

Our Hope of Eternal Life Titus 1:1-4

Do you remember the Millennial Celebration's of New Years Eve 1999? Where were you? Keri-Jae and I stayed in that night choosing not to go into the Octagon in Dunedin for the big party because we had a brand new 2 month old bundle in our hands called Naomi and it was raining. So we watched the celebrations around New Zealand and the world on TV. At midnight as the cameras went around the nation and then the world it was one celebration in particular that stood out for me and that was Sydney's with their firework celebration at the harbour bridge. At the climax of the fireworks emblazoned on the middle of the Sydney Harbour Bridge were the letters one hundred metres tall E T E R N I T Y. And I was left wondering why did they choose of all words, that word? What is the meaning behind this?

And after some investigation it turns out that this was one man's heartfelt response to His Saviour Jesus and their mission together in the world. It turns out that this word ETERNITY in this font had been scrawled half a million times on the streets of Sydney over a 35 year period as a one word sermon or message. Sydney residents would awake each morning puzzled to find the word in gold chalk on Sydney streets. The writer remained a mystery for some years. It turned out to be an introverted nomadic nightly wanderer called Arthur Stace. It took the press 30 years to track him down. And when they did they learnt his story. It turns out that Arthur Stace had an impoverished start to life and soon became a ward of the State. Growing up he was known as a thief. He served in World War I and on return from the Great War sunk to the depths to live his life as a drunken alcoholic. A spiritual awakening began for Stace in 1930, but it took a Baptist evangelist who was a fellow war veteran, the Rev John Ridley, to fully arouse Arthur Stace whilst preaching a sermon in Kings Cross in 1932.

"ETERNITY? What a remarkable, uplifting, glorious word?" Ridley cried to the congregation, "because there is only one ETERNITY." And it was these very words that night that grabbed hold and held on to Arthur Stace's heart never to let him go. 'ETERNITY, ETERNITY."Oh, that I could shout and sound ETERNITY all over the streets of Sydney. You have to meet ETERNITY. Where will you spend ETERNITY?"

And what happened next as Stace tells it, he walked out of the church with the words ringing in his head.

He was so overcome by their impact on him that he just had to write the word. "I had a piece of chalk in my pocket and I bent down right there and wrote it." The thing to note here is that Arthur Stace could barely write his own name properly but when he attempted to give expression from the desire within, he himself was amazed at just what came from that piece of chalk in his hand. It was as if a professionally trained calligrapher wrote out for the first time the word that changed his life. It is no wonder that when the press found out whom he was that he was dubbed Mr. Eternity. And of course the question that arises in the minds of so many is, why did he cling to this one word sermon for 35 years?

The answer I have read is this:

Because on November 14, 1932, that same wonderful word clung to him and would not let him go. It kept on thrilling his rescued and redeemed life day and night. Asked if he ever thought of changing his one-word sermon Stace replied, "No. It's always been the same. I think ETERNITY gets across the message—it helps people stop and think."

One journalist was caused to stop and think it through who then went on to write, "Stace's goal was to help us consider our mortality."

So, when you stop to consider ETERNITY it brings you to the immense issues of life here and now, and at the same time, the life to come.

Arthur Stace died in 1967 and the word ETERNITY appeared at the foot of his grave just as he wrote it. His headstone names him as Mr. Eternity. Newspaper's reported that he was the first and greatest graffiti-ist—no other artist did it with one word half-a-million times.

When fireworks spelled out the word across the Sydney Harbour Bridge at the dawn of the new millennium, Arthur Stace now departed for 33 years reached more people all around the world in that moment with his message, than he ever could have imagined. It was as if Arthur Stace was saying one last time as he was often heard in his later years of life...

"The great question is not what you make of ETERNITY, but what ETERNITY will make of you!"

And that is our hope today, what eternity will make of us because a Christian has the hope of eternal life, a promise made by the Eternal God, God the Father of his Son and our Saviour Jesus Christ. And the apostle Paul in his letter to Titus highlights the promise of such hope in our reading today.

To begin with, hope, along with faith and love, is one of the three great Christian virtues. Hope is not wishful thinking, neither is it something that the believer bases on unfounded optimism. Instead, it is a joyful confident expectation of eternal salvation, an assurance of our future destiny. And that future destiny, ETERNITY, ETERNITY, is our assurance of life forever!

It was such a hope that helped motivate Fanny J. Crosby to write her hymn 'Blessed Assurance'. "Blessed Assurance Jesus is mine, Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine! Watching and waiting, looking above, filled with his goodness, lost in his love. Hope is that blessed assurance and confident expectation of our eternal destiny founded and based on, or should I say 'in', God's love, a loving truth that brings us 'eternal life'. It says in...

[NIV] John 3:15-16 That everyone who believes may have eternal life in him. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Eternal life is life a believer lives both now and forever more in a living daily fellowship with God. That's today, tomorrow, next week, next month, next year, right up to the day you die and then 'next' forever after that- that is the forever quality of eternal life – that is why eternity is life forever!

To try and begin to understand the concept of eternity and how long it goes on for, imagine if you will taking a life sized map of the world or actually being at the equator itself and taking a pin and making a small pin prick on the line of the equator. And what this pin prick represents on the line of the equator around the world is your total life span, the amount of time you will spend living your life on this planet in relation to eternity which is represented by the line of the Equator circling the world.

Eternity is life forever. So I have to ask this morning, "have you got it?" Do you personally have within your own heart the hope of eternal life?

v.1 When we read and listen to God's servant, Jesus' apostle Paul it becomes apparent that if we have not responded to God's call through the Gospel then our faith cannot be furthered because we do not have the hope of eternal life in our heart. Therefore, only as the elect, those who have responded in faith to the good news of Jesus Christ can we grow deeper in the knowledge of the truth of the things of God that leads to us walking daily in all godliness because we believe and we know it because we have been born again by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, God's deposit and presence of eternity in our hearts.

v.2 And God our Father, the holy father of the Son Jesus Christ our Saviour, does not lie. It is humans who lie.

Have you ever been called a Cretan? My sister used to call me that when I was a boy. Do you know where this phrase came from? I'm pretty sure my sister didn't, it was just a phrase in common in my childhood years. Since reading the bible, the book of Titus I've found out the source of her word in **Titus 1:12** One of Crete's own prophets has said it:

'Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.'

When Paul wrote this letter to Titus in Greek literature at this time 'to Cretanize' meant to lie. So Paul's making a point here, in contrast to God, it is humans who lie, which should get us thinking about who or what is behind this sin? Where did lying come from. Lies have their source in the first sin in the Garden of Eden and the one who spun the lie to Adam and Eve. That would be the serpent, Satan, the Devil, for he is the Father of Lies as spoken by Jesus' own words in **John 8:44**

You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Truth is foreign to Satan and those who belong to him, whereas, God has promised us in Jesus Christ his son, our Saviour, the hope of eternal life which is not a lie but the truth. And as truth it is a:

Hope in v.2 *promised before the beginning of time* when there existed only God. If we turn to the Old Testament we find reference to the this eternal foundation and nature of God in *Psalms 93:1-2 Your throne was established long ago; you are from all eternity*", and also we cannot miss out *Genesis 1:1* which says *In the beginning God.... there was only God the self-existent one who created the heavens and the earth*. Establishing and keeping the world firm and secure throughout the ages says Psalm 93:1. Such a reign says the Psalmist is from eternity and with it such is the eternal hope for God's kingdom to come on earth. And God's Statutes, [Psalm 93:5] his life directives for his people stand firm because they are stable and reliable; and holiness adorns your house for endless days on earth as it is in heaven. Paul proclaims this truth to further the faith and knowledge of believers to confirm the promise of God's eternal hope.

The Hope of Eternal Life is also a hope which I believe springs eternal from the moment of conception In the womb **Psalm 139**

13 For you created my inmost being;

you knit me together in my mother's womb.

14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;

your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

15 My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

16 Your eyes saw my unformed body;

all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

17 How precious to me are your thoughts, God How vast is the sum of them!

And while all this creating, making, knitting together was going on in the womb God has set in the heart of every single human being, male and female, from each and every different race, tribe, nation and people group that has ever been and ever will exist...

Ecclesiastes 3¹¹ *He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.*

In the heart of all! Yet not all will accept, believe and receive the truth of eternity. Not every people group has the truth yet which is why we like Paul have the Great Commission to Go and make disciples, of all nations, all people groups and give them the teaching of the good news of the Gospel in their own language to begin with. The church has that challenge laid out until the day Jesus returns- to go out and share our hope of eternal life with one and all, to connect the truth we have in our hearts with the seed of eternity that God has set in theirs.

To wrap up this morning, whatever any person may believe or claim, our hope is not confined to this world, to this one life that we each have to live. The full and perfect realisation of our hope in eternal life will come for us in the return of the Prince of Life or the end of our own life on earth. Arthur Stace, Mr. ETERNITY did not see the return of the Lord in his life time but he did go to meet and be with him in eternity according to his hope in God's promise.

We began this morning with the story of Arthur Stace and the cry of his heart upon receiving God's salvation through Jesus Christ, which was his one word message of ETERNITY! I will finish now leaving you with the thought of another, C.S. Lewis, who said with regards to our hope of eternal life, "Once a man is united to God how could he not live forever?"