

Eternity in their Hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11)

08/31/2014 at Grace Fellowship Church
by Grant Van Cleve

Intro: Heavenly summer

- World Cup with fun passionate Albanians
- Nature with Swedes
- Late summer in SoCal - Post 'June gloom,' south swell waves.
- 'Life if great.' It's been like heaven on earth

Good as Christians to be able to embrace our context

- Dualistic Gnosticism
 - Evangelicals can be 'so heavenly minded that they aren't any earthly good.'
 - We point to certain denominations that focus exclusively on this 'fire insurance policy' type of faith and think we are better
 - We point to the weak theology of certain denominations, but don't note their positive engagement with society.
- Bonhoeffer's incarnational theology (In [Eric Metaxes' great book](#))
 - "When we say 'yes' to God we also say 'yes' to the world He created."
- Albanian imperative
 - Lenin's mantra that 'Religion is the opiate of the masses.'
 - We had to prove the it works 'for realzies' not just a pie in the sky wishful thinking to appease those getting the 'short end of the stick'
 - My decision to make Monday as relevant as Sunday via ([Business As Mission](#))
- America, etc grew on the backs of solid Christians out making a difference in daily life.
 - Our track record of seasoning the loaf is pretty stellar. See Alvin Schmidt's books '[Under the Influence](#)' or '[How Christianity Changed the World](#)' chronicle it

Arthur Stace's 'Eternity'

Amidst all the resounding truth of what I just said, comes an opposite but equally important counter weight that hits us hard amidst the Carpe Diem of a good summer.

It landed on Sydney, Australia in 2000 about like it would on Orange County today... 'Eternity' at the end of the giant Olympic firework show.

Word became a national phenomenon after an eccentric named Arthur Stace wrote 'Eternity' in elegant copperplate with white chalk, and later yellow crayon, 500,000+ times on the streets of Sydney. 5-10am daily for 37 years.

He grew up in poverty, looking after himself and stealing as needed. Stace used to sleep on bags under the house and when his parents were drunk he had to look after himself. He used to steal milk from the doorsteps, pick scraps of food out of garbage and shoplift cakes and sweets. His schooling was practically non-existent. At twelve he was made a ward of the state, but received no great education. At fourteen he found his first job, running alcohol between his sisters' respective brothels.

On August 6th, 1930, he got saved at a meeting with food and a message for those, like him, on the streets. Some months later he heard the Rev. John Ridley preach, based on Isaiah 57:15:

“Eternity, Eternity, I wish that I could sound or shout that word to everyone in the streets of Sydney. You’ve got to meet it, where will you spend Eternity?”

From that moment on this uneducated man, barely able to write even his own name, had a mission. Suddenly I began crying and I felt a powerful call from the Lord to write "ETERNITY". I had a piece of chalk in my pocket and I bent down there and wrote it. Stace, whose limited education had left him barely able to write his own name legibly (as more than one reporter confirmed), found that he could write Eternity, however, quite elegantly, two foot wide. No one knew who was doing this until 1956, when a pastor saw Arthur write eternity on the pavement and asked, “Are you Mr. Eternity?” Arthur Stace replied, “Guilty as charge.”

Living as if Eternity were real

What do you make of Arthur Stace’s one word sermon?
How then can an eternal perspective change how to live?

Evangelistic

Arthur Stace clearly saw it as an extension of that first evangelists message. We talk time, but do we think about eternity? We may try to avoid it, reject it, despise it, but we must face it, and the time could be any moment.

- Ecclesiastes 3:11 “*He has set the eternity in their hearts.*”
- Isaiah 57:15 “*For thus says the high and lofty one that inhabits eternity.*”
- James 4:13-17 “*don’t brag about what you’ll do today. It’s **but a mist** that can disappear.*”
- Luke 12:16-21 on the fool who built for today and suddenly has his life taken from him.

Different perspective when things are tough.

- 1 Corinthians 15: 19 “If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.”
- Psalm 73 on evening out the score “My feet almost slipped as I envied the wicked... until I went into the temple and saw their destiny.”
- Hebrews 11 great cloud of witnesses – who never saw the score evened out before death. But they cheer us on to put our trust in that future reality.
- Hoping & Groaning amidst the challenges (see Gundlach Rom 8:18-27 sermon)
 - Romans 5:3-5

Eagerly await his coming

- Heb 11:1 ‘Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.’
- Holy Spirit was a taste of it (Rom 8:23)
- “This life is all of hell a believer will taste, and all of hell a non-believer taste.”

Altered investment strategies

- Wealth temporary / don’t store *Luke 12:16-21*
- Derivative use of money = best investment *Luke 16:9*
- Don’t look for repayment now *Luke 14:13-14*

Life is good, but the one beyond is better

- Lonely Planet on Sydney, Australia: “You would have to die and go to heaven to find a better setting for a city.”.
- I know moments when I say, “*It doesn’t get any better than this.*” Well it isn’t true:

- “The most ordinary moment on the New Earth will be greater than the most perfect moments in this life – those experiences you wanted to bottle or hand on to but couldn’t.” Randy Alcorn
- “Our Father refreshes us on the journey with some pleasant inns, but will not encourage us to mistake them for home.” C.S. Lewis in the Problem of Pain
- We are aliens and strangers on earth, because we are citizens of heaven.
- C.S. Lewis in his Last Battle – chapter ‘Farwell to the Shadowlands.’

Dare to sacrifice and invest in the other side

Dead Poet’s Society movie – with crowd from the past challenging the students to ‘seize the day’ (Latin *Carpe Diem*).

- vs. Hebrews 12:1-3 where a great cloud of witnesses (read about in Heb 11) challenge to ‘let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.’
- Or Philippians 3:7-14 Paul writes in about the good in life piling in comparison to what’s to come... and then the process of laying other things aside that we can stretch forward to to win the prize he has called us heavenward for.
- Both are alling us to ‘seize eternity’ (Latin *Carpe Aeternitatem*)

Francis Chan’s rope illustration. See at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIKZnHnHNM> (Or if interested in the whole thing, go to <http://media.cornerstonesimi.com/media.php?pageID=6> and scroll down to 3/8/2009 sermon, “Living a life that matters: Living Eternally”).

Hedged in: Life + Death

We started realizing that we as Christians need to do more to be involved in life. But we also realize that the temptation is to be temporal and lose sight of ‘things above’ (Col 3:2) and ‘delaying our hope.’ They seem to be in contrast.

A particular passage helps me combine the two, though. Philippians 1:20-25 e.g. *21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.... 23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.*”

Is Paul seems to echo Hamlet’s ‘To be or not to be.’ Schizophrenic pull between two things.

But the ‘torn’ is seen elsewhere in the N.T. to refer to being hedged in (Luke 8:45, Luke 19:43). We can’t drift from the path, because we know that either edge brings us back to the center.

- The Message for 1:21, “*Alive, I’m Christ’s messenger; dead, I’m his bounty. Life versus even more life! I can’t lose.*”
- **Hope of salvation as a helmet** – 1 Thess 5: 8
- **Hope as an anchor** saving us from storms like hit Catalina recently - Hebrews 6:18-19
- 1 Thess 4:13–17: Christ “died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him
- Ton Chrestos’ is known Greek phrase for ‘Life is good.’ Paul [probably intentionally] puts the ‘Ton Christos,’ noting that the good life is truly ours because we are Christ’s

Hedged in is like those **bumpers for kids in bowling**.

- Help kids play the game at all.
- Help grown up throw the ball more vigorously. The ‘sufficient courage’ of Phil 1:20
 - E.g. Courage to e.g. sow generously and reap generously (2 Corinthians 9:6-7)

- Eg. Craig Hill's example last week of of hospitality to stranger or even enemy.
- Plus best bowling is hugging the edge and then curving back in to hit at the right angle.
 - Are you daring to live on the edge? Flirting with death. With insolvency. Faith = risk. Being hedged in gives us the ability to dare for the kingdom.

Not a transcendental absorption in Christ while stuck in the body (though, that can be part of it)

- Think back to 'Dead Poet's Society.' Neil who plays 'Puck' in the play commits suicide rather than be confined to a life of not really living. Romantic, but actually missing it.
- Living is given more meaning because I can dive back in and serve others. (Phil 1:24-25)
- This service can lead to trouble – Paul is in chains as he writes this. (Phil 1:7,13-17,28-30)
- What would hedged in, other focused, risky behavior look like to you?
- It's in this space that we find the meaning of our tension between sucking the marrow out of life today and keeping an eternal perspective.
 - E.g. man just hiking the beautiful mountains of Montenegro, and there finding an unreached, Muslim group there who became friends.
 - E.g. we are wired to love the wind in our face on a boat, but what if that boat were carting you up the river to a group without the gospel.
 - E.g. Good wine with friends... how about bad wine with new unreached friends sincerely toasting 'L'chaim' to their newfound friends.
 - E.g. Business deal is fun and generates resources... but what about diving in to get solar power for rural Africans, and prep entrepreneurs to run it, and make a minimal return instead?

* * * * *

Key quotes

- "He is a great fool who tries to hold on to what he cannot keep, only to lose what he could have gained." Jim Elliot
- "Only one life, twill soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last." C.T. Studd.
- "Our Father refreshes us on the journey with some pleasant inns, but will not encourage us to mistake them for home." C.S. Lewis
- C.S. Lewis in his Last Battle has a section, 'Farewell to the Shadowlands.' Jill and Eustace are thrust from their train into Narnia. When their adventure is over they fear going back. Aslan tells them that they have died in a train accident and will no longer have to go back to the Shadowlands. "The term is over: holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning. And as He spoke He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in the world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read; which goes on forever; in which every chapter is better than the one before."
- "If there be so certain and glorious a rest for the saints, why is there no more industrious seeking after it: One would think, if a man did once hear of such unspeakable glory to be obtained, and believed what he heard to be true, he should be transported with the vehemency of his desire after it, and should almost forget to eat and drink, and should care for nothing else, and speak of and inquire after nothing else, but how to get this treasure. And yet people who hear of it daily, and profess to believe it as a fundamental article of their faith, do as little mind it, or labour for it, as if they had never heard of any such thing, or did not believe one word they hear." Richard Baxter 1649