

# ETERNITY

## A SERMON

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“But the mercy of the lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; too such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.” Psalm 103:17,18

WE have in these words what I may call four eternals. We have here eternal mercy, eternal righteousness, an eternal covenant, and an eternal commandment; for though the word commandment is here spoken of in the plural, yet when we come to that part, we shall see that all these commandments are contained in one commandment, and that that one also is eternal. And may the Lord bring us this morning to where the apostle was and those with him, when he said, “We look not at the things that are seen, for they are temporal, but at things that are not seen, for they are eternal.” And when we can somewhat lose sight of the things of time in the contemplation of eternal things in a way that renews us in the inner man, such seasons are not easily forgotten, and they are foretastes, though, I grant, but drops from the ocean, but mere rays from him who will be unto his people an everlasting light, yet they are small foretastes of that bliss in which the whole person shall be immersed at the last great rising day.

Our text, therefore, though rather long, I shall take a twofold main view of. First, *the four eternals*. Secondly, *the character to whom these eternals belong*; and we have a threefold description of the same; them that fear him, that keep his covenant, and that remember his commandments to do them.

First, the eternity of his mercy; “But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting.” We will look at the mercy first contrastively. It contrasts, first, with the comparative vanity and the brevity of human life. Hence the Lord, it is here written, “knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are as grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.” Here we have, then, in very simple, but at the same time solemn words, set before us the comparative emptiness and the brevity of human life. What, then, is the remedy here? “But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting;” and this mercy is by the Lord Jesus Christ. Then it comes out that there

is not a perfection belonging to the most high God that does not appear in mercy's form; every perfection of his nature appears in mercy's form. Hence the 41st Psalm closes with the testimony or declaration of gratitude to God in his eternity; "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting." And then in one or two preceding verses of that Psalm you find the Savior's resurrection referred to; for the Savior says, "By this I know that you favored me, because mine enemy does not triumph over me. And as for me, you uphold me in my integrity, and set me before your face forever." Then, after thus contemplating the integrity, and resurrection, and ascension, and eternal settlement of the Savior in heaven, then comes in the gratitude; "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting, and to everlasting." Now I say that every one of the perfections of God's nature appears in mercy's form by Christ Jesus. The first quality of mercy, which is perhaps the noblest we can think of, not but that all the other qualities are equally noble, because they are founded upon the same principle; the first quality of mercy is that it is the mercy of his love; and there is no mercy like that which springs from love. You know that mercy may be shown from many inferior and different motives; but the mercy here is nothing else but the mercy of God's love, and that love is seen in the gift of his dear Son; first, in the greatness of the gift which Christ Jesus is; and, secondly, it is seen in the great work which Jesus Christ has achieved; and, thirdly, in the wonderful consequences that follow the work of Christ, namely, a number that no man can number everlastingly saved. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son thus a propitiation for our sins. Here, then, we have the mercy of God by Jesus Christ, he having met the law of God and the justice of God. It is said that mercy and truth meet together, that righteousness and peace have kissed each other, that is, by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Here, in this order of things, the very justice of God turns, as it were, into mercy; the very holiness of God turns, as it were, into mercy. I do not mean that these perfections undergo any change in their nature, but they undergo a change, as it were, in their position; and hence "he is a just God and a Savior," and "it is God that justifies." So that God in his eternal justice is, by what Jesus Christ has done, on the side of every one that believes in him. What a wonderful scripture that is to this end; "To him that works not." Ah, the apostle might well say, "works not;" for when we look at what we are as sold under sin, and look upon the law of God, and see what it is, and see the entire contrast, we may well give up all thoughts of work; and then, when we look at what the Savior has done, how he has brought mercy and truth together, and caused righteousness and peace to embrace each other, the apostle might well say, "To him that works not, but believes on him that justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." Here, then, God appears entirely in the form of eternal mercy. And why is this mercy from everlasting? What can be the reason of it? There must be some reason, I should think, in the very nature of things, why this mercy is from everlasting. And I suppose the chief reason is the Lord's love to his people. Having loved them, he has therefore gone forth, as we have been reading this morning, from everlasting on their behalf. Now then, when we look at the brevity, and emptiness, and guiltiness of human life, what we are, we see the remedy is in this eternal mercy by Christ Jesus the Lord. We must be careful to look at this mercy as being by Jesus Christ, or else we shall not understand either the nature or the order of it. Now then, that mercy being by Jesus Christ, it is by that which is eternal. He being God as well as man, and his work being eternal, that clears the way for the eternity of his mercy. So then, while hour after hour, day after day, week after week, are passing away, and those that have arrived at riper age, feel that time seems to go faster and faster, how encouraging is it to know that this mercy that is by Jesus Christ, this mercy that swallows up all our sins like a mighty ocean, this mercy in which the Lord appears thus, "as far as the east is

from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us” how encouraging is it to know that this mercy is eternal!

And it is a remarkable thing, too, that in our text it says his mercy is “upon them that fear him;” as though the Holy Spirit should here say, this is that order of things in which men are sure not to fear the Lord unless they are taught of the Lord; for in all ages the gospel of free and of sure mercy has been something that has been offensive to the carnal mind. Thus, then, by Jesus Christ there is all the mercy we can need, and that mercy is from everlasting, to show that it is nothing new with the Lord. If I may so speak, he has well considered it, he has considered this matter from all eternity, and everything is well arranged and unalterably settled. “Forever, O Lord, your word is settled in heaven.” Now those that are taught of God very often lose sight of this great truth, that God in all his perfections appears in the form of mercy; and John means a similar thing when he said that “God is love.” Hence if we come to the word of God, we shall see how clear this is, that every perfection of his nature appears in the form of mercy. Take, for instance, his power. Job said, “Will he plead against me with his great power? No.” I believe, as though Job should say, that the Redeemer lives. Job was a believer in Jesus Christ as the way in which that mercy came. Will he, then, plead against me? will he deal with me according to my sins? No; mercy has swallowed them up, whether those sins be great or small, many or few. And will he reward me according to my iniquities? No; for he has laid on him the iniquities of us all. “Will he plead against me with his great power?” that is, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, receiving the testimony of what he has done; for here it is this eternal mercy appears, all the perfections of God appearing in a mercy form. “Will he plead against me with his great power? No; but he would put strength in me.” If he endured what he did for you, to bring you out of the state you were in by nature, then he remembered you in your low estate according to his mercy; and if he saved you, it is according to his mercy; and if he abides by you, it is also according to his mercy. We thus see, then, that not only his love, but his almighty power, is entirely on the side of the man that feels his need of this great mercy. “As high as the heaven is above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.” Just the same with the holiness of God. Jesus Christ is our sanctification, and thereby God in his holiness is on our side; so that his holiness, which is the terror of every man by nature, and the terror of the awakened sinner, until he finds out the way of conformity to it, Christ being our sanctification, his blood cleansing from all sin, we being made holy by faith in him, we are, after this order of things, sanctified by God the Father, he in his mercy imputing our sins to Christ, and imputing the work of Christ to us; Christ in his mercy putting away our sins, and bringing in that righteousness which we must speak of presently, and the Holy Spirit bringing our souls to a knowledge of what we are, and thus giving us to see that Jesus Christ is our sanctification, hereby holiness is on our side. And the reason we are to give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness is not merely because he is holy; that is the foundation of it; but not merely on that account, for no one can give thanks for that which stands against him; but by Christ it stands for you; and so the people of God again and again are called a holy people.

Thus, then, in receiving Jesus Christ you receive this mercy, and he is on your side in his power, in his justice, in his holiness, and in his eternity, for the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting, by that that is like his mercy, namely, his dear Son. You observe that if this mercy was by something fallible, then that which would fail would be an impediment to the mercy. But this mercy is not by something that is fallible, for Jesus Christ was not to fail, neither was he to be discouraged. Now then just look at these two things, first, the truth that every one of the perfections

of God by Jesus Christ appears in mercy form; and indeed all his dealings with us in providence, the time will come when he has completed all, when we shall see that every dealing with us was in mercy, and all the afflictions, crosses, and trials, of which we have been the subjects, that all was done in mercy. Look, then, at that one thing; I cannot but linger here one moment longer; how sweet the thought that while by sin every perfection of the blessed God stands directly against us, so that we are by nature children of wrath, enemies to God, at war with him in all his perfections! how great the change that is wrought in bringing us over into reconciliation to him in this wondrous order of things by Jesus Christ! Well might the apostle, when tracing out this matter, arrive at that sweet conclusion, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" May the Lord, for this is the great point, more and more assure you that he is on your side!

It is not the greatness of your sins that so much discourages you; it is not the darkness which you may feel; it is not the weakness; it is nothing of that kind, nor all the adversities, afflictions, losses, and crosses, of which you may be the subject; but the great point of discouragement with the real Christian is this: Is the Lord my God, or is he not? If I could see that he was, if I could feel that he was, if the Holy Spirit would bring home the word with power, and assure me he is on my side, let that one point once be settled; I am quite established in the sufficiency of his mercy, I am quite assured of the ability of his grace, I am quite assured of the ability of his dear Son, I am quite assured of the immutability of the blessed God, there is the great point. Once let that cloud be driven away, once let that be cleared up, and then, come what will, we may smile at anything and everything. All the troubles of life, and all the threatening of death, it does not matter what comes; if you are thus favored to know that the Lord is on your side, you smile at the idea of any insufficiency in his mercy, you smile at the idea of any insufficiency in the Savior, you look at him in his eternity and in his greatness, and you say, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" We get sometimes a great deal of help and consolation from the hope of his mercy. Some of you can go on and hope, and hope; you say, Well, nothing else suits me but this eternal mercy by Jesus Christ; the work of Jesus Christ having harmonized all the perfections of God, that God in all his perfections is on the side of his people.

Now if you can say that is your hope, you are one of the Lord's people. If you can say you have no other hope; if you can say all other hope is swept away, and your hope is there alone, as said David, "I am like a green olive tree in the house of my God; I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever;" now, I say, if you are brought thus to see that nothing else can be your hope but the mercy of God that is by Jesus Christ; if you are brought to place your hope here, then you are one of his. But my saying so will not satisfy you; I should be very sorry if it did, unless what I say should be brought with some degree of power into your souls; then, when the Lord is pleased to attend the word with power, and make you feel you are one of his, why, that will satisfy you. Now, that is one point, then, to consider for our comfort, that by Jesus Christ every perfection of the blessed God appears in mercy form. He exercises his knowledge to find out good things for you as an act of mercy; and his wisdom, his power, his justice, his lovingkindness, his providence, all are exercised in a way of mercy, and he delights in mercy. So that the Savior might well say to the apostles, "Preach the gospel", this gospel of mercy, "to every creature." Then, after thus seeing the necessary sufficiency of his mercy, because if mercy mean the Lord himself by Jesus Christ in all the perfections of his nature, then there must be an infinite sufficiency; then mark the other, namely, that this mercy is by him that is infallible, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever. Now, if you could look to tomorrow, to next week, to next month, or to next year, or to

any period in the ages to come in which Jesus Christ would not be the same in his person and work that he is now, we might then look for some impediment in the way of mercy. But Jesus Christ will remain the same, and therefore this mercy travels on all through our life; it is to everlasting, travels on with us through death, takes care of the dust when it is in the grave, and will raise us triumphant at the last great day. Jesus Christ, then, remains the same; no impediment will ever arise. To my mind, I know not what it is to yours, but to my mind this is a very sweet thought, because I am as sure as I am of my existence that I shall need as much mercy tomorrow as I do today, perhaps more; that I shall need as much mercy next year as I have been favored to have this year, perhaps more; I shall need as much mercy the remaining part of my days as I have had the former part of my days; and I am sure nothing but mercy can smooth our dying pillow; nothing but mercy can make us willing to depart from a world we do know to that eternal world. How sweet the thought, then, that there is no uncertainty about it. David might well delight in the thought that "You have spoken of your servant's house for a great while to come." So, then, the mercy of the Lord is suited in every way to us, and it is by Jesus Christ, therefore from everlasting to everlasting.

The second eternity we have is that of righteousness: "And his righteousness." How triumphantly the word of God speaks of the eternity of Christ's righteousness. First, the 9th of Daniel; after Daniel describing the wondrous work of the dear Savior, he says, "And to bring in everlasting righteousness." Let us see if we can understand this by contrast. Angels were of course created in righteousness, in uprightness; but they fell, and unrighteousness took the place of righteousness. Adam was created upright; but he fell, and the righteousness was gone. But Jesus Christ has brought in everlasting righteousness, that is, he has made things eternally right between you and God; nothing can ever get eternally wrong between you and God. Oh, what a sweet thought! I may have wrong thoughts, wrong feelings, all wrong myself, but with God nothing can get wrong. Justified by faith, here is a righteousness that sets me right with God when I sleep, sets me right with him and keeps me right with him when I wake; nothing wrong, always right. "You are all fair;" not "were," or "shall be," but "are," as the current, present tense. "You are all fair, my love; there is no spot in you." Who is she that looks forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?" When things are wrong in our feelings, we think we have gotten wrong with God; but no, no. As we have often said, the Israelite, under the old covenant, might become righteous and unrighteous fifty times in his lifetime, because his justification consisted in his works. Moses describes the righteousness which is of the law, that the man "which does these things shall live by them;" but the righteousness which is of faith is eternal. Therefore, the Christian is always right with God by faith. "He believed, and it was counted to him for righteousness." So, that none of the changes we go through make the slightest difference to that declaration in the present tense, "You are complete in him." There it stands; he has brought in everlasting righteousness; it is eternally right. Now I am speaking of high things; certainly, things that are beyond the reach of the creature; and the Savior might well say of the Holy Spirit, "He shall take of mine, and show it unto you." What a mercy is it for you, when everything seems wrong in your feelings, perhaps wrong in your circumstances, that is, according to your judgment, for of course we judge a great deal after the sight of the eyes, to believe, in the face of it all, that all is right, that all is well, that you stand righteous before the blessed God. We see how triumphantly the Lord revealed this eternal mercy, this everlasting righteousness, to the thief on the cross. The Lord was not pleased to bring the thief into it until he was on the cross, and the perfection of Christ's righteousness was the great secret of that man coming right with God, made

right by the mercy of God, the atonement and righteousness of the dear Savior. See in the 51st of Isaiah how beautifully the Lord speaks of this righteousness, to endear himself to us, and to make us rejoice in him, he said, "Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath; for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner; but my salvation shall be forever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished." Here, then, is mercy by Jesus Christ, wherein the Lord appears eternally on our side by that that is infallible: here is a righteousness that keeps us right to all eternity, a righteousness that shall not be abolished. If we just for one moment take the word "righteousness" to mean the whole humiliation work of Christ, then we may take something in the way of contrast that is implied in the words I have just quoted, "My righteousness shall not be abolished," meaning, I think, not only that Jesus Christ's righteousness should continue, but meaning that that work of Christ has abolished sin, the curse, death, and all tribulation, but that itself continues. Here, then, is a God of mercy for us to live with, and here is a God that has provided a righteousness in which, as a righteous God, he can live with his people as a righteous people. "Your people shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land forever."

The third eternal is that of the covenant; "His covenant." And this covenant is everything endearing. There really does seem a beautiful tendency in the gospel to bring about the ultimate end, which is, "that we should be perfect before him in love." Now, let us read out this covenant, and look at it in its eternity. "I will betroth you unto me forever" there is the eternal, "in righteousness" in the eternal righteousness we have noticed, "and in judgment;" the word "judgment" there, I apprehend, means "wisely"; that the Lord should betroth the people to himself so wisely that he should never regret that betrothal, that he should never have any desire to alter it; betrothed unto him from eternity in Christ's righteousness, and in judgment, done wisely. And, oh, how wisely the covenant is ordered. When God formed his testamentary will, how wisely it was formed. I have heard at different funerals, I have been at some very curious wills that have been made sometimes in relation to their families and friends, very curious, very singular; some appeared to me to be very just, and some very unjust, very curious. But our God has made his will after that wise order that he will never regret or repent. Hence, he has sworn of Christ, and that is one of the items of this covenant, and will not repent, "You are a priest forever." And Jesus Christ himself said, "I will redeem them from death, I will ransom them from the power of the grave; repentance shall be hid from mine eyes." In the 11th of the Romans the Holy Spirit is represented as in his gifts and calling being without repentance. "I will betroth you unto me forever; yes, I will betroth you unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies; I will even betroth you unto me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord;" that is, if I understand that scripture rightly, you shall know the eternity of this covenant, the perfection of this wise arrangement, this judgment; you shall know the eternity of this lovingkindness, and mercy, and faithfulness. And it is after this order of things that Moses said, "The eternal God is your refuge; underneath are the everlasting arms." Thus, then, we get mercy suited to us in every way, especially in the eternity thereof; we get a righteousness that keeps everything right with God, and if we are right with him, we can bear with everything else. There will always be some crooks as long as we live in the world; "In the world you shall have tribulation;" but if we have peace with God, then all must be well. And then here is this covenant, which his people shall know; "You shall know the Lord;" that is, know him in this covenant; "for the counsel of the Lord," what he means to do, "is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant,"

The fourth, eternal is that of the commandment. Some of you perhaps are ready to say, I do not see how *eternal* will apply to the commandment. In this way that all the commandments given to the people are summed up in one commandment. If you go to the 10th of John you will find one commandment there; and I make no hesitation in saying; that all gospel commandments are summed up in that one. The dear Savior spoke thus; "Therefore does my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father." Now Jesus Christ was commanded to live and to die; he was called and commanded to swallow up death in victory. This was God's commandment to him, and that commandment the Savior delighted to do; yes, he says, "It is my meat to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work." Thus, then, his commandment is everlasting life. But to whom did he give that commandment? Just as he commanded Moses to deliver the Israelites from Egypt, so he commanded Jesus to save the people; and Jesus has done so. Just as he commanded Joshua to bring the people into the land, so Christ is commanded to gather in the sheep, and to give them possession of the land. This is what the Savior has been doing, and is doing. And just as David was commanded to work out the freedom of the people, so said Jesus, "If the Son make you free, you shall be free indeed." And just as Solomon was commanded to build the house and to bring the people, only temporally, to complete the picture as it were, into such a state that there should not be an adversary, nor evil occurrent, every man sitting under his vine and his fig-tree, from Dan to Beersheba, and none to make them afraid; just so the Lord Jesus Christ is commanded, and does these four things; namely, he saves his people, brings them into the land, gives them freedom, and will by-and- bye enrich them with eternal glory. Here, then, is the one great commandment; his commandment is everlasting life, and that commandment is given to Jesus Christ. "You have given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as you have given him." Do not, then, these four eternals present the Lord every way in an attractive form? Are you a poor, miserable, guilty wretch? Then by faith in Jesus Christ cry to God for mercy, for with him is plenteous and eternal mercy. Are you a poor, condemned creature? Then cry to God to impute in a manifest way to you the righteousness of his dear Son. Do as David did, as you read in the 71st Psalm; "I will go in the strength of the Lord; I will make mention of your righteousness, even of yours only;" and you shall find acquittance from condemnation, access to God, and peace with him. Are you a poor weak creature, having nothing to stand upon, as it were, a poor capricious creature, easily moved? Then pray to God to bring you into the bond of that covenant that is ordered in all things and sure, and you will find a standing there, that when the rain shall descend, and the wind shall blow, and the floods shall rise, they beat upon you in vain; for taking your stand upon the rock of this everlasting covenant, you will find it to be all your salvation and all your desire, and you will begin while in time to realize a little of the blessedness of eternity. And do you feel your deficiency to the Lord's commandments that belong to the Christian, some of which, in conclusion, I will presently notice; do you feel your deficiency there? Every Christian does: there is not a real Christian anywhere that does not confess that when he would do good, evil is present with him; that does not confess that he has a nature that brings him into captivity, and he cannot do the things that he would. Then, if this be the case, plead what the Savior has done; he kept God's commandments, he always set the Lord before him. And think to yourself, Well, I am a poor creature myself, but Jesus Christ kept God's commandments, he did God's will in perfection; so, I will rely, not upon my keeping his commandments, but upon Jesus Christ having kept them. He has met the law and the precepts of the gospel, confirmed the promise, he has done everything. This is just where the poor thief was. Why, the thief on the cross had nothing in himself

he could rely upon; but he saw in Jesus Christ eternal mercy, eternal righteousness, an eternal covenant, and he saw that Jesus Christ had kept every commandment perfectly. "This Man has done nothing amiss." I have done nothing right, and he has done nothing wrong; I have done nothing but sin, and he has done nothing but save; I have done nothing but rebel, and he has done nothing but obey; and so I now publicly thus confess, though on the cross, for the crimes I have committed, that this Man has done nothing amiss. But here is eternal mercy, eternal righteousness, an eternal covenant, and an eternal commandment, which is everlasting life; why should I, though a dying thief, and dying in public disgrace, why should I despair? Though rejected and cursed by the creature, and justly too, turned out of the world, and I may cry to the creature long enough, but there is not any pardon on earth for me; oh, why should I despair when there is such mercy as this, such a righteousness as this, such a covenant as this, such eternal life as this? "Lord, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Was there any hesitation in the answer? No. "Truly I say unto you, Today shall you be with me in paradise." There was the answer. I am sure when you sing that hymn, each of you that knows his own heart will not feel that the language is too strong to himself,

"And there may I, as vile as he,  
Wash all my sins away."

Every man that knows his own heart will feel the truth of this, that his nature is indeed vile, and will wish to unite with the afflicted and poor to glorify God for his mercy.

I now notice, in conclusion, the character to whom these eternals belong. There is a threefold description here given of that character, "The mercy of the Lord is upon them that fear him." How beautifully (this is a favorite part of mine) this is brought about in the experience of the real Christian! Let God the Father be set forth in the order of the sovereignty and certainty of his mercy, the real Christian reverences, respects, loves that, stands in awe of that, and he that touches that touches the apple of the Christian's eye; he fears God tenderly. Let the Savior be set forth in this order, in the eternity of his mercy, and let a doctrine be brought in that would cast a reflection upon the Savior's perfection to eternity, and the Christian would shrink from it, fly from it as from the face of a serpent. He reverences, he fears, he loves, adores, and worships, a Savior the same yesterday, today, and forever. Let the Holy Spirit's testimony be set forth as the testimony of mercy, which it is, and let some conditionality be brought in as a ground upon which the Holy Spirit is to do certain things, the Christian, who is so enlightened as to know the Holy Ghost (for the world knows him not, but "you know him," said the Savior; we know him, some of us, two ways; first, our insipidity without him; secondly, the vitality, the joy, the liberty, the power, we have when the Holy Spirit rests upon us) let something be brought to the real Christian contrary to the sovereignty and certainty of the Holy Ghost, the Christian would shrink from it. Have you ever noticed how men set the Holy Ghost and Christ's testimony at war? They make out that he would do many things that he does not do because men will not allow him. Why, the Savior says, "He shall take of mine, he shall show it unto you, and "he shall testify of me," and "he shall guide you unto all truth," and "he shall glorify me;" he shall do it. That is the testimony of God.