

Eternity is Eternity

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[0 : 0 0] Well, tonight we are continuing our series called Doctrine for Mission. This series is looking at some of the key theological truths that the Bible gives us, which will help us as we seek to share our faith. As we are praying, we are praying, we long to see people in our community come to faith in Jesus. We long to see God being worshiped by more and more people in our community, and God has given us a crucial role in that work. He's placed us to be witnesses for him, but that is not something that we find easy. It's something that we all find hard. And what this series is trying to do is to show that there are some wonderful truths in scripture that can help us all and can encourage us and equip us for the work of mission that God has given every single one of us to do. Never forget that it's not just people like Amy Carmichael who are missionaries.

Every Christian is a missionary. And I remember hearing David Meredith give a brilliant description of that. He said, ultimately, there's only two types of people in the world. You're either a missionary or you're a mission field, one or the other. And for every single believer, we are missionaries. So we're looking at key truths to help us with that. Tonight, we are going to turn back to 2 Corinthians chapter 4, verses 17 to 18. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. As we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. This week, our title is eternity is eternity.

I'm sure it's fair to say that we all have things that we are afraid of. Some people are scared of spiders. Some people are scared of snakes. Some people are scared of planes or maybe just heights in general. There's lots of things that can frighten us. For me, my big phobia is scary movies.

I absolutely hate them. So I've never watched a horror movie in my life. Never will. You could not pay me enough money to watch a horror movie. And I never enjoy scary moments in other types of film as well. So if any of you have seen Toy Story, the creepy kids underneath Sid's bed, that's pretty much the creepy toys underneath Sid's bed, that is pretty much my limit. Anything beyond that. And I just can't do it. I absolutely hate scary films. Whatever it is that scares you, these fears are very real. And yet when we think about it, we're probably blowing it out of proportion.

I've seen people going absolutely crazy because there's a tiny wee spider on the ceiling, minding its own business. And looking at myself, I'm pretty sure that my fear of scary films is a little bit unnecessary. And when we compare it to many of the awful things that people actually experience in life, then the things that we are afraid of are often not nearly as big or as scary as we might think they are. When it comes to sharing our faith as Christians, there is something that I think all of us are scared of. I know I'm scared of it. I've heard many other people admit that they're scared of it. And I'm pretty confident that you will be scared of it too. This is probably the one thing that makes sharing our faith so difficult. This is the one thing that we all dread. So what is it? What are we all scared of? We are scared of a moment. A moment. That moment, the moment when we speak to someone about our faith, the moment when we try to ask them what we believe, the moment when we try to invite them to church or to a Bible study. That moment is terrifying. And a good way to test whether or not you're scared of this is to think of somebody you know, whether in your family or somebody you work with or a neighbour or a colleague. And as soon as you think of them, head out of the church early just now, go to their house, knock on the door and share your faith with them. How does that make you feel? Strong, energised and confident?

[4 : 54] Or slightly terrified? If it's the farmer, if you're feeling confident then that's wonderful and I hope that that never changes. But if it's the latter, if you feel terrified then all I can say is welcome to the club. I know exactly how you feel. Sharing our faith involves a moment that is very likely to fill you with fear and dread. And there's lots of reasons for that. We're afraid that it's going to be an awkward moment. And so you know, you think, well talking to somebody about football, about the weather or about movies or whatever it may be, that's easy. But talking about Jesus, even to people who we are normally completely comfortable around, all of a sudden it becomes tense and difficult. We're afraid because it's a risky moment. That's what makes it scary. The fear of what might happen. Will I spoil a friendship? Will I offend the person? Will I get tied in knots? Will I make a complete hash of it? There's an awful lot of risk in that moment. And so the fear of what can go wrong can be crippling. We're afraid because it's likely to be a costly moment.

So when we talk about our faith it means that we're exposing ourselves to all the possible outcomes of that conversation. We need to be open, honest and vulnerable. We might be asked difficult questions. We're probably going to have to follow up with more conversations. And we need to be committed to building up a closer relationship with the person in front of us.

We can't just run up to someone telling them where Jesus is in the runaway and have nothing to do with him ever again. We've got to have that sense of commitment. We've got to be courageous and gentle. We've got to be patient and bold. All of that takes a huge amount of effort. And all of that makes the moment loom all the larger. And the result of that combined awkwardness and risk and cost of the moment means that all too often we conclude that the moment just isn't worth it.

And I've done that so many times in my life. I'm not saying that to have a good you. I say that to myself first and foremost. There's so many times I've done that in my life. Sometimes it's the result of lots of thinking. So you plan to speak to somebody. You think I want to share my faith with this person. I want to invite them to church. And you plan it. But then as time goes on you start to have more and more second thoughts. You think, well, what if it's awkward? What if you think, what about all the risks that this might bring? What if this happens? What if that happens?

We become more and more conscious of the cost. And so we just retreat back into the safe territory of not opening our mouths at all. Other times though, it's the result of split second thinking.

[7 : 54] That door opens for a conversation about the Gospel. But instantly the warning lights in our minds that say awkward, risky, costly, they're flashing in our minds. And the door closes again as the person or the conversation moves on. I can think of so many times in my life when I've shied away from speaking about Jesus because I've been too scared of what a moment might bring.

So what's the answer? How do we stop that moment from being such a huge hurdle? Well, we need to find a way of recognizing that the moment is not nearly as huge as we think. And the way to see that is to compare it with something bigger, something much bigger. We need to compare the moment with eternity. And we need to learn that a moment is just a moment. Eternity is eternity. That comparison between a moment and eternity is crucial. And it's one that the Bible encourages us to make. We see that in several places. An example here we read in

Second Corinthians four where Paul compares the light moment of the affliction and his experience with the eternal weight of glory that God is preparing for us. These verses are moving our focus away from the moments of the here and now and they're directing our attention to eternity. And Paul does the same thing in Romans eight. He talks about the fact that he says, I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the with the glory that's to be revealed to us. In Philippians one, he talks about this dilemma he has between the work he has to do here and his desire to be with Christ in eternity, which is far better. The Old Testament Psalms do the same thing. They talk about how our lives are just like grass growing and withering a flower blooming and then fading compared to God who is from everlasting to everlasting.

The Bible frequently takes the moment that we're experiencing or that we're about to experience and compares that moment with eternity. And you and I have got to do the same. So what should you think about when you think of eternity? Well, there's two key concepts that should come into your mind, two key words that should come to mind whenever you think about eternity. They're easy to remember because they both begin with Q. Quantity and quality. These are the two words that we should associate with eternity. First of all, quantity. Eternity is the realm of infinite quantity. In other words, it's really, really, really big. And there's a sense in which we can only describe that in terms of in terms that are negative. So rather than say what it is, sometimes it's easier to just say what it isn't. So eternity has no beginning. And that's instantly beyond what we can fully grasp because in our minds, we just want to go back to our start. We want to go back to a starting point from which eternity then comes. But if you do that, you have to go back further. And then if you go back to the back, you have to go back further and further and further and further. Eternity has no beginning. There was never a period before it. In the other direction, eternity has no end. Looking back, there's no start. Looking forward, there's no finish. Just on and on and on. Eternity is everlasting, never ceasing, always continuing forever.

Third thing is that eternity can't be measured. No start, no end, no measurement. No matter how far we stretch back or forward, up, down, no matter how big we try to picture eternity with the universe and with history in it somewhere, however that works, no matter how big we try to imagine, we cannot measure it. Meters, miles, megawatts, light years, none of them are adequate. It's too big, too long, too vast. It is immeasurable. And fourthly, eternity cannot diminish. So there isn't a tiny bit less eternity tomorrow than there was today. There's no finiteness to it. It's infinite.

[12 : 50] But again, that's just telling us what it isn't. It's infinite. Not finite, doesn't fade. So when the Bible tells us that Jesus, the Son of God, has come so that whoever believes in him might not perish but have eternal life, we are being promised life of that quantity. Life that unites us to the God who has always been there. Life that will never end. Life that cannot be measured. Life that cannot deteriorate. And that's beyond anything that we ever experienced because just now for us, our lives are always on a countdown. Always. One less day at school. One less birthday.

One less summer. One less winter. One less hug with your family.

One less day. Always on a countdown. Nothing is on a countdown in eternity. The second key concept, however, is quality. So the eternal life offered in the gospel is not just life that goes on and on and on and on and on. It is life that is utterly brilliant.

And at the heart of that life, at the heart of that eternal life is one key thing. Jesus defines knowing, defines eternal life. I just gave it away there. And he gives it in one key term, knowing God. You can see it there in John 17. When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said, Father the hour has come, glorify your Son, that the Son may glorify you.

Since you've given him authority over all flesh to give eternal life to all whom you've given him. And this is eternal life that they know you, the only through God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. That is a statement of quality, not just quantity. And this is what's so important.

[15 : 10] God is not just the giver of eternal life. He is the very essence of eternal life. Eternal life is knowing him. And that doesn't just mean knowing about him. It means being in a relationship with him, being in the closest, most beautiful, most wonderful relationship with God. Eternal life means knowing God as your Father, knowing Jesus as your brother and savior, knowing God the Holy Spirit as your comforter and best friend. And the key point is that the quantity and the quality of that relationship is just immeasurable. Knowing God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit and him knowing you forever and ever in a beautiful relationship. And there's so much we could say about that. It means that we're going to know his company, his care, his kindness, his creativity, his majesty, his beauty, his glory. We're going to know that more and more and more forever and it will never stop unsurpassable quality, never ending quantity. So that means that if you're a Christian or if you become one, for eternity God will provide for you. So there'll be a new heavens and a new earth where everything that's brilliant about this earth will be even better and everything that's rubbish will be gone. For eternity God will protect you. There'll never be a moment when you're exposed or vulnerable or exploited or alone. For eternity God will satisfy you. We're made for him. That's who we are made for. And so we are going to be at our most content and complete when we're with him. The place where you belong more than anywhere else in all eternity is in his arms.

His embrace will be ours forever. And for eternity God will delight in you. So we will stand in all of him. We will gaze forever at his indescribable majesty and yet the only reason that we love him is because he first loved us and he gave his son so that we might be his forever. For eternity, forever and ever, you and every other Christian will be cherished in a beautiful, wonderful relationship with God. Eternal life, never ending quantity, indescribable quality.

But the Bible also reveals that eternal life is not the only possibility. The qualitative element of eternity presents us with another reality as well. Eternal life is offered in the gospel through faith in Jesus. But it depends on having faith in Jesus. It depends on knowing God. It depends on having that relationship with him. For those who do not know God, for those who reject Jesus, eternity will not mean eternal life. It will mean eternal death.

And that doesn't mean death in terms of non-existence. It means death in terms of separation. Separation from God, separation from all that is good and beautiful, separation from all hope and peace, and eternity of agonizing separation. Jesus spoke about that. He says, whoever believes in the Son has eternal life. Whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him. Paul speaks about it in 2 Thessalonians 1.

They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might. It's a picture of awful separation. Sometimes people think that heaven and hell will be contrasting versions of the same kind of thing. So heaven will be the place where we can all be together and everything will be good and wholesome and pure. Hell will be the place where, oh, we can still be together, but it will be naughty and raucous and wild.

[20 : 03] So heaven will be like a peaceful walk in the park. Hell will be like a reckless night on the terrain. And I've heard people say, you know, whenever I end up, I'll have friends in either place.

That idea of hell is terrifyingly inaccurate. Hell is not a place where we do a naughty version of the good stuff in life. Hell is the place where there'll be an intensified and relentless experience of everything that is awful. Everything that's truly awful. The devil is not wanting to give you a naughty version of heaven that will still be fun. The devil wants to entice you, deceive you and destroy you. He wants you to reject God. He wants you to align yourself with him.

And that will leave your relationship with God eternally ruined. Instead of enjoying God's eternal blessing, we will fall under his holy wrath. What will that be like? Well, I can't give you a full explanation and I'm not sure I would want to, even if I could. But the place where we get the clearest glimpse of what that will be like is on the cross. Because there Jesus took our sins upon himself and as he did so, he came under the wrath of God. In those moments, he experienced the reality of separation from God. In other words, he experienced hell when he cried, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Now, there's a lot of mystery in that, but there's one thing that's not mysterious at all and that is that the cross was horrific. And that's why the cross is where you see just how awful eternal death in hell will be. But even in the horror of the cross, we also see the incredible glory and beauty of the gospel. That's because the one place where you can get a glimpse into what hell is like is to look at the Son of God bleeding and dying so that you don't have to go there. And that's why if we do end up in hell, we have no one to blame but ourselves.

Eternity is inescapable. Through faith in Jesus, eternal life is offered and given freely.

Through rejecting Jesus, eternal death is provoked and administered justly. Eternity is the question that every single one of us has got to reckon with. It is a question of life and death, eternal life and eternal death. These are the only two options for how we will spend eternity.

[23 : 54] Eternity and eternity is eternity. With all of that in our minds, we need now to go back and reassess that moment when we share our faith with other people. That moment seems so awkward, so risky, so costly that it's just not worth it. But compared to eternity, all of that changes. Compared to eternity, the moment is no longer awkward. It is urgent. The sheer quantity of eternity immediately makes us realise that life is so short and it confronts us with the reality that time is running out.

That's why the New Testament urges us to make the best use of time. You can see that in these verses from Ephesians and Colossians. That's why Paul makes it so clear that because we believe, what we believe has to shape the way we speak. He says that in the chapter that we read, we believe so also we speak. It's not we believe, therefore we just keep quiet. We believe so we've got to speak. We've got to tell people. They've got to hear this message. That speech has got to be an open statement of the truth. You can see it there in verse 2. We need to give an open statement of the truth to people about Jesus and about the gospel. We need to recognise the fact that people need to see that Jesus Christ is Lord and we're all going to appear before his judgment seat.

Because we're going to appear before that judgment seat, what do we do? We persuade others. That's what Paul says. We are ambassadors for Christ.

The moment is urgent. The moment that we share our faith is so urgent.

And all of that theology, all of that theology, the reality of hell, what Paul says, we believe, therefore we speak. The fact that we need to make an open statement of truth. The fact that people are going to appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so we have to persuade others.

[26 : 43] The fact that we are ambassadors for Christ. Which part of that theology justifies me or you sitting at home doing nothing?

While all the people in Carla Way take a step closer to hell. This is the most urgent need of every single person that lives in our community.

The people who we love, the people who are going to be at the old folks dinner as it's shared out. The people who are at the Carla Way show every year when it's on. The people who do the home caring. The people who go to school. People who live across the road from us.

I said at the start that sometimes when you think about that moment where you share your faith, all the fear of it makes you think, oh I'm just going to go to safe territory and you think safe territory over here. I'll just keep my mouth shut. We've got to recognize that that safe territory is an incredibly dangerous place for us to go. Because the people around us have got to hear this message. All around us people are perishing. The outward body of every single one of us is wasting away. These moments when we speak to others about the hope that we have in Jesus are urgently, urgently needed. So compared to the moment, compared to eternity, the moment is not awkward. It's urgent. Compared to eternity, the moment is not full of risk. It's full of potential.

And this is so crucial to recognize. The urgency of the moment is very real. But if all we think about is the urgency, then it's very likely that our motivation to speak is going to arise primarily from guilt. But we've got better reasons to talk about Jesus than guilt. The truth is, is that the moment that seems so risky is actually a moment that's got extraordinary potential.

[29 : 05] Think of all the people that Jesus spoke to. The woman at the well, the paralytic who was lowered through the roof, the woman who had been bleeding for years and years. They all had a moment that changed their lives forever. And the same is true for every single believer, for every one of us and every other believer. The moment that you met with Jesus has transformed everything.

So yes, the moment when you talk to your friend about Jesus might not be the easiest conversation that you've ever had. It might be a bit strained. It might not even be welcomed by them, but it might change their eternity. And maybe there was somebody who was scared to talk to you and thought, this is awkward, this is risky, this is costly, and God used it to change your eternity. He can do the same with us as we go and speak to others. When we speak to somebody, that moment might be the key link in the outworking of God's plan to bring that person from a path to death and into a beautiful, eternal relationship with him. That's the amazing thing about how God works. Even the tiniest moment can make a massive difference. One of my favorite examples of this is when I heard a friend of mine giving his testimony in a church service while we were in Edinburgh. This guy, he was probably around my own age, and he said that his father had been very strict about church attendance growing up. So as a child, he was kind of, you know, there's a very, very strict approach to church attendance. But as an adult, he had stopped growing, going to church, but this niggled at him. And he got married, he got a job and got on with his life, but it's still just niggled at him. So one day he said to his wife, I think it would make my dad happy if we went to church.

And my friend was really nervous saying that because his wife didn't go to church at all, and you know, he kind of thought this is going to be awkward, this isn't going to go down well, but I feel I have to say something. And so he said it to it. And to his surprise, she replied, I don't mind if we go to church. And his wife was in the congregation watching him with tears pouring down her cheeks when he said, that moment changed my life.

They both started attending church. They both came to faith in Jesus. Their eternities were transformed by a moment. It only takes a moment for God who said, let light shine out of darkness to shine in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus. Compared to eternity, the moment is not full of risk.

It's full of potential. Compared to eternity, the moment is not costly. It's precious. In the chapter that we read, Paul gives a wonderful description of what we are like as we share the gospel. He describes us as having treasure in jarge of clay. And that's teaching us that the moment when we share the gospel is not a moment when we lose our reputation to our cost. It's a moment when we distribute, distribute the most valuable treasure that the world has ever known. And what makes it valuable is that it's treasure in heaven. It's treasure that lasts for eternity. So in this life, we experience all sorts of awful things. We experience injury, illness, aging. In eternity, there's going to be full and total healing. In this life, we experience the heartbreak of separation. In eternity with Jesus, there's going to be a beautiful reunion of all of God's people. Now we shed tears. In eternity, Jesus will wipe them away.

[33 : 17] Now we experience pain and suffering. In eternity with Jesus, there will be joy that never, ever fades. And best of all, we will be with him. As Paul says, he who raised Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us into his presence. That is the best treasure that the world has ever known. And in a moment, we can distribute it. We can shed it out.

All of that means that when compared to eternity, the moment is definitely worth it. That doesn't mean the moment will be easy. It might be a light momentary affliction, but may God write on our hearts the fact that this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

But as we do that, as we speak in these moments, we also need to make sure we remember what Paul says in verse 18 there, that we do not look to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen. That means that our perspective has got to look beyond the reality that's in front of us. The unseen reality of eternity is more important than the challenges of the moment when we share our faith, no matter how big those hurdles may be. But I also think that this seen, unseen distinction is important in relation to the person that we're trying to share our faith with or share the gospel with. So when you speak in that moment, you might see a hostile reaction, but hidden underneath unseen, there is very likely to be a desperate fear of death.

You might see a blushing, awkward face, but underneath there could be a deep longing to know Jesus. You might see hesitation and swithering underneath, they just wish more than anything else that they had the same treasure as you. What we see and experience in a moment is not the whole story.

The moment that you and I are so scared of might be the moment that they've been waiting for, they've been waiting for, for a year. And you never know, maybe in eternity you're going to be sitting next to a friend who right now is not a Christian and you'll be telling them about how terrified you were of that moment that God used when you shared your faith with them or when you invited them to church or when you reached out to them to share the gospel. If you or I can be used by God to make a difference for eternity, then whatever the dreaded moment might bring, boy, it will be worth it.

[36 : 47] The reality of eternity is inescapable. Knowing Jesus means that we have amazing treasure to share. It also means that we know how urgent our message is. We've got something amazing to say, we've got a massive reason to say it. We believe, therefore we will speak. That moment might be hard, it might be awkward, we'll probably feel like we've done a bad job of it. None of that matters because God will fill in the gaps that our inadequacies leave. But this week, tomorrow, tomorrow is another opportunity for the moment to happen. That can be in a conversation, it can be in a text message, it could be in a letter or a card that you write to somebody, a moment when you share the good news of Jesus with the people that God has put into your lives.

Tomorrow is a new opportunity for that moment to happen. That moment might be scary, but never forget that a moment is just a moment. What matters is eternity.

Eternity is eternity. Amen.

Amen. Let's pray. Father, we thank you so much that through your Son we can have eternal life.

And we also recognize that without your Son, there is eternal death.

[38 : 58] Help us to see the urgency of the moment, the potential of the moment, and the preciousness of the moment. And may these truths help us to overcome our fears.

And we pray that in the week ahead, you would give every one of us a moment to share our faith with somebody who has yet to come to know Jesus.

And we pray, oh God, that in your mercy that they would. And for any here or watching who do not yet know you, Father, please, help them to see that eternity is eternity.

Help them to see that the time to trust in you is now. Amen.

I've got a terrible confession to make that I don't ever know what the last Sam is. So it's Sam 116. So I'm so sorry. We're going to sing from Sam 116, verses 5 to 14.

[40 : 23] Let's stand and sing to God's praise.