

# Life After Death (2): Time and Eternity

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Now, it's tempting to think when we come to consider eternity that what we really need is a scholar or a theologian, and we do need to be good theologians to think about eternity and grasp what the Bible teaches about time and eternity.

And whether you know it or not, if you've ever had a thought about God, then you are a theologian. Theology is very simply words or thoughts about God. And so even if you have thought or said that God does not exist, that is still a thought, a word about him.

You are still doing theology. And so hopefully tonight helps us with that because good theology is worship. Thinking rightly, speaking rightly about God is one way that we love him. And in the words of Jen Wilkin, the heart cannot love what the head does not know. But sometimes we need more of an author, an artist, to give us a kind of artist's impression of something that is so vast for us to get our heads into. And that is why preachers like this one love C.S. Lewis, an artist, an author, because while he's not always on point, he gives us great pictures to think with, great artist's impressions of things that are sometimes hard to grasp.

So here's one for tonight from his book, *The Weight of Glory*. He writes, The load or weight or burden of my neighbor's glory should be laid daily on my back, a load so heavy that only humility can carry it, and the backs of the proud will be broken. It is a serious thing, he says, to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the most dull and interesting person you 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. All day long, we are in some degree helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in the light of these overwhelming possibilities. It is with the awe and circumspection proper to them that we should conduct all our dealings with one another.

All friendships, all loves, all play, all politics. There are no ordinary people. Here it is, you have never talked to a mere mortal. You have never talked to a mere mortal.

[ 2 : 5 6 ] What is he saying? Every single person is on a never-ending trajectory into eternity. How then should we live life now? Friends, we live in a small rock pool of time that is carved out of the great sea, the great ocean of eternity. That is all we know. We were born into time, and in some sense, death is simply being washed out of that rock pool into the vast ocean, out of time as we know it, into eternity. Last time we saw that because of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, life after death is not a vague possibility. Or somebody's best guess, it is very, very real, as real as the risen Christ. So then, how do we live our lives now, knowing that the context for our lives is not the next year or two or 10 or 20 years, but forever? Perhaps you're thinking, what does eternity have to do with me now? Okay, I live in time. I have a week planned tomorrow.

What does eternity have to do with me? Well, as Lewis has illustrated so vividly for us, it is all in the preparation. We set our course today, and eternity tells us that that course carries on forever. And so eternity, knowing that eternity is real, makes our time now much more important than we think, much more significant, not less. So the question is, what are we preparing for, and how do we prepare? We've got three points to consider this evening. Like last time, we'll be moving around the Bible a wee bit. Our first point is getting our thoughts straight. The second point, getting our hearts straight. And the third point, getting our lives straight. Firstly, then, our thoughts. What do we mean by eternity? Well, firstly, the Bible teaches us that only God is eternal. Only God is eternal. Now, haven't I just said we all live forever? Well, yes, but that is not the same thing as being eternal. You and me don't have an end, but we do have a beginning. God created you at a point in time. Your body and your soul, your whole being was formed in the hands of the eternal creator. And part of the wonder of human life is that God didn't kind of download a pre-existing soul or person into your body when he created you. As he knitted together your organs, your tissues, he knitted together

your soul. You are a whole being. From the very first cell, he made you who you are, your whole being formed in his infinite hands so that you are a creature of the eternal creator, a fearfully and wonderfully made creature of God. And that is the big difference between you and him. Okay, that you are a creature and he is your creator. This is what theologians call the creator creature distinction. The basic division that lies at the heart of reality between the creator God and everything that he has made that is not him. Okay, a simple way to put it is that there is simply none like him. Nothing that he has made compares to him. And one way that you are not like him is that whereas you have a beginning, God does not. And that is hard for us to wrap our heads around, isn't it? We can imagine something not ending, but not having a beginning. Can our minds stretch back that far? They can't. It's one of God's incommunicable perfections. That simply means something that is true of him that he cannot share with others. He is eternal. Think of the very first words in the

Bible. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. In the beginning, he is simply there to start time, to create a cosmos, to speak and bring things into being. Think back as far as you can go, says Genesis, and then some. And further, endlessly, endlessly, time and space have a point of origin.

And very clever people study when and how it might be, don't they? But we can never get to God's point of origin because he does not have one. That is evident in creation. Here's Paul in Romans 1. He says, for since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made. Does the universe itself tell us that it's always simply been here like this? With all its beauty and wonder and change and decay? Or does it not rather shout that somebody designed and created it with order and beauty, who sees it through the changing seasons and sustains all life, who brings life out of nothing? Friends, it is either one or the other, isn't it? Something must be eternal. Either the fabric of the universe is, or one who began and created the fabric of the universe. The only other option is that the universe created itself, which, of course, is impossible. Something that doesn't exist cannot bring itself into existence.

So which is it? We did not create ourselves. And we have not always been here. David says in Psalm 139, for you created my inmost being. You knit me together in my mother's womb.

[ 9 : 20 ] And in the same way, the universe did not create itself. And it has not always been here. We read and sang from Psalm 90 earlier, before the mountains were born, or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting, you are God. So that from the endless mist and darkness of eternity past, into the glory and the radiance of eternity future, he is eternal God. And we worship him for that, don't we? For there truly is none like him. It is part of what makes him worthy of our praise and adoration, that he does have no beginning and no end. He is majestic and glorious.

God uses all kinds of ways to express that to us. I am the alpha and omega, he says, the beginning and the end. I am he who was and is and is to come. Jesus spoke to us of God having life in himself, and his life that was not created, but self-existing life.

Who are you, God, said Moses? Remember that? Tell me who you are. What does he say? I am that I am.

I am. I simply am. What is he claiming? That he is sufficient for his own existence. That he is being itself. That he stands in need of no one and nothing to begin him, sustain him, give him life. He has life in himself. And so what are we saying? We are saying that God is eternal life. God is eternal life. And me and you exist because the eternal God created a time-bound world with creatures in it. And that is the biblical backdrop for our lives now. And it is the widest possible backdrop, isn't it, for our lives now. You and I were created by an eternal God. So then, how much value and significance does your life now have? Eternity tells us that your non-eternal life has eternal value and eternal significance. Because you are designed, created, known, and cared for by one who has no beginning and no end. We live in time, don't we? We know that, that the changing cycles and seasons, aging, changing, dullness and decay. But in that, think, each moment of your day, your seconds and minutes, your hours and days have an eternal weight of glory resting on them.

[ 12 : 26 ] Whatever tomorrow holds, whatever is in your diary, the normality, the routine, the stresses, the challenges, the opportunities, think that it resounds through eternity. Because your days were created and ordained by an eternal God who knows and cares what you are doing, what you are going through, you. He knows your name. He sustains your life. He gives you breath. He

knit you together in the womb.

And he has had every day of your life planned out before the beginning of time. Friends, that is the backdrop to your life. Not only eternity, but the eternal creator.

We can make the mistake, can't we, of thinking of eternity as a sort of thing in itself. We speak about eternity as a kind of synonym for heaven and for glory.

But in fact, eternity is a description of God himself. It does not exist apart from him. God does not inhabit eternity as if it existed alongside or with him.

Rather, eternity is who he is. And he is our creator. And he has created us in time and for eternity.

[13:49] And so then the question is, how do we come to share in a kind of life that isn't ours properly then? How can we have eternal life if we are not eternal? Because secondly, the Bible tells us that life in Christ is eternal.

Life in Christ is eternal. So you are not eternal. But you can have eternal life. How does that work?

Well, if we've got our thoughts straight, okay, that eternity is simply the life of God, then for us to have eternal life, what?

We must share in the life of God. We must share in the life of God. And this is where our hearts come into play. Why? Because God says there is only one way that we can share in his life.

And that is by putting our trust in his son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We read from John 5 a moment ago. If you just have that open in front of you and see this. John is the great preacher of eternal life.

That's why we're going to his gospel. That phrase, eternal life, it comes up 17 times in his gospel, six times in his first letter. That's actually more times than the rest of the New Testament put together.

[15:01] And in John 5, John records Jesus saying incredible things about it. Given what we've seen about God, the distinction between him as creator and us as creature. Listen to this.

Jesus says in verse 21, Just as the father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. The son gives life just as the father gives life.

How? Well, in the same way that God did when he created the cosmos. Verse 25, Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the son of God.

And those who hear will live. Do you see, he will speak. And his word will give life. How can he do that? Speak life into being.

Well, he tells us in verse 26. Look, I'll read this slowly for us. For as the father has life in himself, so he has granted the son also to have life in himself.

[16:09] Remember that, life in himself. Self-sufficient life. A life that has never begun, will never end. Life in its own right. The very life of God.

The father has life in himself. So does the son. So Jesus is speaking as the eternal God. The creator of all things.

Of me and you. The one who can say, I am that I am. John is so clear in his introduction about that, isn't he? In the beginning was the word. And the word was with God.

And the word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made. Without him nothing was made that has been made.

In him was life. And the life was the light of all mankind. The life of God. The work of God.

[17:05] The word of God. He is eternal God. And get this. The reason that God sent his son into the world. His very own eternal son.

Was, verse 24. So that we could share in his life. Very truly I tell you. Whoever hears my word. And believes him who sent me.

Has eternal life. And will not be judged. But has crossed over from death. To life. I hope we've picked up by now. That eternal life is not just a length of life.

Okay. We will all live forever. But eternal life is a quality of life. It is God's life. And so what is he saying? That actually eternal life.

Isn't something that happens next. As in heaven. Glory. Eternity. But a kind of life. That begins now for us in Jesus. Let me just read verse 24 again.

[18:05] When do we begin to have eternal life? Very truly I tell you. Whoever hears my word. And believes him who sent me. Has eternal life. And will not be judged. But has crossed over from death.

To life. Do you have eternal life? Jesus says that if you have heard his message. And accepted it. Believed in him.

Trusted in God. Then eternal life has begun for you. You are no longer living a life of death. And despair. And decay.

But a life of eternal life. You are a creature of dust. What is more. You are a sinful creature of dust. And yet you are sharing in the very life of the eternal God.

Because you are united by faith to the son of God himself. I don't know if you remember Henry Skoog.

[19:09] The Abedonian theologian. And his book that I've mentioned before. The life of God in the soul of man. The life of God in the soul of man.

That is how Christians like Paul can say things like this. In 2 Corinthians chapter 4. He says.

Though outwardly we are wasting away. Yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.

For our light and momentary troubles. Are achieving for us an eternal glory. That far outweighs them all. He's saying there is an eternal quality to our lives now.

Because we are united to Christ. Yes in our inner life. A constant renewal and refreshment. But in our outward lives as well.

Notice Paul describes the troubles that we go through now. As being light and momentary. I wonder what you make of that.

[20:09] Your troubles now seem to you light and momentary. If you read what Paul himself went through. You'll know he's not speaking dismissively. About the troubles and the difficult things that we face.

In the same letter. He's comparing himself to the so called super apostles. And he says this. I have worked much harder. Been in prison more frequently. Been flogged more severely.

Been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews. The 40 lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was pelted with stones.

Three times I was shipwrecked. I spent a day and a night in the open sea. I've been constantly on the move. He goes on later. I have labored and toiled.

And have often gone without sleep. I have known hunger and thirst. And often gone without food. I have been cold and naked. Besides everything else. I face daily the pressure of my concern.

[21:06] For all the churches. Who is weak? Who is weak? And I am not weak. He says. These are his troubles.

And humanly speaking. We would not look at his life. And say that his troubles were light. And momentary. Would we? But he does. And his point is that.

If we are in Christ. Then our lives are storing up for us. An eternal weight of glory. That doesn't just about make up. For what we go through in this life.

That rather it outshines. Our troubles in this life. By the light of a thousand suns. That is what makes the troubles. Light and momentary. The fact that our eternal life.

Is not only waiting for us. But has begun. Remember those trajectories. That Lewis illustrated for us. The glory and the horror. You are already on the way.

[22:06] To becoming the glory. Says Jesus. Says Paul. If you are united to Christ. By faith. You have already begun. The eternal life.

That you will live forever. That's that idea. That the weight of glory. Remember. The weight. Something heavier. More real.

More concrete. Than this life. There is a weight of glory. That is being stored up. In and through. This life. And its troubles. For. You have eternal life.

Now. And you are heading into. Eternal life. Then. And so everything. Suffering included. Says Paul. Serves to make you. More and more.

Of the radiant one. That you will be. It is all. Grist in the mill. Of your sanctification. It is all. Storing up. An eternal weight. Of glory for ye.

[23:01] And so it is. Where our hearts come in. Doesn't it? Eternal life. Does not begin. By agreeing. With a doctrine. Or by a feeling. Of being close to God. Eternal life. Begins when we put our trust.

In Jesus Christ. And our hearts. Come to rest. In him. As our only hope. In life. And in death. It's when God. Changes our hearts. That we come to have.

His own life. In us. And it is only then. Isn't it? It's only then. That we can possibly. See our troubles now. As being. Light and momentary.

Because not only our heads. But our hearts. Are resting in something. That is. Lasting and eternal. We might wonder then. Why did God. Create the world.

And all of us in it. If it all fades. In the light. Of eternal life. Why does this life. Matter for us then. If we are just. Passing through. You. Well.

[ 23 : 57 ] Here's our final point. And question tonight. Are you living. For eternity. Head. Heart. Now. Life. Where have we got to? God is eternal.

He gives us eternal life. In Christ. So how then. Should we live? Well. The first thing to say. Is that. If your trust. Is not in Jesus.

You cannot live. For eternity. Here's John again. In his first letter. This is the testimony. God has given us. Eternal life. And this life. Is in his son.

Whoever has the son. Has life. Whoever does not have the son. Does not have life. If you have not rested. The whole weight.

Of your life. And heart. And soul. And faith. On Jesus. This isn't yet. Your life. But I hope you can see. How freely. God would give it.

[ 24 : 52 ] To you in him. How free it is. A man once came to Jesus. And asked him. What must I do. To inherit eternal life. And that is what every human religion. Asks.

Give me a list of things to do. Or a way to live. So that I can. Get. And gain. And earn. Eternal life. For myself. But God. Gives eternal life.

Freely. In his son. Jesus. We put our faith in him. And we get his life. In us. And so the first thing to do. Is if you have not already.

Take hold of Jesus. By faith. As your own savior. And Lord. It's possibly. The most famous. And well-known verse. In the whole Bible. But it's worth. Reading. And reflecting on.

Isn't it? 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.

[ 25 : 47 ] That is why Jesus came. So that you might trust in him. And have eternal life. And God reminds us in that verse.

Doesn't he? That the opposite of eternal life. Is not nothing. But it is eternal death. The opposite of glory. Is not you as you are now.

But. But the horror. The wrath of God. The outer darkness. And so the most important question tonight. Is which trajectory. Are you on?

Jesus said. Believe in me. And you have crossed. From death to life. That can be a reality. For you tonight. As it is for so many here. God says.

Believe in your son. And you will not perish. But have eternal life. And so friend. If you need to. Believe in him. Believe in him. Because it is only once.

[ 26 : 42 ] Our faith is in Jesus. That we begin to live. For eternity. Now what do I mean by that? Well. We don't simply wait. For the end of our lives. To come. To be swept out of time.

And into eternity. What is this life for? Okay. Why did the eternal God. Why did he create. A cosmos. A time bound world.

Creatures. Me and you. Why did he do that? It was not because he was lonely. And needed somebody to love him. And it was not because he wanted someone to love.

And had to create us. God has created everything that he has created. Because from eternity. He has loved his son. Paul says in Colossians chapter one.

For in him. All things were created. Things in heaven and on earth. Visible and invisible. Whether thrones. Powers. Rulers or authorities. All things have been created through him.

[ 27 : 42 ] And for him. For him. The fabric of the universe. Me and you. Time itself. God made it all for Jesus.

A kingdom for his son. To rule. A world to honor and worship his son. And so here again is the big picture. We live here and now for the honor and the glory of Jesus.

Jesus. Because if we are in Christ. That is what we will be doing forever. God has loved us. And he has given us Jesus. But bigger than that still.

God has loved Jesus. And has given him. Us. And for all that will change when we die. This will not. We will still be God's creatures. In a new creation. And we will still use our time. To serve. Honor. Glorify. And worship Jesus.

[ 28 : 42 ] Except. Here's the difference. Sinlessly. Tirelessly. Perfectly. And what do I mean use our time?

Well the New Testament word for eternity is *aiōnios*. Which literally means of the ages. And so the New Testament picture of eternity is not a kind of timeless existence.

It will be age upon age. Time without end. Every chapter better than the one before. We will still be time bound creatures.

Only glorified creatures sharing in God's eternal life. In a new creation. And so brothers and sisters. If we imagine that we will develop a thirst for eternity when we get there.

Then we are not yet living the life that God has created us to live. If we think that now is for us. And then is for him. We have not yet grasped eternal life.

[ 29 : 48 ] Living for eternity is living life backwards. Living backwards from what we will be to what we are. We use our time now for Jesus. Because he has stepped into time to give us eternity.

We use our money now for Jesus. Because he left the riches of heaven to give us an eternal inheritance that will never perish, spoil, or fade. We use our bodies now for Jesus.

Because he became incarnate to enter our world. His body was torn for our salvation. To raise us from death in immortal and imperishable bodies.

We use our suffering now for Jesus. Because Jesus suffered for us so that our suffering would achieve for us an eternal weight of glory.

We use our relationships now for Jesus. Because he came into this world and was cut off from his heavenly father for our sin.

[ 30 : 51 ] So that we might be united with him forever. God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Remember what Lewis said about our relationships with others here and now.

All day long we are in some degree helping each other to one or other of these destinations. It is in light of these overwhelming possibilities, he says.

It is with the awe and circumspection proper to them that we should conduct all our dealings with one another. All friendships. All loves. All play. All politics.

All politics. He is saying tomorrow. Tomorrow. Will you treat and speak to others as the immortal beings they are in every sphere of your life?

Remember, you have never met a mere mortal. And you have begun not only an immortal life, but eternal life in Jesus Christ.

[ 31 : 49 ] That changes everything, doesn't it, about tomorrow. We hear all the time that real meaning is found in living for the present, not in the future. But brothers and sisters, there is nothing in your life now that eternity does not make more important and more significant and more valuable here and now.

There is nothing that it does not change. And so we learn to live for eternity now because we have the life of God in us, in Christ.

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. So in Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 4, we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen.

Since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. God holds out his own life to you in Jesus.

Will you take hold of it? And if you have taken hold of it, eternal life has begun for you in Jesus. So will you live it?

[ 33 : 04 ] Will you live it? Let's pray for that together now.