

Sermon to the Saints which are at Topeka, Kansas -- Sunday, February 25, 2024

“I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.” (Revelation 1:8)

The world is in advancing chaos. Now I believe that if we assigned each able person in this body to one of the known expositors of the past six or seven centuries, each would be found to express in his writings that they saw the world reflecting chaos. It's probably exactly true that in each successive generation, since the first advent of Jesus Christ, the world has trudged forward in fits and starts toward its own decline and deconstruction.

As I open up the components of this substantive and comforting declaration from Jesus Christ, I ask that you look past the obvious point that Jesus Christ is God. That is absolutely true, but in the context of the writing, it is an incomplete view. The question that should be raised is why Christ makes this declaration at this exact point in the opening of the book containing the details of His own Revelation ... His own day. If we ask that question, I think we will go forth from today rejoicing that we have such certainty about what we say and what we do, as we watch this world go through her death throes.

Within just a few short verses, Jesus Christ says the same thing, ***“I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last” (Revelation 1:11)***, but he's giving a different message in that declaration than he is giving in this one. There are similarities for certain, but the thrust of the message changes because it is appended to a different context. So for today, we will look at the intent of Christ in His declaration in response to John's introduction of the book ... introduction of the subject of Christ's Revelation.

Expositor Joseph Seiss was an American Lutheran who preached in the early years of the 20th century ... approximately 100 years ago. He did 52 sermons on the Revelation, which were collected together and put into a book titled *The Apocalypse*. In each sermon, he does a large section of exposition and then closes with a “call to action”. In the exposition portion, he mostly sounds like a clear-headed preacher of the doctrines of grace that we preach in this church. In the “call to action”, he sounds like a raging Arminian heretic pretending that any soul listening to him has the inherent capacity to will or to do anything. A position we know is contrary to Scripture: ***“For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” (Philippians 2:13)***

Many of us grew up sitting in this church house listening to his expositions being read at some length, thankfully without the “call to action” being included ... at least in my recollection. Many of my initial impressions about the Revelation of Jesus Christ were influenced heavily from the lectures by Seiss, and there is a tremendous amount of comfort to be had in reading his rather lively style of pulling scriptures together to inform the writings of John the Beloved in this book of his visions. It's the Lord sending us helps ... sometimes even in the form of unclean birds who lack discernment to see that they are preaching against their own dark-hearted notions of the Trinity. Much like Brent has laid out for us from Balaam who went to curse, but could only bless.

I recommend the reading of Seiss – but please keep his blasphemy separate from the good expository work relying only on scripture to interpret scripture. Here is some of what Seiss offers on this language of Revelation 1:8:

“To all this [i.e., verses 1-8], the apostle yet adds a most devout reference to Christ, and to Christ’s declaration concerning himself, the further to confirm the solemn truthfulness of his words, and to incite us to lay the more stress upon them. Great things, and, to human reason, very improbable things, were upon his mind, and about to be submitted to the Churches. Their importance, and the predisposition on the part of men to disregard them, seemed to call for some especial pledge of the likelihood and certainty of their accomplishment.”

The truth that we’ve learned, from searching the scriptures daily for independent verification, is that this canon of scripture contains layer upon layer of promises. Guarantees to the saints in every generation – that this mystery of the gospel will be wrapped up. One will read Paul’s words and expositions of them. Another will be saturated with the writings of Moses, or one of the major or minor prophets. Still another will find great comfort in taking a deep dive into the poetic lines of the Psalms, the Proverbs, or the Song of Solomon. In all these presentations of God’s Word, regular declarations are made about various and sundry components of the coming Day of the Lord. In all these, the presence of the Trinity is evident in capturing and expressing that coming work.

So, when John the Revelator completes his opening summary of the work appointed in the Day of the Lord, this utterance comes forth from Jesus Christ to seal his words. To give to the intended recipient of this introductory framing of the Apostle a confident certainty that they are exactly including what needs to be included ... and exactly limited to the framework needed to be prepared to receive all the glories of the prophecy. We probably will not fully grasp all of the nuances of that framing until the Holy Ghost secures it into each of the elect souls who will live the prophecies that follow. But we today should be quite assured of their scope and their import, because the Christ for which the declarations were made has sealed it with this simple and comprehensive assurance. Similar to how He expresses the passage regarding our hope of salvation:

“Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things [His counsel and His oath], in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us:” (Hebrews 6:17-18)

This is why we will benefit from diving into what is intended in this expression from Christ. Not because we will understand it perfectly now, but because we can understand it fully enough to fill up our present capacity and therefore confidently and boldly speak to our generation about what John has said.

“I am”

It is an interesting fact that the first time you see these two words thrown together in the English language version of the Bible, it is when God is telling Abram in a vision – or an “ecstatic state”, according to Hebrew Lexicon dictionary – that He is his **“shield, and [] exceeding great reward.” (Genesis 15:1)**. The fulfillment of the promises flowing from that conversation is an integral part of the Revelation of Jesus Christ. Nice symmetry. The coupling is used hundreds of times to introduce an assurance from God that one of His attributes is engaged ... or simply that it is His honor, His kingship, His deity that is present and at work. Hundreds of times.

All of those passages are relevant instruction for us to get our arms firmly around the expressed and implied presence of God in His intimate work with His elect saints in the earth. They are all assurances to the weak and doubting flesh, to bear it up under what appears to us unsolvable conditions. We are endlessly in need of assurances to our help, like is addressed by Peter:

“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.” (1 Peter 4:12-13)

We are forever imagining in our weak flesh that the thing happening to us is uniquely experienced. The phrase **“some strange thing”** comes from the Greek word referring to a foreigner or stranger with whom you go and stay for a bit. Like the Vrbo or Air B&B stuff we sometimes use. Setting up our living in some new, strange place where the rules for basic living are changed. New bed, new bathroom, new kitchen, new living room, new yard, new city, new state ... and for some of you brain-damaged folks, new country! What is this strange place we’re in? Our flesh is disrupted when changes come ... and we get out of sorts. We get testy and maybe a little short-tempered because we don’t like this change imposed upon us by the God of eternity. We need to be reminded time and again that it is not a surprise that we will be **“emptied from vessel to vessel” (Jeremiah 48:11)**, as is the lot of God’s elect. So we’re constantly reminded in this blessed love note we received from God, to strengthen that most precious faith, without which **“it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” (Hebrews 11:6)**

Moses is told to go to the offspring of the patriarch Jacob (Israel) to pronounce an end to their slavery in Egypt. And when asked who sent him to do the work of releasing them, he is to say **“I AM hath sent me unto you.” (Exodus 3:14)**. When you boil down all of the noise generated by human imagination – from which springs an endless display of pure vanity – you come to the root of every single thing. The Existing One. The only Being that was not created. Whether an expression of will, an expression of a thought, or an action – it had to originate first from the only Being that predated that created thing. God is that I AM; as He then proved to the tyrant Pharaoh for the purpose of releasing His chosen people from captivity.

That same eternal Being and (therefore) authority, in the form of the Son of God – the second member of the Trinity – is now coming forth to express that it is the eternity and holiness of the

Trinity assuring the reader that John’s introductory words are not originating from the vanity of the human flesh. They are not the ramblings of an imprisoned and incoherent man. They are the divinely inspired, and perfectly formed words of the I AM. The I AM hath sent John to the work. The I AM has inexplicably maintained those words – that are absolutely despised by the overwhelming population of every nation and every tribe of the human race through every generation between then and now – to be available to that body of humble believers. Those who will need the **“patience and comfort”** (Romans 15:4) of these powerful and inspiring words to maintain their hope through the most distressing of times that will accompany this dispensational transition.

Our friend and elder Jon has done a great deal of work on this attribute of God’s infinity (November 7, 2021), so pick up the string I’ve started here and make yourself expert on the subject by consuming that and the related sermons on His attributes. In this sermon, it’s time to shift over to a more specific application of the Trinity’s nature.

“Alpha and Omega, [the beginning and the ending], saith the Lord”.

Christ, in this clause, continues to express the eternity of the Trinity. Except, His focus narrows on the application of that sound doctrine to the matters of eschatology. So, we are certainly to understand that the I AM was at the beginning – before any part of the creation had existence. But, as John Calvin accurately articulated in his exposition of a related passage: *“God does not grow old by any length of time, and never will surrender his authority; for he does not sit unemployed in heaven, but from his throne, on the contrary, he regulates the affairs of this world. But although the world put in his place an innumerable crowd of gods, yet he declares that he sustains no loss, because he will always continue to be like himself.”* This analysis would suggest that the reference to **“Alpha and Omega”** includes all of the letters of the Greek alphabet between the first and the last, or the clause **“the beginning and the ending”** intends the enumerable steps in directing and managing the creation between those two conceptual poles.

“Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.” (Hebrews 13:8)

I put brackets around the portion of the verse **“the beginning and the ending”** above because in Seiss’ exposition, he indicates that this clause *“is not found in some of the oldest and best copies of this book. It was, perhaps, introduced merely as an explanation of the clause going before it. It does not seem to convey any additional thought. He is the first, because all things took their beginning from him; and he is the last, because in him shall all things have their consummation.”* Indeed, most who read the expression **“Alpha and Omega”** – including me for the majority of my life – see it as a way to express **“the beginning and the ending”**. Like when we say *“from A to Z”* in English vernacular, intending the message that everything is included from those items beginning with the letter A to those beginning with the letter Z.

But consider a more specialized purpose for this expression coming from Jesus Christ. He intimates here that more personal ownership in this language. He is not only speaking of an

abstract description to show Himself a member of the eternal Trinity. He is, I submit, speaking of an even more intimate connection to what John the Revelator has said in the preceding seven verses introducing the Day of the Lord. He is speaking of a title that has uniquely been His office from the beginning – as this same Apostle so perfectly describes in his very first words authored in the Canon.

“¶ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men.” (John 1:1-4)

This opening oracle in the book of John introduces Jesus Christ in His glorious deity. He is not in a subservient role to the other members of the Trinity, but a tantamount role. He is the spring source of all the creation, and He is the source of all life. The expression that I think deserves more precise attention, however, is that He is called the Word. The unique office of this member of the Trinity is that He is the expression of the Trinity to the world. He is literally the first and primary reason for there being the need for and the proper use of language – the first through last letter of every one of the estimated 7,139 languages made use of in the earth. Look at this passage, and the unique descriptor of our Christ:

“¶ God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.” (Hebrews 1:1-3)

Christ is here described as holding the office of the “***express image***” of the Triune God. Drilling down the Greek term here used further details this unique office. The word is “*charakter*” (“*khar-ak-tare*”). When humans communicate in any language, it is articulated by striking a series of characters to express a thought. This would intimate that when we’re told that “***Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled***” (Matthew 5:18), it is because those characters are as eternal as Christ Himself. He is the expression of that law and therefore it cannot pass away – because He cannot pass away. When Job says that his Redeemer shall “***stand at the latter day upon the earth***” (Job 19:25), he means that every inspired Word shall still be fully in play, because Christ is “***Alpha and Omega***”.

To close this point, then. When this unique office of the Christ is utilized to certify John’s introductory words in the Revelation, it is a promise from the very Word ... the very expression ... of the eternal God that each character utilized in what has been written has the approval of the very reason for language to exist. It is just as eternal as Christ Himself.

“which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.”

These words have the same effect on my soul as comfort food has on my body ... only the nourishment is as perfect as the comfort is complete. I visit this place often, and I suspect that all of you do as well. If you have not yet reached the place in your individual lives where this is what you dwell on hour by hour, I tell you with all confidence that it is a place you want to be. In summary form, I like what Seiss expresses here. I want to begin with that, and then parse out a more deliberate application of the words.

“This sublime form of speech is used to describe the Eternal Father; but it belongs equally to the Son. He is the I AM, whose being is the same through all reckonings of time. As the Father exists in all the past, present, and future, eternal and unchangeable; so Christ, who is the express lineage of the Father, is ‘the same, yesterday, today, and forever.’ He was with the Father before the world was. He is now at the right hand of the Father. And he is to come in the name and the glory of the Father in those eternal administrations which are the joy and hope of his people. ‘The Almighty.’ Than this there is no higher name. It declares the complete and unqualified subjection of all created things to our Lord Jesus Christ. It leaves nothing which is not put under Him. Oh, the adorableness and majesty of our Redeemer! Who could play false in such a presence? What son of Belial may escape righteous retribution in such hands? What untruthfulness can there be in such a Being? What lack for the full performance of all the will and purpose of One with such characteristics! Rather than give way to doubt and unbelief, let us fall down in lowly adoration at His feet, take His truth, and rejoice in Him as our hope and our everlasting consolation.”

When I think of all the endless distresses we heap upon our low and flesh-cursed heads, this is the place to go for comfort. When I contemplate how often we go into darkness, because the crook in our lot seems to be unrelenting and insatiable in its appetite to infect and destroy us, this simple truth about our peculiar relationship with an eternal God gives me peace. When the practice of this most froward generation – making the most perverse behaviors and words their glory and their light and their good – vexes my soul, I flee to grasp this eternity of Christ and the certainty of the outcome He has promised. Christ is, was, and is to come. Christ is the Almighty. It is comfort food.

But what Seiss misses in this very beautiful generic application of the words is what I want to offer my friends here today. I have spent twelve sermons opening up seven verses of text that serve as John’s introduction to his visions and ambassadorial package to the world regarding Christ’s second advent. The first was in 2017. Add this thirteenth to discuss Christ’s seal upon the words, in verse eight. Seiss covered the same verses in two lectures. Most who read these words blow past this introduction with hardly a thought given. There is so much more to gain from them. Perspective.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ: This appointed period of transition between the current dispensation of the New Testament Church and the millennial reign of Jesus Christ. The first advent of Christ included upheavals in the social, political, and physical fabric of the earth. The second advent is appointed to bring cataclysmic social, political, and physical disruptions that will include the physical return of Christ in glory. These are appointed matters. Christ was with God in the appointment of them. Christ is, at this very hour, active in governing providence to bring

them to pass. Christ will be the center of the world's most violent and hateful energy – to the rejoicing of His remaining people at that hour. His Almighty nature is going to accomplish it.

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.” (Isaiah 9:6-7)

Which God gave unto Him: A term of the grand Covenant of Grace is the presentation of this Christ with a majestic display of His redeeming work. In that pre-time agreement, as a party equal in glory, Christ was appointed to secure the peace of His gifted elect human souls; to secure the redemption of those elect; to secure for them eternal life. As He **“was”**, He freely entered that covenant. As He **“is”**, every detail in the maintenance of each little soul from that time immemorial to the time of final execution is meticulously watched over with a sovereign and loving eye. And since He **“is to come”** into that grand transition ... into that opening of the Book of Redemption ... into that disposal of the created heaven, earth, and sea, and all things in and under it ... into that final abiding with His glorified saints in earth and millennial reign with his Jewish remnant; we have every assurance that there has been no break in the dotting of our Friend. From the first proverbial inking to the last fulfillment, what was given Christ will be had by Christ.

To shew unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass: As the author of creation and the author of providence, Christ prepared a record for His saints to know Him ... through Patriarchs, Judges, the Law, and the Canon. A record that secures that little remnant's understanding regarding what is prepared in the history of the creation to be brought to a certain conclusion and have a certain outcome. Each generation of His saints has been graciously given that necessary understanding to guide their ambassadorship to the earth and prepare them for how they will experience the time between the making of the Covenant and the final eternal fulfillment. More acutely, though, the record prepares the generation of His loved ones who will go into that short and excited transition that brings Him forth to transfer the kingdoms of the earth to the **“kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ” (Revelation 11:15)** – first the earthly kingdom, then the eternal one.

And he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John: To ensure that it was available to that final generation in a **“more sure word of prophecy” (2 Peter 1:19)**, the work was appointed to an angel. The deployment of this grander race of created beings, in the work of caring for and guiding the elected members of the lesser race, is quite remarkable. These humble, patient, majestic, and powerful allies to Christ have been interwoven into the work of preparing those who will be granted a place to rule with that eternal Savior. There they have been – since the work in the Garden of Eden, until the new heaven and new earth are established, and the

eternal kingdom is entered. A curious and wonderful truth that shows to us the creation-altering nature of these coming things.

Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw. ¶ Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand: The record of the coming times – and how it so perfectly and seamlessly meets the established glories of the testimony of Christ from the beginning – was carried forth to the written scripture by an appointed human. This is the Lord’s work. Indeed, the Word testified of is the very Christ revealed to John. And the promise, as the day of execution approaches, is that the blessed elect will read the words. They will hear with eternally prepared sheep’s ears, the voice that they know in the pronouncement of His coming. They will miraculously and mercifully adhere to those words without allowing a drop of the corruption of the flesh to soil them. They will know certainly that the time of execution is just before them and therefore their greatest hope is to hold fast to this testimony ... this record ... this prophecy.

John to the seven churches which are in Asia: The eternity of Christ – that he *“is”* the overseer of every event of providence – is seen in the work with His Church. His Bride. His Beloved. That blessed Sheba, who is *“black, but comely”* (**Song 1:5**) in the eyes of our Solomon. The intimacy of the relationship – that we have explored in some bit, but have yet to fully examine – is specifically introduced as one of the integral points in the work of preparing the Day of the Lord. The Church has to be prepared by the arranging Christ. The Church has to be guided by the King of Providence to know how to face this coming time. The eternal Christ speaks to comfort and prepare her.

Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth: This salutation from John the Revelator captures the authority and sovereignty of the Christ about whom his writing is concerned. Not simply the eternity of Christ is echoed, but the whole of the Trinity. Further, when our Christ’s authority is brought to bear it is in the way of His faithfulness, his role as Redeemer, and that he is in fact the King of kings in the earth. The difference between those grand recognitions by John, and the words of our current passage is the author. For a human to see and articulate the glories of Christ is a good thing. For Christ Himself to authenticate those words, and declare His infinity and omnipotence in the work that is to come, is quite another.

Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father: That chief work, as it relates to the race of humankind in the Covenant of Grace, is that of the Kinsman Redeemer. The love of Christ for His people ... His obedient propitiation for their sins ... and the resulting translation of those doomed and damned of the race to the office of kings and priests with Him to the Father. What solidifies this love more than His eternity; one with the Trinity in the council halls of eternity? What brings certainty to our hope in His sacrifice for us more than that He remains unchanged in every generation of the

creation He launched? What more than the certainty of His continuation brings gravitas to the new office His people hold as royalty in His eternal kingdom and priests to His mercy seat?

To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen: An eternity of it. An occupation that no human has been capable of contemplating in nearly six thousand years. Nor could it be contemplated, even if the sin-wrecked race had billions upon billions of years to work at it. Indeed, without the intervention by the declared Almighty God, all the race of man will do is perpetuate darkness until it evolves to lightless, unseeing grubworms feeding on dead flesh in a feverish vanity of unhinged lusts. But that Sovereign has promised the actual employment of His beloved in taking in the glories of the King of Eternity – in ever-increasing doses and without the least alloy of corruption. What could it actually be to give glory to the God of such grandeur that the human lacks even the capacity to articulate?

“And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities.” (2 Corinthians 12:3-5)

How well do we even understand what Paul is saying here? Much less would a human be able competently to describe what Paul witnessed and heard? The things were beyond what the laws of human nature will accomplish in this flesh. But our hope is grounded in the promise of the God who rules that plane that we will be given the honor to see it and spend our existences glorifying the God of it all. The pinnacle of this glory and this honor simply cannot be sufficiently stated in the words of this human existence – in any language whatever. Indeed the best we could do in that regard would truly be our very infirmity.

Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen: And so the case then is stated by John, of what will be this coming event. As certain as the promise of the eternal Lamb, slain before the foundation of the world. As certain as that same ***“Word was made flesh, and dwelt among” (John 1:14)*** humans to actuate that promise by being ***“taken, and by wicked hands [] crucified and slain” (Acts 2:23)***. As certain as God then ***“raised [Him] from the dead” (Acts 4:10)***. As certain as that same Jesus was ***“taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.” (Acts 1:9)***. Christ’s eternity, as one in the Trinity, confirms His Apostle John’s words that he will just as certainly return before the eyes of every created thing.

We here should understand that we live in a time that has not experienced so many humans, since the antediluvian world. We live in a generation when humanity has chased vanity and sin beyond no generation before us. We have witnessed with our own eyes how millions bow down to the most trivial of human institutions. We have witnessed the advancement of sodomy – in all of its dark expressions – to where it is now joyfully pursued and pressed into the warp and the woof of society’s fabric worldwide. We have witnessed how violence and bloodshed is considered so insignificant that more time is spent on decisions about the next meal or entertainment than on how we can stop the carnage. There are no more great men. There are no more great thinkers.

There is no more justice or even any human with power who solemnly considers their standing before God.

“There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you that he will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:2-8)

I’ve been weighed down heavy with the impression – in my dreams and in my waking musings – that we are here now. That the words that need to be declared to this little flock of Christ is ***“Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” (Isaiah 40:3)*** As I come to the close of John’s introduction, and Christ’s sealing of that introduction, it feels like the time has come to examine this church according to the plumbline that is set for the Church of Revelation, ***“for the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God” (1 Peter 4:17)***. Lord willing, we will examine what our Christ will tell us in how this is to be done, and it is my sincerest hope that we will find ourselves true to that measuring stick and abundantly willing to prepare ourselves as the Bride of Christ to be taken into the bedchamber of our God.

I love you all. Amen.