

# Ages to Come

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Preacher: Rev Andrew Coghill

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Ephesians chapter 2 we read at verse 7 that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus so often when Ephesians chapter 2 gets read it tends to be verse 8 that captures our attention for by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God but I'd like us today to think for a little while about the preceding verse 7 that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus the ages to come it's an appropriate thing for us to think about as we stand on the threshold again of another year not knowing how many we will see we know how many we've had but we don't know how long we'll be spared for in this world the ages to come is something that really ought to focus our imagination how long is an age?

well when Paul writes of the ages to come or the coming ages as some modern translations would put it does he mean the centuries ahead you know beyond the first century where he's engaging with the Ephesians and the Corinthians and others you know does he mean the times that we now would refer to as the dark ages you know the Roman Empire times and then the Saxon times and then the Middle Ages and all the centuries there of the medieval church and so on and then the modern age and the so-called enlightenment and all the discoveries of art and science and technology and so on these would be ages to come in terms of Paul's perspective that would certainly be far enough in the distance but you know how long is an age?

it's a relevant question because you know at the end of Matthew's account of the gospel as I'm sure you remember chapter 28 at verse 20 where Jesus says to his disciples that he will be with them as the authorised version has it to the end of the world the literal Greek of that statement is to the end of the eon or the age as many in fact all modern translations put it but it is inconceivable that there would ever come a time in world history when you know the age in which Jesus was going to be with his people has passed and somehow an age would dawn when Jesus would not be present with his own disciples with his own people when he wouldn't be in the midst of them that time is never going to come because he has promised he will never leave them nor forsake them so to understand the end of the eon as being to the end of the world is perfectly accurate so if the end of the age is synonymous with the end of the world then what does Paul mean by the ages that are still to come what does the ages to come mean well I don't think there can be any doubt really that he is referring to the next world to eternity and this is borne out by what we read in verse 6 the preceding verse and hath raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus it's a reference to the state of glory in which believers shall dwell with the risen and ascended Christ for all eternity worshipping before the throne of the Lamb and falling down before the ancient of days casting their crowns before him if each of these ages to come now this is the sort of scary bit if you think about it that if the age or the eon is the lifetime of the world

Jesus is going to be with his people to the end of the world in terms of this world then that would suggest that the eon the age is the shelf life of an entire world so from when God first says let there be light until the time when he brings all the world to an end and it all melts in the fervent heat that Peter tells us about and then he makes a new heaven and a new earth if that the age is the entire length of a world then the ages to come being in plural must be lifetimes in the plural that would be for the lifetime of say another planet earth if he had made another one another world another planet and so on the time it takes from the first day that they are created by God to when he finally disposes of them at the end that lifetime of an entire world is an age in that sense and Paul is talking in the plural here so this gives us something of a little glimpse of what eternity is like you know the ages and ages to come we have some idea of how long we are looking at in terms of eternity and what a passing blip this life or this world actually is but then you know common sense and above all experience already teaches us that anyway doesn't it you know unless we're still very young in which case you know the time from say one birthday to the next or the time that each school year seems to be seems to be forever you know takes ages between one birthday and the next or one Christmas and the next or one holiday and the next always takes a long time to pass and that is true when you're young but of course as you get older not only does time seem to speed up but mathematically as well it is in a sense diminishing and diminishing you know when I was 18 it had taken my whole life to get to the end of those 18 years when I was 36 then it had taken only half of my life to do the next 18 years and so you know as you go on through life the proportion of your life it takes less and less and less proportion of life for it to pass and as most of us

I'm sure are aware you know from the end of one year or the beginning of a new year to the next one seems to be incredibly quick as you get older and older time passes so swiftly here in this world as Job puts it in chapter 7 verse 6 my days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle we exhaust our supply of analogies and illustrations trying to convey the contrast between time and eternity sometimes you know if I'm travelling on the ferry perhaps and I lean over the side and look you see sometimes you see these wee orange fishing boys in the water and you know on the way to either or or or and focus on one of them that's in the distance in a wee wee orange dot in the distance and just keep focusing on that as the boat gets nearer and nearer and nearer until eventually it's sort of at the top end of the boat and then it comes past and then it's level with your eye and then before you know it it's a wee past and you keep focusing on it until it just becomes another little orange dot in the distance and then it vanishes outside and it only takes a split second to actually pass you you can be focusing on it for the ages and then it's gone now if I were when I got to either the river or the pool or whatever

[ 7 : 29 ] I used to then hire a wee rowing boat and try and go out and find that wee boy somewhere out in the mitch I probably couldn't do it because it's so tiny and insignificant in terms of the rest of the sea I saw it for a moment it was in front of my eyes as the ship passed as the ferry passed and then it was gone and I couldn't find it again if I went back to try and find it once it had disappeared out of sight and also you have to ask why would you want to because okay you've got this passing blip but the whole reason the blip passed was because you were on a journey you know the journey either started away to hullapool or and you don't just say oh I'm really bored today I think I'll just take the ferry across and twiddle my thumbs and I'll pull or just go and get back on the ferry and come back again nobody's going to waste the time and money to do that you make the journey because you've got a journey to do but it doesn't end at the ferry terminal on the other side that's only the start of the next stage of your journey because you've got so much yet to travel so much yet to do so much yet to go through and most people when they make their journeys to their mainland for whatever reason whether it's holiday or visiting family it might be business or work but they're usually looking forward to the trip looking forward to where they've got to go and the ferry journey's only part of it and the wee blip of the orange boy in the water it doesn't even register because there's so much more travelling to do there's journey to make we pass through this blip of a life to get to the eternity which does last there's so much journeying to do in eternity this blip of life it's just gone in a moment before we know it doesn't last but we're on our way to that eternity which does last which doesn't fade away which doesn't change or grow old now one of the things that we do more in the winter

I don't know but you in our house certainly we do it a lot more is we have the fire on a lot more in the winter than we would in the summer and of course if you light the fire whether in the afternoon or morning it's designed to you intend that it will last all afternoon and all evening and then finally it will fade out once you go to bed at night but nobody lights the fire just so you can watch it flame up and then go out and say oh well that was nice for a few minutes while it lasted you light it in order that it'll continue it'll warm your room it'll light up the room it'll transform the appearance of it and it'll keep you cosy all through the evening and right through to night and then you go to bed you don't worry about it anymore but if the objective is the long lasting considerable warmth and light of the fire you can't actually get to that fire until you first of all strike a wee match and you strike a wee match and you put it in with the kindling or the paper or the fire light or whatever it is that's in there and then you get that light and then the original match which got you to light the fire goes out and even if you can do the wee trick the clever wee trick of burning it all the way along till it's black and then holding the hot end and let it burn all the way through so you've got this frazzled little black match from start to finish great trick it's still gone in less than a minute but that way you didn't just strike the match for the sake of striking the match the reason you struck the match was to get the fire going so you'd have the lasting warmth the lasting light that would see you right through all the evening all the night the fire lasts the match doesn't but the fact of the matter is you can't have a fire unless you've got the match first you can't get to eternity unless you go through the little blip of the light and flay up of this world this life first of all and it seems like this is everything that matters this is as good as it gets but it's not this is the match yes you're going to strike it yes it's going to light yes it's going to flay up but it will only last the light that it kindles will only last if it is then added to something greater put into something greater just as the light of the match will only last in the light of the fire if you insert it into that which is prepared the kindling of fire the fuel what have you and it will last and it will give light and warmth all the evening and all the night but the match will go out and the match will go out whether you light a fire with it or not you can strike as many matches as you like they will go out eventually you can have as many different souls in this world as many lives in this world as you like but unless that life is plugged in to something that is intended to last it's going to go out and the same is true with all of us a match however brightly in flames even if you can do as I said the little trick burning a long way to the end it goes in less than a minute given how brief and fleeting time is how vast and unchanging eternity is there's something that we as near mortals need to grasp and that is that contrary to our normal perception eternity is the actual the true reality and all the days of this life are just the momentary preparation for it I'll say that again eternity is the actual reality the true reality all the days of this life are just the momentary preparation for it now for those who love the

Lord Jesus Christ that's got to be good news because it is explicitly stated in our text that Christ's desire is not only to have his children sit where he sits in heaven but that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace and his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus it might be a little bit about the ages to come lifetimes of an entire world as we would know it not even lifetimes of people but lifetimes of worlds ages to come this is what he intends and desires to do throughout all eternity to show to bring out to set forth the exceeding immeasurable riches of his grace and his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus imagine that for all eternity Christ Jesus the son of God will be bringing out treasures of grace and riches of glory showering his children with kindness constantly endlessly and that he will keep on doing it because he is

Jesus Christ the same yesterday today and forever none of his children will be spoiled by such indulgence because there is no sin there with him nothing that defiles is allowed in his presence so for them even to be there he must first already have washed them clean in his own precious blood because there is no sin there there is no separation between God and his children they cannot fall prey to sins attended miseries to illness or disease or to death or to sorrow or unhappiness or aging or decaying right speculating saying well what is heaven going to be like will there be children in heaven well I think personally there must be although one could speculate as to whether you know those who are saved but who die in infancy will they be as children in heaven or will they be in heaven will they be grown up to the fullness of what they might have been will they be fully grown in heaven do we ourselves enter heaven at the age that we are or do we become as children as Jesus said we must if we are to enter the kingdom of heaven no I know I can think of nothing better than to be a little child in heaven with Jesus there but what there won't be is there won't be any old age as we now know it there will be no wrinkly skin or fading eyesight or hardness of hearing there will be perfect clarity in our hearing perfect vision in our eyesight perfect skin perfect resurrection bodies unchanging throughout eternity throughout the ages to come as Christ showers his kindness and the exceeding riches of his grace upon his delighting children age upon age while earths and suns and stars burn out and fade away still he doesn't change his reality his grace his kindness his riches and mercy this is the reality this is the reality this is the lasting permanent unspoiled undying reality way beyond the passing earthly obsession with physical matter which after all crumbles awaited us the eternity this eternity is the reality and truth this is what God is like everlasting this is what his endless love and the riches of his grace is calling us to it's got to be good news this is what he wants for sinners because let's face it he knows from experience that life down here is brought with hardship and suffering and sin and cruelty and temptation and disease and death and it's all because we have become separated from the one who is the opposite of all these things death enters in because man sinned against the one who is life itself dis-ease enters in because man separated himself from the one who is all health and well-being and perfection in himself darkness enters in because man turns away from the light of the world

God who is himself peace in place of hardship you know he is joy in place of suffering he is purity in place of sin he is kindness instead of cruelty he is fulfillment instead of temptation and temptation never fulfills never satisfies remember he is health and well-being in place of dis-ease and he is life to all the fullness of it in place of death sin separates us from God and brings all these negative things that we associate with life you all the suffering the pain the sin the hardship the difficulty darkness all of that is part of this fallen world sin brings in and it separates us from God whereas Christ through his death on the cross pays our debt and puts us right with God and in the riches of his grace he reunites us to the

[ 18 : 31 ] Lord our righteousness and restores us to what he always intended us to be and what he always intended for us now it would be untruthful and deceiving of me to suggest that this is what eternity is going to be like is what the ages to come will be like for every soul who departs this life the vast majority of the human race want nothing to do with Christ Jesus for them the prospect of spending eternity with him would fill them with honor their idea of heaven would be a place of continuous indulgence of their favorite earthly vices and recreations alas such an eternity does not exist and even if it did they would soon find that the things they thought they liked in this world when they are done ad nauseam again and again and again and again and again and again and again without respite without break would soon become their own kind of hell but hell is not a place of such recreation indulgence this world this world alone was the place where they were allowed and enabled to indulge their unbelief and follow their own selfish wishes to their hearts content and as they wanted nothing to do with God in time so they will be required to have nothing to do with him in eternity sometimes there are those who think it is unjust of God to inflict eternal punishment for what is after all temporal sin that is sin limited by the constraints of time here on earth you know might it not be more just to require somebody only to sort of endure a lifetime in hell because of a lifetime of sin that would be more fair and then they could get out of it but the Lord knows perfectly well that a soul which has spent an entire earthly lifetime at enmity with him lacks lacks only the opportunity and the time to keep on doing that very thing if such a soul in the torments of hell were offered a respite the respite of a second entire life on earth before returning to eternity do you think they would use that opportunity to seek out Christ to love him to honor him to serve him and obey him the Lord himself knows that a heart still hard against him in eternity if given a second life on earth would fill it up again with exactly the same shallow and selfish vanities as before thinking nothing of the Lord and probably rather pleased with itself at getting a second shot to indulge all the old appetites to the full it's like what Jesus said you know if you even are angry with your brother in your heart it's as though you've murdered him think oh no that's not the same I would never kill my brother no but if you thought you could get away with it would you do it

Cain knew he could get away with it except from the sight of God so he did it Jesus said if you look at a woman with adultery in your heart then it's as though you've committed it in actual fact because the only thing stopping you is you didn't think you'd get away with it but if you actually knew you would get away with it would you do it well if that lust and that adultery is there in your heart in your eyes then it's as though you've already done it if the hardness of heart against the Lord is already there it's as the word would continue if a third life were offered us after a second one of rebellion and rejection against the Lord the same would happen those who continue hard in their hearts against the Lord right through to the end of their days would continue to do so whether they were given an extra million days or an extra million lifetimes it would just go repeating again and again and again and again if they were given any number of lifetimes the result would be no difference the same would happen again throughout eternity if such opportunities were given or three of people in suffering for for you and even if they were given as their customers could do so they may ask again as there are always nextán in such a human being enter into something in the world right through death but beloved as Paul wrote to the Hebrews but beloved we are persuaded better things of you and things that accompany salvation though we thus speak we have all been that enmity with God at some stage in our lives this chapter in Ephesians is addressed precisely to those recovering from such a case you have he quickened who were dead in trespasses and sins wherein in time past he walked according to the course of this world according to the prince of the power of the air the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh and fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind that were by nature the children of wrath even as ours but God who is rich in mercy for his great love wherewith he loved us even when we were dead in sins I've quickened and brought us alive together with Christ by grace and he saved and I've raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace and his kindness to warn us through Christ Jesus for by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves it is the gift of God this is a chapter written to people who have themselves fallen from grace who were themselves sinners at enmity with God without God and without hope in the world as he says in verse 12 so we can't say

oh well no hope for me oh well I've had it God's not interested in me yes he is that is why he has come that is why he has come from heaven to earth that is why he has died on the cross that sinners might have their sin forgiven and through faith in his name faith which we have not of ourselves it is the gift of God we are made his workmanship created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God hath before ordained that we should walk in that this is his desire that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace and his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus how vast are those ages to come how brief this short span of years here on this earth it is the burning of a matchstick compared to the burning ongoing fire in the greats it is the blip of a moment compared to the vastness of a lifetime how vast are those ages to come how brief are these few years we are given here to the earth and how many of them have you already lived now and how many of those that you have lived have been given to Christ friends a Christ this year is a wasted year don't let this 2017 be a

Christ this year don't let it be a wasted year but even Christ though he can restore and make good all that the locusts have eaten all that the locusts of unbelief has taken away from you and destroyed he is able to make good all that has been done all that has been lost he is able to gather up all our years of unbelief and find in them still things that he can use to his glory and it may even simply be the depravity or the sin or the failure in which we have lived so that when we are redeemed we can actually get alongside somebody else and say well yes I do know how you feel and I do know what you're going through because I went through that too this is what my life was like but this is what Christ has done for me with the Lord like the broken pieces after the feeding of the 5,000 or the 4,000 gather up the pieces that nothing be lost and when our life is given to Christ all the years of unbelief and sin and hardness of heart that went before that we would think is just water down the drain nothing is wasted with the

Lord he is able to restore the years that the locusts have eaten he is able to give back meaning and purpose even into that which was lived at enmity with him it can be of service it can be of use in his cause waste no more of your energies your time your treasure and what one of the old covenanters used to call the painted clay idols of this world if you would see this world at its best and most beautiful see it as the handiwork of Christ if you would seek love and romance for your heart then respond to the lover of your soul and pledge your troth to him for he will be better to you than husband or wife or children and he will hire lead you to your soul mate or else enable you to follow and fulfil his own example in godly singleness of life if you covet money or wealth then lay that ambition at the foot of his cross and see how the one who owns all the gold and silver of this world will bring riches into your hand once he knows that you would be and are prepared to lay them all out in his service and for his cause and can sit lightly to the treasures of this world whatever these fleeting few years have in store for you you cannot afford to let them pass without

[ 30 : 22 ] Christ as the very centre and soul of your very being without him they will be empty and long and joyless but believe you me eternity will be worse with him with him not only will they be filled with meaning and purpose and joy in the midst of the sufferings of these few fleeting years but the long eons of eternity will be a blessed rejoicing in his loving company that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness to warn us through Christ Jesus man who have his feet to hear them