


# Eternity



Amid the boisterous celebrations with which millions around the world greeted the year 2000, the city of Sydney, Australia, sounded an unexpected note of sanity. As the clock struck midnight to herald the end of 1999 and the beginning of the new year, a single word appeared in bright lights on a bridge spanning the city's famous harbour. It was the word *ETERNITY*.

The Hebrew text of Ecclesiastes 3:11 says that God "hath set eternity in [men's] heart." That is a profound statement. In creating man, God stamped eternity indelibly on his consciousness. This fact defines the peculiar majesty and mystery of man. It explains a lot about his yearnings and frustrations. And it spells out the real reason God placed him on the earth.

### ***God made man an immortal soul.***

He set eternity in his heart. Man is not just an evolutionary step or two removed from brute beasts. Beasts have no sense of eternity, but man cannot avoid it, for God created him an immortal soul. As an immortal soul, he has everlasting existence. God made him to live forever. It is true that his time in this world is brief. But death is not the end of any of us. After this—*ETERNITY!*

This was the belief of the patriarchs, prophets, and poets of the Old Testament. It was the clear teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ and His apostles. It is a truth that raises urgent questions. Job asked, "Man dieth, and wasteth away: yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?" (Job 14:10). The Lord Jesus asked, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for

his soul?" (Mark 8:36-37). The Bible provides plain answers to these questions. It describes an eternity of bliss for all who know Christ as Saviour. Jesus assured the penitent thief who was crucified beside Him at Calvary, "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). That assurance belongs to every justified sinner. Paul testified for every one of God's people facing the approach of death, when he triumphantly asserted, "We are confident, I say, and willing . . . to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8). The same apostle, having described the return of Christ, the resurrection of the saints, and the rising of living saints to meet the Lord, said, "So shall we ever be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:17). That is the meaning of eternity for all who know Christ.

But not only the godly live forever in eternity. The ungodly are also immortal. Jesus spoke of a rich man lost forever in the torments of hell (Luke 6:19-31). His question in Mark 8:36-37 emphasizes that the loss of the soul is so great that all the combined possessions and pleasures of this world cannot compensate for it. The apostle John describes how the smoke of the torments of the damned ascends before God forever (Revelation 14:11).

God has created every man and woman to exist forever: He has stamped eternity indelibly on every human soul.

***Since man is immortal, nothing that is merely temporal can satisfy his soul.*** Materialism can never meet the needs of a soul created for eternity. The possessions and pleasures of the world may blind a man for a



while. They may stultify his conscience. They may derange his reason. But in the end they will leave him empty. The poet John Gay, who is buried in Westminster Abbey, wrote the epitaph that adorns his tomb: *Life is a jest and all things show it; I thought so once and now I know it.* To anyone who makes this world his god, life will be a meaningless and mirthless joke—and though admirers attempt to sanctify such an empty existence with the honour of interment in Westminster Abbey, they only compound an already black comedy.

Ecclesiastes chapter 2 describes the folly of trying to satisfy a heart stamped with eternity with the trinkets of the world. Solomon confesses that he set out to fill his heart with pleasure and surround himself with gaiety and laughter. He ate, drank, and made merry. He indulged all the follies of which he could dream. He built great houses and decked them with all the trappings of wealth. He multiplied his riches beyond measure and filled his life with music and dance. But after all his indulgence he found himself in the pit of disappointment and despair, confessing that all his pursuits were mere *vanity*, or utter emptiness.

***Since nothing that is merely temporal can satisfy man's immortal soul, he should make the matters of eternity, not time, his chief concern.*** This is something every one of us should consider with the utmost urgency. Here are three questions about eternity each of us should ask.

***1. I must live forever, but where?*** What is the truth about eternity? On this subject we cannot trust the opinions of men, but must have the authoritative revelation of God. And the word of God is explicit: Each of us will live eternally in heaven with Christ or in hell without Christ. This is the stark reality that faces us all.

***2. How can I be sure of heaven?*** The Lord Jesus Christ supplies the answer: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

Therefore, to be "in Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:17) is to be in the way to heaven. All who are in Christ are assured of heaven (2 Corinthians 5:1, 8). How does a person get to be "in Christ"? Not by works or personal merit, but by faith in Christ's finished work: "[The Lord Jesus Christ] was delivered for [because of] our offences, and was raised again for [because of] our justification. Therefore being [having been] justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Romans 4:25–5:2). Believers in Christ receive the hope, or confident expectation, of glory. Whosoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).

***3. In the light of eternity, how may I make the best possible use of my time on earth?*** We shall give account of ourselves to God (Romans 14:12) and should walk accordingly: "Walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time" (Ephesians 5:15–16). We should live like Moses, who chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward" (Hebrews 11:25–26).

Let us not forget our true interests. Let us fix in our minds the bright message that flashed so incongruously among the garish lights of the millennial celebrations in Sydney—and then obey the advice engraved on a headstone in an Irish cemetery: *Consider, man as you pass by; as you are now, so once was I. As I am now soon you will be; consider, man, eternity.* In the light of eternity, consider and "prepare to meet thy God" (Amos 4:12). ■

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