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SERMON TITLE Embracing an Eternal Perspective

SERIES

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KEY SCRIPTURE 1 Corinthians 15:19; Psalm 73

SYNOPSIS Often, we focus too much on the here and now, when we should consider everything in the light of eternity.

HIGHLIGHTS



☞ Embracing an Eternal Perspective

Three weeks ago, we celebrated Easter, which remembers the death and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus. Then, a couple of weeks ago, we talked about what it would mean if there were no resurrection. Preaching would be pointless; faith would be futile; death would have dominion; and, the future would be fearful. Today, I want to continue on that topic just a bit more.

I'm concerned that in our modern age, believers are overly focused on the here and now, without taking much consideration for eternity. There are whole ministries which focus on how to get the most out of life now. To be sure, Jesus did promise us an abundant life, but I don't think he meant that in terms of the so-called "good life," with all the trappings of wealth and fame. I think he meant a life grounded in relationship with the Lord. And, I think that the bible very strongly urges us to ☞ focus on eternity - beyond the few decades we have in this life. **1 Corinthians 15:19 says, "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable."**

Our hope is in an eternity with the Lord. **We don't just live in the moment; we live for eternity.** ☞ **Eternity with Jesus is our great hope.**

Hope is not simply some 'pie-in-the-sky, airy-fairy-wishfulness'. Hope is a firm expectation of all promised good things. We live in hope. We carry on our lives with hope. There is a spring in our steps, a glint in our eyes, and a positive outlook even while others are seeing only negativity, all while looking at the exact same events. It's important for us not to let go of our hope.

So, I want to ask you this question, "Where are you going?" It all comes down to this – either you know that when you leave this life you will enter into eternity with Christ, or you have no hope at all for anything beyond this life, and that means this life is ultimately futile.

In his day, Paul was addressing Christians who were carrying a lot of baggage from previous heathen philosophies into their new faith. Many of them saw Christianity as just some kind of fresh start, and living a more wholesome life, but that was all. I think a lot of people today, believers included, view the Christian faith in much the same way. It's just one way to live a fairly wholesome life, but that's it. Many see it as really not much different from other religions... "we're just trying to be decent people and get along with everyone." In fact, for many, the choice of faith is simply a matter of which religion offers the most interesting music, programs and other benefits. "Which one makes me feel better about myself?"

But here at Open Bible, we believe that **Christianity is not just one of many self-help programs** or philosophies of decent living. **We believe there is one God and one Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.** And, we believe there is much more beyond the few decades we live on this earth.

But sometimes, even with that belief in hand, we might wonder about life. We might wonder whether our faith really matters. **We might wonder if it's worth it** to try to live this Christian ☞ lifestyle, because it's not easy. Asaph pondered about these things in **Psalms 73**.



In verses 2 and 3 he said, “my feet had almost slipped; **I had nearly lost my foothold**. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.” Then, a little later in verses 13 and 14 he said, “Surely **in vain I have kept my heart pure**... All day long I have been afflicted, and every morning brings new punishments.”

In the rest of the Psalm, he talks about people who make no effort to follow the Lord, but seem to have a great life. Even though they live unholy lives and indulge in sinful behavior, they don't seem to have any troubles and are healthy and wealthy. They just do whatever they want and have no problems to worry about. It doesn't seem fair.

I think we sometimes have the same questions. Ultimately, what good is there in being good? One commentary put it this way – “Not only are the wicked rewarded equally to the righteous, they seem to be *more blessed* than the pure in heart. Their lives seem to have *less* trouble and are not as plagued as the average man.”

In fact, when Asaph talks about his condition, he feels that he is being chastened, which implies that *God Himself* was afflicting him with the difficulties. In essence, it seemed that God was easy on the wicked and hard on Asaph. Now, we know that he was exaggerating the situation, but it was prompted by *real* feelings. Have you ever felt that way? Like, “What's the point? It's hard being a godly person, and there doesn't seem to be any reward for it.”

This was weighing heavily on Asaph until he went into the house of the Lord. After going to church, so to speak, he was reminded that he had an **eternity that would make it all worthwhile**, but those who didn't follow the Lord were living in a dreamlike state and would soon be awakened to an eternity that would be devastating, destructive and dreadful. He saw the great benefit in drawing near to God, which he doubted before.

We can either have an earthly perspective or an eternal perspective. An earthly perspective focuses on the here and now. “What's in it for me? How does this improve my life now?” This **earthly perspective produces sinful attitudes and behaviors as well as doubt**.

Asaph admits how stupid he had been when he only looked at life from an earthly perspective. He was envious and bitter. He was like an animal that doesn't have the ability to consider the future. He was senseless and ignorant because he was only thinking about the present situation, and it created doubt. **Doubt can limit our walk with God**... Peter actually walked on water but got sidetracked and sank when he doubted. Those are the results of an earthly perspective, and if left unchecked, can ultimately lead to the fate of the wicked, with devastation and destruction.

☞ But an **eternal perspective gives understanding and builds faith**. Asaph realizes that he will one day enter into glory, and that the Lord is his ultimate refuge.

☞ **2 Corinthians 4:16-18**

Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For **our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them**



all. 18 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.

The glory and joy of our eternal heavenly reward is so great that it is incomprehensible and indescribable. In heaven, with God, the believer has the best that is available; and on all the Earth there is nothing greater or better than God himself.

*In verse 26 he basically says that even if he were to experience trouble and sickness all the days of his life, even if his heart and his flesh were to fail, he was still better off than the wicked because God was "the strength of his heart" and "his portion forever." The word "portion" is another word ☞ for his reward or his inheritance. **God is better than health, wealth, possessions, pleasures, or anything else.***

--Dr. David R. Reagan... One of the keys to living a triumphant life in Christ — to living a joyous and victorious life in the midst of a world wallowing in despair — is to live with a conscious eternal perspective.

*I have personally found this to be so important that I carry a reminder of it in my shirt pocket at all times. It is a small card that was sent to me in 1988 by the great prophetic preacher, Leonard ☞ Ravenhill. The card says, **"Lord, keep me eternity conscious."***

What does that mean? In the words of Peter, that means living as "aliens and strangers" in this world (1 Peter 2:11). Similarly, in the words of the writer of Hebrews, it means living as "strangers and exiles" on this earth (Hebrews 11: 13). Paul put it this way: "Do not set your minds on earthly things, for our citizenship is in heaven" (Philippians 3:19-20).

In Hebrews 11, the Hall of Faith, we see that an eternal perspective enabled the saints of old to keep on living their faith in spite of many difficulties...

Abraham was able to leave his home and follow God in faith because he was 'longing for a better country—a heavenly one.' v.16

Moses chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time... because he was looking ahead to his reward. v. 25,26

Other Saints were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. v. 35

If we look at life from an earthly perspective our lives will be filled with sorrow and our faith will be weak, but if we will look at life from an eternal perspective we will be filled with joy and hope and a strong faith in God. Even though we will have some difficult times and we will see some troubling things in our life, we will be able to say with Asaph, "Surely God is Good!"

☞ **Colossians 3:1-2**

3:1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, **set your hearts on things above**, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 **Set your minds on things above**, not on earthly things

Here's some questions to ask yourself:

☞ **"Do I live as though this is all there is?"**



“What are the most important things to me? What are the things I would not give up if a gun were put to my head? And are those the things I give priority; or do I focus my life on what is passing away?

“Do I treat my fellow Christians as though I’m going to spend eternity with them?”

“Do I feel an urgency to call others to Christ, because I know that there is a resurrection, and that if they reject Christ they will spend eternity in torment?”

“What does my religion consist of? Relationship with the risen Christ; or in structures and programs and rituals and rules...as though this is all there is?”

*Embracing God’s eternal perspective will help us understand many things about our lives. To gain that perspective and understanding, we must **read His Word, listen to Him in prayer, and be willing to follow His directions. God is eternal**, so our relationship to Him is very important. **Scripture is eternal**, so we must commit ourselves to studying and applying it. **People are eternal**, so we invest ourselves in our marriages, our families, and our friendships. By contrast, material things are not eternal, so we should spend less time, energy, and money on grasping for them.*

Where is your focus? What are your priorities? These are things for you to take before God and honestly ask Him to reveal in you. Do you have any tendencies toward faithless living? Ask Him to refresh your mind and heart that eternity is real. And **since eternity is real, absolutely everything should be considered in light of that truth.**

Now as I close I want to point out something very important. All men everywhere will rise on the last day; not just the Christians. Daniel 12:2 says this: “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake; these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.” There is no escape and no rest. There is not even merciful oblivion for the one who rejects God.

If you’re here today and you’ve never confessed your sin to God and received His free gift of eternal life through faith in Christ, then today is the day of salvation. Today is the day you need to turn to Him. Don’t miss this opportunity because you never know if this opportunity will have been your last.

And, if you’re a believer but you realize that you have been too earthly focused, then it’s time to get back on track. Get your priorities right. Set your heart and your mind on things above. Embrace an Eternal Perspective.