

"The first and the last"

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In the book of the Revelation (the unveiling of God's mind for the universe) the Lord Jesus refers to Himself and is referred to many times as "the Beginning and the Ending;" "the First and the Last;" "the Alpha and Omega" — expressions denoting the absolute greatness and pre-eminence of His Person. It is just this precious thought — *His* greatness — which one hopes will establish the atmosphere of this paper, and will also find an abidingly deeper place in the affections of every reader. It is abundantly clear from many Scriptures, outstandingly the magnificent words of John 1, Colossians 1 and Hebrews 1, that He was and is before all, that all creation sprang from His mighty creatorial Word; indeed Isaiah 9: 6 invests Him with the name "Father of eternity" itself (N. Trans.).

It is of course well known that the title "Alpha and Omega" in Revelation 1: 8, covers the whole of the Greek alphabet; and equally remarkable is the word "Me" in Zechariah 12: 10 from which verse 7 is quoted — "And they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced." The word "Me" is composed of the Hebrew letters "Aleph" and "Tau" — the first and last letters in that language (cf. first and last stanzas of Psalm 119). In Him, the Eternal Logos, is the full expression of the mind and heart of God; His every utterance in complete accord with the will of God; His words replete with grace and divine authority (Luke 7: 22, 36).

He is the *beginning* — before all things, and the *end* is safely in His hands too! He is "*the* Alpha and Omega," the presence of the Greek article focuses attention upon Him as being *uniquely thus*. Ephesians chapter 1 unfolds to us the "mystery of God's will" in that He will "head up all things in the Christ." I quote the words of one now with Christ — "It will be a grand spectacle, as the result of the ways of God, to see *all things* united in perfect peace and union under the authority of man, of the Last Adam, the Son of God; ourselves . . . His companions in the heavenly glory" (J.N.Darby). And then the grand finale of 1 Corinthians 15 — "then the *end*." Every contrary rule and authority and power annulled; every mark, and the effect of every mark, of Satan's malice and man's failure completely removed; the whole scene scintillating with a glory that only Christ could have established; the eternal day of God is introduced, what a majestic end — the platform entirely clear, and the glorious utterance from the throne rings out — "Behold I make all things new."

Would it be consistent with the above to consider briefly the *first* and *last* recorded words of the precious Saviour to men in the gospels? Some of these are of a definitely dispensational character, but the desire in this paper is to see a little of their moral importance to ourselves in this day. Space permits but a short reference to each. In Matthew 3: 15 we read — "Suffer it to be so now; for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." In the scene of man's sinful departure from God, Christ is saluted as the one Object of delight to the Father's heart, and in order that *man* might be secured for God's pleasure, and that a *righteous* basis for this might be established, the blessed Lord would go into death (of which baptism is a figure). Precious words indeed from the lips of the mighty Son of God found here in lowly grace.

Mark records that "Jesus came . . . preaching the gospel": Hebrews 2 tells us that the grand message of salvation was "*first* (began to be) spoken by the Lord." Can we measure the joy to His own blessed heart as He thus spake of God's glad tidings for men? The "Son of God" (v.1) Himself making known the attitude of God's heart toward men. "Grace reigns through righteousness." The incident in Luke 2 is most precious in its content. The questions and answers of the Lord are not recorded for us,

but His words — "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business" indicate a service of devotion to the will of God and love to men which is unique in action and in result. 2 Corinthians 1: 3 speaks of the "Father of compassions" (N. Trans.). How often this heavenly compassion was manifest in the Saviour's approach to weary hearts! "He saw . . . and had compassion." Behind the manifest miracle of Nain's gate was the compassionate heart of One committed to His Father's business — Eternal love the might sphere from which the acts of power sprang.

In John's gospel the Baptist sees Jesus "*Coming unto him*". If the One whose majesty and glory as the Eternal Word fill the early verses of this chapter moves *towards man*, moral questions are at once involved — hence John's testimony in verse 29 to the *work* of Christ. Then in verse 36 John utters those simple yet profoundly blessed words — "Behold the Lamb of God!" Words fail to suggest the deep abiding significance of such an utterance; does not the glory of them shine out in the succeeding incident! God's Lamb — "of full deity possessed;" the Creator, the Light of the world, manifested here as the Lamb about to suffer in order that men might be drawn, as attracted by the glory of His Person, and cleared of guilt by His perfect sacrifice, into the very abode of eternal love, to be at home with Himself. Righteousness established; the glorious glad tidings preached; the Father's heart declared and the love and tranquillity of the Father's abode enjoyed in the company of the Son Himself.

"In Thee most perfectly expressed,
The Father's self doth shine;
Fulness of Godhead, too; the Blest,
Eternally divine.
Worthy, O Lamb of God art Thou,
That every knee to Thee should bow."

The *last* words of this precious Christ in the gospels can be referred to but very briefly. The confidence engendered by His words in Matthew is surely something we would all greatly appreciate in these days of disintegration on every hand. "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth . . and, lo, I am with you always even unto the end of the world; Amen." The original language reads — "*I with you am*". The mighty "**I AM**" before whom the power of Egypt was broken that His people might be free; the One before whom the pride and power of the Pharisees and chief priests "went backward and fell to the ground;" He who could say "*I am* the Good Shepherd" enfolds His sheep in the clasp of Divine power and love — "*I with you AM*." And this, beloved, to "the end of the world." "He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. so that we may *boldly* say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Hebrews 13). The everlasting arms beneath, the banner of love above, goodness and mercy our constant companions unto the end.

In the fortifying power of this we can venture on the Lord's command in Mark 16 — "Go . . . and preach the gospel." Strengthened by His clasp of unchanging love, moving in our service as in obedience to His will, we shall know the blessedness of His presence with us in our labours — "the Lord working with them." Only in such service can there be fruit abiding for God.

The Saviour's words in Luke 24 open up a subject of vastly blessed dimensions — the promise of the Holy Spirit. We see in Acts the dynamic change in the movements of His disciples as they came into the blessing and power of the indwelling Spirit of God. What immense vistas of blessing are opened up to us, what unailing resources are ours! As unrieved in our hearts He leads us into all truth; He is the One by whom the love of God is deluged into our lives; it is as led by Him that we can

walk through this scene in the dignity of sons of God. Much, much more indeed is involved in the "promise of the Father." "He led them out *as far* as to Bethany." Bethany is not the end of the pathway — but it is where the shadow of death is lifted from our spirits — and where the fruits of victory are to be enjoyed.

Finally we have the precious command in John 21 — "Follow Me." This, beloved, is "better felt than told." His searching words of love discovering all that would tend to hold us from full committal to Himself, shall we not say "Lord thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee." *His* love has wrought this; He desires our company — shall we not respond to such love?

Lead on Almighty Lord,
Lead on to victory;
Encouraged by Thy blessed Word,
With joy we follow Thee.
We follow Thee, our Guide
Who didst salvation bring;
We follow Thee, through grace supplied
From heaven's eternal spring.