

# Rev Alex Macdonald - Eternity

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[ 0 : 00 ] Could you turn with me now to that passage we read in Revelation chapter 22 and some words that we find at the end of verse 5.

Revelation 22 verse 5 and these last words, and they will reign forever and ever, and especially the expression forever and ever or for eternity.

Those of you who were there last night will perhaps remember that I spoke about eternity, one of the songs I sang was about eternity, and about that fireworks display in Sydney at the beginning of the year 2000 when the word eternity was written in large 50 foot high letters on Sydney Harbour Bridge.

And eternity had become a kind of motto of the city of Sydney and the song told a little bit of the story about how that had come about.

Well from the 1940s through to the 1960s this word eternity had mysteriously appeared written in chalk in immaculate copper plate writing on pavements throughout the city.

[ 1 : 10 ] And nobody knew who was responsible, it was a mystery for I'm sure over 20 years. And eventually it was revealed that it was a man called Arthur Stase.

And he had a very poor background, very deprived background. He'd become a petty criminal and then he'd gone off to take part in the First World War.

He was gassed and shell shocked. He came back home to Australia and he slid down into alcoholism. Then one day at a meeting for down and outs in a church he saw the difference between himself and the Christian people who were there and he wanted what they had.

And he got down on his knees and he prayed and he asked for Christ to come into his heart. And he became a Christian as a result of that and he was enabled to give up his drinking.

He subsequently heard a preacher say, I wish I could shout eternity through all the streets of Sydney. And Arthur said, he repeated himself and kept shouting eternity, eternity.

[ 2 : 20 ] And his words were ringing through my brain as I left the church. Suddenly I began crying and I felt a powerful call from the Lord to write eternity.

I had a piece of chalk in my pocket. I bent down there and then and wrote it on the pavement. Now he wasn't well educated at all but he found he could write this 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 in the early morning writing this word eternity. Now we don't know how many people throughout history that made them think about the issues of life and death.

We don't know. It's an amazing testimony and the fact that that word eternity was written at the very beginning of the millennium. Thomas Chalmers who was a great preacher and philanthropist and one of the founding fathers of the Free Church of Scotland in 1843.

He was once criticised in the General Assembly while he was still in the established church before the disruption. And on that occasion he was arguing vehemently against what were called pluralities.

[ 3 : 37 ] That was the idea that a parish minister could hold other posts, other jobs like a professorship in university or whatever and as Thomas Chalmers believed that's neglecting the essential work of parish ministry.

Well the criticism that was made of him on that occasion was that in his younger days as a minister he was actually unconverted in those days. He had argued the very opposite in those times when he wanted to continue as a parish minister and be a professor of mathematics in St Andrews University because he was a minister in a rural parish in north-fife called Kilmenny.

Well how was Chalmers good answer this charge? He had argued one way when he was younger now he was arguing the opposite. He replied what is mathematics because the chair had been a chair of mathematics.

Not as mathematics it is the study of magnitude but then I thought not of two magnitudes the littleness of time and the greatness of eternity.

Not long ago, three years or so ago I retired from the pastoral ministry. I had been over 40 years in the ministry and it seemed to me at that time and it seems still now how quickly that time passed.

[ 4 : 58 ] The littleness of time. In spite of all the things that may have happened that seemed so important. In spite of all the things that happened in the world the greater world around us momentous things have happened in the world and in the church over those years.

But yes most of them shrink into insignificance in the light of eternity. Only these things that are eternal ultimately matter.

So what is eternal? What is forever? 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 and at the heart of it will be a new people.

But you know human beings are eternal also. In Matthew chapter 25 verse 46 Jesus said at the end of that very powerful parable of the sheep and the goats he said then they will go away into eternal punishment but the righteous to eternal life.

Once we begin life in this world our life doesn't end in this world. We exist everlastingly. Jesus said it's a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses.

[ 6 : 18 ] 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.

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 nat.

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

So I'd like to think with you this morning about some of the things that are suggested by this word forever or forever and ever or for eternity.

The first thing I want to say about this is that the New Testament teaches that if we trust in the Lord Jesus Christ we will live forever.

[ 7 : 27 ] Romans 6 verse 23 the famous verse the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.

So often the word eternal is used in conjunction with the word life, eternal life. Life in this world is for a short time no matter how long it may be.

We may live to be a hundred or over a hundred but still it is so short not just in comparison with the length of time of the history of this world but certainly in comparison with the length of eternity.

In Psalm 90 in a later verse from the verses we sung it says in verse 10 the length of our days is seventy years or eighty if we have the strength yet their span is but trouble and sorrow for they quickly pass and we fly away.

The incredible string band had a song called October song and some of it goes like 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 want to murder time when my heart is aching but mostly I just stroll along the path that he is taking.

[ 8 : 40 ] And isn't that the way that so many people think about time sometimes we want to murder it sometimes time is passing too quickly but at other times we just go with the flow as we say.

In his younger days Paul Simon wrote a song where he says I was twenty one years when I wrote this song I'm twenty two now but I won't be for long. Time horizon and the leaves that are green turn to brown and they wither with the wind and they crumble in your hand.

Sometimes it's in our younger years that we think time is passing so quickly and we're not achieving anything or maybe it's in the middle years of life when we talk about having a midlife crisis we suddenly realize that life is slipping away from us it didn't turn out as we dreamed.

Van Morrison has a song where he says say Kessara whatever it will be but then I keep on searching for immortality she's so beautiful but she's going to die someday everything in life just passes away precious time is slipping away.

And isn't that the truth precious time is slipping away. Caesar Borgia who was one 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.

[10:05] Time is slipping away are you prepared for eternity. Contrast what Caesar Borgia said with what the great evangelist D.L.

Moody said some fine day you will see in the newspapers D.L. Moody is dead don't you believe it I shall be more alive that morning than ever before that is the hope that the Christian can have based on the unique work of the Lord Jesus Christ that's the confidence that we can have because of this word forever we will reign we will live forever for eternity the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord and that is reflecting the words of Jesus in John's Gospel where he says in chapter 6 I'm the living bread that came down from heaven if anyone eats of this bread he will live forever this bread is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world or later in chapter 10 he says my sheep listen to my voice I know them and they follow me I give them eternal life and they shall never perish no one can snatch them out of my hand or in the most famous verse of all John chapter 3 verse 16 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 that's the great promise made to us if we believe in the Lord Jesus my friend it is as simple as that you may say it can't possibly be as simple as that you just have to believe in Jesus you just have to trust him you just have to believe that he did what he came to do and he said he did to die for the sins of the world that's all you have to do believe me it is as simple as that so make sure of this one thing in life that you have accepted this gift of eternal life because what's the opposite of eternal life it's eternal death it's dying forever it is not being with God and living in his presence but being excluded and in outer darkness it is knowing the corruption and the disintegration of personality forever that's the awful alternative so while it is day while there's time can ask this opportunity that Jesus is giving you second thing I want to reflect on about this word forever or eternity eternity is that if we trust in the Lord Jesus Christ we will never thirst forever here in this chapter verse 17 it says the spirit and the bride say come and 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 reflecting reminding us of the words of Jesus in John chapter 4 when he was speaking to the Samaritan woman that he met by the well there whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst and literally what he says there is will never thirst for eternity indeed the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life so part of eternal life is never thirsting eternally see we spend our lives looking for that deep and lasting fulfillment or satisfaction in life don't we that's really what we want in life to be fulfilled to be satisfied and of course we seldom find it as the stone song I can't get no satisfaction and that seems to be a common human experience Robert Burns our Scottish national poet in his great rollicking poem Tamashanta has these beautiful lines in the middle of it all he says but pleasures are like poppies spread you see the flower its bloom is shed or like the snow falls in the river a moment white and melts forever pleasure doesn't ultimately

satisfy or fulfill but what about wealth people pursue wealth possessions material things surely that will give us satisfaction and so often we look for the latest thing to buy and we think we get that will be really satisfied you get it and after a little while even if it doesn't break down or it doesn't need repair or whatever it begins to Paul a bit it doesn't have the same joy or satisfaction that had to begin with the former Mrs. Onassis who was married to the richest man in the world at that time said wealth has not made me happy nor as the world knows has it made my husband happy but what about ambition what about you know getting on in the world achieving something through work or through celebrity or whatever it may be and so many people today want celebrity to be well-known popular for something well Jack Higgins who was the author of numerous best-selling thrillers including the eagle has landed he was asked once what he would like to have known as a boy and he said I'd like to have known that when you get to the top there's nothing there isn't that devastating isn't it someone who achieved so much in his life and yet he felt there was just nothing in it the book of Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament explores all these things you know when Solomon used the great wisdom that he had and the great opportunity that he had to find satisfaction in life through through his wealth through go work through pleasure whatever it was and he said everything is empty it's like chasing the wind and it's a very modern book that book of Ecclesiastes isn't it because it reminds us of that reality so that talks all about the fact of this thirst we have for life and for satisfaction and we don't find it here and time is running out but what Jesus

has to offer is a lasting satisfaction remember the great theologian Augustine said God has made us for himself and our hearts are restless until they find rest in him so this restlessness this longing for satisfaction that we have it's not going to be satisfied until it's satisfied with coming to know God there's no lasting satisfaction until we come to know him until we come to find God or rather we are found by him in Psalm 63 David says oh God you are my God earnestly

I seek you and 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 do you know something of that longing for God that dawning realization that there is no lasting satisfaction except through knowing him and have you come to know this sense of your soul being satisfied as with the richest of foods we were all satisfied last night our appetite satisfied by the amazing meal that was provided for us but isn't it far better to know that deep and inward and lasting satisfaction of knowing God of having our thirst satisfied and continuously satisfied in Psalm 16 the Psalm that we sung from speaks of that eternal satisfaction verse 11 you have made known to me the path of life and you will fill me with joy in your presence with eternal pleasures at your right hand isn't that amazing expression eternal pleasures at your right hand people so often think that Christianity is just some sort of killjoy religion we're all wet blankets God is promising us eternal pleasures yes there may be sacrifices to be made here and now but he's promising eternal pleasures yes if we live a life dedicated to the Lord Jesus Christ here and now yes there will be struggles yes there will be difficulties along with the joy but there'll be an eternal reward you see we were made by God and we were made for relationship with God and God has done everything necessary in Jesus Christ to restore that relationship that's why Jesus came into the world to put us right with God so that we can come to know him and we can be satisfied in that amazing relationship you know a human relationship of real love is so satisfying isn't it where we feel so just at home with another person well that has got its own frailties of course but this relationship with God is the perfect expression of that kind of relationship and it's promised to us forever so if we trust in the Lord Jesus Christ we will never thirst forever but the opposite of that of course is that if we don't know him we will thirst forever that that dissatisfaction and that frustration will go on and on forever and ever never reaching our fulfilment as human beings but deteriorating and disintegrating or a horror of a future is the alternative make sure that you've accepted the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ you've taken the water of life from him as you trust in him the third thing I want to notice is that of course specifically literally our text says here that we will reign forever we will reign for eternity they will reign forever and ever literally it is they will reign to the ages of the ages that's the biblical expression for eternity now what about this business of reigning or ruling where does that come from what's the idea of this well you see we were created in the beginning to rule to have dominion Adam and

Eve were put in the Garden of Eden and they were told that they were to rule over creation Genesis chapter 1 verse 26 then God said let us make man in our image in our likeness and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air over the livestock over all the earth over all the creatures that move along the ground and of course even today when people sometimes talk disparagingly of that early part of Genesis and talking about man having dominion over the creation and that causing a lot of the problems that have been caused today a lot of the problems have not been caused by that doctrine at all they have been caused by an abuse of science and technology which is a different matter altogether let's not get started into that but the point is that in the beginning we were given this authority over creation and if there is something wrong in our relationship with creation now or the environment it is us again that must seek to put it right because we have been given this authority so even those who disparage what is said in the beginning of Genesis they recognize that human beings have a responsibility to do something about global warming or whatever it may be the point is we were created to rule to reign but since we rebelled against

[ 22 : 11 ] God the Bible makes it clear that the creation has rebelled against us in Genesis chapter 3 cursed us 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 your food until you return to the ground since from it you were taken for dust you are under dust you will return so instead of that beautiful perfection of human beings managing and ruling over the creation and doing it well for the glory of God now there is disruption there's disintegration and there's frustration.

In Romans chapter 8 verses 20 to 22 we read 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 see these expressions talking about frustration about bondage to decay that things are not now as God originally intended it so all our attempts to rule over the creation are frustrated in some way anybody you know who who wants to cultivate a garden or plant plants in a field or whatever it may be you recognize this it doesn't grow perfectly there are pests there are diseases there are weeds that grow up for the shouldn't and so on and that's just an example for the whole of our lives we enter into this kind of frustration and this bondage to decay but then look how he goes on he says but we'll be brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God we know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time in other words just as childbirth is a painful thing to go through yet it produces something amazing in the birth of a newborn child so he's saying these frustrations of creation and so on are leading on to something glorious what is that glorious thing in Hebrews chapter 2 from verse 6 where the writer there is quoting from Sam 8 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 referring again to that dominion over creation and putting everything under him God left nothing that is not subject to him yet at present we do not see everything subject to him that's just what we've been talking about but how does he go on does he just leave it there and is that the message that well we're just living in a frustrating world no he says but we see Jesus but we see Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone the fact that Jesus has come as the new Adam the one who would achieve what Adam had failed to do that's our great hope and in Revelation chapter 11 and earlier chapter of this book we're looking at the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ and he will reign forever and ever we may fail and we may be frustrated in our reigning and ruling over creation but Christ is the new head of creation and as we look to him we will find satisfaction and a lack of frustration in seeking to live in this world but not only in this world but in the world to come because our text says here that they that is the people of God they will reign forever and ever and it's only because Jesus reigns forever and ever that we will reign forever and ever so there will be a new heavens and a new earth a new universe that Jesus will create out of the ruins of this one and in it we will reign with him we will exercise this authority over creation and do it in a way that is glorifying to God and beneficial to ourselves all of the frustrations of this world will pass away in the perfect kingdom of Christ what a glorious future but again what's the opposite the opposite of reigning with Christ forever is to continue the frustrations of this present world to the nth degree of never being satisfied never having this integration that we ought to have with the created world and we might put it even stronger than that instead of ruling ourselves forever with Christ we will be ruled over we will be forced to be where we would never want to be in outer darkness far from God. Fourthly and finally as we think of forever as we think of eternity if we trust in the Lord Jesus Christ we will be with Christ forever if we're reigning together with him we're with him in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 verse 17 Paul says and so we will be with the Lord forever. Sometimes the Bible uses very simple language just monosyllables short little words to describe the most amazing things so we will be with the Lord forever.

[ 27 : 56 ] What is at the heart of the gospel is the promise that we will be with Christ forever. The great catastrophe of the human race is that we're estranged from God.

In Isaiah chapter 59 verse 2 we're told that our sins have separated us from God. In Ephesians chapter 2 verse 12 Paul says remember that at that time you were separate from Christ excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise without hope and without God in the world.

Does that describe you this morning my friend? Are you still far away? You're still excluded? Are you still in the outside? You hear other people talking about it but you don't understand it? You're on the outside of the door? Well listen to what Paul goes on to say. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near how?

Through the blood of Christ. The good news is that God himself has done everything necessary to bring us back to himself and he paid this amazing price the blood of Christ the death of Christ that suffering of Christ upon the cross as he was excluded from the presence of the Father.

[ 29 : 13 ] My God my God. Why have you forsaken me? This salvation this redemption this reconciliation that God has achieved between God and man it's not a temporary thing.

It's not just for this life only it's forever. Jesus said in John 14 in my father's house or many rooms if it were not so I'd 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 so that you also may be where I am. And Paul says in Philippians I desire to depart and to be with Christ which is better by far. This expression keeps on recurring to be with Christ and isn't that in a sense at the very center of what it means to live eternally it means to be with Christ.

A glimpse of Jesus a moment in his company surely would be heaven enough to us but we are to be with Jesus forever. This amazing person who lived this amazing life of compassion and love and this amazing person who gave himself utterly over to death for us who made the ultimate sacrifice to be with him to be his friends now and forever isn't that amazing.

So make sure that your faith is in the Lord Jesus Christ. Make sure that you love him and you will know to this reality of being with Christ forever.

[ 30 : 49 ] But of course again the opposite of being with Christ forever is to be away from Christ forever. Away from everything that is good and pure and true and loving and kind and darkness where there's weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Again what a horrible prospect but it's ours unless we trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. There's no sort of in between that the Bible allows for.

There's no kind of neutral position. You're either one or the other. You either continue as you are born in sin and shape and in iniquity or you trust in the Lord Jesus Christ who has given himself for you.

Trust him and you'll know the peace that he brings. So there is a now and a forever time and eternity.

I'd like to draw things to a close by quoting in full a poem that was written a good number years ago by a man called Gordon Bailey called Playing Out Time and thinking about the way that we fritter away time.

[ 32 : 01 ] He uses the picture of us living our lives as if we're paying our time into a slot machine in one of these amusement arcades. This is how it goes.

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 win there, two lemons and a bell, a mind consuming, mind confusing, one way street to hell. This one armed bandit's not one armed.

[ 33 : 00 ] I hold the arm I see, but what about the arm it's got that has a grip on me? The arm that binds me, blinds 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 hoax. 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.

[ 34 : 05 ] I've wondered where the living go outside of this arcade. I'm told I 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.

Don't play with time. Don't play around with this great offer of salvation in Jesus Christ. Accept him now. In contrast to the man who plays for time and lost, there's the words of the great him, the sands of time are sinking.

It was written by a woman called Anne Cousin who took some of Samuel Rutherford's ideas, Samuel Rutherford the great covenantor. He had written some notes on this very passage, Revelation chapter 22, and she took some of those ideas and put it into this great hymn. And it's the idea of the hourglass, you know, how they used to be, instead of a clock, an hourglass where the sand would trickle down from one from the top to the bottom in an hour.

[ 35 : 22 ] So the sands of time are sinking, the passage of time. The sands of time are sinking, the dawn of heaven breaks. In summer morn 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 wove, 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.

Let's pray. Our loving Heavenly Father, may we be filled with this vision of Emmanuel's land, of eternally living with you, the living God.

[ 36 : 37 ] Lord, we don't deserve it, we could never earn it, but we thank you that the Lord Jesus deserves it and he has earned it.

And if we trust in him, he is ours and we are his. Lord, deliver us from playing with time, but rather to use the opportunities that time give us, the opportune moments, such as now, when you speak to our hearts and you urge us to come to yourself.

Bless us by the power of your spirit. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.