

Echoes of Eternity

by John Ridley

Eternity is a vital concept that reminds us of our mortality and the importance of making the most of our time, and it is echoed through creation and the Christian's life.

Duration: 44:15

Scripture: Psalm 102:25-27, Isaiah 57:15, Matthew 25:31-34, Matthew 25:41, John 1:1-3, Revelation 21:4

Topics: "Eternal Life", "Gospel Message"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of understanding and embracing the concept of eternity. He shares the story of Stephen Grellet, an evangelist who recognized the eternal significance of the gospel and passionately proclaimed it to influential individuals. The preacher highlights that all of creation echoes the message of eternity, reminding us of the eternal nature of God as the creator. He also references the Bible, specifically the book of John, to affirm that Jesus Christ is the creator of all things. The sermon concludes with a reminder that the sands of time are sinking for everyone, urging listeners to consider their own eternity and the importance of embracing the gospel.

Transcript

The word eternity is only mentioned once in this English Bible of mine, the old King James Version, that some people don't read so much today, but it's the grand, basic Bible for the British people. And the word eternity is only mentioned once in the text of Scripture. But three times, on the margin, or in the revised version, you'll find references to eternity, fitting the case of another word.

But will you remember this word, it's a sonically word, a wonderful word, just like a great mountain peak, standing up and leaping above all its fellows, and casting a kind of glorious shadow over the whole mountain range. An Everest of Scripture, snow-capped in the purity of God. Eternity! Eternity! Thus saith the High and Holy One, who inhabiteth eternity, I dwell in the holy place, with him also who is of a humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, to revive the heart of the contrite one.

Eternity! What a remarkable, uplifting, glorified word, once uttered, because there's only one eternity, and the Eternal God is in command of it. I seem to hear it coming out of the past, like a distant sound of thunder, bursting with a clap in the present, and rolling on with mumblings and rumblings into the unknown future. Eternity! Eternity! How can you preach on eternity? Yet, if a preacher does not touch eternity, he is missing the great mountain ridge and glorious scene that God has given us in this world, who inhabiteth eternity.

Oh, how can you begin the sermon? I don't know of a beginning, and I'm not sure of an end. It seems almost that you cannot contain everlastingness into a small sermon. Yet, it is essential that all preachers should remind the congregation time and again that they are travellers to eternity.

Eternity. Oh, define it, preacher, you say. Tell us what it means.

Well, some people have tried to do that, my friends, and thirty-seven and a half years ago, I tried to do it in a long piece that one grand old writer had given, but I won't tonight. All I say is, the best definition I've ever read of eternity came from a deaf and dumb boy. He was in the deaf and dumb school in Paris, and the teacher wrote on the blackboard, what is eternity? And there was a silence, of course, because they were deaf and dumb, and no one moved for a few moments, and then this laddie came forward and took up the piece of chalk and wrote, the lifetime of the Almighty.

There you've got it. The lifetime of the Almighty. Thus saith the high and lofty One who inhabited eternity.

Archibald Brown once said, there's no word that is mourned, passed by, and ignored than the word eternity. And yet, that is one of the most vital things that men and women must face, everlastingness. How privileged I was to be saved under the preaching of William Lamb.

My brother Yonder would remember it with me. We sat beneath that man, and the hymns he introduced us to were the hymns of the Eternal. Eternity is drawing nigh, was one of them.

Another one, very precious and sung tonight, the sands of time are sinking. That's true for every one of you here tonight. No matter how old you are, five, ten, twenty, forty, fifty, sixty, the sands of time are sinking.

I wonder if the dawn of heaven waits. He gave us the hymns of Jerusalem, the golden, forever with the Lord. And a few more years shall roll, and where will you spend eternity? And in my young heart, I realized the greatness of eternity.

And I remember so clearly one of his hymns. Oh, the clanging bells of time, how their changes rise and fall, but in undertone sublime, sounding clearly through them all, is a voice that must be heard as our moments onward flee, and it speaketh aye one word, eternity, eternity. I want to show you some of the echoes.

I want to unstop your ears, and let the echoes of that word get into your heart if possible. Only three great headings in it, but if you can grasp them and remember them, you'll be a good candidate for eternity. Listen, the first one is this, creation echoes eternity, eternity, eternity.

Yes, it does. Way back about 1795, a certain man escaped from Paris, the French Revolution was on, and this man escaped from Paris, and got across the Atlantic, and he came to America, and got freedom, and Stephen Grellet was full of joy. He'd been in all the awful horror of the French Revolution, he'd been in danger of death time and again, and now he's in the free land of the United States, and he said, I was a conformed infidel, and I walked out into the country, thinking of nothing religious, and then I approached a forest, and as I walked into the forest, I had dissipated thoughts, but nothing to do with religion.

Suddenly, I heard the wind moving and rustling the leaves of the trees, and then I heard all the insects round about, all murmuring louder and louder, eternity, eternity, eternity. He said, it brought me to the dust, like Saul of Tartus. It opened up before me a terrible gulf.

Infidel as I was, I cried out, if there's no God, there's certainly a hell. And then, he said, as that awful sound continued, eternity, eternity, he said, it opened to me a new sphere. It led me to see a place where mock and rush does not corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal, and lo, where the stranger finds a home, and the weary find rest.

Oh, he said, through the blood of the Lamb of God, through the finished work of Jesus Christ, I came to see it all. Stephen Grellet, oh, what an evangelist. No, he didn't address multitudes like Billy Graham, but he reached the kings, and the captains, and the presidents, and the prelates, and the prime ministers, and he went everywhere, proclaiming the gospel, with a spirit burning, that it's eternal life, or it's eternal death.

And oh, Stephen Grellet never forgot that the whispering wind, and the rustling leaf, and the insects were all saying, eternity, eternity, eternity. How true that is. You know who is the creator, don't you? You've read the first chapter of John, and you tell there quite well, you could see quite well there, that all things were made by him, Jesus Christ, and without him was not anything made that was made.

Who is the creator? God, who created all things, by Jesus Christ, Paul said. He's the creator. That's why the wind, and the rustling leaves, and the insects all said eternity to Stephen Grellet.

Go and look out on the wild waves of the ocean. Ah, there was a grand touch in one of Dickens' books, Dombey and Son. There was little Paul dying day by day, and there was sweet Florence, 15 years, and little Paul only six years, and little Paul says to his sister, Flo, what does it say? The ocean, I mean the sea.

You know, Flo, what it says, don't you? Oh, what are the wild waves saying? Sister, all day in their song. Oh no, brother, she said, I don't know anything about that. It's just the wind moving the waves.

No, no, no, he said, it is something greater that speaks to the heart alone. The voice of the great creator dwells in that mighty tone. Have you ever heard the ocean? Have you ever seen those waves come whitening to the shore, and you've seen them break with the beauty on the rocks, and you've heard a sudden roar, and then that night in your motel, or your little camp near the sea, you heard a constant, constant roaring, roaring.

I was only a little chap when I was taken to Manly by my mother, along with the family one day, and we were there in the sand and enjoying ourselves right up to about four o'clock in the afternoon, and then we saw a lot of people racing to one spot, and we hurried after them. They said, it's a man, he's been caught in the current, and he's been dragged out. They're after him.

Oh no, no, they haven't got him. Oh, they might get him yet. No, no, they're heading back now.

No, they're not, they're helping each other back. And slowly the night came on, and I knew, as we got word later, they couldn't find him. He was caught in the current and carried out, and I don't know that my parents lingered there, and the night came down, and we stood on the promenade, and there in the darkness with the wind around us, I heard the roar of the ocean as it was rising in tempo and power, and I thought, where is he now? I wonder if he's in heaven.

I wonder if he's in heaven. Ah yes, the voice of the great creator is heard in that solemn tone. The sea, the sea is his, and he made it, and his hands prepared the dry land, and he said, thus far shall thou come and no farther, and here shall thy proud waves be stained, the creator.

Doesn't it whisper, doesn't it challenge you with an echo, eternity? Or turn, if you like, to the inland of the bush, and the far-stretching plains of Australia. And oh, look at that drover. He's been driving those sheep for a few days, and now he comes to another stop.

The night is falling, and he's tethered his horse, and he's got the sheep in a kind of a pen to hold them for the night, and he's boiled a billy, and he's had his tea, his damper and his tea, and now darkness upon the earth, and he's put his saddle up there as a pillow, and he's stretching himself without any covering in the hottest trade and inland, he's stretching himself out, and he's looking up. And he sees the wondrous glory of the everlasting stars. Yes, that's right, Banjo Patterson wrote it, you're right.

I came home from the first war with Banjo Patterson. He's quite a character, if you knew Banjo Patterson. But that was from Clancy of the Overflow.

It's the drover who, looking up in the night, can see the wondrous glory of the everlasting stars. But long before Patterson wrote that, long before the drover looked up, God said to Abraham, lift up thine eyes to the heavens and see the stars, and if you can, count them. Thy seed shall be as those stars.

And Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness. The stars. Listen.

What does David say? When I consider thy heavens, the moon and the stars, the work of thy fingers, what is man that thou art mindful of him? Or the son of man that thou visitest him? Stars to the shepherd David. Take a leaf over in your Bible to the twelfth chapter of Daniel, and see this mighty prophet. And by the way, I preached on this at the memorial service for William Lamb.

And hear Daniel saying, and they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever. You won't see their photograph in the paper. You won't see them done up at all or adorned exceptedly with the laurel wreath of glory.

But they shall shine how long for? Ever. And ever. Eternity.

Look. Creation. The greatest of them all.

The man. And there they are gathered round doing a job on the road, and they're having a talk and a joke every now and again. And then suddenly there's a halt, and one says, take your hat off, boys, take your hat off.

Silence. Caps off. Another poor fellow gone.

I wonder who'll be the next. Oh, well, I suppose take your chance about it. And there the coffin goes by.

Oh, open your ears, men, open your ears. It's a poor human being who is saying from the casket in his cold clay, you've got to meet it, you've got to meet it. You can't sidestep it.

Eternity. Eternity. No subject more ignored and passed by, said Archbishop Brown.

That creation. Witnesses. And echoes over the valleys of time.

Echoes. Eternity. Eternity.

But I want to tell you, my dear friends, the Christian echoes eternity. Are you a Christian? Are you a Christ one? Are you really belonging to Jesus Christ? Then, out of your lips will spring the word eternity

sometime or other. It'll leap out of your lips because it's born in your heart.

When you came and took Jesus Christ as your Saviour, and he settled down in your heart because he's always willing to come, he tells you this is an eternal business. I heard that that night in the third front seat there on the right, from the lips of William Lamb, and foolish as I was, I lay there awake with a kind, oh, I thank God for the new birth, born of the Spirit, washed in the precious blood of Christ. And the Christian must speak of eternity, of course he must.

He can't sidestep it. He won't always use that word, but he'll bring in the meaning of eternity alright. I give you that little beautiful illustration from Uncle Tom's cabin, that master classic written by a godly woman.

You remember that Uncle Tom was whipped almost to a death point because he refused to whip, rather, a poor old woman, a slave who couldn't work fast. And so Legree took it on his strongest men to beat Uncle Tom, till he's terribly torn, and he's hardly able to move with the pain. And now early in the morning after Tom's whipping, Legree, that brutal character, comes round and looks down on him and says, hey Tom, well how do you feel now? How do you like it, Tom, when I tie you to a tree and light a little slow fire round your feet? Pleasant day, Tom? Oh, Master, he said, I know you can do dreadful things, but when you've killed this old body, there's nothing more that you can do, and there's all eternity to come.

Eternity, said Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe, commenting on her own writing, eternity, that word thrilled through the black man's soul with power and light, and it thrilled through the sinner's soul like the bite of a scorpion. Eternity, eternity, and some men and women are going out into eternity, and they're not Christ, and they're going out with all their brutality or badness, all their wrong and sin and debauchery, they're going out into the vast. Oh, beloved, we've got to, we've got to echo the word, we must echo that word, eternity, we Christians must, in some way or other, that's why he breathes his blessing down and revives the humble, and revives the contrite heart to keep fervent in witnessing, because time closes with eternity.

Then every one of them shall give account of himself to God, but without Christ, no hope, no hope. Oh, that grand saintly minister, Robert Murray MacSane, dying about 29 years of age, or 30, and they found in his records of his visitation in the parish of Dundee, Scotland, they saw these words, MG, two initials, lies hard on my conscience, I've done that woman no good, oh, speak, speak, what matters it in eternity, the slight awkwardness of time. You ever been silenced? I have, afraid, sometimes been silenced, it's been awkward to speak of holy things and great testimony, and sometimes it's just awkward.

But other times not so bad, I gave a man away out in the country years ago, in November, early November, I handed him out a tract and I said, will you take a friend? Oh, he said, yes, I said, will it tell you how to win the Milton Cup, eh? I said, no, it'll tell you how to win eternity through Jesus Christ as your personal saviour, if you want to, oh, disappeared suddenly, the small awkwardness of time, but I'm glad I said it now, so glad, and I remember passing another place, and it was either the barmaid, or else the lady in charge of the hotel, oh, a poor old ramshackle place far out in the bush, and she was coming out rather early in the morning to clear up just at the side door, and I went up to her and I said, would you mind taking some of these gospel messages, lady? Oh, I haven't time for that kind of thing, she said. Oh, haven't, I said, you'll have to find time to die some day, lady. Yes, she said, and some of us don't find time for that, we're taken off so suddenly, condemning our own self, condemning our own self.

Dear Arthur States, he said he heard my great big voice thundering out, eternity, eternity, but I didn't think of anyone for years, I didn't know anything about it, but he went out to relay it, far more than ever I could do, to relay it with his simple word all over the place until they couldn't ignore the little fellow. Oh, but you

say, Mr. Ridley, I can't talk much, and after all, you're speaking about this one and that one, but it's Jesus that counts right, oh, I'm so glad you've fallen on the sword, that's all. If anyone ever witnessed to eternity, it was Jesus, it was Jesus.

And when the king comes and sits upon his throne, he will divide the sheep from the goats, and he'll put the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left, then shall the king say to those on his right hand, come, ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, then shall the king say to those on his left hand, depart from me, ye cursed, ye cursed, I leave it there, it's worse if I went on, the devil a place for the devil and his angels. Do you think I should go on when Jesus Christ said that? Yes, depart from me, ye cursed, and depart the place prepared for the devil and his angels, no one wants surely to inherit that. Listen again, Jesus Christ is speaking about a certain man who looked at his grand, well-packed barns and he said, well, I know what I'll do, now I'll pull down these barns and I'll build bigger ones, that's right, and then I'll say to my own soul, soul, take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry, you've got much goods laid up for many years, and Jesus said, and that night God said, thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee, who shall these things be? Jesus spoke of eternity, listen again, be also ready, for in such an hour as you think not, the Son of Man cometh.

Watch, watch, watch as if on that alone hung the issue of the day, pray that grace may be sent down, watch and pray, my Christian friend, are you fighting the Christian battle? Are you echoing? Eternity's got to come, friend, eternity, now you're two-thirds of the way through and we won't belong, why? Creation, creation whispers eternity, and again the Christian echoes eternity, and again and last that great monument, no friend, no, it's not the great pyramid, once in my foolish days as a young man I climbed the great pyramid, a marvellous monument, I saw the desert and the Nile, but oh dear, if ever I was shaken, it was climbing that pyramid, never again, never again, now it's greater than the pyramid, then you say, what is it, the Taj Mahal of India, of Agra, no, I saw it in its golden beauty and in its glory, a remarkable place, but that's not the greatest monument in the world, then you say, perhaps then the arch of triumph in Paris, crowning that great city, no, I've stood there and I've gazed down the swamp to see and seen its wonder, but that's not the greatest monument, what is it? The cross echoes eternity, the cross lifted up was he to die, it is finished was his cry, now in heaven exalted high, hallelujah, what a saviour, why was he there on that cross of shame, why was he there to perform a great sacrifice, preacher, to give a great example, oh no friend, no, don't you call him a victim, don't you call him a martyr, don't you call him a hero, unless it's just to go up something higher, he was there as the son of God, he was there on that cross and he is the same essence as God, it is God bearing his people's punishment for sin upon that cross, and it is God the son drinking the cup, he tasted what? Death for every man, he tasted death and drank the cup for every man, wondrous love, to bleed, to die, to bear the cross and shame, this guilty sinner such as I should name that blessed name, Jesus, oh Lord Jesus, what love was poured out of the cross, the love that came to die, no man taketh my life from me, I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again, this commandment have I received of my father. Now in heaven, at the right hand of the majesty and high, there's the man of the cross, the man of the wounds of the cross, and he's commended God's love to me, and to you, and to all men, he said in effect, you have sinned and failed shockingly, you are the offspring of Adam, come unto me, come unto me, come unto me, and thou shalt be born again, and the sin will be blotted out, and the evil will be overthrown, I have found a ransom in this blessed redeemer. Eternity, death is the doorway to eternity, and Jesus tasted that death to give us an open doorway into the presence of the father, provided we are truly Christian, and truly Christ, and we have contrite hearts, and we have humble spirits, truly there's welcome for the wanderer, welcome home at the end of the day.

Oh, my friends, you've got to meet him, oh, I remember one great preacher, I heard him preach on one occasion, but this is what he said, you, you my friend, young man, young woman, older friend, you must die, unless the savior comes suddenly, then it might be a different story, but given your measure of life, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, well, not much further, 90, perhaps you might time the 100, it'd be all added strain and stress, and what is that in the great millenniums of God?

It's in time you've got to settle this matter, you must not go into eternity, unless you come beneath its shadow, but on the father's side, the darkness of an awful grave, the gates both deep and wide, and there between us stands the cross, two arms outstretched aside like a watchman, set to guard the world from that eternal grave, the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord, the cross divides, there was one manufacturer, there was another manufacturer, and Jesus in the midst, and though one railed on him, and it seems from one of the gospels, the other railed on him too, oh, bitter moment, and then one changed too, and lo, he's saying, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom, and the blessed Saviour answers, verily I say unto thee, today shall thou be with me in paradise, life, instant deliverance, instant acceptance, brought instant promise of blessing in paradise, oh, paradise, who would not long for thee, terrible thing to be separated, and terrible beyond description, to be separated from the sovereign Father, and the sweet Saviour Jesus Christ, and the loving Spirit, now comes my few final words, dear friend, not with the strength of thirty-seven and a half years ago, but just a kind word to you as I say, that monument of the cross is the place of decision, there you decide in the light of love's fabulous sacrifice, in the light of untold mercy, to poor miserable failing people, in the light of infinite wondrous grace, sovereign grace, you're told to make a decision, you're told to stand up for Jesus, you're told to come to the Redeemer, and to keep on coming, and to get fresh blessing, to revive the heart of the humble, to revive the contrite one, yes, well, you must do it at the cross if it means anything, and I think of those few great men that I could go on numbering, but I come to the close list, and how great were those men, here is one called George Whitfield, and it said of George Whitfield, that he walked in two worlds, and had eternity stamped on his eyeball, and he shook England, and America, and the British Isles, one of the greatest of soul winners, Whitfield.

Here is Dr. Leighton, Archbishop Leighton and Doctor, saying to the theological students in Edinburgh two or three centuries back, saying young men, you are candidates for eternity, give yourself to the Saviour, oh, give yourself to the Saviour, yes, and here is another speaking, and this one, a grand scholar, a master of the Hebrew, a marshal in the army of God, and a humble child, Dr. Duncan, almost an amazing scholar, he memorised a great part of the Old Testament in the Hebrew, he loved the old English translation of the Bible, the authorised version, and he said at the close of one of the years, he said young men, young men, my brother, pointing to the men in his class, many people will be wishing you a happy new year, your old tutor, himself, wishes you a happy eternity, do you think that this preacher doesn't wish in his heart, with all his soul, each one of you, I wish for you this, and I read it from God's word, they shall hunger no more, they shall thirst, neither shall they thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat, for the lamb, which is in the midst of the throne, shall lead them, and shall feed them, and will lead to living fountains of waters, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, I wish for you these wonderful words, I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God, and God shall wipe away all tears from their faces, and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away, all the saints of God, their conflict passed, their life's long battle won at last, no more they need the shield and sword, they throw them down before the Lord, all happy saints, forever blessed are Jesus Christ, how safe your rest,

where will you spend eternity, this question comes to you and me, tell me, what will your answer be, where will you spend eternity, some are accepting Christ today, turning from all their sins away, heaven will their blessed portion be, where will you spend eternity, turn and believe this very hour, trust to the Saviour's grace and power, then will your joyous answer be saved, through a long eternity.

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