

God Is: Meditations on the Attributes of God

God is ... Eternal (Psalm 90:1-17)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn to HCC on December 3, 2023

Introduction

- ❖ If you've been here long enough, you know you're eventually bound to hear, from this pulpit, another *Lord of the Rings* reference or illustration from Tolkien's legendarium. Well, today's your lucky day! I want to describe for you one of my favorite scenes from *The Hobbit*.
 - It's when Bilbo Baggins is deep in the caverns of the Misty Mountains and engaged in a game of riddles with the creature named Gollum. Bilbo is playing this game with his life at stake. And for a while neither one is able to best the other. They keep going back and forth answering each other's riddles.
 - At one point, Gollum tells this riddle. He says, "***This thing all things devours: Birds, beasts, trees, flowers; Gnaws iron, bites steel; Grinds hard stones to meal; Slays king, ruins town, And beats high mountain down.***"
- ❖ Now when I first read that, I thought of some mythical monster. If you're familiar with *The Hobbit*, you know there's a dragon at the end, and throughout the story there are trolls and goblins and all sorts of creatures. So the answer must be something along those lines.
 - But Bilbo surprises us. He answers correctly, "*Time.*" Time devours all things: birds, beasts, trees, flowers. Time gnaws iron, bites steel, grinds hard stones to meal. Time slays king, ruins town, and beats high mountains down.
 - **Time is a formidable foe that always wins in the end.** Kings and queens, despots and dictators, presidents and prime ministers – the most powerful people on the planet – have all fallen victim to time. Time is a respecter of no persons. Slowly but surely every one of us must submit to its power.
- ❖ We all feel it. Time takes its toll on us all. **As it ticks on, our bodies weaken and grow frail.** We look in the mirror and see the effects of time – the presence of wrinkles, the graying of our hair, or the loss of it altogether. Time takes its toll.
 - And not just physically. **As time passes, so do opportunities.** New possibilities in our careers or our relationships present themselves, and if we don't take the chance now, they pass us by. Often never to return again. **Time is a constant source of consternation.** It's a source of great anxiety and regret for many – either because it moves too slowly or it passes too quickly. Or because we feel like we never have enough of it or we're always racing against it.
- ❖ Time is a formidable foe that always wins in the end. We might as well surrender to it now. Because no one can beat it. No one can control it. **Correction – I should say *no creature can beat it or control it. For there is One who can. He's the Creator.*** The Great I AM. He is the immutable, all-powerful God of Creation.
 - We started a series on the attributes of God called *God Is*, and last week we covered one of his incommunicable attributes. Attributes unique to God alone. We said that classically there are four incommunicable attributes: God's independence, his omnipresence, his immutability (which we looked at last week), and his eternality (today's focus). We'll follow a similar outline. I'll begin by defining terms. Then I'll demonstrate this attribute in Scripture. And lastly I'll draw out some implications.

Defining God's Eternality

- ❖ We begin with a definition. This is how we'll define his eternity: **God is eternal in that he has no beginning or end; nor is he limited by time in any other way.** Now I realize, that for centuries, people have been theorizing and debating God's relationship to time.
 - **Is God located *in* time or does he stand *outside* of time?** Is time itself eternal and thus God lives and moves and has his being *in* time OR is time part of his creation and thus God preexists time itself? Is he timeless or time bound? Theology books go back and forth on this point, and most of the debate is argued on philosophical grounds or even comparing Newtonian physics to Einsteinian physics. It gets complicated. To the point that many Christians avoid the subject altogether.

- ❖ But I don't think it's good to just ignore these questions. Because how you answer these questions will have an impact on your theology. It will affect how you view God. So the questions are worth asking. And I believe there are answers.
 - But I have no interest, this morning, in espousing philosophy or physics. Those disciplines inform our thinking, but our theology must be based on what God reveals about himself in Scripture. And I think there is enough biblical evidence to show that God's relationship to time and his experience of it – is vastly different than our own.

- ❖ Notice there are two parts to our definition. **The first emphasizes the infinite nature of God in respect to time, which differs greatly from our finite nature.** Every human being as a birthdate, and all of us will have a date to mark our death. But God is different. God is eternal, which means he was never born and will never die. **There has never been a point in time when God did not exist, and there will never be a point when he will cease to exist.** God's eternity suggests that he has no beginning, and he has no end.

- ❖ But there's a second aspect to this attribute. **Not only is God *not* limited by a starting point or end point, God is not limited by time in any other way.** Think about how time affects us. It takes a toll on our knowledge. Over time, our memories fade. I can barely remember what I did last weekend, let alone last year or over the last 40 something years!
 - And because of the constraints of time, I don't know the future, and even what I can anticipate is fallible. My knowledge-base is limited to the immediate present and to the not-so-distant past. **Time constrains my knowledge.** But God is different.

- ❖ **Time has no constraints on him so he knows perfectly what, to us, is experienced as the past, present, and future.** In theology, it's said that God sees the past, present, and future with *equal vividness*. His memory of every detail in the past is as clear as his knowledge of every detail in the present, as well as his foreknowledge of every detail in the future. Because God is eternal, he is omniscient. He has perfect knowledge of all events, of all things.
 - That's the difference between God and us when it comes to time. Theologian John Frame says when we look at time, we see it as a limitation. It hinders us. It frustrates us. But God looks at time as a tool to accomplish his purposes. **He is the Lord of Time.** It doesn't constrain him. He's not limited by it. He's in control of it. We're not.

Demonstrating God's Eternality

- ❖ Okay, so that's how we're defining God's eternity, but now I need to show you this in Scripture. So turn to Psalm 90, a psalm written by Moses. **Did you notice this whole psalm is about time?** It's basically contrasting our experience of time with God's. God is eternal; man is temporal. God remains and lasts forever; man is fleeting and blows away like dust.
 - Let's read vv1-2 again. *"Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God."*

- ❖ Here Moses affirms our definition of God's eternity. He begins by tracing God's existence all the way back before all the generations of man. Then keeps going back before the mountains were formed. And then further back before the universe came into being.
 - It's like Moses is straining to look down the corridor of the past and can't see a beginning for God. And then he strains to look as far as he can into the future and sees no end for God. So he concludes, *"from everlasting to everlasting you are God."* You have no beginning or end. You're eternal.

- ❖ Even the first verse of the Bible affirms this. Genesis 1:1 says, *"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."* So Scripture clearly teaches that the universe had a beginning. But verse one implies that God existed *before* that beginning.
 - Now, granted, that alone doesn't prove God is timeless or that time was created along with the heavens and earth. But it's hard to imagine what the experience of time would've been like *before* the heavens were created. Before the existence of planetary bodies in motion. Since our understanding of time is measured by the orbit of the Earth around the sun and the moon around the Earth. So before these planetary bodies existed, can we even rightly speak of there being time?
 - **The bottom line is that God's relationship to time and his experience of it as Creator is starkly different than ours. We are creatures created in time.** Look at how Moses describes us in v10, *"The years of our life are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty; yet their span is but toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away."*

- ❖ What a contrast from v2 – where God is described as everlasting! And throughout Scripture we encounter more affirmations of his eternity. Deuteronomy calls him, *"the eternal God"* who holds his people safe in his *"everlasting arms."* (Deut 33:27) Isaiah calls God *"Everlasting Father"* (Isa 9:6) as well as *"an everlasting rock."* (Isa 26:4) Daniel calls him *"the Ancient of Days."* (Dan 7:13)
 - In 1 Timothy, it says he is *"the King of ages / King eternal."* (1 Tim 1:17) In Revelation, it records God saying of himself, *"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end."* (Rev 22:13)
 - Alpha is the first letter in the Greek alphabet and Omega is the last. God is saying, "I don't have a beginning or an end. I *am* the beginning and the end."

- ❖ That blows my mind! Do you remember Elihu, one of Job’s friends? It blew his mind when he tried to contemplate God’s eternity. In chapter 36 of Job, Elihu says, “*How great is God – beyond our understanding! The number of his years is past finding out.*” (Job 36:26) **In other words, you can’t wrap your mind around God’s eternity.** It’s beyond understanding. Stop trying to figure it all out and just worship and say, “*How great is God!*”
- ❖ **Now we said earlier that God being eternal also means time doesn’t limit him in any way – especially his knowledge.** We said that he sees the past, present, and future with equal vividness. I see this being affirmed in Psalm 90:4, “*For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.*”
 - If I really focused and thought hard enough, I think I could remember pretty much everything that happened to me yesterday. But if you asked me about what happened on this particular day last year, then forget about it. Or imagine if I were somehow able to live for a thousand years. There’s no way I’m going to remember a single detail of what happened a thousand years ago!
- ❖ But listen to what Moses is saying. “*For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past.*” That means God can know all the details of all the events spanning a thousand years as clearly as we can recall the events of yesterday – all with equal vividness.
 - In fact, Moses says that, to God, a thousand years are like a “*watch in the night*”, which was an interval of about 3-4 hours. Just think, how much can you remember about the past four hours? A pretty good chunk? Well, God’s knowledge of the entire past, present, and future is just as clear as that. Just as vivid. In fact, more so.
- ❖ That’s what it means for God to be eternal. Time puts no limits on him. No constraints. It never frustrates him. It’s so different than us. **Time frustrates us all the time!** Have you ever wished you could just stop time? Or reverse it? Or slow it down? Or perhaps speed it up?
 - When you can’t wait for the school bell to ring or for the weekend to come – time seems to crawl like molasses. But when that deadline or that exam date is looming – then time seems to fly by so fast.
- ❖ **But for God, time never passes too slow nor too fast.** The Apostle Peter makes reference to Psalm 90 and says, “*with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.*” (2 Pet 3:8) So God is never just waiting around for the seconds to count down. Nor is he ever rushed or hindered by the clock to accomplish all that he had planned.
 - **For God, everything happens at just the right time – in the fullness of time.** He’s never frustrated, never anxious. He has no regrets over time. He always has enough to accomplish all that he wants. That’s what you can do when you’re eternal.

Drawing Implications of God’s Eternality

- ❖ So we’ve defined terms. We’ve demonstrated from Scripture. Now let me draw out three implications. I want to show you how God’s eternity is (1) a disturbing reality, (2) a comforting reality, and (3) a life-altering reality.

God's Eternity is a Disturbing Reality

- ❖ **First, his eternity is a disturbing reality, especially for those who don't know Jesus as their Savior and Lord.** If you look back at Psalm 90, the first six verses are focused on God's eternity. But then in v7 it seems like Moses shifts gears and starts talking about God's wrath. But it's really not a change of topic. **It's the focus on God's eternity that leads Moses to contemplate the disturbing reality of God's wrath.**
 - The connection is found in v3. "*You return man to dust and say, "Return, O children of man!"*" That mention of returning to dust is, of course, an echo of Genesis 3. Having rebelled against God – in trying to be like him to supplant him – Adam and Eve are cursed and told they'll eventually die. They will "*return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.*" (Gen 3:19)

- ❖ The point is: **Death is God's judgment against sin, and since we're all subject to death that means we're all under God's judgment.** We're all under his wrath. Therefore we read in vv7-9, "*For we are brought to an end by your anger; by your wrath we are dismayed. You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. For all our days pass away under your wrath; we bring our years to an end like a sigh.*"
 - Now if that's not bad enough, the New Testament's teaching on this matter is even more disturbing. We often forget (or don't realize) that Jesus is the most loving man who ever lived and yet he spoke more about hell than anyone else in Scripture.

- ❖ **He taught that God's judgment against our sin doesn't end at bodily death.** He talked about a place called hell where sinners will be consciously punished for their sins. The Bible describe it as a "*second death*" (Rev 20:14).
 - And the way Jesus describes it is horrifying. He depicts hell as a fiery furnace where "*there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*" (Mt 13:42) **But the most disturbing thing Jesus taught about hell is that hell will be eternal.** He describes it as a place "*where your worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.*" (Mk 9:48) And he also talks about how the unrighteous "*will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*" (Mt 25:46)

- ❖ **Friends, I think eternity is the most disturbing thing about hell.** Imagine standing on a beach in Galveston. Imagine that one grain of sand represents one year and all the sand on the beach is the length of time you have to spend in hell. Imagine if at the end of each year one grain of sand is removed from the beach; thereby shortening your stay in hell.
 - It's going to take a long, long time to clear the beach. But at least it's not *forever*. At least there's hope that after millions and millions of years the sand will eventually be removed and you'll be free. You can stay hopeful and wait for that final year.
 - **But all hope is lost when Jesus utters the word: *eternal*.** That means no chance. No reprieve. No hope of deliverance.

- ❖ And why is that? Because the Righteous Judge himself is eternal. There's no hope in hoping that someday his wrath will fizzle out or somehow he'll cease to exist and take his wrath with him. **Because he's eternal, God's memory of our sins will never fade.** There's no hope in hoping that maybe, after enough time, he'll forget about what we've done.
 - That's not going to happen. God will never have a senior moment. He'll never forget our sins. That means his wrath can eternally haunt you forever. That is a terrifying, horrifying, disturbing reality for all sinners.

- ❖ Why does Jesus speak this way? Because of love. To warn you to flee from this wrath. If you saw your neighbor's house going up in flames in the middle of the night, wouldn't it be love that compels you to disturb them in the comfort of their sleep? To warn them of the flames.
 - **That's why Jesus speaks this way about hell.** Because we're the ones sleeping in a burning house. What we need more than anything is to wake up to this reality. That's why he uses such disturbing language.
 - And the moment we realize our peril and cry out, "Jesus save me!", that's when we learn the true nature of love. That's when we see Jesus enter the house and pull us out – at the cost of his own life.

- ❖ Here's the point. **The eternal wrath of the eternal God can follow you forever with dogged persistence.** You won't shake it. You can't hide from it. **Your only hope is if somehow that wrath can be fully exhausted and eternally satisfied before it touches you.**
 - Friends, that is exactly what Jesus did for us. On the cross, he bore God's wrath and died our death. With his own life, Christ offered *for all time* (for all eternity!) a single sacrifice for sins (Heb 10:12). **And now the promise of God is that if you trust in his Son Jesus, you will not perish but will have everlasting life.**
 - Friends, do you trust him? Have you cried out to Jesus for rescue?

God's Eternity is a Comforting Reality

- ❖ So God's eternity is a disturbing reality. But once Jesus rescues you, everything changes. What once was frightful takes on a different reality for the Christian. **God's eternity becomes a comforting reality.** This is the whole point of Psalm 90. Where do you turn when life is hard, when you're under pressure, under attack? A Christian knows to turn to the eternal God who is "*from everlasting to everlasting.*" That's where v1 points us. "*Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.*" The Lord can be your dwelling place, your refuge, your stronghold – because he is eternal. That's what makes the difference.

- ❖ If you're in God's arms you're safe – so long as he still lives. **The only scenario where believers would ever have any reason to fear is if our God (our dwelling place) were to somehow cease to exist.** Then we'd be on our own. Then we'd be in trouble.
 - But as Deuteronomy 33:27 says, "*The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms.*" Take comfort in knowing that no matter what hardships you face, no matter how great your enemies, how fierce your critics – **you are in the embrace of the eternal God who upholds you with everlasting arms.**

- ❖ Here's another comforting thought. **Think of all the times you've been frustrated because the timing of things didn't work out.** Things didn't go according to plan, to your timetable. You thought you'd have a job by now. You thought you'd be married by now. You thought you'd have a large family by now. You thought your kids would be out of the house by now.
 - You're frustrated. The timing has been off. **But since God is never frustrated by time – since everything happens for him at just the right time – we can take comfort in knowing that his timing is always on.** Everything is going according to *his* plan, to *his* timetable. If he were bound by the constraints of time, we would lack this assurance. Thank God he's not like us. Thank God he's the Lord of Time.

God's Eternity is a Life-Altering Reality

- ❖ There's one more implication. For the Christian, God's eternity is a comforting reality, as well as a **life-altering reality**. Once the eternal nature of God really sank in for Moses, he turned to God in prayer. I want to highlight one request in particular.
 - Look at v12, "*So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom.*" When you realize how fleeting this life is compared to eternity, your heart's prayer will be for wisdom – the wisdom to know how to live your life knowing your days are numbered.
- ❖ **When you're young, you think you'll live forever.** So it's easy to be careless with time. We waste our time, our days, our months, even our years. We end up living for *this* life. We put all our eggs into *this* basket. This present life that the Bible describes as a mist that appears for a moment and then vanishes into the immeasurable vastness of eternity (Jas 4:14).
 - **But ask anyone who has battled cancer or any other life-threatening disease – anyone who has been forced to number their days – and they'll testify to how that experience altered their lives.** They'll tell of how they learned to appreciate every new day. How they no longer took anything for granted. And how they were intentional to not waste a single moment God gave them.
- ❖ **Let me conclude with a challenge – to number your days by viewing them in the light of eternity, of God's eternity.** The sands of time are sinking, my friends. We only have one life to live, and the sun will soon set on it. Eternity stretches out before you with no end. For those saved by the grace of God, your eternity is secure. You know how you'll spend it.
 - ***But how will you spend the short number of years in this life in such a way that it will echo in eternity?*** How are you spending your days? And what are you spending them on? On social media? Playing video games, watching shows, keeping up with all the latest news, gossip, and trends?
 - "Teach us, O Lord, to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom."
What is one change you can make this week to make better use of your time? One change in your personal life, your devotional life, or your family life? In how you use your downtime or spend your free time? What is one change you can make to make clear that God is the Lord of *your* time? **What will you do with your time that'll make all the difference for all eternity?**