

# Why Does Eternity Matter...Now?

Series: AfterLife

Brad Bailey - May 25, 2014

Intro...

I can feel something beginning to happen inside my kids...yearbooks are coming out...parties... plans...**summer is coming**...and even though still weeks away there is a restless excitement. **Just ask any school teacher whether an approaching summer vacation stays in the future.** Of course not! Kids get restless and rowdy in the weeks before, because their future is impinging on their present.

Our family has a **larger transition at hand**...our firstborn...oldest...finishing High School...preparing to go to college...to leave home. He's full of anticipation... wearing his Point Loma College sweatshirt...

The future often gets to us (in our thoughts and feelings) before we get to it (in our actual experience).

> **In a similar but even more powerful way...Christ bore a connection to eternity in himself and brings eternity to get in us...**to be stirring and effecting us even now.

Past several weeks...been in a series entitled "AfterLife." Before concluding, let me REAFFIRM..

**We're like children**... tell a child that it's a big world out there...and they may think about the small neighborhood outside the front door. Then we learn we live in a city...then we are introduced to maps...then a globe...and finally solar system. And we think now we know all that exists. The more we look into what God tells us about eternity...the more I think we may think we've grown up and grasp it all... but may still be far more like children.

**Herman Weyl** an eminent mathematician and physicist of Gottingen and later a member of the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, opened the Terry Lectures of Yale with these remarks ***"Mathematics and physics make the world appear more and more an open one, as a world not closed but pointing beyond itself."*** - *Herman Weyl*

**To deny the reality of an eternal realm** simply because we haven't experienced it yet may be like the **days of ocean travel before Columbus**. They **assumed they would sail off the edge of a flat world** because from **their limited perspective** they could not see the larger curve that revealed the world was round.

**What changed? Someone returned from the new world...and declared it's existence.** That is **what Christ has done**... and made possible in himself.

**Christ reveals that the world is bigger...and that the Living God reigns over all...the Father of all life... and that separation was never what God intended as our end...but separation reflects our own unsundered hearts of autonomy.**

**"God has put eternity in our very hearts" (Ecclesiastes 3:11)...**to keep us seeking beyond ourselves.

**Christ came to defeat death and offer eternal life... life which we gain through being united with him...to entrust our lives fully to him.**

### **Romans 6:5 (NIV)**

If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.

If we want to state the most extreme opportunity possible...we say "It's *the opportunity of a lifetime*." What Christ offers, to those united to him, is more than "*the opportunity of a lifetime*" God offers you ***an opportunity beyond your lifetime***.

And while we **normally think in terms of the future...because naturally we are bound in time**. It is also now. There is a **more dynamic relationship** to heaven than **merely it lying in our future**. It has **always intersected** with our temporal realm bound in time and space. [1]

Jesus said..."The Kingdom of heaven is at hand." He brings that intersection to bear in a new and profound way.

**And so as we are united with him...we are in perhaps a very REAL sense ...already placed into eternity.**

### **Colossians 3:1-4 (NLT)**

Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. ...<sup>3</sup> For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.

Your life IS **ALREADY hidden in Christ**...in the eternal realm.

**The Scriptures are clear** that we **won't fully experience** the eternal heavenly realm on this current earth ...but we have **already been given a place in it**.

So he says... we should "***set our sights on the realities of heaven.***"

**Some might think...if I have my reservation for a future life...it doesn't make any difference in this world.**

**The great** trend today in the western affluent world has been that of a **declining interest in heaven** and a **focusing of our hopes and expectations on earth**.

We can become so **stimulated** we think we're **satisfied**.

We have such a **sense of power and control** we are in **denial of our mortality**.

We have created ideas about the "**good life**" that are actually very self-consuming and short sighted.

The tendency today is often that of thinking of eternity...of heaven...**as mere fire insurance** for the future...and merely **an add on**. And the way we live is as if this is all there is.

But as *C. S. Lewis notes...*

*"If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were precisely those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at Heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you will get neither."*

So I want to **conclude our weeks of focus** on the AfterLife... considering...

## **Why Does Eternity Matter...Now?**

**How does the reality of eternal life with God influence my present, temporal life on earth, now??**

**How do we live with the ends in mind?**

The Scriptures have a lot to say...but let's begin with listening to the words of Paul in 1 Peter 1...

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer in grief in all kinds of trials... Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do.” 1 Peter 1:3-6, 13-15

**Here again the Scriptures don't tell us about something that merely effects what comes after this life...but that which changes this life.**

**We have been “birthed” into something...into a new existence...and eternal life...which is a “living hope”....something alive in us.**

There is a dynamic interplay between the eternal and temporal. We see this in how Jesus lived...connected to eternity and engaged with everything around him.

**The bigger eternal reality I am a part of is not to distract my living, but to direct my living.**

**How does it direct my living?**

Drawing upon traces of Peter's statement along with other Scriptures...the first thing that stands out... is that...

**The bigger eternal reality we are a part of...**

**1. Transforms our perspective of the temporary hardships we face.**

The smaller our sense of the world is...the more enclosed it is...the less hope we will grasp. The bigger the world...the more open it is...the greater hope lies within us.

We can appreciate Peter's reality in verse 6...

**“You can rejoice in a new life though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.” – 1 Peter 3:6**

**Grief is a natural part of life**, particularly when we face **disappointments** and **loss**.

Sometimes those disappointments run deep... and can lead to underlying battles with despair deep within.

**Jesus... a man acquainted with grief and sorrow. He knew the hard nature of this life...but he saw through it.**

So as the Scriptures say...

**Hebrews 12:2 (NIV)**

**Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**

**Jesus endured what this world brought to bear...by the power of what the bigger world he served had to offer.**

Paul... who gave up comfort and prestige to follow Christ despite great suffering...would write,

**“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” - Romans 8:15-18**

**He would also write...**

**2 Corinthians 4:14, 16-18**

...we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence. ... Therefore we do not lose heart. 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. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Paul reminds us that there is a bigger picture...so while we see the troubles at hand...there is a LOT more for our hearts to take in. [2]

Life is not simply a matter of looking at the **bright** side, but of realizing the **bigger** picture.

*Catherine Marshall in Touching the Heart of God writes, “My friend Marge was waiting for her plane to take off. On one side of the plane the sunset suffused the entire sky with glorious color, but out the window next to her, all she could see was a sky dark and threatening, with no sign of sunset. A voice within her said, ‘Your life, too, will contain some happy beautiful times and some dark shadows. You see it doesn’t matter which window you look through; this plane is going to Cleveland.’”*

Life is not simply a matter of looking at the **bright** side, but of realizing the **bigger** picture.

This is **what God wants every one of us to know** as we **grow closer to approaching death** from this temporary state. He wants us to become **confident about what’s coming next** for us so that we’re **not clinging to this life** rather than embracing the life to come.

Like Jesus... who saw what was before him...

**We do not need to approach death with our backs to the future...but rather we can die facing forward.**

Similarly...

**The bigger eternal reality we are a part of...**

**2. Transforms our pursuit of temporal pleasure**

Many people have commented about the *bumper sticker motto* that says: ***Who dies with the most toys wins.***

> It speaks of how we might **pursue life within such a limited existence.**

**There's a common word** that captures what Jesus is describing...it's **“accumulation.”**

We can become that person who is **hoarding.**

Have you ever seen the Reality TV show “Hoarders?” Hoarding is pretty crazy stuff.

Hoarding is **rooted in fears**...fears that create an irrational grip on stuff.

We can have this irrational drive to hoard **not only possessions**...but **also pleasure.**

Many find some pseudo sense of “life” when they feel power in holding...power in

winning...power in sex...power in risk...power in any form of pleasure.

**Every day we are being told there is something we can buy** that **will satisfy** our greatest needs.

Most of us know that it's rather ridiculous...but a part of us is still thinking “Wow...If only I could... have that.” Or “I'm never gonna be really satisfied unless I get more...do more...”

> **We're trying to squeeze more out of these lives than they were meant to give.**

If we perceive that this is all there is... naturally may have an underlying drive to grasp and grope for every rush of pleasure we can imagine. This has become **more extenuated**... **neurotic** for us as **21<sup>st</sup> century North Americans** than any people who have ever lived... because we **presented with almost boundless opportunity for pleasure and accomplishment.**

**Contrast with Christ**... a short life... which avoided the political dramas and big cities until his end... who healed many but never even encountered most... who left no earthly family... yet could say at the end of his short life what seems to elude us all... ***“Father I have COMPLETED what I came for...”***

**Wow... I never feel I've completed all I was supposed to accomplish.**

> But **Jesus understood** that **this life is not the end** but **more of a means.**

He didn't look at this world as a **mall** but a **mission.**

He didn't focus on **consuming** as much as **contributing.**

**Jesus said,**

**Matthew 6:19-21 (NIV)**

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

It doesn't make sense to become attached to what won't remain.

**Eternity has the power** to break our irrational accumulation.

**If we grasp the bigger** eternal reality we are a part...we will **stop relating** to this world **as a mall.**

We won't accumulate a lot of stuff. We'll be careful about how much time and money and energy you invest in a place that you're not going to be living in for the long-haul.

If we find our self spending most of your discretionary time buying or watching...something's wrong. If you're spending a lot of money on things you can't take with you when you leave, something's wrong.

This leads to a **final central** way in which we live with the ends in mind...

**The bigger eternal reality we are a part of...**

**3. Transforms our investment of time, talent, and treasure into the things that truly remain.**

If you look back to our opening text of I Peter 1, verse 4 declares

*“He has given you not only new birth into eternal life, but an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade, kept in heaven for you.”- 1 Peter 1:4*

**Not only has God given you a new life in the eternal realm...but an inheritance that is itself going to last forever.**

**In our temporal lives**, great value is given to a **FINANCIAL ADVISOR** who can offer a glimpse into **foreseeing** what will be a good investment...what will provide the best returns.... a glimpse into the future.

**Jesus came from heaven** as the **ultimate advisor** and says only **one market is going to really last...** and its value and **dividends will never end.**

**There is a story about a sailor shipwrecked on one of the South Sea islands.** He was seized by the natives, hoisted to their shoulders, carried to the village, and set on a rude throne. Little by little, he learned that it was their custom once each year to make some man a king, king for a year. He liked it until he began to wonder what happened to all the former kings. Soon he discovered that every year when his kingship was ended, the king was banished to an island, where he starved to death. The sailor did not like that, but he was smart and he was king, king for a year. So he put his carpenters to work making boats, his farmers to work transplanting fruit trees to the island, farmers growing crops, masons building houses. **So when his kingship was over, he was banished, not to a barren island, but to an island of abundance.**

**> In the same way, we're all here a short time, and what will prove lasting is what serves the eternal purposes of God.**

Paul...

**1 Corinthians 15:58 (NIV)**

Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain

Must grasp that **our ultimate destiny isn't** that which calls one to **step back...** but **rather to step up... and step out.**

Peter whose words we hear as we began ...would continue to write those 'scattered' ... and directs us saying: "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good works and glorify God on the day he visits us." (2:12)

He is echoing the words of his Master, who said, "Let your light so shine before people that they may see your good works and glorify your father in heaven."

Some years ago a book and a movie came out titled, *The Accidental Tourist*. The central character was a man who wrote travel guides for different parts of the world. In order to write these books, he had to travel to these places himself and spend days or weeks in foreign and sometimes exotic locations. As the story unfolds, we learn that all this traveling is really just running away from the emptiness of his own life. We learn that he never really experiences any of the places he visits. He eats American whenever he can. He avoids interacting with the local inhabitants. He does not affect, nor is he affected by, the places he visits. He just drifts from place to place—an accidental tourist.

How different it is for Christ's people as we make our way through this world. We don't find ourselves in these places by accident, but on purpose—God's purpose. We're not simply taking in the sights and sounds along the way, detached and unaffected. We're here to **mix it up** with **our neighbors and co-workers and friends**, to be touched by their needs and to touch them with the healing, saving, transforming love of God.

**We are not accidental tourists, but deliberate bearers of the grace of heaven.** We can arrive at school and the office **on a mission**. We run our errands and raise our children with a sense of purpose: to live our lives in such a way that people may see our good works, and be ready to meet God. And we do it with a sense of urgency, because we know we're only here for a short while. **If you woke up this morning...it's because God has a purpose.** If you wake up tomorrow...it is because God chose another day to work with this world.

### Resources:

### Notes:

1. Regarding the implication that our eternal destiny should change our temporal life, Paul also speaks of this making us “people of the day” rather than the night.

*You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. 1 Thessalonians 5:5-11*

If you've invited Christ into your life, you're no longer asleep... you “belong to the day”... and together we should stay awake... live in the light... and encourage the best in one another.

Similarly we are reminded that ‘Our citizenship is in heaven’ - Phil 3:20

We can also hear Paul's own choice... Philippians 1:23-25

I'm torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith (Philippians 1:23-25)

**2. Regarding perspective on troubles...**

The Bible isn't afraid of revealing such a sense about life, it's filled with glimpses into the souls of faith. Even depression can be a natural response to unmet longings; to expectations which are deeply and despairingly unmet.

David often spoke of temporal life as despairing apart from God...

Ps. 16:2 says to the Lord "apart from you I have no good thing." So what kept a step in David's dance for life? He goes on in this same Psalm to express:

Ps. 16:8-11 "I have set the Lord always before me Because he is at my right hand I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; by body also will rest secure because you will not abandon me to the grave nor will you let your Holy One see decay You have made known to me the path of life You will fill me with joy in your presence with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Paul says more extensively,

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father." The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. Romans 8:15-18

...we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence. All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God. Therefore we do not lose heart. 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. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. 2 Corinthians 4:14-18