
ETERNITY IN OUR HEARTS

OPC Women's Retreat ~ March 6, 2021

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Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-11

A. Eternity in Our Hearts

1. I've been focusing on this passage for about nine months now. And even though it's profoundly challenging...and humbling, it's been a key comfort for me as well.
2. **You will have noticed that this is a passage about time.**
 - a. There are 30 references to "time."
 - b. It assures us that there is "for everything a season" and that God has "made everything beautiful in its time."
 - c. We're told that all things, at all times...are just right. Which, in and of itself, is very helpful since we live bound by time.
 - d. The last year in particular taught us just how bound by time we are, simply by our countless questions of When? when will things close down, when will things open up, when will my kids go back to school, when will I go back to work, when will I see my family and friends, when will things be normal? when?
 - e. Being reminded by this passage that regardless of when "when" happens... "when" has been made beautiful in its time. God is already in the "whens" of our life (v. 15)
 - f. And yet, this past year so many of us have been super restless about the way time has passed. Physically restless, yes, but more than that...spiritually restless.
 - g. So with that we're going to turn to Verse 11 of this passage as one of our main focuses this morning.
3. The writer of Ecclesiastes, or The Preacher as he's often called, who's just told us that God has made everything beautiful in its time, then says, "**ALSO (also), God has put ETERNITY in to man's heart.**"
 - a. We all possess eternity in our hearts.
 - b. This explains so much.
 - c. It untangles mysteries.
4. **What is it then? What is eternity in our hearts?** Here are a few of ways it's been defined:
 - a. It's a peripheral awareness of the infinite
 - b. A hint of a vanishing point in the distance
 - c. It's a pull towards last things

- d. An innate knowledge that there's something more than what we can see
 - e. It's a low grade angst tugging at our senses, but can't resolve.
 - f. **In other words, it's a dilemma. It's a dilemma because it's a longing...for something more. Something we can't quite know.**
5. You see, **the second half of verse 11 flat out tells us that we can't know it.**
- a. The Preacher follows up telling us that God has put eternity in our hearts, with this: "YET, (yet) so that [we] cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.
 - b. You can't find it out.
 - c. God, who is not only the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end; but also the **author** of the beginning to the end has made it so that we don't get to see the **entire** story.
At least not yet.
 - d. **Interesting right? Both the pull to understand time, AS WELL AS the limits** on our ability to do so, have been ordained by God.
 - e. We can detect eternity and want it, but we can't quite apprehend it.
6. **I think it's fascinating that God designed it for us to have this dilemma.**
- a. **A dilemma that creates significant tension for us.**
 - b. Tozer puts it this way, "*God made man in His own image and he deposits the longing after eternity...there within the hearts of men. What, then, is the matter...? Like the lion in the cage [we] pace back and forth and roar to the heavens...I think this is the truth: we are disturbed BECAUSE God has put everlastingness in our hearts. He has put a longing for immortality in our beings, something that demands God and heaven.*" (Renewed Day by Day, Volume 2)
 - c. When Tozer says that this longing demands God and heaven, I think we can agree he means that the things of here and now, are never going to REALLY satisfy. I mean, we know that practically, right?
 - d. **We sense our dissatisfaction.** Eccl 3:11 names it. This thing we wake up, that deep longing...for something else. The ache we can almost feel. The blahs and the blues that nip at our heels are all wrapped up in this dilemma.
 - e. Herman Bavinck writes, "*This desiderium aeternitatis, this yearning for an eternal order, which God has planted in the heart of man, in the inmost recesses of his being, in the core of his personality, is the cause of the indisputable fact that everything which belongs to the temporal order cannot satisfy man. He is a sensuous, earthly, limited mortal being, and yet he is attracted to the eternal and is destined for it.*" (The Wonderful Works of God, Pg. 3)

7. **When seen in this light...that this dilemma is the result of God's fingerprint on our hearts whispering, "Do you feel that? You want something more because you were designed for something more. For another time and another place."**
- a. Then the dilemma becomes something marvelous.
 - b. It becomes a **testimony**. The testimony that God's handprint ON you, which is heightened I might add by Christ IN you – is a testimony to the fact that His handprint makes you **homesick**.
 - c. This is not your home; this is not as it was meant to be.
 - d. My Brazilian friends have a magnificent word that I think is a perfect description for this experience. Sadly, it's also a word that is without direct translation. But I want to try and explain it anyway
 - e. **The word is "SAUDADE" and it's something you HAVE.** The way it's used, can be very roughly translated as: "I am with a very deep sense of missing."
 - f. This word...that captures and overflows with meaning:
 - **Saudade means** "a vague and constant desire for something that does not exist [in the present]." Whether that's a person or an experience.
 - It's NOT an active discontent or sadness **but a pleasant dreaming and nostalgia.**
 - It refers to a...yearning that evokes a sense of incompleteness...
 - g. **Because of eternity in my heart, I am with this deep yearning, this sense of incompleteness.**
 - h. **But so are you. You are with this missing.**
 - i. YOU are longing for something... infinite. In your heart you know the continual desire for something "that demands God and Heaven."
8. **That is what it means to have eternity in your heart, and yet in such a way that you can't know it entirely. Not yet.**
- a. Being united with Christ, seated in heavenly realms, blessed with every spiritual blessing, **and yet earth and time bound**, is an example.
 - b. **We toil among thorns, but our hearts know** there is a kingdom in our midst...one that is not yet all that it WILL be. But we know enough that the land needs the King to return.
 - c. **Ultimately, that's what our hearts are longing for. We want our King.**
 - d. **It's also why we can both long AND rejoice.** Because we **will** one day behold our King. That's pivotal to our rejoicing now. In Peter's first letter he

says: “Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not **now** see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory...” (1 Peter 1:8)

- e. **We long, but we also rejoice, because the longing – which is eternity in our hearts – reminds us that ALL JOY is wrapped up in beholding our King.** (In the presence of the Lord is the fullness of joy... - Psalm 16:11)

Rejoicing & Longing

1. **As eternity lives in our hearts, bringing both rejoicing and longing, it's helpful to remember two things as we hold this tension in balance: Where are we? and Who are we?**

2. **Where are we?**

- a. We're sojourning on the fallen side of eternity. And while we do we're confronted everyday with visible reminders of invisible realities yet to come. Reminders and realities that are often in contradiction to each other!
- b. When we see sorrow **now** we're reminded that one day there will be no more tears. When we see strife, we're reminded that one day there will be perfect peace. When we see sickness, we know one day there will be no more death.
- c. We're someplace where disappointments, bumpy rides, unpleasant plot twists, and even tragedies sometimes come to us.
- d. We are, as best as I can discern, in the land of Nod, East of Eden.
- e. We're displaced citizens of another country, continually aware that something's off. That this is not how it's meant to be.

3. **Who are we?**

- a. **Image bearers**, holy ones, set apart alive in Christ ones who bristle against the hard **reminders of realities yet to come**.
- b. Reminders that are at odds with eternity in our hearts.
- c. After all, **our hearts have a hint of a different story**. Our hearts look to the horizon and know that beyond the vanishing point is...something else.
- d. Whether we call it “home,” the New Jerusalem, the City of God, Zion of Christ...
 - i. It's our eternal home that our hearts see.
 - ii. It's eternity there that we long for
 - iii. We want now what we will have **then** because eternity in our hearts pulls us toward the last things of Revelation 21 and 22.
- e. **We are saints who have been gifted with the knowledge of a time** when disappointments, bumpy rides, and tragic plot twists will be no more.

- f. And even though we know this, sometimes we forget and start to think that the things of “now” **will** satisfy and delight.
4. **Thank God that by his loving grace there is much that we can delight in now:** family, friends, work, ministry, gifts and talents, health and strength.
- a. It’s just that for each of those delights, **at times there can also be pain or sadness.**
 - b. But what we’re seeing is that the grievous within the good, is **intentionally** disorienting. We’re people implanted with glory, but embedded in the ordinary.
 - c. Which creates a life made up of **opposite experiences, somehow held in balance.**
 - d. Ecclesiastes just listed these contrasts: love/hate, tearing/mending, scattering/gathering, weeping/laughter.
 - e. That’s because **each season of life is meant to be considered as part** of the whole: the finite and the infinite.
 - f. It doesn’t mean the painful side of our experiences now isn’t hard, desperate, even traumatic, it just means...**there’s something more we’re meant to balance it against.**
 - g. When the providences of God are dark and obscure, what is its balance? Ah, yes, time is moving towards eternity. **This is not the whole story.**
 - h. Matthew Henry writes, *“Everything [by God] is done well, as in creation, so in providence, we shall see it when the end comes, but till then we are incompetent judges of it...we see but the middle of God’s works, not from the beginning of them, nor to the end of them...[and it is the end that will crown] the action.”* Matthew Henry Commentary on Ecclesiastes 3:11-15)

B. I suppose you’re seeing why the Lord brought this topic to mind for today?

1. Because whether we’ve thought about it or not, **we’ve all felt eternity in our hearts acutely this past year.**
 - a. **Just think about how hard it’s been to be separated.**
 - b. Isolation is counter to our Christian nature. We are people who have been called **to gather; to go; and to be as one.**
 - c. Frustrations at being apart, and the accompanying lack of knowing others and being known by them has certainly made it difficult to see things as made beautiful in its time.

- d. We've yearned for the heavenly experience Paul talks about in *1 Corinthians 13:12*: "For now we see in a mirror dimly, **but then** face to face. Now I know in part; **then** I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known."
 - e. Haven't we deeply desired this kingdom reality **on earth**, as it is in heaven?
 - f. We miss each other because we are meant for each other. We're meant to be together. It is unnatural for a body to be separated.
 - g. *Romans 12* explains "...so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another."
2. **And yet, last year a time was determined for us to be apart.** Some of us remain apart due to vulnerability and caution.
- a. Don't misunderstand though, the *separation* isn't my point. **My point is that the extended loneliness, disappointment, and even the anger we experienced were more than just discomfort.**
 - b. **They were signals.** Signals sent forth from that place in our hearts where eternity charts the course. Whispering, "You feel that, right? The fears and anxieties, the irritation over the disruptions. The sadness over lost time...You feel how these have created longings just out of your reach."
 - c. **Well, we see now that that's by design. It's our desire for eternity.**
 - d. And because we're so eager for what lies ahead, we're prone to getting a little *ahead of ourselves* during times like this and start to grow impatient.
 - e. Though we're made for eternity, we're not home yet. Still homesick.
 - f. As we remember this, then we can say with the apostle Paul, "...we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal." (2 Cor 4:17-18)
3. **Pains like the ones we've experienced during this season are signals, and they are our cue to look up, meet God's gaze, and see Him looking back at us with love and care, hearing Him say, "Be of good courage, I've made all things beautiful in its time."**
- a. **If we will fix our eyes in eternity, and in that moment refuse to look away from the Father's face;** His grace will transform our fussing, in to faith, and rest.
 - b. On the other hand, fretting that looks down, or in, leads to spiritual impairment, discouragement, and depression.
 - c. **So look up.** Hold steady and don't look away.
 - d. Because **what you're looking for is the kingdom of heaven**, and most importantly, **you're looking for your King.**
 - e. The Lord Himself deposited that longing in your heart, you're on the right track. Like the bride-to-be in the Song of Solomon who dreams of her beloved...saying,

“On my bed by night I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him, but found him not. I will rise now and go about the city, in the streets and in the squares; I will seek him whom my soul loves.” (Song of Solomon 3:1-2b)

4. The way to see Christ by sight in heaven, is to first behold Him by faith today, here on earth.

- a. So the next time you sense that pull towards something more, towards last things, you'll be able to name it.
- b. It's eternity in your heart looking for home.
- c. As you look to Christ now, the desires of your heart are established. And one day He will **fulfill** those desires.
- d. Psalm 37 tells us, *“Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.”*
- e. **So rejoice in the knowledge that the one who knows you fully** is also the One living and breathing in and through you. Moving you, day by day, towards the satisfaction and fulfillment of every longing you've ever had.
- f. **Here and now is not for nothing.** It allows your heart to tell you a story. The story of one chosen to look beyond, of one who endeavors to discern beyond the vanishing point. The story of an heir according to the promise and the hope of eternal life (Gal 3:29; Tit 3:7).

5. This is YOUR story.

- a. Here is the crux of it: It's **the story of one learning to understand and rejoice** in her ability to hold the tension of glorious **eternity** next to present frustration and know that it's a story where, ultimately, everything sad becomes untrue.
- b. It is **the story of your union** with “the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” (Rev 22:13)
- c. Eternity in your heart **will** be fulfilled because the *something more* it has always wanted is **Someone** more.
- d. The time will come when at long last you'll behold Him whom your soul loves.
- e. You see, **as stunning as heaven will be**, what will be so extraordinary and miraculous is that you will see Your Savior's face. And you will know Jesus as He has known you.
- f. Sojourning saints, **let the rumblings and yearnings of eternity in your heart cause you to rejoice exceedingly.**
 - i. It's how you testify to the One your soul loves.
 - ii. It's what reorients you in the hard times and distinguishes you from those who know no better.
 - iii. It's you believing that the work He **began** in you is continuing...

- iv. and will be completed on the day eternity with Him begins.
- g. **Longing AND rejoicing. We're called to both.**
- h. **And we're called to remind each other of both. It's part of what we've been missing while we've been apart.**
- i. What better way to love each other well from afar? Than to link arms in the Spirit, let eternity in our hearts testify to our calling, and move toward our collective dream of HOME...
- j. Where we will behold our King and be homesick no more.

Let's pray...