

The Eternal God is your Refuge

Murray/New Year's Eve

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Let's turn again to Deuteronomy 33 and read again verse 27. Deuteronomy 33:27.

27 The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms:
and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy
them.

2015 closes with the world in a state of tremendous insecurity, events in Paris and San Bernardino, also events in the Middle East as it continues to explode and as historic nations implode, all create a culture, an environment, a sense of tremendous insecurity. All the opinion polls show that the predominant concern at the end of 2015 is indeed people's sense of vulnerability, a sense of danger, a sense of threat, not knowing where and when the next attacks or dangers will come from. And of course, Christians are not immune from this. We feel it ourselves. We see these events and we wonder also if it can happen in California, can it happen in Michigan. Of course, it can. We wonder about the world that our children will inherit as we see increasingly dangerous nations acquiring weapons of mass destruction. And at times, we can feel tremendous fear and anxiety for ourselves, for our children, for the church, for the nation, and it's at such times that such verses as these are bedrock to stand on. They must become our foundation to rest upon as we head into a new year.

These words, of course, come in the context of Moses' blessings of the tribes. Some of the blessings, we have to admit, are very difficult to understand. The language is very poetic and metaphorical. The exact circumstances that some of the blessings are addressing are difficult for us to perhaps grasp but if there's one thing that's constant and very clear, it is this here at the end of these blessings as Moses turns the children of Israel towards the character, the nature of God. Beginning in verse 26, "There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rides upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky." And here one part of this incomparability is this: that the eternal God is thy refuge, thy security. I want to look at that phrase this evening. I want to look briefly at the meaning of eternity and then, secondly, at the measure of eternity; how do we actually measure this, how do we actually try and understand what this massive concept, eternity, actually means.

So, first of all, just a few words about the meaning of eternity or eternality because it says the eternal God is our refuge. One way of understanding this is by reminding ourselves that there are three categories of existence. Three categories of existence. The first category is this: there are things that have a beginning and an end, such things as animals. They have a beginning here below and they have an end here below in this earth. They start at one time, the end at another time and their age span varies, of course, per species and within species as well, but every single animal has a beginning here and an end here. They are not eternal.

The second category of existence is: those who have a beginning here but no end here. Into such category come angels and human beings, especially when we're thinking of, of course, the soul. The soul of the human being, that your soul, my soul, is not from eternity, it had a beginning. At the moment of our conception, our souls began but they have no end here, they continue in existence. Though our bodies come to an end here, at least temporarily before the resurrection, the soul does not. The soul keeps going. It has a beginning but it has no end. It's not from everlasting but it is to everlasting. The same goes for the angels.

But then there is another category of existence and its those that have no beginning and no end and really I shouldn't have said "those" because there is only one, the one who has no beginning and no end. He's from everlasting to everlasting and that, of course, is God. He alone as the apostle says in Timothy, he alone has immortality. Now, we might speak of ourselves, of the human race, having immortality and we do to a limited extent in the sense that we have immortality going forward. We will never die, as it were, and our souls, they will never cease to exist, but we don't have immortality looking backwards. God does. No matter how far back we look, we cannot find his beginning point. No matter how far forward we look, we cannot find his end point. That's why he's described in the Bible as from everlasting to everlasting.

Now, I want to just drill down in that a bit more with these three thoughts. First of all, just think for a moment on this whole idea: the eternal God has no beginning. He has no beginning. He never started to be. There was never a moment when he was not. He always was. In Isaiah 43 he says, "before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me." In Isaiah 44 it goes on, "Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God." There was no one before him so as far back as we look, he's there.

He has no beginning and he has no end. There will never be a time when we can say God is not. There will never be a time when he comes to an end. No matter how long this world lasts, no matter how long the new heavens and the new earth last, he will be. He will be. He has not beginning. He has no end. He is from vanishing point that way to vanishing point that way.

No beginning, no end, and then think thirdly of this: no time. No time. When we think of our eternity going forwards, if we live forever with God we, will always be conscious of time passing, of a succession of time. That's how we experience it, isn't it, as limited

creatures. We can only exist, what's the time just now? It's 7:26:35. I don't exist at 7:26, I don't exist at 7:30, I can only exist here at this very moment in time and then I exist in the next second and the next second and as I go forward into the next second, I'm no longer in the previous second and I'm not in the next second until that second comes. I'm limited. You're limited. We only exist at successive points in time. God's not like that. You and I can only be present in one place at a time and in one point of time at a time. God's not like that. God exists in every place at every time.

How can we understand this? Well, it is rather mind-boggling, we must admit. If we can ever get our minds around the idea that God can be everywhere, to add onto that that he can be at every point of time in every place, how can that be? God doesn't exist in a succession of time. Maybe I can illustrate it like this. You're watching a military parade, you're down on the sidewalk and you're watching this uniformed men and women pass you. You maybe see one or two at a time down at your level as you're looking out, or you might see a bit more bits and pieces of shoulders and legs but really you only start seeing a handful at the most at a time down at your level. Then if you think somebody up on the top of a ten story building looking down, he can see everyone. He can see everything. Everything there is present to him whereas only one or two people are present to us and that's the case with God and eternity as well. We can be present at one place at one point in time but from God's perspective everything is present to him. Everything and every time. The first day of this universe is as present to him as today and tomorrow is as present to him as today, and the last day of days, the last day of this world's history, is as present to him as today.

He is from everlasting to everlasting, he sees from everlasting to everlasting. He is in every point of time from everlasting to everlasting. This is awesome, isn't it? It's mind-blowing. That's why when God spoke to Moses, he gave him this name "I am that I am." I just am. Wherever I am I am and whenever I am I am and whatever time past, present, future, I am there. I am that I am. Isaiah 46, "Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done." 2 Peter 3:8, "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years." We might be able to hold one day, he can hold 1,000 years and 2,000 and 3,000. It's all the same to him.

This is the kind of God that's being spoken of here, the eternal God. No beginning. No end. Timeless. And therefore when we read the next phrase, "The eternal God is thy refuge," that means so much more to us. This eternal God, this God with no beginning, this God with no end, this God who is present in every place, this God who is present at every moment of time and to whom every moment of time is now, this God, this eternal God is thy refuge. If we can say that's the meaning of eternity, that's the meaning of eternity.

But let's make this more practical. How do we measure this? How do we unpack this in a way that is helpful to us? How do we bring this to bear on our own lives and our own problems and our own challenges? Well, think first of all, God's persons are eternal, the

three persons in the Godhead, each of them is eternal. Here it's probably speaking specifically of God the Father. This is the eternal God who is thy refuge. In John 8:58, "Jesus said to them, Verily, verily, I say to you, Before Abraham was, I am." The Son is eternal. Hebrews 9:14, "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God." Here we see the testimony of Scripture. It's saying whether we look at the Father or the Son or the Holy Spirit, each of the three persons and all of the three persons are equally eternal, equally from everlasting to everlasting.

Then we contrast that with ourselves, creatures of a moment, creatures so conscious of our beginning here and our end here, conscious of the passing, the rapid speedy passing of time, another year just gone like a flash. We feel very much our limitations, our fragility, our mortality. We feel very much the constraints and restraints of time upon our existence; how it once past is so irrecoverable. And when we think of this, it humbles us, doesn't it? It makes us worship these eternal three persons but it also humbles us in contrast when we think of how unlike the eternal God we are and that such an eternal God should take note of such creatures of time as we are; that he should not only take notice of but care for and provide for and even save, come into time in the person of his Son and be bound by time in the humanity of his Son and then come to an end in his humanity in the person of his Son. Such things are staggering.

God's persons are eternal but, secondly, God's perfections are eternal, his attributes, his characteristics. We could go through all of them but think of his mercy. Think of his mercy, it is eternal. We read, for example, in Psalm 103:17, "the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting." An eternal mercy.

Think of God's knowledge. We read in Acts 15:18, "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." It's not as if God started with no knowledge or little knowledge or much knowledge and added to it and is growing in knowledge and will continue to. No, his knowledge was as perfect at the beginning as it is now, as it will be at the end. He has full knowledge and perfect knowledge, comprehensive knowledge. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning. Again, you contrast that with ourselves, don't you? We start with zero knowledge as a little infant. We grow in knowledge slowly and then rapidly and then we come to a crest, a peak of knowledge sometimes it feels like our 40s but hopefully it's 50s or 60s before we start declining and losing knowledge and sometimes ending up we know nothing. That's not God. His knowledge is eternal.

Think of his power which is one of the emphasis here, "The eternal God is thy refuge." Again, you think of a little baby, an infant, and a teenager, and a middle-aged person, and an old person. There is a rise and there is a fall, isn't there, in our power and strength but not with God.

And surely these things should be a tremendous comfort to us as we head into a new year and we see the cruelty of man, we think of the eternal mercy of God. We see the ignorance of man, we think of the perfect and eternal knowledge of God. We see the

weakness of man and humanity and of ourselves, and we're drawn to put our trust and seek out the eternal power of God. God's perfections are eternal.

Then, thirdly, God's purpose is eternal. God's purpose is forever. He has a plan. It's a plan that was made before time began. A perfect plan that he's never abandoned and he's never amended and he'll never have to edit or change. To go along with his eternal persons and his eternal perfections is an eternal purpose. And when we see the winds of change and the rapidly shifting opinions of the majority on all the issues of the day, surely it's wonderful to come back to hear about the eternal purpose of God. No matter which party's in power, no matter who sits in the White House, no matter what happens in the primaries and the general election, no matter what direction this country takes, the eternal God's purposes shall stand. Not one of them will be frustrated or thwarted or defeated. As we already read, "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning." Psalm 33:11 says, "The counsel of the LORD stands for ever." Ephesians 3:11, "According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ " before the foundation of the world. Eternal purposes.

And if God's purpose is eternal, then the application to us is let's agree with it. Let's submit to it. Let's cooperate with it. Let's commit ourselves to him rather than fight and rebel. Who is going to win that competition? His purposes are forever and it calls us to align our purposes with his and to truly pray and do, "Thy will be done on earth," in me, "as it is in heaven."

Fourthly, God's promises are forever. We're thinking here specifically of God's Gospel promises. They are as true today as they were when first uttered by the prophets, by the Lord Jesus and by the apostles. Every single one of the Gospel promises is forever. They don't have an expiration date at the end of 2015, they come with us thankfully into 2016. And all the promises of God to his people about working all things together for their good, about keeping them through faith unto salvation, ready to be revealed at the last time, all these promises are good and true and sure and steady and trustworthy.

We're hearing so many promises, aren't we, in these days from politicians fighting for their party's nomination and we know, we know from past experience that very few of these promises will be kept. It can have a spill-over effect into how we view the words of anyone and we become cynical and suspicious and that can even carry on and into our spiritual lives as well. We get so used to and so expert at doubting, questioning the promises of our leaders that we can sometimes put a question mark over God's promises. By faith, rub out that question mark and put in its place with a Sharpie an exclamation mark. God's promises are forever.

You remember when David was on his deathbed, he was looking back over all that he had hoped to be and all the promises he made to God about the kind of person and the kind of king he would be and all around him lie shattered promises, dashed hopes, and what are his words? He says, "Although my house be not so with God, although I have not fulfilled my promises, although I have not kept my word, although my house be not as it should be with God, yet he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all

things and sure, for this is all my salvation and all my desire although he make it not to grow. "Although," he said, "I don't see it all just now, although I don't see the fruit of this yet, yet that everlasting covenant perfectly organized and perfectly sure is all my salvation and all my desire. It's all I need and all I want." God's promises are forever.

Then, fifthly, God's protection is forever and that's a special word that's brought before us here, "The eternal God is thy refuge." There is that beautiful verse in John 10:28 where Jesus said, "I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." There is your defense, Paul is saying. There is your defense, Paul is saying. They shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. Who cares about national security when you've got such personal security.

Think of the hand that is brought before you here. It's an eternal hand. And there on the end of, as this verse tells us, everlasting arms. You look at a little baby's arms, there's nothing to them, is there? Even as they grow a little, one year old, two year old, they're just so soft and squidgy and weak. Then we see, perhaps young men especially, grow into teenagers and early manhood and there are sometimes some quite impressive strength. But soon not so long after, the muscles turn squidgy again, don't they, and soft. They begin to weaken and diminish and disappear and it's because they're not eternal arms. No matter how mighty, how strong, how pumped, how revved, these are not the arms we depend on. Here are the arms, "The eternal God is thy refuge," and underneath are the everlasting arms. God's protection is forever. Not a second out of his security.

You want to rest in such arms to carry you out of 2015 into 2016. Will that not give you a measure of calm and peace and trust and tranquility as you look ahead? Think of these arms that are carrying you. They've never been weak and they never will be weak. They are omnipotent, all-powerful arms and he loves to bear the weight of his people. He loves for all his people to be in his arms. He can carry every single one of us and every single one of his people all around the world and they don't spend a split second out of his hand or out of his arms. He dares the denizens of hell and he says, "You'll never pluck them, not one of them, out of my hand." God's protection is forever. What a refuge.

Then, sixthly, God's pleasures are forever. God's pleasures are forever. The happiness of God's people is called eternal joy, eternal glory, an eternal weight of glory, an eternal inheritance. At thy right hand are pleasures forevermore. What kind of pleasure could ever compete with that? No matter what pleasure God blesses us with in this world, whether it's the pleasures of a job or the pleasures of a sport or a pastime or a friendship or a vacation or a house, or whatever it is, none of them are eternal. God's pleasures are forever. Heaven is forever so pleasure is forever. That's what lies ahead and that's what the departed saints of God are enjoying this evening, pleasures forevermore. There is no up and down. There is no happy day and sad day. There's no rise and fall. There's no crest and trough. His pleasures forevermore. As far as the eye can see are pleasures. Oceans of pleasures. All different kinds and varieties to satisfy every single part of humanity. Pleasures for the eyes and the ears and the nose and the mouth and the hands. Pleasures for the mind. Pleasures for the heart. Every kind of physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, relational pleasure that is without sin, all of them and forever. The Psalmist says, "Thou

wilt show me the path of life. In thy presence is fullness of joy." So whatever the ups and downs of the coming year, we don't put our trust in the ups and we don't get down by the downs, we look forward to unbroken eternal pleasures in not so long a time ahead for any of us.

But then lastly here, God's punishment is eternal. Yes, God blesses his people in such a way that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed, but he also punishes those who are not his people so that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the sufferings to be revealed. God is a holy God. Wherever he sees sin, he will punish it, and where he sees sin forever, he will punish it forever. The pleasures of sin are but for a moment. The punishment of sin is but forever. That's why God speaks of everlasting fire, everlasting punishment, everlasting destruction. Revelation 14:11 says, "the smoke of their torment ascends up for ever and ever: and they have no rest night or day." Just think of these words again, "the smoke of their torment ascends up for ever and ever." As an old writer said: it's the word "ever" that breaks hope and breaks the heart. Ever and ever.

If this eternal God is not your refuge, if underneath there are not everlasting arms, then this God is your enemy and his arms are not your comfort but your terror. You are not resting in his everlasting arms and so you will know the wrath of these everlasting arms. Why leave 2015 in such an insecure condition? That's far worse than ISIS is a threat to you. That's far worse of a threat than Hillary Clinton in the White House or Donald Trump in the White House or whoever in the White House that you fear. Imagine having this eternal God as your enemy, having such arms to punish you forever. It need not be and should not be. You know the answer. You know the Gospel. You know where you must run.

It's interesting, Pastor Macleod and I did not consult over our sermons until we found out that from looking at the liturgy that both of us are preaching on the subject of refuge or safety. It's interesting that, isn't it? We've talked about should one of us change it? No. Obviously God wants us to hear two messages like that with some overlap in that area of refuge. It must mean that some of us are in tremendous danger and that need this refuge. You don't need to wait until Pastor Macleod's sermon tomorrow to run into this refuge and be safe, you can do it tonight.

Let's leave this passage with thoughts of eternity rising as above the thoughts of time, but let's use time to prepare for eternity, to prepare for our meeting of this great eternal God so that when we meet him we can say, "Eternal God, you are my refuge and, oh, how wonderful to see these everlasting arms that have carried me all the days of my life."

Amen.