

## **Prophets and the Coming Weight of Eternity** Eph 2:1-10 2 Cor 4:7-18 *Jesus Talk* 29.6.20

### **Introduction**

In the context of praying for tonight's message, two stories came my way. First, someone shared that their Christian friends do not seem particularly interested in talking about Jesus but are keen to speak about things like their families, possessions, houses and holidays. Ok, you might think, many Christians are simply worldly, but my second example is far more potent. A Pentecostal pastor forwarded to me a YouTube video that has gone viral. It is about Three Prophetic Dreams <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jnh5jV3nJyM> recently had by a Assemblies of God minister in Kentucky. The third dream concludes with foreign troops on the streets of the United States and Washington in flames. The pastor, sincere and who shows no sign of looking for money, has obviously had some sort of highly unusual experience. His final message was to stock up on food and ammunition and get right with the Lord. What is entirely missing in *both* stories is insight into the coming weight of the glory of God which is ours in Christ. These believers lack a vital share in what Paul says, "the things that are seen are passing, but the things that are unseen are eternal." (2 Cor 4:18).

The revelation the Church needs today, more than ever, is that it is *not* my story with a part for God but Christ's story with a part for me. It is not America's or Australia's or Israel's story that counts, the whole glory of God is in Jesus' story. Only when the Lord graciously returns his glory to our midst will the current discipling crisis in the Church be resolved. This is an urgent prophetic message without which people have no real hope. In some areas of California, unsurprisingly, there have been more deaths from suicide recently than from coronavirus (<https://abc7news.com/suicide-covid-19-coronavirus-rates-during-pandemic-death-by/6201962/>). Very few churches are able to speak to the scale of what is happening in the world because we lost a sense of the magnitude of Jesus' story. Christ has been scaled down to someone who forgives us and gives us a happier life on the way to heaven. We have turned away, as 2 Peter 2 puts it, from the "divine power" "glory and excellence" of God in his "precious and very great promises" through which we "share in the divine nature" and have become "shortsighted or blind" (2:3-5). What happened in the Fall to cause us to become like this?

### **Fallen**

A Christ-centred reading of Genesis 1:1, "*In the beginning*, God created the heavens and the earth." (Gen 1:1) begins with Jesus' story in John's Gospel, "*In the beginning* was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men." (John 1:1-4). The creation of all things was the act of an all-powerful Creator illuminated by the loving character of Jesus (John 1:14).

When Adam heard the Word, "of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." (Gen 2:17) he received a warning not to fall away from the life of the Word of God himself. Since this revelation was strong enough to enable him to obey the Lord's command his submission to the tempting words of the devil was an attempt to step outside of the history of the Word of God/Word of life, who is Christ. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." (Matt 23:35)

cf. Psalm 119:89; Isaiah 40:8; 1 Peter 1:23; 1 Peter 1:25); if Adam had obeyed the command of the Lord he would have been united with the history of the Word in the power of the divine promises and would have lived forever free from any possible corruption or decay. (Sharing in the quality of the resurrection life of the Lord cf. “And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.” 1 John 5:11). The glory/weight of eternal life would have begun in Eden.

Because this didn't happen countless false religions and philosophies have been trying to attain personal immortality, or escape it e.g. Buddhism, ever since. Only the gospel of Christ can impart the weight of eternity (2 Tim 1:10). The eternity which is ours in Jesus has nothing in common with *concepts* of infinity, endless time or timelessness. Such views of eternal life describe an infinity of boredom. Any eternity of time apart from the Lord of life and love would be unbearable. Perhaps this is hell.

Whilst The Old Testament regularly teaches that the Lord exists from eternity (Job 36:26; Ps 90:2; 93:2; 102:25-28; Isa 41:4; 57:15) there is rarely any notion that we can share *his* enjoyment of eternal life. The God of Israel is the “One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy” (Isa 57:15) and too exalted to share the properties of his own existence with sinners. The revelation of the weight of the glory of eternal life awaited the coming of that life himself, Jesus.

### **The Story of Jesus**

Paul expresses the gravity of knowing Christ by repeatedly teaching of a wisdom and mystery that was “hidden for ages and generations in God...*now* revealed to his saints” (Rom 16:25; 1 Cor 2:7; Eph 3:9; Col 1:26). In the start of his first letter, John expounds the accessibility in Christ of what was once locked away in the divine nature, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— 2 the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and *proclaim to you the eternal life*, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us” (1 John 1:1-2). John elsewhere opens up the limitless dimensions of the Jesus story when he speaks of, “the Lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world.” (Rev 13:8), and in his Gospel records Jesus praying to return to the glory he had with the Father, “before the world existed” (John 17:5). John's Jesus is “the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” (Rev 22:13), as the early creeds say, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father.

Let me stress what all this means for us. The weight/gravity/intensity/glory of God's eternity is revealed *as* the life-story of Jesus Christ, eternity is nothing less than the inexhaustibility of the love of the Father for the Son given in their Plan (executed in the Spirit) to make, redeem and perfect the creation in Christ. The coming weight of glory is the inexhaustibility of this love.

Jesus' limitless earthly authority sprang from his knowing himself to be eternal life. “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself...I am the ...life...” (John 5:26; 14:6). To say, “I am the bread of life/resurrection and the life” (John 6:35, 48; 11:25) was for Jesus to promise the sharing of his own life. The “spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14) he offers are the expression of his life in the Spirit ( cf. Ps 36:9). God being flesh in Jesus (John 1:14) is the revelation that there never was a time or

eternity when God he did not intend for us to share in his own life. In Jesus, we see all of God's unity, truth, goodness and beauty happening for the sake of the world. As Jesus said, "this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3). The love of God in Christ takes us endlessly beyond our natural capacities into the eternal life of Father, Son and Spirit. The prophets of the old covenant had glimpses into this majesty and glory (Isa 6:1-6=John 12:41; 1 Pet 1:10-11), but we see it more fully than they ever could in the embodiment of Jesus in the likeness of sinful flesh to condemn sin in the flesh (Rom 8:3). The hinge point for us entering this eternity is the cross.

### **Glory in the Cross**

The weightiness of the cross surpasses all human imagining. In the history of religion, the gods are immune to death or identified as its power, but the God we worship in Spirit and truth triumphs over our mortality by his own death and resurrection. Eternity is weighty because of the sacrifice of the Lamb. The brilliance of the book of Revelation is that it not only speaks of the Lamb slain at the beginning of eternity (Rev 13:8) but his glory forever illuminates the new creation at the other "end" of eternity (Rev 21:23). All Christians will testify that our eternal joy and delight will be to have Jesus as our Lord and Saviour forever, but few amongst us embrace the unparalleled wisdom of God as to how this has come about. Peter testified on the Day of Pentecost, "God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." (Acts 2:36).

The key that opened the gate of eternity to humanity is the submission of the eternal Son of God to the Father. From eternity "past" Jesus was willing to die for the cause of the Father's love. In expounding the present Lordship of Jesus in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul places submission in a central position, "For "God has put all things in subjection under his (Christ's) feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. 28 When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all. (1 Cor 15:27-28). That God becomes "all in all" grows out of the free eternal submission of Jesus to the Father's will. Submission is the generating centre of the story of God in Christ, including our own receiving of the weight of glory.

Back in the Old Testament the Lord spoke prophetically through Isaiah 57:15, "For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a *contrite and lowly spirit*, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite." The one and only truly contrite and lowly spirit belonged to Jesus. The submissive lowliness of the Son of God was manifested in him becoming human and reached a climax in his death on the cross. When the eternal one cries out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34) nothing weighty seemed to be happening. It must have seemed to Jesus that the story which had begun in eternity had ended in a whimper and despite all the promises of God, like Isaiah 57:15, God was not with *him*. All this is very hard to comprehend, but as he bore our history in the cross (2 Cor 5:21) the history of the power of sin, Satan and death, all evil and an entire old cosmos was coming to an end in him (cf. Rom 8:3; Heb 2:14; 1 John 3:8). Whilst this side of the resurrection revival this is pure joy at the moment of Jesus' forsakenness when the Father-Son relationship seems broken eternity has no substance and the Lord is plunged into a purposeless everlasting void (Gen 1:2; Jer 4:23).

Christ's resurrection and ascension into heaven mean the decaying old creation has been ended in him. Through Jesus sacrifice and victory the meaning of everything has been changed for us who belong to him. No longer are we children of the devil (1 John 3:10) but sons of God. Sin no longer places us under the wrath of God (Rom 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10).

The great 17<sup>th</sup> century Pietist August Hermann Francke (1663-1727) puts it in an extraordinary way in one of his hymns, "O Jesus, my soul has already flown up to you, You have, because you are totally love, Completely exhausted me, Leave off, what are times and hours, *I am already in eternity, Because I live in Jesus*" x2

## **Church**

If Francke is correct why does most of the Church live as if we are disconnected from eternity in the NOW? Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 are helpful here; "Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self his being renewed day by day. 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us *an eternal weight of glory* beyond all comparison, 18 as 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*". Whoever suffers for Jesus' sake, in any way, sees the present form of this world (1 Cor 7:31) for what it is, passing and insubstantial, and they becomes more and more aware of the weight of eternity in Christ. When we submit to whatever the Lord allows the world to throw at us, relationally, financially, health etc the more the world loses its allure and the more intensely real eternity becomes (cf. Mark 10:28-30). For whoever suffers for Christ's sake knows that the story is Jesus' story with a part for us; the great biblical truths of being chosen in Christ before the foundation of the creation (Eph 1:4), having died with Jesus and raised with him (Rom 6:1-5) and being seated with him in the heavenlies (Eph 2:6) are not abstract ideas/concepts but dynamic realities that shape our lives at the deepest level,

## **Conclusion**

When I first started praying about this message of the coming weight of glory I could actually sense, as it were, this future coming to me in the present, and I was overcome with an immense sense of satisfaction. This satisfaction is surely the Father's pleasure in the story of his Son; and ours in him. All this is ours (1 Cor 3:21-23).

The present pitiful condition of the Western Church has come from a falling away from the fulness of the story of Jesus. Our individualism has been a problem for centuries, but today it has fruited into the pitiable consumer Christianity which glories in My Story with a place to God. Fleshly Christians (1 Cor 3:1-3) having little interest in the cross and so cannot experience the coming weight of glory in Christ. In refusing to abide in the Word which opens up for us a creation that never grows old or fades away we have repeated the sin of Adam. It is only from sharing in the Spirit's revelation of the riches of eternal life *in Jesus* (1 John 5:11) that boundless creativity breaks forth in the Church. It is no accident that the language of giving glory to God "forever and ever" (Gal 1:5; Phil 4:20; 1 Tim 1:17; 2 Tim 4:18; Heb 13:21; 1 Pet 4:11; Rev 1:6, 18; 4:9,10; 5:13; 7:12; 10:6; 11:15; 15:7; 19:3; 20:10; 22:5) spans all the letters of the New Testament. In a time when we are selfishly encouraged to "take hold of the day" and make the most of our worldly opportunities Paul's prophetic exhortations speak directly to us; "Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called" (1

Tim 6:12), and it is time for the “rich in this present age... (to) take hold of that which is truly life (1 Tim 6:19). Which means to take hold of Jesus through the power of the Spirit.

As I was out praying recently, I felt the Lord speak to me 2 words Peter spoke to Jesus “we have left everything and followed you.” (Matt 19:27) ““Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68). These are Spirit-inspired words for our times. I am asking the Lord what it is, materially, emotionally, relationally, financially....that I need to leave behind to have a richer awareness of the eternal life I now possess in Christ, for the sake of others. Let us ask this together.