

## ***The Revelation of Jesus Christ, the Alpha and the Omega***

*Revelation* is a book that has been either misunderstood or disregarded entirely. Some avoid a study of this last book of the Bible, fearing it's arcane and confusing, reserved for those few "experts" who take the time to learn great details about the mysterious details of prophecy. Others avoid it, thinking it's all about fearful doom, gloom, and judgment.

*Revelation* is a poetic message that involves all 5 senses with poetry, song, and sound. In the opening words we see it's to be read aloud and heard. It's a particular type of literature called "apocalyptic," which appears throughout Scripture (especially in Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah) and was employed by Jesus when he used this highly symbolic language to speak of the end times, as we noted last Sunday (Mark 13).

Follow as I read our New Testament Scripture, **Revelation 1:1-8**:

*1 The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place; he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John,<sup>2</sup> who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.*

*<sup>3</sup> Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear and who keep what is written in it; for the time is near.*

*<sup>4</sup> John to the seven churches that are in Asia:*

*Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne,<sup>5</sup> and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood,<sup>6</sup> and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

*<sup>7</sup> Look! He is coming with the clouds;*

*every eye will see him,  
even those who pierced him;  
and on his account all the tribes of the earth will wail.*

*So it is to be. Amen.*

*<sup>8</sup> "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.*

We're all aware of the misery and suffering rampant throughout the earth—suffering from natural disasters and at the hands of angry, warring mankind. We live in an unstable and dangerous world, and in unpredictable and volatile times. Yet *Revelation* serves to remind us that this continues to be our Father's world, and our Lord Jesus reigns over all, even over the wreckage and havoc wreaked by sinful mankind. One remark that is often heard during times of disaster and

crises is, “Where is God in all of this?” *Revelation* is God’s revealing himself “in all of this,” showing that he is sovereign over all of life.

The revelation of Jesus Christ is, first of all, an unveiling of the Alpha. In our Scripture (8) Christ gives one of his “I Am” sayings (7 others in John’s gospel), “I am the Alpha and the Omega...who is, who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.” Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters in the Greek alphabet. As the Alpha, Jesus is the first. Jesus is God the eternal Son, equal to the Father from all eternity.

Many argue against the existence of a good God, referring to natural disasters and terrorist atrocities, such as recently in Paris. “How can a good God allow the helpless to suffer?” We need to remember that God’s creation is good, and was without suffering. Suffering and the “groaning” of creation followed man’s fall (Genesis 1:25, etc; Romans 8:22).

Jesus, the Alpha, the one who was and who has always been, the co-Creator, had us in his heart before time began. No matter what happens around us and to us, we must remember this. God has placed his claim upon us and has designed the events of our lives to lead us to himself. We are no after-thought or mistake of nature. He’s the exalted King of kings. Jesus is worthy of our reverence and our total reliance upon him for salvation and grace. When we see what appears to be a world falling apart, remember: Jesus is Lord over all, and is holding this universe together. And we owe him our allegiance and full trust.

In our Scripture we read, “*To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood.* Jesus first loved us. Unlike the hyper-Calvinists who worry about who’s elect and who’s not, we simply preach and share Jesus with whomever will listen, and we trust God to honor his word with those he has chosen. Only when God’s people come to saving faith in Jesus can they look back with thanksgiving and say, “I didn’t choose Jesus. He chose me. I wasn’t looking for him. In fact, I was running from him, and by grace he took hold of me for himself.” Jesus is the Alpha, the first, the foremost, and the founder of our faith.

The revelation is of Jesus Christ, who says, “*I am the Omega.* Jesus completes our faith. Jesus is “the author and perfecter (bringing it to maturity and perfection--- Hebrews 12:2 Amplified Bible) of our faith.” Jesus is not through with working in my life, and he keeps on forming his character in me, and when he comes again, and I see him face to face, I will be like him (1 John 3:2).

As the Omega Jesus is saying he concludes history. *Revelation* was given to encourage believers, even in the first century church, to realize we are all living in the last days, this interim church age of urgently joining God in his Great Commission work. Each generation of the church has had its signs of the end, its tribulation and antichrists, and in some particular way has seen the “coming” of the Lord, particularly as each believer has gone to meet the Lord in glory. Yet

I also believe there is approaching the final Day of the Lord, when Jesus will come personally and gloriously, and destroy the final Antichrist and the works of the devil.

Every generation also has had its so-called prophecy experts, who pretend to know more than the Lord Jesus knew during the days of his earthly sojourn (Mark 13:32). The important truth in *Revelation* is that Jesus says that as Omega he will be the one to conclude world history as we know it, and we must be comforted by that fact as well as prepared for that eventuality. The world won't be destroyed in a nuclear holocaust, instigated by the capricious whim of a mad dictator. Jesus is coming to bring judgment to unbelievers and salvation to his children, as we see in verse 7. He, the Omega, will wrap up history as we know it.

As the Omega, Christ will consummate his kingdom. We look forward to that Day when we'll be all Jesus saved us to become, and also we'll receive our full inheritance of glory. The Omega, our Lord Jesus, will come to receive us to himself, and bring us to be with him and with one another in a consummated reunion of eternal fellowship.

CS Lewis spoke of a certain homesickness Christians feel whenever we contemplate a beautiful sunset, or hear a great piece of music. He says that's the beckoning of the eternal, and God-given homesickness for heaven. Maybe that's part of what *Ecclesiastes* 3: 11 means by God's setting eternity in our hearts.

This is the message of the last book of the Bible, that God is going to finish what he started in his original creation, and what he had in mind in sending his Son to save us. He's going to finish what he started when he saved you, and he's going to finish the work that's going on in you right now. The world isn't going to have the last word, nor the devil, nor even your old, sinful nature that seems to keep on dragging you down from your higher calling in Christ Jesus.

Someone once asked a well-known minister if he was an optimist or a pessimist, and he said, "*Of course I'm an optimist. I've read the last chapter of the Bible.*"

*Revelation* was written to remind us that the Omega Point is near, the end of earthly history is coming to a grand and glorious conclusion, as we read in our text, "the time is near." *Revelation* tells us that we have been in the last days since the days of Jesus. Every generation of the church is a part of the last days and is to live in the light of the coming of Jesus Christ. We are all part of the church age when the Gospel is to be preached and social ills are to be rectified, and the environment to be preserved as we live in expectation of Jesus' coming to conclude earthly history. One thing we can know for certain, the coming Day of the Lord is nearer than it's ever been!

To say he's the Alpha and the Omega is for Jesus also to say he's everything in between. It's like when we say, referring to our alphabet, "from A to Z," we mean by that, "everything." Jesus Christ says also, he is the Almighty, the *Pantokrator*. He is sovereign. Our text gives a revelation of Jesus Christ, who is sovereign over even the mighty Roman Empire, as this earthly kingdom was called by its subjects. Emperor Domitian issued his edicts of persecution against these Christians, who seemed so defenseless and powerless against the legions of Rome.

Yet, the *Revelation* says Jesus is "ruler of the kings of the earth," and though the Roman Empire is mighty, Jesus is *the Almighty* (verses 5 and 8). The *Revelation* of Jesus Christ reminds us that God is sovereign over all, and we are not vulnerable to the devices of Satan and his dupes. Even the receiving of the revelation was made possible by John's being banished by Caesar to the penal colony of Patmos. As someone remarked, the devil made a big mistake in banishing John to that island prison (just as he made a mistake in banishing John Bunyan to the Bedford jail, and Alexander Solzhenitsyn to the Gulag Archipelago). What the devil and his forces meant for evil, God meant for good in working out his giving us *Revelation*, that has encouraged the church for 2000 years.

Who could have imagined that the little segment of believers within the first century church would outgrow and far outlast the mighty Roman Empire? When Nancy and I were in Wales, we visited the site of an ancient Roman Empire ruins. Our tour-guide opined in the greatness and power of the Roman Empire, to have such a mighty fortress so far away near the northwest coast of Wales. And he said, "Imagine, that great empire lasted for over 4 centuries!" *Revelation* reminds us that we belong to the kingdom of God, which continues to expand and reach all nations, tribes, languages and peoples, and will continue till its glorious consummation and throughout the untold glory of an endless eternity.

Jesus Christ is the Alpha and the Omega, the alphabet of life. All you need for saying and writing anything in English or any other language is the alphabet, which is always adequate and always relevant. It never changes, and can spell any word! Books can become obsolete in a short period of time, but the Alpha and Omega is always timely and relevant to meet our needs. Just as is the alphabet, Jesus Christ is sufficient for all our needs.

Eugene Peterson talks about the sufficiency of Christ for the Alpha/beginning of our faith, and for the Omega/ending of our faith, when we face death or the coming of Christ in glory. But Peterson says we're to help each other deal with the "in between" of life, the daily and ongoing struggles and disappointments of life.

I want you to know that in the *Revelation* we are looking at Christ, the *Almighty In-Between*, who is able to give you grace for every trial, to heal every

disappointment, to forgive every sin, to mend every heartbreak. Yes, we look to the one who is coming soon, but this also means he's very near right now, and is available to be your sufficiency. Because of the sufficiency of Jesus Christ, John could greet the churches with "grace and peace to you" (4).

John says he has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve the God of our Lord Jesus (verse 6). We are part of an invincible kingdom, and we're priests, with direct access to our sovereign, sufficient God, and with a priestly duty to serve one another, and to bring others to God. The Great Lord Jesus of the in-between not only delivers us from sin, death, and hell, but he gives us a new beginning and daily grace for the "middle of life" (Peterson).

*Revelation* is written to those under the severe threat of Caesar's persecution to remind them that they're really the ones who reign. "He has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father" (verse 6). Jesus is the Almighty In-between. By faith we live in the victory of Christ, whatever our outward circumstances.

I recall a sermon preached at an international Baptist meeting in 1980 in Toronto, Canada, when much of the world was still in the throes of communism. One of the preachers was an African American pastor who preached a sermon to encourage those undergoing persecution. The preacher told of going with his son to a department store, and wandering into the toy department. The little boy began playing with one of those inflated clowns that serves as a punching bag. The bottom is filled with sand so that when the clown is knocked over, it bounces right back up. So, the preacher's little son began to punch the clown and it came right back up every time he knocked it down. "Look, Daddy!" the little boy exclaimed. "He's knocked down on the outside, but standing up on the inside!"

*Revelation* reminds us that we may be knocked down on the outside by the world under the control of the Evil One. But we belong to a kingdom that has overcome the world and will some day be exalted and consummated. In the meantime, even when we may be knocked down on the outside, we can stand up on the inside as more than conquerors through him who loved us (Romans 8:37).