundred million ages from now should affect the way we live.

So that's what we want to talk about. Eternity. Life. Existence. Forever and ever and ever. And it's a weighty subject.

It's not something that we can talk lightly about. It's not easy. Our eyes on a clear, dark night can see 3,000 stars thereabouts, depending on where we're at.

And with the telescope, the powerful telescope, we can see billions of stars. And I don't know how they count them, but they count them or estimate them.

But we are still peering and peering into the dark sky. And there's always more and more to see.

But in our universe, there are places where no eye has ever seen them, except for God.

[4:18] There are galaxies which only God knows about and only God watches. And we can't see into the darkness. And eternity is like that. We can see so much.

We can see a faint glimmer. But what we don't know exceeds what we can know. But the Bible is clear about eternity.

It tells us everything we need to know about eternity. And everything it tells us is useful for us.

It's useful for teaching and rebuking and correcting and training in righteousness that the man of God might be prepared for every good work. So the first thing that the Bible says about eternity is this.

That eternity is coming. Eternity is coming. Now, some people and some men, they have the idea that we're just going to live here forever and ever.

[5:17] It's always going to be this way. There's always going to be people. There's always going to be nations. There's always going to be children and grandchildren. There's always going to be the bad and the good.

And Peter says, you must understand that in the last days, scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, where is this coming that he promised?

Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation. And that's the common human conception.

We are going to live forever. We're going to figure out some way to avoid extinction on this planet. We might travel to another planet and somehow avoid it.

And life will go on more or less. But the Bible doesn't allow us to think that way. Peter goes on to say, But they deliberately forget that long ago, by God's word, the heavens existed, and the earth was formed out of the water and by water.

[6:25] By these waters also, the world was deluged and destroyed. People deliberately forget that there used to be no world.

And it was created. And it was destroyed in a flood. Life just doesn't go on and on. God has interrupted our world once with a flood.

And he wiped out human civilization. He wiped out all life. Except for that handful that was saved in the ark. But plants, animals, human civilization was destroyed.

Life doesn't just go on. What is seen, what we see around us, is temporary. So, 20 years ago, well, let's say 25 years ago, 1984, there was a mighty nation called the Soviet Union.

Where is the Soviet Union now? 65 years ago, Nazi Germany was from Morocco all the way to Moscow.

[7:33] And where is it now? And then there's Rome, the First Reich, if you will. It stretched from Ireland and there are green shores all the way to Mesopotamia and the desert.

And God told Daniel that Rome was like iron. And it crushed everything that it came into contact with. And it lasted for a thousand years.

And then it fell. Everything. Nations are wearing away. And we've already talked about our own bodies. And we know that they're passing away.

We feel it in ourselves, don't we? We get older. And exercise is harder. And sickness is easier. And it's easy to get sore. The young become old.

And the strong become weak. And the bright and the talkative and the gregarious are brought to ashes. And that's the world we live in.

[8:34] Everything is passing away. So you buy a brand new car. And maybe you've experienced this. You buy a brand new car. No one's ever owned it. And the inside smells so new.

And the carpet is so clean. And you say to yourself, I'm going to take care of this car. And then five years later, there's gum embedded in the carpet.

And the new car smell is replaced by fumes from the engine that somehow are creeping into where you drive. And what was once so shiny is now dusty, isn't it?

And there's that gunk that's in the council and in those creases. And I don't know where it comes from. And there's crumbs in the seat. Five years later, the car's towed away to the junkyard.

And that's our world. It's not getting newer. It's getting older. It's not getting better. It's wearing away. And soon, God will roll it up like a garment and put it away.

[9:43] The Bible says, yes, these things are passing away. But there is a place that is permanent. There's a place that is permanent. We are going to a place where change and decay won't happen.

The new heavens and the new earth are coming. That's the testimony of the word of God. So endless day is coming. Therefore, Paul says, we don't lose heart.

Though outwardly, we are wasting away. Yet inwardly, we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

And I thank God that he tells us that there is a world coming that will not change and will not decay. Because sometimes I lose heart.

Don't you? You look around and everything's wasting away. And if that was the world that, if that was all that was said, it would be very depressing. And sometimes we can look around and we can get depressed.

[10:53] I run in the morning, sometimes, most of the time. And as I'm jogging through the neighborhood, I can get depressed. Because even in the neighborhoods around me, there's

dilapidated houses with sagging roofs and moss and mold.

And there's a nasty love seat that someone drug out to the curb and it's been sitting there for weeks. The trash people won't pick it up and they won't do anything with it. And it's still there. This is our world. It's falling apart. And if we look at this world, it can just depress us. And that's just my neighborhood. I don't want to even think about our country and our culture and the state of so many churches.

But it's a reminder that we are waiting for an eternal glory that far outweighs all the troubles and the problems that we face.

So that's the first big thing that the Bible says. Things are passing away. This world is passing away. But eternity is coming. This world is not forever.

[12:08] The second big thing that the Bible teaches is that there is an eternity of heaven and there is an eternity of hell waiting for every single person in this room today.

Eternity is not all good news. Eternity is the worst news that an unbeliever can have. Listen to Psalm 145:20 where you can contrast the unbeliever and the believer.

The Lord watches over all who love him, but all the wicked he will destroy. God cares for those who love him, but he will destroy the wicked.

We do not all go to heaven. There is a heaven and there is a hell and everyone here will be in one of those places. And those places are permanent.

They're forever. Turn in your Bibles to Isaiah chapter 66. Isaiah 66 and verse 22.

[13:16] God says that heaven and hell are forever. Isaiah 66 verse 22. As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me, declares the Lord, so will your name and descendants endure.

From one new moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me, says the Lord. And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me.

Their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind.

The new heavens and the new earth will endure before God from month to month, from new moon to new moon, from Sabbath to Sabbath, so from week to week, they will endure.

They'll never change. God will be worshipped forever and ever and ever. And men will come and bow down before him. But hell is forever too.

The worm will not die. The fire will not be quenched. Heaven and hell are both eternal. And that is good news for those who are going to heaven.

[14:36] We will never leave. Jesus Christ will draw us to himself and we will never be separated. We will never be asked to leave.

We will never grieve him. We will have perfect, eternal, everlasting communion with God. And how can we even convey eternity?

How can I even convey eternity to you? There's an eternal weight of glory. It is overwhelming. And we will experience forever and ever and ever without end with God.

We will eat with the Lord Jesus and have fellowship with him forever. So let's say you go on a date with your husband or your wife and you take the kids to a babysitter.

You go to Carrabba's, maybe somewhere really pretty nice. And you eat delicious food. You order appetizers, maybe wine if you're so inclined.

[15:41] And you just sit together and eat and drink. And you eat and drink each other. You have fellowship. And you're just loving on one another. It's so good to get away from all the troubles that you've been facing.

And you just love one another. You have heart-to-heart fellowship. Well, that's a picture of what the Bible portrays eternity as. It's a marriage feast.

It's the marriage feast of the Lamb. Who is the groom? The Lord Jesus. Who is his bride? The church. His beloved people.

And they sit down together. And they eat together forever and ever. They enjoy one another. And unlike those dates, it never ends.

You never have to get up from your table. You never have to go pick the kids up. And go back to your normal, everyday life. Your everyday life will be enjoying God forever and finding out more about Him.

[16 : 46] If you've been married, do you remember those first few weeks of marriage? The first few weeks and months. It was so happy. It was so new.

It was so full of love and intimacy. And you're just exploring what it was like to live with one another. And brothers and sisters, that is what we are going to have forever and ever.

It will be an endless honeymoon. Endless delight. Endless joy. Endless love and peace and fun and wonder.

Eternity is the happy hope of every Christian here. It's forever and ever. But hell is eternal too.

Sin is against an infinitely holy and righteous and good God. and when we sin we should be thrown into hell forever and ever.

[17 : 53] God is faithful and He is just and He is good when He puts men into the lake of fire. And that is why hell will be forever.

Because we have sinned not against man but against the infinite and the eternal the unchangeable God. Robert Murray McShane said that this doctrine is hard to handle lovingly.

And men can take a sadist glee in talking about hell. And that's not my purpose. But hell is eternal. The Bible says so.

And Jesus the one who loved perfectly told us about it more than anyone else. In Matthew we read it last week. Anyone who says you fool will be in danger of the fire of hell.

It says in Matthew 13 the Son of Man will send out His angels and they will weed out of His kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil.

[19 : 04] They that is the angels will throw them into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Brothers and sisters we know this but has it gripped you lately?

Hell is a real place where the souls and the bodies of men will suffer forever and ever. So eternity is a horrible prospect for the wicked.

Matthew 25 41 21 then he will say to those on his left depart from me you who are cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

It is forever and ever. There is no escape. There are no second chances. When you reach hell that is where you will be forever.

You will not be purified and sent to heaven. Your punishment will never end because your sin will never end and the darkness and the pain and the poverty and the sorrow will be yours forever.

[20 : 14] And so from a hundred billion years from now God will not say stop. He will not call quits on hell. It will be forever. And so if you don't know Christ flee.

Flee from the coming destruction because it is horrible. It is absolutely horrible because it is forever. So either heaven or hell awaits us all.

And let me ask you, what is the difference? So we're walking down this path and we come to a fork in the road and it's the fork of all forks. One path goes to eternal glory and joy and hope and bliss and the other one goes into darkness into the abyss and the pain.

And what makes the difference? Well, this is our third point, God's mercy. God's mercy makes the difference.

Ephesians 2.4 says, but God because of his great love for us. And you know the context of that verse. We were once dead in our sin and our transgressions.

[21 : 25] We were slaves to sin and to Satan, but God. so the trajectory of our path was straight down, straight into hell.

But God, who was rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions. It is by grace you have been saved.

So the Father loved us. And Jesus Christ came and laid down his life for sinners. And Jesus Christ died to take the hell that sinners like us deserved.

And in place he gave us the endless delights at the Father's right hand, the things that he deserved.

And the Spirit of God came upon you.

And he gave you a new heart. And he took what was Christ and he applied it to you. He made us alive again in Christ.

[22 : 24] So the only difference between going to heaven and going to hell is God's mercy. The mercy of our triune God. So we thank God.

No one here can boast. No one here can say, I was smart. I was good. I did it right. It was by grace that we have been saved. So has grace captured your heart?

Why aren't you going to hell? Because of grace. we were absolutely helpless. We were covered in the filth of our rebellion.

We were naked and we were alone and we were by the side of the road and our father came and he loved us and he cleansed us and he dressed us in the robes of Jesus righteousness and then he married us.

He loved us. He brought us to himself and he accepted us in Jesus Christ and so we are nothing. The dirty rotten sinner is nothing but God's mercy is everything.

[23 : 36] The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have saved us. So now I want to conclude with this question. How can I use this practically?

I want you to be thinking, how can we use this practically? If you remember at the beginning of the year, when we started this series of lessons on practical religion, the first chapter was on self examination.

And that's where we want to end this. We want to begin a self examination and we want to end where we started. Ryle asked us some questions and he had to search our own hearts to find out if we were in Christ.

And we don't want to ask those same questions, but we want to ask, as we seek to apply these things to ourselves, am I applying these things to myself?

Am I thinking about eternity? So let me ask you, this is for all of you to participate, and I don't have very many notes left, so you have to participate.

[24 : 44] What, and we have 15 minutes, what application do you see for this in your life? So how should this doctrine of eternity change or shape the way we live?

And as you do this, examine yourself and see if you're fitting the pattern. So how should this affect us? How should this change us?

Roger. Maybe this leads into our study, but the closer I get to the end of my life, the more I feel like life's accelerated, and my life is shortened, and like I've got to make use of everything that I've got. So it causes me to think I live in this last day of my life. Making every moment count, forget about all this retirement baloney that everybody talks about, retiring, being laid back, not doing anything, stopping the work, I feel like I've got to do more, I've got to work harder, and even when I'm not working to take your money that I ought to be doing something, even if it's volunteer work for me, the Lord is done.

Ephesians 5.15, be careful how you live, not as unwise, but as wise, making the most of every opportunity because the days are evil. How many opportunities do you have to live?

[26 : 11] you have one. You have one chance. It's one go around. Sometimes I think of this life as on one side of the balance.

This 50, 60, 70 years is on one side of the balance, and on the other side is forever and ever and ever. And that frightens me because what I do with this teeny tiny amount of time is going to set the course forever and ever.

How valuable our life is. Time is the most precious thing we have. Jonathan Edwards made a number of resolutions regarding how he was going to use time, but listen to this one in light of eternity.

Resolution 22. resolved to endeavor to obtain for myself as much happiness in the other world as I possibly can with all the power, might, vigor, and vehemence, yea, violence, I am capable or can bring myself to exert in any way that can be thought of.

Edwards saw eternity and he wanted to live in light of it. He wanted to make his life count and he wanted to work for heavenly treasures and not for earthly treasures.

[27 : 37] He didn't want his happiness cooped up in these 60 years. He wanted to enjoy it forever. So we have to use our time wisely and remember that we are going to eternity.

Any other thing? How else? There. There. There. Eternity might embrace the person gives us hope no matter what situation we're in.

We always have that hope within us. And also to know that there is the spirit in the only person.

Right. Eternity should encourage us, shouldn't it?

We see our bodies wasting away, but God has plans for our bodies. God has plans for us and plans to do us good. And so our best things are ahead.

And it doesn't seem that the wrong is off so strong that this world is controlled by Satan and his will is done.

[28:52] And nothing ever seems to stop the tidal wave of sin, but God is the ruler yet. And he has appointed a day when he will judge the earth.

He will judge the living and the dead. And he will consume this world in fire. And out of the fire, he will bring the new heavens and the new earth. And that should encourage us. What else?

Jim? We should be living more thankful if we think of the Lord is doing and will doing that great day. We didn't say to ourselves we didn't earn our salvation.

He paid it all. We should live in that light of being thankful for what he's continuing to do for us.

When we drop him for forgiveness of sinners, I just think, stop to realize, like you said, the difference between heaven and hell, what he seeked us from, that he suffered hell for us.

Isn't that what Christianity is all about? that we live thankful, joyful lives because of what God has done for us. And one of the things that God has done for us is he has rescued us from hell.

[30:06] And so how can it be that thankfulness and love and gratitude just don't overflow in our lives? That we can be complaining, we can be grumpy, it's wrong, it's wicked.

Let me ask you, how should this affect the way we raise our children? How should eternity affect the way we raise our children?

God. Scott. Saturday, I had a list of things to do, a lot of this, and it was about four Saturdays to be one.

A friend from Tennessee stopped in sleeping in a day, I was getting fancy, because I had a lot to do, he ladies not that good, I could start working, my brother all stops and I just get this tension and frustration I gotta get things done, I want my kids to help, and I'm stressed that they're not working like I would like them to work, and then here's what I've heard today, it just puts it in perspective, and I need wisdom to know how does this affect my kids, what am I teaching, I mean we can teach them the work we need to, but yet on the other hand there's more to life than getting that shingle fixed yesterday, yet it rains and it's going to leak and all this floods my mind, and I just have to trust that as I raised my children that I would put things into perspective for eternity, and just even, just what you said about having to tell, just explaining that to them, you know, I can explain work or sports, but do I explain what's really important, so I need wisdom to be working with children.

[32:12] Anyone else about children? Jackie? I think that Christ's parables were good at this, especially the parable where he gives them all talent, and just stressing that one day, Christ is coming back just like that owner that gave the servant talents, and he's going to say to some, well done, really faithful servant, you've done with what I've given you, and to the last one, he threw them into the pit, and just showing that this is us, which one of those are you?

What has he given you by you going to church and hearing the word like we both do? We get the word like nobody else gets the word, so we say.

What are you doing with that? What are you doing with all the goodnesses that God has given you? Will you come back and say, well done, good and faithful child, you've done with what I've given you, or will you throw you into the pit and say, you've done nothing but there.

So I think taking those parables, which are stories, and making them real to the children, can be very helpful to show them that it's not all about there's coming a time when he's coming back, and those guys lost sight of it, one of the guys lost sight of it, and you know, it's so long in coming, he's not coming back.

And that's our attitude too, so long in coming, I just don't feel like he's ever going to come back. It's just what mom and dad talk about. Let me read a really, it's a pretty long quote from Richard Baxter, but it's really good.

[33:55] It's really good if you're a parent. This is what Richard Baxter says. They have, speaking of children, and this is to parents, they have an everlasting inheritance of happiness to attain, and it is that which you must bring them up for.

They have an endless misery to escape, and it is that which you must diligently teach them. If you teach them not to escape the flames of hell, what thanks do they owe you for teaching them to speak and go?

If you teach them not the way to heaven, and how they may make sure of their salvation, what thanks do they owe you for teaching them how to get their things a little while in a miserable world? If you don't teach them to know God and how to serve him and be saved, you teach them nothing or worse than nothing. It is in your hands to do them the greatest kindness or cruelty in all the world.

Help them to know God and to be saved, and you do more for them than if you help them to be kings or princes. If you neglect their souls and breed them in ignorance, worldliness, ungodliness, and sin, you betray them to the devil and the enemy of souls, even as truly if you sold them to him. [35 : 12] You sell them to be slaves to Satan. You betray them to him who will deceive them and abuse them in this life and torment them in the next.

We have very heavy charge put in parents' hands. It's heaven or hell, and what will we teach them? We teach them to know how to make money and how to come and go and talk, but we won't teach them how to be saved.

How should we apply this? Anyone else? Steve? It's true that eternity should and does put a fire on earth feet, a zeal for the spreading of the gospel and just living and looking in light of it and living like I believe it in front of I believe it.

Yeah, that's one of the things I thought of. It should motivate evangelism. I asked myself, why don't I evangelize very often? why don't I go out and tell people, well, I'm more afraid of them than I am of God.

And I don't see the beauty of Jesus Christ. He's not altogether lovely to me. And the third thing is, I don't believe in heaven and I don't believe in hell.

[36 : 43] hell. I'm basically, most of the time, a practical annihilationist, which is just someone who thinks there's no hell. You're just obliterated.

And that's all there is to it. So, if I believed the Bible, I would be beating down people's doors, beating the bushes, doing whatever it took to tell people about the gospel.

If I believed in the glories of heaven, I wouldn't care what people thought. I would want them to enjoy that and to escape hell. And I would tell them to run and run to the celestial city because it is so wonderful.

So, we must dwell on these things if we're going to evangelize. What else? We have a few minutes. Dale. Along that same line thing.

It's easy to, if not having, if you don't have a perspective, we just read and I said things are going to be rolled up. Anyway, thinking of the news this last week, the people who are trying to preserve this world, who are passionate to preserve this world, but what else can you expect from the unregenerate heart?

[38 : 07] When we have an unregenerate heart that is passionate to preserve things the way they are, but they don't understand, and they will, they reject that there is a God that's in control of this, and that these things will pass away.

We look forward to it, but they don't. And there comes the emphasis for you, mentalism. They just don't understand that.

I can get angry, and I can rip my teeth, and almost come up with oaths in response to what they're trying to do, but the passion for their souls have to be helped, not the end.

What else can you expect from the unregenerate heart? Amen. It reminds me of the Egyptian kings who spent their lives and their whole rule preparing for the end, preparing for eternity.

We see the pyramids, we see the tombs that are beautifully decorated for eternity, and they were doing it in pursuit of a false religion and a false gospel and no Christ.

[39 : 18] And yet, we as Christians, lose sight of that. We lose sight of not preparing physical treasures for eternity, but the spiritual treasures for eternity.

And we forget in our day-to-day life that we are kings and we should be preparing for that glorious kingdom that's to come. I just want to conclude with this last thing.

It should encourage you if you are struggling in your sin, and that's all of us, you will one day live forever and ever without sin.

You will live a million years without a single evil thought crossing your mind. You will obey God forever. You will be freed from sin and you will live forever happy with God.

And so, if you're in the middle, and we all are in the middle of struggling with sin, we're trying to put it to death, but it's hard. Remember the end, because the end is assured.

[40 : 26] There is coming a day when you will enjoy complete victory, you will enjoy complete holiness and happiness. Well, let's pray, brothers and sisters, that God would help us to grasp the weight of eternity.

Father, we need your spirit. We need your spirit to open our eyes to see the beauties of Christ. We need to have the spirit to produce faith in us, to believe in heaven and in hell.

We need the spirit to help us to evangelize, to not be afraid of men, but to speak as dying men to dying men.

We are all coming to the judgment. We help everyone here to hear well done, good and faithful servant. We save those who need saved.

We sanctify all of us for Jesus Christ's sake. Thank you that you are making us a beautiful bride, perfect and altogether lovely for him.

[41 : 38] And we pray that we would, because of this hope, purify ourselves now. In Jesus' name, Amen.