

The Nature of God



From Time to Eternity (Part 1)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again at the beginning of a new week, sharing with you Keys to Successful Living which God has placed in my hand through many years of personal experience and Christian ministry.

The title for my talks this week is: "From Time to Eternity." If you can receive its message, it'll help you to extract joy out of tragedy and purpose out of that which seems purposeless.

First, I need to say something about the word: Eternity. To most people this word is somewhat unwelcome, perhaps even frightening. It represents something they don't really understand and they would rather not have to think about.

This is rather vividly illustrated by an event that happened a good many years ago in the country of Scotland. In that country there was a long bridge over a certain river. A group of Christians in the city there wanted to speak to their fellow citizens about the reality of the things eternal. So they devised a sign and had it erected at one end of the bridge so that people driving across the bridge would see this sign as they were driving all the way across. The sign was amazingly simple. It just had the one word on it, "Eternity." So everybody driving across that bridge, all the way across, was confronted by this one word, "Eternity." Well the impact of that word was such that a group of local citizens got together and had the authorities remove this sign from the bridge. So that's a little indication of the impact of this one concept of eternity.

I can remember as a young boy growing up in England, on Sundays I would hear the church bells. I was less than nine years old at the time, and I can always remember a kind of mournful feeling that came over me. It was like there was something there, but I don't know what it is and I'd rather not get involved with it.

I think that's true of the attitude of many people. They don't want to be reminded about eternity. But the fact is, eternity is an ultimate reality. In fact, eternity is before time was.

Let me speak a little bit about the meaning of the word eternity. By definition, eternity denotes that which is out of time, or above time, or beyond time, something which has no beginning and no end. It is not merely an endless period of time, it is a different mode of being, one in which the

categories we use to describe time no longer apply.

One fact that makes eternity of tremendous importance in the life of each one of us is that eternity is an essential part of the nature of God. God is an eternal being. He does not indwell time, He indwells eternity, and out of eternity He operates in time. When we come face to face with God, we are also confronted by eternity.

There's a verse in the Psalms which very vividly brings out the difference between time and eternity. It's Psalm 90:2:

> "Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God."

Now there we have the two different modes of being. We have the mode of time, the mode of eternity. Time is indicated by the opening statement, "Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world..." "The mountains were born", that was an event in time. "The world was brought forth", that was an event in time. The simple past tense was used to describe them. But when we come to God it's different. Then the psalmist says, "...from everlasting to everlasting, you are God." Not, "...you were God" but "...you are God." He is eternal. He doesn't have a beginning; He doesn't have an ending. He is before time was, and He still is after time has ceased to be. So in the person and the nature of God we come face to face with eternity.

This eternal nature of God is revealed in His personal name which He revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:13-14. You remember that the Lord appeared to Moses in a burning bush, and He commissioned him to return from Midian, to go back to Egypt and be the deliverer of the people of Israel. Moses had a problem when he was given this message. This was his problem:

> "Moses said to God, 'Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you.' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' then what shall I tell them?' [See, that's the question, 'What is his name?' Now God gave Moses a specific answer.] God said to Moses, 'I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

So, God gave Himself that name, the name "I AM." Now this has come down through the Bible in various forms, which I will comment on briefly. In the Hebrew Bible it's four consonants and then there are vowels under the consonants. But because the Jewish people do not wish to pronounce that sacred name or even have it totally written, the vowels are taken from another word, Adonai. However, if you put it all together you get basically the form "Jehovah" and that, of course, has come down through the English language, though it's not really a very accurate representation.

Modern scholars believe that the name was something like "Yahweh" which is the third person of a tense of the verb "to be." It means "the one who is," but it also means "the one who will be." That's the strange thing about Hebrew, the same tense means "he is" and "he will be." Some people have translated it "the eternal." In the French Bible the name of the Lord "the eternal", the one who is beyond time, above time, before time.

This is confirmed also in the Revelation of the New Testament in Revelation 1:8, the Lord speaks and He says,

> "'I am the Alpha and the Omega,' says the Lord God, 'who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.'"

So in God past, present and future all meet in a timeless existence. And He is the Almighty. Bear that in mind, it is very important. The one who is greater than time is Almighty. The one who masters time is the Almighty. Confronted with time and eternity man finds himself in a perpetual dilemma. He desires to escape from time, yet he fears eternity. Escape from the pressure of time has long been the theme of poets, philosophers and others. There's a brief verse from an Elizabethan poet, Andrew Marvel, which just sums this up. He says this:

> "Ever at my back I hear time's winged chariot hurrying near..."

There's that sense of always under the pressure of time. Time is passing, life is moving on, I only have a few short years left. So he sums it up in that rather vivid expression, "Ever at my back I hear, Time's winged chariot hurrying near." I think that's true in the lives of all of us. Sometime or other we realize we are being chased by the chariot of time and it's gaining on us and we've got just a little further to go before we are overtaken by time.

Man desires to escape from time but he doesn't know how. But Jesus has shown us the true way of escape and he states it here in John 17:3:

> "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."

This is eternal life. This is a life that is not circumscribed by the limitations of time. This is a life that lifts you out of time. What's the key to that life? It's knowing God. Because when we know God we know eternity, we are in direct contact with eternity. But the only way we can know God so as to receive this eternal life, is to know Him revealed in Jesus Christ as Father. It's possible to know God in various other aspects without entering into eternal life. It's possible to know God as creator, as judge, as king of the universe. All these are truths about the nature of God, but they do not bring us out of time into eternity. But to know God revealed in Jesus Christ is to step out of the limits of time and into the endlessness of eternity, eternal life. And I heard someone say once, or I believe I read a translation which was a little free but I think it was vivid, "This is what eternal life is for, to know you, the only true God."

The ultimate purpose of man, the ultimate achievement is to know God. And God is so wonderful, so immense, so limitless in His total being and nature that time is not sufficient in which to come to know God. It's going to take all of eternity to plumb the depths of the being of God. So here is the way of escape, a way that does not bring us fear, but brings us peace and rest, it's to know God as Father, revealed through Jesus Christ, His Son. Here is the way to step out of time and into eternity. No longer need you fear that "winged chariot" at your back because you have a way of escape through Jesus Christ into the being of God the Father, out of time, into eternity.

Our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this same time. Tomorrow I'll be focusing on the creation of man. We'll see how God actually breathed Himself into man.

Radio Program

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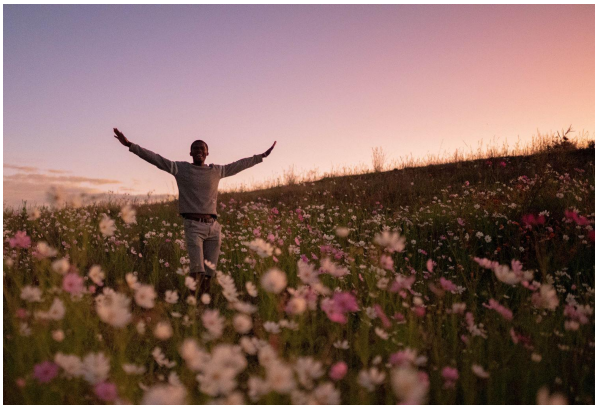

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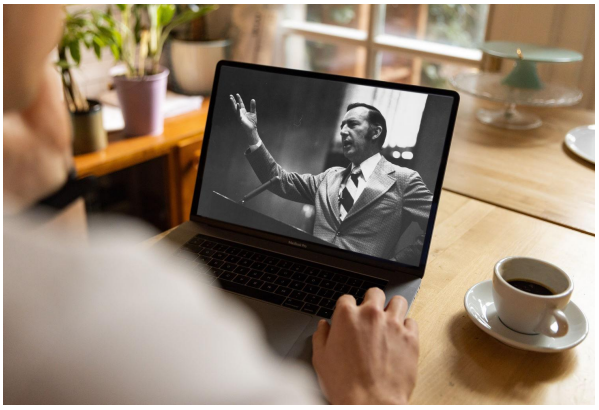

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