

December 2016/January 2017

Dear neighbours,

There was much excitement as 2000 dawned. Fireworks were the norm all over the world. But the first to burst upon the scene were the spectacular Sydney celebrations watched by millions on TV. The climax was the appearance in perfect copperplate writing of the word "eternity" across the span of Sydney Harbour Bridge which you may still google and see.

Arthur Stace served in the first World War. He was illiterate and after demob he drifted and was involved in drink and petty crime. One day in 1932 he entered a Baptist church and heard the speaker dwell on the subject of eternity. It thrilled his heart and he became a changed man. He felt unable to serve the Lord very ably so having learned to write a little he devised the bright idea of going out at night into Sydney and its suburbs (and later further afield) and writing the single word "eternity" in yellow chalk on the pavements, perhaps just once or twice a night.

Between 1932 and 1967 no one ever knew where the beautiful writing would pop up next, and it became a source of great interest. One writer recalls how the children of their neighbourhood in North Sydney used to vie with each other to improve their handwriting to make it as good "copperplate" as "eternity."

No one knew until 1956 who it was who did it, though one or two perhaps guessed. "Eternity" became a byword in Sydney. When Arthur Stace was revealed he became affectionately known as Mr Eternity. Aware of his limitations Mr Eternity thought that this was the one thing he could do to honour the Lord Jesus Christ who saved him. His ingenuity climaxed the opening celebrations in Sydney in 2000 and was viewed across the world. The day will declare probably that his ingenuity also brought the knowledge of eternal life through Jesus Christ to countless numbers also.

Of course it is the Lord Jesus Christ who is the one who should be affectionately known as Mr Eternity. "Even from everlasting to everlasting thou art God" (Psalm 90.2).

Our brains are wonderful but they are finite. We can imagine a future stretching out into timelessness but it is beyond us to contemplate no beginning. If we say of God that there never was a time when He was not, we can't easily grasp what we are trying to say, but it is what the Bible affirms. It also speaks of a purpose which God had for the world and for believers "before the world began" (2 Timothy 1.9).

But what is of the greatest interest to us is that God promises that as far as the future is concerned believers in the Lord Jesus Christ may share life with God for ever and for ever. For eternity. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3.16).

"My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish" (John 10.27-28).

"This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent" (John 17.3).

"The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6.23).

"And this is the promise that he has promised us, even eternal life" (1 John 2.25).

"If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands" (Job 14.14-15).

"Man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets" (Ecclesiastes 12.5). It is for a long time and as far as further participation in this world is concerned it is a long way away.

But where will you spend eternity? "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God" and there is no way to eternal life in the presence of God as we are. Jesus Himself said, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3.3). "That which is born of the flesh is flesh: and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, "Ye must be born again" (John 3.6-7).

As we are born with eternal souls, in contradistinction to the animals, eternity is our destiny. "Them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12.2).

So where will you spend eternity? When Jesus began to teach and preach His first words were "the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye and believe the gospel" (Mark 1.15). Almost the Saviour's last words (Mark 16.16) were, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (another word for condemned – the word used in Greek of passing the sentence of death on someone guilty of a capital offence).

"Eternity" chalked on the pavement in beautiful copperplate writing lasted perhaps 48 hours. The reality is for ever. The message comes to us once or twice perhaps and if we are indifferent passes us by. The life it proclaims is for ever. Jesus said, "But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not God of the dead but of the living" (Matthew 22.31-32).

All have sinned (Romans 3.23; 5.12). We will all be condemned on that basis. To reject Christ is double trouble. For the Saviour was sent to save us from our sins. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth on him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3.16). Again, "as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment, so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many" (Hebrews 9.25).

There is said to be high in the Rocky Mountains a place where if rain falls one inch to the west it will flow to the Pacific and one inch to the right it will flow to the Atlantic. Where your mind and heart fall with regard to the Saviour Jesus Christ will determine your eternal destiny with or without Christ. In heaven or hell. It is for a very long time and the conditions are very different. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved" (Acts 16.31).

Yours affectionately in Christ,