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# ETERNITY



**by**

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# **SYDNEY CHURCH OF CHRIST**

## **ETERNITY SERIES (Nov-Dec 1999)**

<b>Class</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>From Here to Eternity</b>	<b>Introduction</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Building for Eternity</b>	<b>Spiritual v Material</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Burning the Eternal Flame</b>	<b>Perseverance and Trials</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>The Words of Eternal Life</b>	<b>To who else shall we go?</b>
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## Lesson 1 From Here to Eternity

### **Introduction:**

(Eccl 3:11 NLT) *God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end.*

- We read here about "eternity", but what is it? God has given us the ability to comprehend the idea of "eternity", but for most of us, the idea of eternity is not something we think about very often. We struggle to understand it. NIV says that mankind does not "*fathom what God has done from beginning to end*".
  
- Most of us have our thoughts consumed with what is going in our lives today, maybe out as far as next week. If we are very visionary, next year, or even a five year plan. But when the Bible talks of "Eternity" can we relate?
  
- The next five weeks we will be delving into the "eternal" as revealed by God, the only one who has been there already! Prepare to be inspired, strengthened and encouraged by God's almighty plan!
  
- Lesson Titles will be:
  1. **From Here to Eternity**
  2. **Building for Eternity**
  3. **Burning the Eternal Flame**
  4. **The Words of Eternal Life**
  5. **Glory, Glory, Hallelujah!**

### **Setting the Scene**

- Think about this: Scientists tell us the universe has been around for about 15 billion years. The earth has been here for about 4.5 billion years. Mankind has existed for around 200,000 years.
- You and I have been around for less than a hundred. Most of us are less than 50.
- We are an infinitesimal dot on a very long time-line. A very small blip
- It's very difficult for us to conceive of either existing for eternity or not existing for eternity.

### **View of Eternity:**

- There is little faith in the idea of eternity in our world. Consider:
- **History:** Great Empires fade: Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome, Jerusalem - only ruins survive today of once great and powerful empires.
- **Material Possessions:** Deterioration, new car, new clothes, new house.. all become old, scratched, worn out etc. (*Possible humour here*)
- **Pace** of deterioration has accelerated: Computer technology now becomes obsolete in 18 months. We expect things to become obsolete now! We expect to have to upgrade constantly!
- **Relationships:** high rates of marriage and family break-up produces a low level of confidence in the permanence of relationships. Selfishness and lust (so prevalent) attacks the fabric of relationships. What do so-called "marriage contracts" tell us about people's expectations?
- We erect **monuments** and inscribe **plaques** to commemorate great events or people we respect and love. Some people even erect monuments to themselves so their memory will live on.
- **Natural disasters** shake us. We are disturbed when the age-old mountain ranges become volcanoes or collapse in deadly mud-slides. Earthquakes constantly remind us of the impermanence of even the ground on which we walk and the bedrock we build our houses on. Hab 3:6
- **Yet**, there is a strong drive to extend life - medical research, cryogenics (where they freeze you until they figure out how to thaw you out) growth in financial planning sector etc.

□ As people, we operate more in the realm of the short-term than the eternal, yet there is something in us that desperately wants some-how to be a part of it. We think that there has to be more than our few years on this earth....

### **What is Eternity?**

- No limit in time. Outside of time. From eternity past (i.e. no beginning) to eternity future (no end). Always existed, always is, always will be. We get a clue from verses like Heb 13:8. God is in fact outside of time. He sees time like we see the beginning and end of our driveway.

## Five Eternals

(Choose some or all, as time permits)

### 1. God's is Eternal:

(Psa 93:1-5 NIV) The LORD reigns, he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed in majesty and is armed with strength. The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved. {2} **Your throne was established long ago; you are from all eternity.** {3} The seas have lifted up, O LORD, the seas have lifted up their voice; the seas have lifted up their pounding waves. {4} Mightier than the thunder of the great waters, mightier than the breakers of the sea-- the LORD on high is mighty. {5} Your statutes **stand firm**; holiness adorns your house for **endless days**, O LORD.

### 2. God's Word is Eternal:

(Psa 119:89 NIV) Your word, O LORD, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens.

- Bible doesn't change.
- What was true thousands of years ago, still is.
- Illustration: Olympic flame (kind of an eternal flame), transferred carefully between torches carried by runners so it doesn't go out. Thousands of runners carry the flame from Olympia in Greece to the final venue of the games.....
- Q: Do we treat God's Word that way, i.e. with care and respect? Do we realise that we hold the truth of eternity in our hands when we get up in the morning for our Quiet time? People pay thousands of dollars to study for an MBA, improve their selling skills, Stress management, Anger management, Marriage and Relationship guidance, Stock market trading etc... picking up the latest management theories, selling styles, psychology fads etc. **which change every year**... but we can get every day for free the truth that has stood the test of eternity!

### 3. Salvation is Eternal:

(Heb 5:9 NIV) *and, once made perfect, he (Jesus) became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.*

- Jesus is the source of our salvation, and we know that he can say that because he has already conquered death. (the resurrection).
- Salvation available to all **who obey**.

### 4. God has an eternal purpose:

(Eph 3:10-12 NIV) *His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, {11} **according to his eternal purpose** which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord. {12} In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.*

- God has had a plan for eternity for:
  - the church of Jesus to preach the word

- us to be able to approach God with freedom and confidence (ie having had our feelings of guilt removed)

### 5. The Eternal is Spiritual, not Physical:

(2 Cor 4:16-18 NIV) *Therefore we do not lose heart. 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.*

- What we see: the physical world, material things etc are temporary only.
- What is unseen: the spiritual world, future eternal glory etc is eternal.
- We get older and our bodies waste away (hair loss, loss of fitness etc. Humour ???), but God promises that a relationship with him can renew us every day inwardly.
- **Illustration:** Imagine that when you woke up every morning, all your possessions were brand new again. New perfectly-fitting clothes in the wardrobe - no wear or stains, that new-clothes feel... A new car in the garage, zero kms on the clock, clean, shiny, that new-car smell... All your furniture: new, no scratches, chips or dents; the house: brand new, no marks on the wall, the carpets - never touched. Every day it was like this... Fantastic!!! Well it can be like that for us spiritually. Old wounds, old troubles, old disappointments and defeats (chips and dents of life) should be put in perspective. They are *light and momentary troubles* only when compared with the eternal glory that is ahead. With a spiritual perspective we can wake up every morning with a greater excitement about life than new clothes, or houses, or cars can bring! Or do we focus more on the trouble and woes and pass up the opportunity for a new start every day? What are your eyes fixed on? The seen, or the unseen? The physical, or the eternal? That which passes away, or that which lasts forever?

### Conclusion:

- Let's start thinking with the ultimate long-term view! Eternity
- Understand that God is eternal: Be amazed!
- God's Word is eternal: respect and value it!
- Salvation is eternal: Be obedient!
- God has an eternal purpose: You are a part of it!
- The Eternal is spiritual not physical. Be renewed every day!

## Lesson 2 - Building For Eternity

### **Introduction:**

- Mankind has always grappled with the **tension** between building quickly and cheaply, or solidly at a greater cost.
- **Shoes:** buy a pair for \$250 and they may last a life-time. Buy a pair for \$25 and they might last the summer.
- Recent **earth-quakes** in Turkey. Many buildings simply crumbled, taking many lives with them because shonky contractors cut corners in order to maximise profits.
- **Exams:** Students can be faced with a temptation to party during term time and resorting to "cheating" just to pass the exam. They might pass (if they don't get caught), but they won't have learnt much.
- Temptation to take **short-cuts**. "Near enough is good enough". Australian culture: "She'll be right mate!" "look for the quick fix", the "easy way out"

*(1 Tim 6:10-12 NIV) For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. {11} But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. {12} Fight the good fight of the **faith**. Take hold of the **eternal life** to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.*

- What is it about the lure of easy money? We know it can be used to provide all kinds of material things. But compare the temporary pleasure of acquiring things or spending on pleasure (James 4:3) with the eternal benefit of building a life based on faith, love, endurance etc.
- As disciples of Jesus, we must clearly reject the temptation of short-cuts and strive to **build well, taking a long-term ETERNAL view**. Build great lives, great marriages and families, great friendships, great ministries and great churches.

We all know the parable of the **wise and foolish builders**:

*(Luke 6:47-49 NIV) I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. {49} But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete."*

- **Makeshift or Mansion.** Building for Eternity - spiritual Perspectives.
  1. **Building To Last**
  2. **Building Each Other**
  3. **The Master Builder**



## 1. Building To Last

- We are building for eternity, so we need to build to last.
- Building a tower, counting the cost, finishing: **Lk 14:28-30**
- No point in laying the foundation, and then not completing the work.

*(1 Cor 3:9-17 NIV) For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building. {10} By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. **But each one should be careful how he builds.** {11} For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. {12} If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, {13} his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. {14} If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. {15} If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames. {16} Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? {17} If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.*

- (1 Cor 3:10) **each one should be careful how he builds.**
- Picture here of how our God will test our work on Judgement day.
- Notice the building materials: Either gold/silver/costly stones or wood/hay/straw. What's the difference? Wood is actually not a bad building material surely? And goes gold have any structural strength? The difference is in the **cost** of the material.
- How can I know if I am building well (my life, family, ministry etc)... Well, how much is it costing you?
- Areas:
  - Your time. Time with God, time with family, less time with yourself.
  - Meeting the needs selflessly. **Illustration:**.....
  - Listening..
- **Personal spiritual life:** delving deeply with God, developing a great relationship with him. Sacrificing the time for excellent personal devotions (this is the gold/silver/costly stones). OR superficial/brief/lazy quite times (wood, hay, straw).
- **Marriages:**
  - The costly stones of denying self to give to your spouse,
  - The investment of getting lots of great advice.
  - The gold and silver of listening, supporting, serving etc..
  - v. The hay-barn of selfishness.
- **Ministry/Relationships**
  - Respect of others: giving notice, returning phone calls, doing what you said you would do, keeping commitments.
  - Truly meeting needs... someone needs to talk, you didn't budget the time..

## 2. Building the Church / Building Each Other

- Jesus had plans to build his church **Mt 16:18**  
*And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.*
- But God cares not about physical buildings, but the spiritual.  
*(Acts 7:48-50 NIV) "However, the Most High does not live in houses made by men. As the prophet says: {49} "'Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house will you build for me? says the Lord. Or where will my resting place be? {50} Has not my hand made all these things?'*
- Again, the material crumbles, but the spiritual grows. Compare this with the world's view. European cathedral-based religion. Beautiful buildings, amazing tourist attractions, but covered with scaffolding! And there is no dynamic, vibrant fellowship of disciples there preaching the word. Many church buildings have foundation stones with inscriptions that read: "To the Glory of God". Say what! God is not glorified by a human construction, but by people preaching his word!
- God's plan for the church then is:  
*(Eph 2:19-22 NIV) Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, {20} built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. {21} In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. {22} And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*
  - **Foundation** = New Testament Apostles and New Testament Prophets i.e. the teaching of the NT.
  - Jesus as **cornerstone**. A cornerstone was a very carefully hewn stone placed at a corner on the foundation. The faces of this stone defined the three directions (front, side and vertical). It had to be true otherwise, the building would end up out-of-square. Also, all measurements would be taken from this point. □ We must make sure Jesus is our standard - measure ourselves against Jesus, not against each other or the world. (areas of love, service, sacrifice, purity, power, courage etc)
  - Built together: Amazing **unity**.
  - Spiritual dwelling for God, not a material one.

□ So how do we build the church today? By building one another

- **Our Relationships:**
  - Building others up: 1 Cor 8:1b *Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.*
  - Try to excel in gifts that build up the church. 1 Cor 14:12

*(Eph 4:29-32 NIV) Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. {30} And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with*

whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. {31} Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. {32} Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

- God really cares about our relationships. It is possible to grieve him.

**Illustration: The power of words... from Aces online**

A group of frogs were traveling through the woods, and two of them fell into a deep pit. All the other frogs gathered around the pit. When they saw how deep the pit was, they told the two frogs that they were as good as dead. The two frogs ignored the comments and tried to jump up out of the pit with all of their might. The other frogs kept telling them to stop, that they were as good as dead.

Finally, one of the frogs took heed to what the other frogs were saying and gave up. He fell down and died. The other frog continued to jump as hard as he could. Once again, the crowd of frogs yelled at him to stop the pain and just die. He jumped even harder and finally made it out. When he got out, the other frogs said, "Did you not hear us?" The frog explained to them that he was deaf. He thought they were encouraging him the entire time.

- Q: Can I honestly say that the only things that come out of my mouth are words that benefit others? (Which frog am I?)
  - Practicals:
    - Truly encourage at least one person a day! Tip: Recognise an area of positive change in their life. .. "You've changed so much in ..."
    - Volunteer to serve: "I'll baby-sit for you so you two can go out"
    - Don't be a whinger or complainer.
    - Aggressively resolve any arguments or offences with your brothers and sisters (*Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger*)
    - Thoughtfulness: birthday cards, give a gift.
    - Call.
    - Visit.
    - Set up lunch.
    - Pray for and visit the sick.

**□ Be a great Builder of God's church.**

**□ And finally, let us learn from the Master Builder Himself... (if time permits)**

### 3. The Master Builder

*(2 Cor 5:1-7 NIV) Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. {2} Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, {3} because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. {4} For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. {5} Now it is God who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. {6} Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. {7} We live by faith, not by sight.*

- God has built us an eternal house in heaven: it lasts forever, it will never be destroyed like our physical bodies one day will be.
  - Our current home (our physical body) is only a tent, temporary shelter. It does the job, but you wouldn't want to live in a tent forever!
  - God has made us for this purpose! (v5). I.e. to go to heaven and be with him.
- For most of us, buying a house will be the biggest purchase we will ever make. We save for years for a deposit. Maybe our parents help out... But we must get the deposit together or else the bank won't lend us the rest. People scrimp and save and go without in order to raise that deposit. They know they will be paying the house off for another 15-25 year after that. And they are happy about it!!! But think about our spiritual house. God has built it for us already. Now for the big obstacle, the deposit. Who is going to pay that? Well, God does. The Spirit we received at Baptism is the down payment on our eternal house. What's the all up market price by the way? God is paying an amount equivalent to one crucified son. And how much do we owe? Nothing, you see, as our eternal house is inherited.

*(Rev 21:6-7 NIV) He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink **without cost** from the spring of the water of life. {7} He who overcomes will **inherit** all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.*

#### **Conclusion:**

##### **We've talked about:**

- Building Well : don't take short-cuts, build with the costly stones
- Building Each Other: Truly encourage and build others up.
- God: The Master Builder.

## Lesson 3 - Burning The Eternal Flame

### Introduction:

(The introduction is just to get the main concept of the lesson over. Use as few or as many of these ideas as you need).

- **Eternal Flame:** We see them in War Memorials (Anzac square in Brisbane has one). The idea is to evoke an eternal memory of the sacrifice of those who died in war. The burning flame is helps us to keep the memories and appreciation alive. War memorials usually have an inscription that reads: "Lest we Forget".
- A **Flame** is also symbolic of **passion**. An "old flame" is a term referring to a romantic attachment from one's distant past. Paul warns against "burning with passion" (1 Cor 7:9), and he admonishes Timothy to "Fan into flame" the gift of God. You could even say... "Get Fired Up!"
- Song by *The Bangles*:  
*Close your eyes, give me your hand, darling*  
*Do you feel my heart beating, do you understand*  
*Do you feel the same, am I only dreaming*  
*Is this burning an eternal flame.*  
□ The song-writer is wondering whether their love is going to last forever.
- Jesus talking to his disciples said: *Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. (Mt 24:12f).* Jesus was predicting a time when the fire in most people's hearts would go out - the eternal flame snuffed out, passion for God gone. In the letter to the church in Laodicea (Rev 3:14-18) we see a church in which the flame of passion is only flickering weakly. They are no longer Hot, but Luke-warm...
- How do we keep our passion for God hot? How do we make sure we keep an eternal flame burning in our hearts? Well, this was the issue for the people to whom the book of **Hebrews** was originally written. Jews who had become Christians were being tempted to leave Christianity and go back to their old lives and former Jewish religion. Let's learn the lessons tonight about how to keep the passions for God blazing so we can enjoy eternity with God.

### Outline:

1. Pay Attention
2. Fires need Stoking
3. Extinguished Emotions
4. Fired up, not Fizzled out

## 1. Pay Attention : Don't Drift

*(Heb 2:1-3 NIV) We must pay **more careful attention**, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not **drift away**. {2} For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, {3} how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?*

### **Joke: The perils of not paying attention!**

*This is the transcript of a radio conversation between a US naval ship and Canadian authorities off the coast of Newfoundland in October 1995..*

**US Ship:** Please divert your course 0.5 degrees to the south to avoid a collision.

**CND reply:** Recommend you divert **your** course 15 degrees to the South to avoid a collision.

**US Ship:** This is the Captain of a US Navy Ship. I say again, divert **your** course.

**CND reply:** No. I say again, you divert **YOUR** course!

**US Ship:** THIS IS THE AIRCRAFT CARRIER USS CORAL SEA\*, WE ARE A LARGE WARSHIP OF THE US NAVY. DIVERT YOUR COURSE NOW!!

**CND reply:** This is a lighthouse. Your call.

□ The Hebrew writer says "how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?" How does anyone miss seeing Jesus? Well, like the captain of the US warship, we can be blinded by a sense of self-importance, self-sufficiency and pride. The captain didn't really pay attention to the warning. He didn't realise who it was that was speaking.

□ As life goes on as disciples, we need to **pay even more attention** to the word, not less! There is a strong temptation to think "*I've been around. I've heard it all before!, I don't really need to delve into the Bible today - I know what it says*"

□ Drifting is very gradual. The danger with drifting is that you often don't realise you are drifting until it is too late. Illustration:.....

## 2. Fires Need Stoking: The Power of Encouragement

*(Heb 3:12-13 NIV) See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. {13} But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.*

- To keep a fire going we have to stoke it. Feeding the fire on a winter's night at home, shovelling coal into the firebox in a speeding steam engine, huge coal pulverisers blasting an explosive dose of coal particles into the power station boilers that power our cities. All fires need fuel. And the fires in our hearts need stoking too! We are people powered by Encouragement!

### Illustration form Aces Online:

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, the famous 19th-century poet and artist, was once approached by an elderly man. The old fellow had some sketches and drawings that he wanted Rossetti to look at and tell him if they were any good, or if they at least showed potential talent.

Rossetti looked them over carefully. After the first few, he knew that they were worthless, showing not the least sign of artistic talent. But Rossetti was a kind man, and he told the elderly man as gently as possible that the pictures were without much value and showed little talent. He was sorry, but he could not lie to the man.

The visitor was disappointed, but seemed to expect Rossetti's judgment. He then apologized for taking up Rossetti's time, but would he just look at a few more drawings - these done by a young art student?

Rossetti looked over the second batch of sketches and immediately became enthusiastic over the talent they revealed. "These," he said, "oh, these are good. This young student has great talent. He should be given every help and encouragement in his career as an artist. He has a great future if he will work hard and stick to it."

Rossetti could see that the old fellow was deeply moved. "Who is this fine young artist?" he asked. "Your son?"

"No," said the old man sadly. "It is me - 40 years ago. If only I had heard your praise then! For you see, I got discouraged and gave up - too soon."

- Do we really understand the power we have in encouraging others?
- We need to understand that God's plan is for us to build a refuge of encouragement. The world, work-places, schools, universities, other people do a good enough job of discouraging us. The times we are in contact with other disciples are opportunities to reverse the process.
- The Bible sets no maximum on the amount we can encourage others. "Encourage... as long as it is called Today" You cannot overdo this. No-one has ever over-encouraged!
- Practical 1: Decide to call someone this week, just to be an encouragement!.

- Practical 2: Don't miss church. {Heb 10:25} Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.
  
- Practical 3: Don't forget to encourage those that are going well! We all know that even when fires are burning brightly, they still need stoking. The speeding steam-train needs its regular shovelful of coal to keep it going the same way.



### 3. Extinguished Emotions

(Heb 5:7-9 NIV) *During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. {8} Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered {9} and, once made perfect, he became the source of **eternal salvation** for all who obey him.*

- Lessons from Jesus here on how to handle trials. We read here of Jesus facing the most intense challenge of his life connecting with God at an emotional level - "loud cries and tears". Jesus did not hold back from expressing his deep feelings to God about the situation.
  - Expressing our deepest desires to God. What do You really want? Do you have deep desires about anything? We need to get in touch with our emotions. How do we really feel about God? Do we passionately love him, or are we totally ticked off with him, or are we just "numb". Are your emotions extinguished? We need to learn to "connect" with God emotionally if we are going to make it for the long haul.
- *Jesus was heard because of his reverent submission.* But hang on! Jesus' most intense prayer recorded in the NT is surely the prayer of Gethsemene, and even after praying about it Jesus still went to the cross. So what does the Bible mean when it says God **heard** Jesus? God didn't take away Jesus' looming suffering. How can you say God heard Jesus' prayers? **The outcome didn't change! Well, no, but Jesus' heart did.** His anguish became acceptance and resolve, his actions were obedience, and the result although agony and death for him, brought salvation and victory for us!
- Also impressive is Jesus' attitude of **reverent submission**. If we are facing trials do we have an attitude of *reverent submission*? Or is it more one of *irreverent rebellion*? If we get angry with God, or discouraged, or develop a martyr's complex we are not being *reverently submissive*.
- Jesus had a **right view of God**. *Although he was a son, he learned obedience*. There is an old saying: familiarity breeds contempt. Jesus was a son, and therefore had the closest relationship with God. How many sons today after twenty years treat their fathers with contempt instead of respect? How many fathers today fail in teaching their children to be obedient? Jesus didn't abuse his close relationship with God for granted. He **learned obedience**. Jesus learned the hard lesson of the value of simply being obedient to God even when it hurts personally.

#### 4. Fired up not Fizzled out

*(Heb 10:32-39 NIV) Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you **stood your ground** in a great contest in the face of suffering. {33} Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. {34} You sympathized with those in prison and **joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions.** {35} So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. {36} You **need to persevere** so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. {37} For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. {38} But my righteous one **will live by faith.** And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." {39} **But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.***

- We live in a throwaway society: We are used to throwing things away: packaging, junk mail, disposable nappies and disposable razors. We are advanced at this! We have separate bins now for plastic, paper, food and glass! It's convenient, it is wonderful. We like to throw things away...
- But **don't throw away your confidence...** But I don't feel very confident about my relationship with God! Remember the earlier days (v32)... you stood your ground, you've been insulted for God, you had the joy, you **knew you had the better and lasting (the eternal!) possessions.** The confidence is based not on how you may be feeling at the moment, but on God and his faithfulness.
- **We need to persevere.** Illustration : Thomas Alva Edison - inventor of the light bulb and thousands of other things..

Edison For at least 50 years others had experimented with some sort of electric lamp, but none with success. In the period from 1878 to 1880 **Edison and his associates worked on at least three thousand different theories** while developing the incandescent lamp. The lamp would consist of a filament housed in a glass bulb, in a vacuum. He had his own glass blowing shed where the fragile bulbs were hand blown for his experiments.

Edison's crew **experimented on six thousand different types of materials for the filament of his electric lamp.** They eventually narrowed their filament choices down to just two. Edison and staff began working primarily with fine platinum wire, which proved unsuccessful. They tried mixing 10 percent iridium with the platinum, but problems continued because the filament still would not handle the current without melting. Eventually Edison got the idea of using a carbonized cotton thread. His first experiments with this method produced the "Edison Effect" or "Thermonic Emission", caused by the flow of electricity from a hot filament across a vacuum to a metal wire. This development eventually led to the electronic vacuum tube.

- Edison's first successful carbon filament test: **lasted 13 hours.** **After persevering with thousands of experiments and thousands of failures. Perseverance for us results in eternity!**

- {38} *But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him.* {39} **But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.**
  - "Shrinking back"
    - Perhaps a metaphor from lowering a sail and so slackening the course. (Vines Expository on OT and NT Words).
    - Perhaps like an army in ancient times. The worst routs happened when the army lost their courage, turned tail and ran. Then the slaughter was great. (eg. Judges 20:4-46).
    - **God wants us to not slacken our course, but pull the sail tighter into the wind. Live by faith - allow God to fill our sails with his power.**

### **Conclusion:**

#### **We've talked about:**

- Pay Attention ☐ Don't drift, pay closer attention
- Fires need Stoking ☐ Shovel on the encouragement!
- Extinguished Emotions ☐ Don't quench your passions. Connect with God emotionally.
- Fired up, not Fizzled out ☐ Persevere. Live by Faith, Let God fill your sails!

## **Lesson 4 - The Words of Eternal Life**

### ***Introduction:***

*Joke: The pastor was speaking about heaven, about eternal bliss and the joys that are awaiting each person on "the other side." He paused for effect and asked, "How many of you here want to go to heaven?" All hands were raised except for an eight-year-old boy sitting in the front pew. The minister asked, "Don't you want to go to heaven, too, son?" The boy replied, "Yes, but I thought you were making up a load to go right now."*

- If there is one aspect of life that is common to all of humanity, no matter what culture, or social position, occupation or living standard, it is that we all die. And there are as many ideas about what happens after death as there are cultures.
- Many religions teach many different things about "the after-life". Some say it is simple extinction, some expect a return in a re-incarnated form, some have no concept at all. People speak of "tunnels of light, or of a merging into the cosmos as a drop merges into a pool, or perhaps a spirit-world inhabited by their ancestors.
- The ideas are contradictory. The subject suffers from a total lack of empirical research! We can't devise experiments to test the different theories. We can't sift the evidence, as there is none to sift. No-one has made it back to tell us about it!
- There was one man however, who taught authoritatively on this subject. Jesus spoke not only of what eternal life is, but on how to get it. And he seemed to live a life focussed not on an earth-bound view of existence, but on a glorious future...

### ***Outline:***

- 1. The Words of Eternal Life**
- 2. This is Your (Eternal) Life!**
- 3. What must I do to inherit eternal life?**

## 1. You have the Words of Eternal Life

*(John 6:53-68 NIV) Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. {54} **Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.** {55} For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. {56} Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. {57} Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. {58} This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your forefathers ate manna and died, but **he who feeds on this bread will live forever.**" {59} He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum. {60} On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "**This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?**" {61} Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? {62} What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! {63} The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. {64} Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. {65} He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him." {66} From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. {67} "**You do not want to leave too, do you?**" Jesus asked the Twelve. {68} **Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.***

- Jesus is talking about **discipleship**. "You can't just have a casual acquaintance with me and expect to be granted eternal life. This is a different ball-game to the external works-based religion you are used to. You have to eat my flesh and drink my blood, You have to let me be **in** you and **nourish** you. This is **different**."
- We must eat and drink Jesus. The life of being a disciple of Jesus must be as basic and second nature to us as eating and drinking.
- Jesus' message seems to have got through at this point. Some of his disciples **grumbled** about it (v61) "This is not what we expected, We didn't ask for this! This is not we signed up for" Some were **offended** it seems (v61). In fact, many stopped following him after this episode (v66) as they realised the true cost in their lives of what Jesus was calling them to.
- Finally, Jesus **challenges** the twelve. "So do you want to go as well?" "This is your chance." "Look, see how many others have turned and left for home". "Can you handle it?" "Is following me truly what you want?"
- And Peter answered, "**Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.**"

*(From Eye of the Storm by Max Lucado, Word Publishing, 1991 Page 35-36)*

The operating room of the Kane Summit Hospital. A doctor is performing an appendectomy. In many ways the events leading to the surgery are uneventful. The patient has complained of severe abdominal pain. The diagnosis is clear: an inflamed appendix. Dr. Evan O'Neill Kane is performing the surgery. In his distinguished thirty-seven-year medical career, he has performed nearly four thousand appendectomies, so this surgery will be uneventful in all ways except two. The first novelty of this operation? The use of local anesthesia in major surgery. Dr. Kane is a crusader against the hazards of general anesthesia. He contends that a local application is far safer. Many of his colleagues agree with him in principle, but in order for them to agree in practice, they will have to see the theory applied.

Dr. Kane searches for a volunteer, a patient who is willing to undergo surgery while under local anesthesia. A volunteer is not easily found. Many are squeamish at the thought of being awake during their own surgery. Others are fearful that the anesthesia might wear off too soon. Eventually, however, Dr. Kane finds a candidate. On Tuesday morning, February 15, the historic operation occurs.

The patient is prepped and wheeled into the operating room. A local anesthetic is applied. As he has done thousands of times, Dr. Kane dissects the superficial tissues and locates the appendix. He skillfully excises it and concludes the surgery. During the procedure, the patient complains of only minor discomfort. The volunteer is taken into post-op, then placed in a hospital ward. He recovers quickly and is dismissed two days later. Dr. Kane had proven his theory. Thanks to the willingness of a brave volunteer, Kane demonstrated that local anesthesia was a viable, and even preferable, alternative.

But I said there were two facts that made the surgery unique. I've told you the first: the use of local anesthesia. The second is the patient. The courageous candidate for surgery by Dr. Kane was Dr. Kane.

To prove his point, Dr. Kane operated on himself! A wise move. The doctor became a patient in order to convince the patients to trust the doctor

- What stood out about Jesus that drew Peter? What gave him the authority? Well Jesus lived a life based on eternity. He was like the volunteering Doctor in the story. Hebrews speaks of Jesus being the "author and perfecter" of our faith. NRSV says the *pioneer and perfecter of our faith*. Jesus lived the life **first** and was resurrected first. That's how we know he has the words of eternal life.
- No-one else but Jesus Christ has ever come with the clear offer of eternal life. Peter recognised this, and that's why he followed Jesus.
- Why do you follow Jesus? Is it because you want to become a better person? Or make some new friends? Or please a spouse? Or satisfy your intellectual curiosity. Perhaps you need to fit some religion in each week? All of these motivations are destined to fail. The only motivation that will survive all testing is what Peter had. "I follow Jesus, because no-one else has the words of eternal life!"
- Jesus wants disciples, and disciples want Jesus!

## 2. This is Your (Eternal) Life

(John 17:1-3 NIV) *After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. {2} For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. {3} Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.*

- Jesus prayed this prayer on the night he was betrayed. He prayed for his disciples and for those who will one day come to God through the preaching of the message - Jesus is praying for **us**.
- *The time has come* (v1). In a sense, eternity was starting here. Soon after these events, Jesus would be glorified as God raised him from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus that paved the way for eternal life.
- Eternal life is Jesus' to give (v2). How can Jesus have the **authority** to give eternal life? That is why the Resurrection is so important. It proved that Jesus has power over death. And if he can defeat death once, he can do it again when he raises each one of us on the last day.
- And what is eternal life? Knowing God **and** Jesus Christ. ***It's all about our relationship with God through Jesus.*** It's actually a strange thing that people want to go to heaven when they die, but don't want to have anything to do with God while they live! What do they imagine heaven to be like? What do they imagine God to be like? They certainly don't understand the idea of relationship.
- **Relationships grow.** (*Big-time personal illustration opportunity here!*)  
*Boy meets girl. They might start to see each other. They go out together, talk together. As the relationship progresses they share more and more of their lives together. They reveal more of their selves to each other. The friendship grows, their love grows. They make a decision to spend their lives together permanently. They get engaged, and then get married.*

Q: Do you see Christianity in terms of relationships or in terms of rules?

Q: Is your relationship with God growing?

- Eternal life is like an **eternal marriage**. The consummation of our relationship with God. This is what Jesus had in mind when he taught the parable of the Wedding Banquet (Mt 22).
- Also, consider this: (Rev 19:7-9) *Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. {8} Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) {9} Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God."*
- The Bible speaks of a great wedding in heaven. Jesus is the groom, and the church - the redeemed and faithful saints is the bride dressed in white. Our relationship with God now is like a 'dating' phase! Let's treat our relationship with God special! Our Quiet Times are like dates! That relationship will ultimately grow into the marriage of Christ and the church.

### 3. What must I do to inherit eternal life?

(Mat 19:16-29 NIV) Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" {17} "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments." {18} "Which ones?" the man inquired. Jesus replied, "'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, {19} honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'" {20} "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?" {21} Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." {22} When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. {23} Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. {24} Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." {25} When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?" {26} Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." {27} Peter answered him, "We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?" {28} Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. {29} And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.

- **It's not what you do, it's what you are...**
- Having the right concept. Many people think that being a Christian is about doing certain things. Going to church, reading the Bible, praying, being nice, and maybe giving some money. But they don't really expect that to be a Christian is to be fundamentally different, having a different allegiance.
- The Rich young ruler here was looking for some **pointers** about some extra deed he could do to "top up" his eternal life insurance policy. I don't get the impression he was looking for a rest-of-his-life radical change. Perhaps he would have financed a synagogue, started a charity, organised a celebrity function. "What good thing must I do" he said. I think he expected to get it out of the way fairly quickly.
- This man was only *young* (v22) yet was already a man of *great wealth*. Obviously, he was very talented and successful in his business. Or perhaps as a ruler he collected a lot of rent and tax. So when Jesus challenges the very **core** of his life - his finances, he finds himself **unprepared**. "I'm sorry Jesus, I am unable to respond in this way." "You can't ask me to give up my life like this. You want me to eat your flesh and drink your blood don't you?.. I can't do it." .. And he went away sad.
- Once again the disciples were dumb-founded (v25). "Jesus I can't believe you turned this guy down!" "He would have been great for the movement!" "He can get anything he wants any time he wants but he can't get eternal life???" "Well if he can't... who can?"
- Peter is **sobered**. "Jesus we've left everything for you" "Are we all right?" "Are we going to make it?" Jesus responds, "It's going to be *great* for you!" "You guys will



have the places of honour in heaven." "I totally respect the sacrifices you have made for my sake... some of you have left houses, some have left family, some have left their fields and their fishing boats to follow me." "You'll get it back I promise, and many times over." "That's what eternal life is like."

- Jesus has put the **offer** of eternal life on the table. He promises fantastic rewards for those who follow him. All he asks is that we recognise the **value** of his offer. We need to see eternal life as a priceless blessing. Nothing we have in this life can compare to it. The true **test** of whether or not someone really to inherit eternal life is what they are prepared to **give up** in order to get it; be it houses, family, fields or fishing boats. Remember the merchant looking for the fined pearl or the man who found treasure hidden in a field (Mt 13:44-45). They joyfully sold everything they had to buy the pearl and finance the field.

What must I do to inherit eternal life? We must place the same **value** on it that God does and treat the offer with the respect it deserves.

- Understanding value is important:

*A story is told of a man who loved old books. He met an acquaintance who had just thrown away a Bible that had been stored in the attic of his ancestral home for generations. "I couldn't read it," the friend explained. "Somebody named Guten-something had printed it." "Not Gutenberg!" the book lover exclaimed in horror. "That Bible was one of the first books ever printed. Why, a copy just sold for over two million dollars!" His friend was unimpressed. "Mine wouldn't have brought a dollar. Some fellow named Martin Luther had scribbled all over it in German.*

- Q: How **valuable** do you consider your salvation to be? A good test of this is how well you guard it! □ avoiding sin, openness, developing relationships, etc.
- Q: Do you see eternal life as something you deserve or as something you only need to make some small adjustment in your life in order to be able to get it? Or do you see yourself truly as being undeserving?
- Q: How grateful are you to be a Christian? Do you begrudge God because of things you have given up along the way?

## **Conclusion**

### **We've talked about:**

- The Words of Eternal Life - The call to commitment is high, but no-one else has words like them.
- This is Your (Eternal) Life! - Relationship with God. Are you heading towards a marriage or a messy break-up!
- What must I do to inherit eternal life? - See the value. Are you guarding it well?

## Lesson 5 - Glory, Glory, Hallelujah

### Introduction:

- What is heaven (and God) like? (kid's ideas....)
  - Dear GOD, In school they told us what You do. Who does it when You are on vacation? - Jane
  - Dear GOD, Are you really invisible or is that just a trick? Lucy
  - Dear GOD, Is it true my father won't get in Heaven if he uses his bowling words in the house? -Anita
  - Dear GOD, What does it mean You are a Jealous God? I thought You had everything. - Jane
  - Dear GOD, Did you really mean "do unto others as they do unto you"? Because if you did, then I'm going to fix my brother. -Darla
  - Dear GOD, Thank you for the baby brother, but what I prayed for was a puppy. -Joyce
  - Dear GOD, Please send me a pony. I never asked for anything before, You can look it up. - Bruce
  - Dear GOD, Maybe Cain and Abel would not kill each other so much if they had their own rooms. It works with my brother. -Larry
- Dear GOD, I think the stapler is one of your greatest inventions. -Ruth M.
- Dear GOD, I think about You sometimes even when I'm not praying. -Elliott
- Dear GOD, I bet it is very hard for You to love all of everybody in the whole world. There are only 4 people in our family and I can never do it. -Nan
- Dear GOD, I didn't think orange went with purple until I saw the sunset you made on Tuesday. That was cool! -DJ

□ Well whatever the kids think about God and heaven, we know that heaven is a place of great **glory**. We know that Jesus will come in glory. We know that God is enthroned in glory. We know that heaven is a place of praising God. For example: *After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a **great multitude in heaven shouting: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God. (Rev 19:1).*** The title of tonight's lesson is "Glory, Glory Hallelujah" - the title of one our most **stirring** hymns. As we complete our Eternity series, **prepare your hearts** to be stirred as we take a glimpse of what heaven will be like.

(Six points. Keep 'em short! Or choose 3 or 4.)

### Outline:

1. Painless
2. Perfect
3. Prepared
4. Pure
5. Permanent
6. Paradise Regained

## 1. Painless

*(Cannan's Land) ...Dear friends, there'll be no sad farewells, There'll be no tear-dimmed eyes, Where all is peace and joy and love, And the soul of man never dies.*

- Isaiah, looking forward to a better time for God's people wrote:  
*(Isa 65:17-25 NIV) "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. {18} But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. {19} I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more.*
- John sees a fulfillment of Isaiah's words in his vision of the new heaven and new earth...  
*(Rev 21:4 NIV) He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*
  - The song says, *There'll be no sad farewells, there'll be no tear-dimmed eyes.*
  - Eternity is a new order. The things we have come to expect about life on this planet will no longer apply. Today we are familiar with **suffering**. We see or experience tragedy every day. Our burgeoning health industry, crowded hospitals and over-worked doctors are all testimony to the fact that our bodies are ultimately **weak**. Some people live with **pain**, discouragement and frustration for much of their lives. No matter how charmed some of our lives seem to be, we will all one day face the **grief** of a loved-one dying.
  - Yet, in heaven, **none** of this applies. God gives us new, perfect and spiritual bodies (1 Cor 15:35ff). They don't wear out, grow old, or get sick. They don't feel tired, sprain ankles or lose mobility. There is no arthritis, no cancer, no heart disease. Heaven has no need for wheel chairs, crutches, prosthetics or false teeth. And of course, eternity means no death, no grief, and no sadness.
  - This of course is a great encouragement to those who are **suffering** in this life. With an **eternal perspective**, God's promise of perfect resurrection bodies is something to be eagerly looked forward to.
  - This leads us on to one of the ways we can think about heaven. The **awesome** things we have now in the kingdom (relationships, inspiration, love, joy, peace etc.) will be **even better**, and the **negative** things we have in this life (pain, death, sickness and so on) will be **absent**.

## 2. Prepared

*(John 14:1-2 NIV) "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. {2} In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to **prepare a place for you.***

- Jesus promises that he will prepare a place for us.
- Have you ever arrived at a hotel, and they can't find your reservation? It's very unsettling. Or imagine you go to visit a friend or relative and plan on spending a few nights with them. On your arrival they start looking around and say, "Where are we going to put you". "Maybe you can sleep here on the floor next to the dog". It wouldn't be very special! Conversely, we love it when we arrive at someone's house and they have cleaned a room, made the bed, placed some flowers, towels, chocolates etc. We feel much more welcomed, much more settled, and much more loved. Jesus is not going to have us turn up on judgement day and start scratching around for a bunk. "Maybe you could just share this room with a few thousand others for a couple of millenia while we build the extension!" No. There are many rooms, and Jesus has prepared for us a place. Because he loves.

*(Rev 19:6-9 NIV) Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. {7} Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! **For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.** {8} Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) {9} Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God."*

- The picture of heaven we talked about last week is the **wedding** of Jesus (the Lamb) and the church. One of the things that make weddings so special is the **preparation** that goes into them. Nothing is left to chance. (*Personal Illus/ Humour*) There are invitations sent out weeks in advance, special clothes worn once, flowers in the church, flowers on the pews, flowers for the bride and brides-maids, flowers for the men. A special meal is ready at the reception. Photographers are hired. Cars are organised. A special cake is made. Special gifts are bought. Speeches are written in advance. A huge amount of preparation, but that is what makes weddings **special**.
- In the text, the bride has made herself ready... And we know how long that can take! But the care and preparation is all about presenting herself the best for her husband to be. It's a result of her love.
- Now, we, as the church are the bride. Jesus prepares heaven for us, but we must also **prepare ourselves** for him. We need a purity of devotion to his kingdom, a growing righteousness, a faithfulness to God's word, but most of all, an eager anticipation of the great day.

### 3. Perfect

(Rev 21:10-27 NIV) *And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. {11} It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, **clear as crystal**. {12} It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. {13} There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. {14} The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. {15} The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. {16} The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. {17} He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man's measurement, which the angel was using. {18} The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. {19} The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, {20} the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. {21} The twelve gates were twelve **pearls**, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of **pure gold**, like transparent glass. {22} I did not see a **temple** in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. {23} The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. {24} The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. {25} On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. {26} The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. {27} Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.*

- This passage is full of amazing images and details. The key to understanding this kind of passage I believe is not trying to figure out what all the details mean, but rather view the scene portrayed here as a **picture**. **Stand back** a bit and take in the landscape, don't zoom up too close to look at the brush-strokes.
- **Perfection** stands out as a feature of the text.
  - V11 - a very precious jewel, clear as crystal. No flaws, no cracks, no impurities.
  - V12-17 - perfection in the **form and symmetry** of the holy city. We have a perfect cube shape (as wide and high as it is long). The number and arrangement of the gates are significant. Twelve is a number of completeness for the religious world: there were twelve tribes of Israel, twelve apostles. They're all there, no one is missing. (Imagine having only eleven gates!)
  - **Measured** with a rod of gold. 12,000 stadia<sup>1</sup> and 144 cubits<sup>2</sup> are both "perfect" measurements - multiples of 12 and 10. **Foundations** decorated with every kind of precious stone (v19). We tend to use reinforced concrete for our large constructions. This image is one of great creativity, planning and value.

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<sup>1</sup> (8 stadia = 1 mile, 12000 stadia = 1500 miles, 1 stadia = 10 cricket pitches (10 chains)).

<sup>2</sup> 1 cubit = ~18 inches or 450 mm.

- The "**pearly gates**". (By the way, there are twelve, not just one, and there is no mention of Peter here... maybe he is inside with his keys, or at one of the other gates!). Imagine a huge single pearl with a passageway cut through it. The pearl itself of course is totally symbolic of perfection, in shape, colour, and value.
- **Even the main Street is made of gold**, like transparent glass (v21). Compare the use of gold for the street with what would have been used at the time: dirt, or rocks. Gold is normally reserved for the most prestigious application, not for paving roads. Many people would have only seen gold when they visited the temple or walked past a ruler's palace. It would have been considered virtually unobtainable for the average person. (Today of course, we use the very dregs of the oil refining process for our roads, and we call it bitumen.) Gold has always been considered to be the most valuable precious metal. (You want the gold medal not the silver one). Also note that the **city** itself is made of gold too (v18).
- There is **no temple** (v22-23). Presence of a temple actually signifies a **separation** between man and God. Building a temple is the best mankind can do to try and reach his God, but it actually falls way short of union with God. Not so in heaven. There's no need of any temple any more because God and Jesus are there **in person!** And they are lighting up the city! A personal visit of a dignitary is always more exciting than seeing them on TV. We prefer a live concert to the CD. We enjoy the movies, but we love to see Tom Cruise walking down the street in the eastern suburbs of Sydney. Imagine how incredible it would be to have God and Jesus with us in person, constantly and forever.
- **Gates will never be shut** (v25). Gates in walled cities of ancient times would be closed at night for protection, to keep unwanted enemies out. During the day, the gates would be open to allow commerce and access to the city. But in this vision of the heavenly city, there is perfect **dominion**<sup>3</sup>. There are no enemies to worry about. They are all permanently destroyed.
  - **The last enemy to be destroyed is death.** (1 Cor 15:26)
  - We therefore have perfect security.

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<sup>3</sup> Compare with Israel's history. For much of it, they never totally defeated their enemies (particularly the Philistines), and were therefore always subject to raids etc. The best period was under David, *when God gave him victory over all his enemies* eg 2 Sam 7:9-11. Even then I don't suppose they would have advocated unwalling cities or opening gates at night.

#### 4. Pure

- **The materials are pure.** Jasper as clear as crystal (v11), Pure gold as pure as glass (v18). The specifications for the building of the tabernacle and the temple in the OT always called for "pure gold" (Ex 25, 28, 37, 1 Ki 6, 2 Chr 4) *Pure gold* is mentioned ~50 times in the Bible.
- **Pure gold is the result of a refining process.** It's harder to get it, but it is worth more. Many men have a 9-carat wedding ring - it has more alloyed metal in it - makes it tougher but it has less gold. Fine gold jewelry is 18-carat. *Pure gold* is stored in bank vaults.
- Not only that, but Heaven will **remain pure eternally.** *Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. (v27).*
- **Nothing impure will ever enter it.** That includes us. Obviously, the natural sinful state in which we live our lives would never make it through quarantine. We need to be purified first. And that can only come about by being washed in the blood of Jesus...

*(Isa 1:18 NIV) "Come now, let us reason together," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.*

*(Rev 7:14 NIV) I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

- Since the blood of Jesus is the only way in, the onus rests on us individually to make sure we **preserve our relationship** with Him. We must keep our hearts pure in this life to guarantee that we will want to keep serving God for a life-time.
  - *(There are many passages on personal purity. Pick one or two of these to meet any needs.)*
  - *(Psa 119:9 NIV) How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.*
  - *(Mat 5:8 NIV) Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*
  - *(Phil 2:14-15 NIV) Do everything without complaining or arguing, {15} so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe*
  - *(Phil 4:8 NIV) Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things.*
  - *(1 Tim 4:12 NIV) Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.*
  - *(1 Tim 5:1-2 NIV) Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, {2} older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.*
  - *(Heb 13:4 NIV) Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.*

## 5. Permanent

(Here a bunch of Scriptures. Just read them out for this point, emphasising words like **forever**.)

- (Isa 25:8 NIV) *he will swallow up death **forever**. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken.*
- (Isa 51:6 NIV) *Lift up your eyes to the heavens, look at the earth beneath; the heavens will vanish like smoke, the earth will wear out like a garment and its inhabitants die like flies. But my salvation will **last forever**, my righteousness will never fail.*
- (Dan 2:44 NIV) *"In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will **never be destroyed**, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself **endure forever**.*
- (Dan 7:18 NIV) *But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will **possess it forever--yes, for ever and ever.**'*
- (John 6:51 NIV) *I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will **live forever**. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."*
- (1 Th 4:17-18 NIV) *After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we **will be with the Lord forever**. {18} Therefore encourage each other with these words.*
  
- In our first class we talked about how little we expect things to remain forever. We use the word "forever" fairly lightly. (e.g. The lecture/movie/talk went on forever, "I'll love you forever", diamonds are forever) Even our strongest and most permanent institutions: marriage<sup>4</sup>, life itself, peace and safety etc. can all fail, and will ultimately fade away. But when God talks of his kingdom **enduring forever, remaining forever, not wearing out**, he means **FOREVER!**
- Heaven is **PERMANENT**.

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<sup>4</sup> Marriage of course is a relationship not an institution, but I couldn't think of a word that covered them both!



## 6. Paradise (Regained)

- We are familiar with the story of creation in the book of *Genesis*. God created a perfect world and put Adam and Eve in Paradise. They had a perfect relationship with each other and with God. They had access to eternal life (the tree of life *Gen* 2:9, 3:24). But sin entered the world and paradise was lost in *Gen* 3.
- The rest of the Bible is God helping mankind to find his way back into Paradise again.
- Now at the end of the NT, we read:

*(Rev 22:1-5 NIV) Then the angel showed me the river of the **water of life**, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb {2} down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the **tree of life**, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. {3} **No longer will there be any curse**. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. {4} They will **see his face**, and his name will be on their foreheads. {5} There will be **no more night**. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.*

- There it is, the **tree of life** again! When Adam and Eve sinned by disobeying God and eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge, they were expelled from the garden before they ate the fruit of the tree of life (there were two trees). That would have given them eternal life. Imagine if mankind in all its sinfulness lived forever. Hitler would still be alive! God had no choice, but to make us mortal. But in his grace, he has provided a way for us to gain eternal life again.
- The **water of life** is there too: maybe like the rivers in Eden<sup>5</sup>. Certainly Jesus talked of "living water" (*Jn* 4). *To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life* (*Rev* 21:6).
- Eden was a **fruitful** place, but probably not every month! Normally we are fired up to get one crop a year out of our earthly fruit trees. This tree is exceptional.
- **No curse**. (v3). The **curse is reversed**. The fall in *Gen* 3 with its subsequent curses are all forgotten now.
- We will see God's face (v4). OT characters did not expect to see God's face and live (*Jacob Gen* 32:30, *Moses Ex* 3:6, *Ex* 33:18-23). Adam hid from God. When God hides his face from man it is never good (*Deut* 31:17, *2 Ch* 30:9, *Ps* 10:11, *Ps* 27:9). Our sin of course hides God's face from us (*Isa* 59:2). But we will be able to see God's face. And I bet he's smiling!
- No more night. No more sun. God created all of these in *Gen* 1. They will be gone. No more concept of time passing perhaps? God said, "Let there be light". Now he is the light. No more suns or moons required.

□ Paradise regained. We have come full circle. From Paradise in the Garden of Eden to Paradise in Heaven. Jesus says: *I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.* (*Rev* 22:13)

□ **Closing out** our Eternity Series, this passage from Peter sums it all up pretty well:

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<sup>5</sup> Also, possible references to *Zec* 14:8, *Ezek* 47.

(2 Pet 3:3-17 NIV) *First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. {4} They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." {5} But they deliberately forget that **long ago** by God's word **the heavens existed and the earth was formed** out of water and by water. {6} By these waters also the world of that time was **deluged and destroyed**. {7} By the same word the **present heavens and earth are reserved for fire**, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. {8} But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord **a day is like a thousand years**, and a thousand years are like a day. {9} The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is **patient** with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to **repentance**. {10} But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. **The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed** by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. {11} Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? **You ought to live holy and godly lives** {12} as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. {13} But in keeping with his promise we are **looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth**, the home of righteousness. {14} So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, **make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him**.*

### **Conclusion: Heaven is:**

1. **Painless** - *No more crying there, we're going to see the king.*
2. **Perfect** - *The hill of Zion yields a thousand sacred sweets, Before we reach the heavenly fields, before we reach the heavenly fields, or walk the **golden streets**, or walk the golden streets.*
3. **Prepared** - *I know that over yonder stands, a **place prepared** (a place prepared) for me. A home (a home) a house not made with hands, most wonderful to see.*
4. **Pure** - *He wills that **I should Holy be**, In word and thought in deed; Then I his holy face may see, When from this earth-life freed.*
5. **Permanent** - *When We've been there **ten thousand years**, bright shining as the sun, There's no less days to sing God's praise than when we first begun.*
6. **Paradise** - *Lo! What a glorious sight appears To our believing eyes!  
The earth and sea are passed away, The earth and sea are passed away  
And the old rolling skies, And the old rolling skies.*

*From the third heav'n where God resides, That holy, happy place,  
The New Jerusalem comes down, The New Jerusalem comes down,  
Adorned with shining grace, Adorned with shining grace.*

*How long, dear Saviour, O how long shall this bright hour delay?  
Fly swifter round ye wheels of time, Fly swifter round ye wheels of time,  
And bring the welcome day, And bring the welcome day.*