

Session 4 Jesus as the First and the Last

Please refer to the teaching notes for this message.

INTRODUCTION

Tonight we're going to look at Jesus and His title, or His name, as "the First and the Last." This is very significant, because this is the name that Jesus used the most in the book of Revelation. He spoke this name concerning Himself more than any other name. That's a very significant point.

THE MOST POWERFUL INFLUENCE ON THE CHURCH IS THE REVELATION OF JESUS

Let's give a quick review. Paragraph A. In Revelation 1-3, John sees a vision. He communicates this vision, and in doing so, he highlights thirty distinct descriptions about Jesus, or titles about Him. He highlights eighteen eternal rewards. Each one of these descriptions and each one of these rewards communicates something very specific about Jesus to us. Here's the important point: each one of these and all of them together are necessary to equip the Church. If we don't understand these thirty descriptions and these eighteen rewards, we're not as equipped as we can be in terms of our revelation of Jesus.

The Holy Spirit knows the most powerful influence on the Church is the revelation of Jesus Himself. He gives us this insight so that we would overcome compromise and endure persecution, but not only that: that we would be equipped to engage and participate with Jesus in ministry in a deep way. Someone says, "I want to overcome compromise and temptation. I want to endure hardship more effectively rather than giving up and giving in. I want to be more equipped to partner with Jesus right now in this age."

I say, "Good. I know one of the key ways to get equipped"—these thirty descriptions of Jesus; these eighteen eternal rewards.

Paragraph B. Revelation 1:10-11. John has the shock of his life. He's on the island called *Patmos*. Most guess that he's about ninety years old. He's on the island of Patmos in the Mediterranean Sea. He's in prison because he preached the gospel. I assume he's in prayer and suddenly he hears a voice behind him. The voice is like a trumpet (Rev. 1:10). It's loud. It's alerting. We'll see in a moment that it's Jesus Himself. He comes up behind John.

The voice like a trumpet means, "Be alert, John. Don't dismiss what I'm going to say to you, John. Make it a priority."

"I AM THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA, THE FIRST AND THE LAST"

The voice, which we know is Jesus, only says one sentence. Whatever this sentence is, beloved, don't minimize it. Don't ignore it. Don't set it aside. It's of the highest priority to Jesus. He spoke it in the alarming, attention-getting mode of a trumpet.

Here's what He said: "John, I'm the Alpha and Omega" (Rev. 1:11, paraphrased). Last session we looked at what that means a bit. It speaks of Jesus and His deity—who He is as God.

He says three things. "I am the First and the Last" (Rev. 1:11b, paraphrased).

The emphasis, as we'll see in a moment, is on Jesus in His humanity. Then He gives the third point. "What you see, what I communicate to you, I want you to write it. I want you to pass on the word to everyone" (ibid).

Here's the message: "I'm the Alpha and the Omega." That relates to His deity. "I'm the First and the Last." That relates to His humanity. "Make sure everyone catches this message."

ONE OF THE MOST NEEDED AND NEGLECTED TRUTHS ABOUT JESUS

I think one of the most neglected messages in the Church is that Jesus is the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last. Jesus intended that it would be one of the primary messages. We ask the Holy Spirit, "What does it mean that He's the Alpha and Omega? What does it mean that He's the First and the Last?" We want to make it known to everyone. I don't mean just unbelievers. He was to make it known to the churches. This twofold message of Alpha and Omega, First and Last, this is a message from the Spirit to the churches.

All of you, you love Jesus and who want to impact people for Jesus, determine that you'll go on the journey: "I will understand and encounter what these two titles mean." "Alpha and Omega" I put together as two distinct ones, so there are four titles. I want to know what they mean. I want to feel the power of it. I want to be anointed to impart living understanding of this truth.

Jesus spoke this title, "I am the First and the Last," four times in the book of Revelation. No other title did He speak four times. Why did He emphasize it the most? I believe it's because it's one of the most needed truths: particularly in the context of the suffering that is described in the book of Revelation related to the end times. It's not limited to the generation of the Lord's return. It was spoken to the Church 2,000 years ago. It has been helpful to any who would go on the journey to understand this dimension of Jesus. It equips them in all the generations.

Here's the point: it's a most necessary truth to be able to stay steady in love, even in the midst of persecution. Jesus emphasized the need to communicate this truth three times. You can look at the notes. Three times He said to John, "John, write this down." Every time it was related to the revelation of Himself as First and Last. "Write it down, John. Write it down. Tell the others in the Body of Christ."

So as a shepherd in the Body of Christ, I take note of this and say, "I want to tell others. I want to get in sync with what the Spirit is saying about Jesus."

I found that it was a challenging idea. I didn't know so much about it. I began a journey: "Holy Spirit, teach me about this. Let me feel the power of it that I may share it with others so they can feel the power of it."

Paragraph C. Jesus as First and Last emphasizes His sovereignty and His preeminence as a man, and His ultimate victory over death. The key phrase is "as a man." We know who Jesus is as God, but the most mysterious truth is who He is as a Man. He's fully God and fully Man. Forever He will be fully God and fully Man. We're more comfortable with Him in His deity. But who He is in His humanity, with a real body like ours, who He is in the mystery of His humanity, in the glory of it, is a most remarkable truth.

These truths of His sovereignty and His preeminence and His total victory over death are deeply connected to the truth of the resurrection, which is connected in Scripture to the truth of eternal rewards. I think the subject of the resurrection is one of the most neglected subjects in the Body of Christ. We mention it at funerals; we mention it occasionally to get a shout of glory in a sermon for ten or twenty seconds: "Yeah!" That's not what I'm talking about. I'm not talking about mentioning it. I'm talking about Jesus as a man, as the Forerunner, as a

man who connected with the realm of the resurrection, who lived in the light of it, in the certainty of it. That's what we need to take hold of.

IF WE DON'T THINK RIGHTLY ABOUT HEAVEN, WE WON'T THINK ABOUT IT AT ALL

In the Western world, it's a strange thought to have our heart anchored, thinking much about the age to come. The problem with thinking about the age to come is that if we don't think rightly about heaven, we won't think about heaven. I want to say that again. If we don't think rightly about heaven, we often won't think about it. When people think of heaven, they typically think of a place far away, maybe floating on a white cloud playing a white harp. They're excited, sort of. The idea of being on a white cloud for billions of years, well, they can't really relate to that.

I have good news: heaven is coming down to the earth. The heaven of the Bible is described as the union of the natural realm of the earth and the supernatural realm of the spirit, right here on the earth—with no devil, sin, or darkness at all. That's what heaven is about. You'll have a physical body like you have now. You'll eat; you'll learn; you'll have friends. You'll have a ministry. You'll have all the capacities of the realm of the resurrection with your physical, material body. When you greet one another, you won't have omniscience; you won't know everything about them. You'll only know what you learn about them in talking to them. When you get a resurrected body, it's not like you get a computer chip and now you have all knowledge. You don't. You only have what you learn through the ages. You'll teach it to others. It will be exciting to learn new truths, to encounter new people, new experiences.

When you greet one another, you'll hug each other. You'll have a physical body. You won't pass through each other like, "Whoa! Let's try that again! Whoa!" That's not going to happen. Jesus said in Luke 24, with His resurrected body, "Look and see. Do I not have flesh and bones?" It was supernatural flesh, but He had bones. He has an elbow forever and so will you. When you hug each other, you won't pass through each other. You'll be on the earth. The New Jerusalem, the city, is coming down to the earth. The premise of the New Testament—Jesus taught on it more than the apostles, but the apostles taught it as well—is that we would live in this short, seventy-year life thinking much and with a view of the life to come on the earth in the natural and the supernatural realm joined together.

If heaven is only kind of an ethereal, supernatural realm, if it's not physical, you won't think much about heaven. You'll be glad it exists, but you won't think about it. Therefore you won't make decisions now in light of it. That's one of the primary emphases of this revelation, as we'll see in a few moments. He's the ultimate and the final result.

HE HAS NO LACK OF SUPPLY TO EXPRESS THE WAY HE FEELS ABOUT US

The works you've done in your life will find their full answer and their full manifestation and their full result in the age to come, when He rewards us.

Now think about it. When you love the most generous Man, Jesus, fully God and fully Man; when you love and obey the most generous, the wealthiest, the tenderest of Men, and you move His heart, imagine how He's going to respond and what He's going to give you in return. He's wealthy. He has a lot of gold and everything else. He's generous. He's moved by love; He has no lack of supply to express the way He feels about the way we loved Him in this life. That's called "eternal rewards."

We have a seventy-year internship on the earth. Then, when the Lord returns, we have a thousand-year assignment on the earth in the millennial kingdom. What we do for seventy years determines our function and role for 1,000 years. We're all saved free by grace, but we will all have different assignments in the age to come. We will all experience a different measure of the glory of God in the age to come. It will be related to the way we loved Him now. Jesus taught on that often. Jesus taught on eternal rewards more than any other teacher in the Bible. He knew the most about them.

I've taught on eternal rewards for thirty years. I always run into people who imagine they don't care about them. I point out that Jesus taught on them more than anyone. I say, "Are you thinking Jesus stumbled and gave us a false motivation, because He kind of lost His way as a teacher?" I don't think so. I think He taught on them the most because He understood them the most. He knew how much we would value these expressions of Him showing us the way He feels about the way we loved Him. What we do in our internship, seventy years on the earth, really will affect what we do in our next ministry assignment on the earth. Many believers, that doesn't connect with them at all, and that's a huge problem. I believe that's one of the reasons why Jesus so emphasized this teaching of Himself as the First and the Last.

Let's read one of the four times when He uses this title. Revelation 1:17. John said, "I fell at His feet like a dead man. He laid His right hand on me and said, 'John, don't be afraid. I'm the First and the Last'" (Rev. 1:17, paraphrased). He gives this title, "I'm the First and the Last." John doesn't know this title, I'm assuming. Now it's used in the book of Isaiah about God three times. I have the verses on the handout (Isa. 41:4, 44:6, 48:12). It's an Old Testament truth, but so far as we know, Jesus has never spoken this title to John in all the years John has known Him.

JESUS HAS FULL AUTHORITY AS A MAN OVER DEATH AND HELL

Then He connects it to His human experience. He says, "John, let me explain what I mean as the First and the Last. I am He who lives" (Rev. 1:18, paraphrased). That's a big statement. "I was dead. I've experienced everything a human being would experience. I walked through it by the power of God. I'm alive forevermore." He takes the title and He identifies it with His human experience in the negative, but also with the answer of God to the negative. He's raised from the dead and lives forever. It's not only the negative, but God's answer to the negative. He says, "I ended up as the Man with the keys, the authority, over hell and death. I have full authority as a man over death and hell."

Beloved, this is the greatest breakthrough in human history: that a Man broke the power of death, and He told the rest of the human race that would trust in Him for salvation and relationship, "Come and follow Me. I broke through."

It's the greatest breakthrough in human history. I remember hearing the report of when man walked on the moon; they said, "It's the greatest breakthrough!" No, there's a greater breakthrough. A man with a physical body broke the bonds of death and was given keys over it, and told the rest of the human race, "Come follow Me. I've made a way. The breakthrough is final. It will never, ever be lost. It's for anyone who wants it, but only on God's terms."

Verse 19. Jesus says it again to John: "John, write what you see" (Rev. 1:19, paraphrased). Three out of the four times when He says, "I am the First and the Last," He then says, "Write it down. Don't let this truth escape your notice. Make it a priority."

So as believers, you're setting your heart tonight by the grace of God to make this truth a priority in your own life and in your discipling of other people. Jesus used this truth to encourage others not to be afraid of persecution. When He said, "I'm the First and the Last," He's the last answer to our lifework. He's going to tell us how He feels about how we loved Him. Our love is weak; our love is fragile. Our love isn't very strong at all, but our love moves Him because it's real. It's the small movements of our heart, because our hearts don't move in any other way. We reach to love Him, we set our heart to love Him, we come up short, we set our heart again. That moves Him and He remembers it forever.

Again, eternal rewards are Jesus expressing the way He feels about the way we loved Him. The biblical view of death is rooted in the revelation of eternity: not just that we go to a place, but we have a full life in ministry with a physical body in that place forever. We don't have a physical body between now and the second coming. When a believer dies, our disembodied spirit goes to a holding pattern up in heaven. It's only a holding pattern. When Jesus returns, we get a physical body and the New Jerusalem comes down to the earth. That's permanent. After 1,000 years, there's a new heaven and a new earth. Then it's even more established and more permanent and ultimate. The two realms of the heavenly and the natural are joined together.

OUR PLACE IN THE CITY IS BASED ON OUR RESPONSE TO GOD

Paragraph F. Every one of us will have a difference in our rewards. Again, salvation is free. We're equally loved by the Father and the Son. We're given full entrance into the city as a free gift. Our entrance into the city is free; our place in the city is related to the way we responded to His grace in this age.

I want to say it again. Our entrance into the city is free based on the work of Jesus on the cross. Our place in the city, our function in the city, is based on our response to the grace of God, which is called our works. They don't save us, but they do affect our rewards. The good news is that our works are very small. Fully 99.9 percent of all the works you do in your life are small and unnoticed. Maybe one or two people will notice. They're small and they seem like a waste of time. The Lord says, "I've taken note of every single one of them."

IT'S NOT ABOUT THE SIZE OF OUR MINISTRY, BUT THE SIZE OF OUR HEART

Look what it says here in 1 Corinthians 15. There's one glory of the sun and another glory of the stars (1 Cor. 15:41). Now there are billions of stars. As one star differs from another star in glory, so also is the resurrection of the dead (v. 41-42). Beloved, there are billions of stars! Not one star is like the other in an exact way. Not one! Not one believer will have the same measure of glory as another. We will all have a different measure of our experience of the glory of God in the age to come. It's not about the size of our ministry, but the size of our heart response to Jesus in this age.

It's not related to how big our ministry was; it's about how big our heart response was to Jesus in this age. I think we will be shocked that some of the most famous leaders in the Body of Christ and some of the most unknown people in their generation will have exactly the opposite place in the age to come.

Here's what Paul said. He talks about our "light affliction" (2 Cor. 4:17). He's not saying if you get sick, you get a greater reward. That's not what it's talking about. It's talking about obeying for the sake of righteousness. We press against what the enemy says, and against the flesh, and it's difficult because our flesh wants to back up. We experience conflict for taking a stand and staying steady, even though maybe only one or two people are even aware of it. It creates affliction because of our commitment to love and obey Him.

Paul said, “Do you know this affliction that no one else is even paying attention to, is working for you an exceeding, eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor. 4:17, paraphrased)? He pays so well for works that are so small, but they matter to Him. He remembers them forever.

This exceeding weight of glory increases the more we stay steady. Paul’s not referring to the glory everyone has the moment we’re born again and we enter heaven. He says, “More is given to your account,” so to speak. “Something is increasing as you stay steady.”

DON’T BE SEDUCED BY THE MEASURING STANDARDS OF THE NATURAL REALM

Here’s the key—verse 18: it’s where you focus your attention. He says, “Don’t look at the human realm. You’ll be seduced by it” (2 Co. 4:18, paraphrased). I don’t mean just seduced into sin; you’ll be seduced into thinking bigger is always better. You’ll get discouraged, because 99 percent of all the ministries in history are really, really small. That’s the will of God. I want to say that again: fully 99.9 percent of all the ministries in history are really small. That’s the will of God. Jesus said it Himself in Matthew 25:21. I don’t have that on the notes. He said, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You were faithful in really small things, and now I will give you much” (Mt. 25:21, paraphrased). We get seduced. Again, there’s only a fraction of 1 percent that influences a thousand people. It’s a fraction of 1 percent. We get seduced by the lie that if we’re not doing that, then we’re wasting our time.

Paul said, “Don’t look at the human way of things. Don’t be seduced by the measuring standards of the natural realm and by what men are excited about. Get locked into what God says and what’s true about the realm of the spirit.

Be faithful. There’s a weight of glory that’s increasing in your life, and you’ll see it when you stand before Him.”

Top of page two. We’ll give just a few minutes on this. Jesus is the First. What does it mean that He’s the First? It’s talking about His humanity. The Alpha and Omega is talking about His deity. He’s the first cause. He’s the source of all blessing. As a human high priest, as a human taking our place, and as a human who was exalted, He takes His place of exaltation and shares the fruit of it with other humans—as a man who paid the debt, as a man who was exalted, and as a man who loves humans. He wants them as His bride, as His eternal companion forever. He’s the first cause, or the source of blessing in our lives.

We say, “OK, that’s easy.” I don’t think it’s so easy. Most of us find it most natural to look to people as the source of blessing in our life. When people are happy, we’re excited. Things must be well. When the people give us opportunities, finance or promotion, everything is well. The Lord says, “They’re not the source. They’re honestly not the source. I may use them, but I’m the source; not them.”

BEWARE THE TWIN DANGERS OF PRESUMPTION AND DESPAIR

This is one of the great characteristics of King David’s life: he looked to God as his source. I can identify three or four things about David’s life that stand out so remarkably about him. He had many good qualities. One of them was his confidence in God’s mercy when he failed. No one was more confident than David when he failed and repented. You have to repent. If you have confidence in the love of God and haven’t repented, that’s called *presumption*. David had such confidence. He would repent, sin, and repent, and he stood before God like he was God’s favorite and he really meant it.

Another thing about David is this: he looked to God as his source. King Saul attacked him and 3,000 soldiers in David's army hunted him for seven or eight years. David said, "You're my source. I'm not going to commit evil to solve this problem. I'm looking to Another as my source. I'm not looking to Saul; I'm looking to Another."

This is remarkable. Here's the point: Jesus said, "I'm the source. I gave it to you originally. Therefore I can return it to you a thousandfold any time I want. I gave you the ministry; I gave you the favor; I gave you the finance. I gave you the open door."

If you lose it because of obedience, or if you lose it in the attack of the enemy, or if you lose it because there's a changing season in God and there was no disobedience and no attack, but it's a different season, it's called *pruning*. Jesus taught on pruning. That's not the devil when Jesus prunes us. That's not the devil. He says this: "I'm your source. I'm the First; I'm the well of blessing. I can give it back to you any time. Know this: in the age to come, I'll give it back to you a thousandfold. I was the One who thought of blessing you. You didn't think of it; I thought about you before you ever thought. I'm the First. Lock into Me. When you had no thought, I had plans for you about your life. When you were just a boy or a girl, I had plans for you. If you lose it because of obedience, a certain blessing or increase, a changing season, or the attack of the enemy, I can give it back in this age according to My wisdom and fullness in the age to come. Lock into this: I'm the First."

He has the final word. He has the last word on what you possess and what you lose. He has the final word on what you lose permanently. The devil doesn't have a final word on what you lose permanently. Men don't have that final word; He does. Beloved, when we lock into this, as simple as it sounds, it changes the whole atmosphere of our interior life. We daydream differently. We plan the future differently. We respond to our enemies differently. We look at promotion differently. Promotion, even with the favor of God, doesn't seduce us. We get it. We can stay faithful in love even while having favor from God. Because many people, after a season of favor and increase with God, lose their connection with Him. We need the right understanding: He's the source. He's the wellspring. He originated the idea. He paid the price for it. He sought us. He was the first One who came after you.

The guy says, "I sought God and I found Him."

The Lord says, "Well, not exactly... You weren't thinking about Me. I trapped you in a corner, I ambushed you, took away all your options, and you said, 'I want you,' and now you think you sought Me and found Me. I'm the first reason you were saved. You didn't have any interest in Me for a long time. I stirred you. I stirred you. I blessed you. I cornered you in. I'm the first cause of why you even have a destiny at all."

When the enemy attacks it, or the seasons change, or in times of persecution, you don't have to worry, because the One who thought of you originally is still thinking about you. He's a man and He understands everything that humans go through. He's God with skin on. He understands it. Not from a distance because of His brilliant insight, but because He felt the pain of it in His human experience. He has sympathy. He remembers the plight. He remembers it well. He's so moved by our love, even our small love in the midst of the struggle.

JESUS HAS THE FIRST PLACE OF AUTHORITY AS A MAN ON THE EARTH

Paragraph C. He has the first place of authority. He has preeminence as a man. There's a man who will be over all the nations. He's over all the nations right now at the right hand of the Father. There's a man. When He

returns, all the nations will give Him their full allegiance. He's a human man, a Jewish man, with a physical body of flesh and bones. Again, it's supernatural flesh. There's no decay, no sickness in it. We will have that same flesh and bones. He will be honored by all the nations of the earth, openly, for everyone to see forever. He has preeminence. He has the first place.

Here's the point: when we align our heart with that reality, when we get who He is, the inevitability of His supremacy, we don't resist it by trying to get away with compromise. We see the inevitability of who He is, and the glory and the worthiness of His supremacy. We give ourselves to it now. He's the First. The first commandment becomes first in the pursuit of our heart. He's worthy and His place is inevitable. No one can move Him from that place. Why would we want to spend decades in compromise, then stand before Him and regret the compromise? As though one day He might not be in that role, and our compromise might somehow make sense later. It will never make sense later—never.

He's first, forever, as a man. When I connect with that, my spirit becomes vibrant. Not that He's a blessing on the side and I throw Him a kiss every now and then: "Thank You, Jesus!" and then go on my merry way. No, He's first. A new world opens up to us when that becomes reality. He's First.

THE FIRST AMONG THE COMPANY OF RESURRECTED SAINTS FOREVER

Paragraph D. He's first to receive a resurrected body—the first human. He's the only Man with a resurrected body right now. Lazarus was raised from the dead, but he only had a natural body and he died again. His body is in the ground now. That young man Jesus raised from the dead, his body decayed in the ground 2,000 years ago. His spirit is with Jesus. Jesus is the only human with a full, operational physical body with flesh and bones. Right now He stands at the right hand of the Father. He's called the firstborn from the dead. He's the first Man to have a resurrected body and He's the guarantee that everyone connected to Him will have a resurrected body like He has.

Not only is He the first One to break through and have a glorified body. He's the Captain; He's the first place of authority over the vast realm of the resurrected. I'm guessing there will be several billion people following the great harvest, all with resurrected bodies. He will be the first among the realm of the resurrection forever.

THE ULTIMATE PURPOSE AND THE HIGHEST GOAL OF OUR LIFE

Roman numeral three. Well, He's not only the First, but the Last. He's the ultimate purpose. He's the highest goal. He's the reason for our life. The reason for our life only makes sense in a growing relationship with Him. I tell you, I would take growing in relationship with Him and the loss of many big opportunities. I want my heart to grow bigger, even if a lot of other things have to grow smaller. He's the reason. You'll have that forever. You can have favor in circumstances and a big heart. You can have both. History tells us that most people in favor lose their connection at the heart level after a number of years of blessed circumstances. It doesn't have to be that way. I've determined I want both: full favor and the biggest heart possible. If ever there's a cross, I want a bigger heart. If ever there's an intersection and a decision: I don't want so much opportunity and blessing that I can't cultivate my heart with Him.

I don't say this like a hotshot: I turn down many, many opportunities in ministry. I can't maintain my heart connection in the way I demand if I take every opportunity. I can't do it. I'll take a bigger heart and smaller ministry any day. Any day. Having said that great statement, I've messed up and done it the other way a number of times. I blew it. The Spirit whispers His rebuke and I say, "Oh, I didn't get it. I missed it." I realign my heart.

Paragraph B. He's the Last, the highest purpose of our lives. I'm not just saying this as preacher rhetoric: all other agendas must be secondary. For real. If they're secondary, you'll have a vibrant spirit. What happens is that we have a language of Jesus being first, but other things are first and our spirit is perpetually dull. We're saved but we live with a dull spirit. I don't want to live with a dull spirit; I want to live with a spirit that feels the presence of God, that's connected, that's increasing a greater weight of glory by my small, little, unseen decisions, day in and day out.

“DECLARING THE END FROM THE BEGINNING . . . THINGS THAT ARE NOT YET DONE”

Paragraph C. Jesus is the last word on everything. He declares the end from the beginning. He says, “I can tell you where everything is going in the nations and your individual life. I can tell with clarity where you're going. I tell you this: My council, My plan for you will stand if you say yes to it. I won't make you say yes.”

He will bring His purpose to completion. I don't care how many Sauls attack David. For those who are new in the Lord, Saul was the angry, jealous king of Israel. David was the young, anointed king. The jealous king was attacking him. Beloved, Saul can't take out David. David ran for seven years from Saul, but Saul couldn't win. The only person who could defeat David was David. The only person who can cancel out the will of God in your life is you. The devil can't do it. Mean people can't do it. Leaders who ignore you can't do it.

People say, “I'm in the marketplace. No one in the upper office gets how good I am.” Or in the church world: “No one knows how anointed I am. All the leaders are missing it.”

I say, “There's no Saul, there's no blind leader who can mess up the will of God for your life. I promise you.”

HE OFFERS YOU THE LAST WORD OF EVALUATION ABOUT YOUR LIFE

Paragraph D. He's the last word of judgment on your life. When I say *evaluation*, I mean *judgment*. The pastor isn't the last word. “Brother you're awesome,” the pastor might say.

He might just have a man-pleasing spirit because you're walking in the flesh to serve his purposes. “You're awesome.” The Lord might say, “Don't believe that. You're not awesome. I love you. You're living filled with compromise.”

“Well, the man of God said I was amazing.”

“He's lying to you and seducing you with his flattery.”

Let's go the other way. The man of God says, “You're a rebel.”

The Lord says, “No you're not. You're obeying Me.” No one has the last word but one Man. Regardless of what it costs you, stay loyal to that Man. He's the last.

JESUS ENDURED THE ULTIMATE EXPERIENCE OF REJECTION AND SUFFERING

Roman numeral V. Now Jesus brings up this term again and applies it. Revelation 2:8-11. He's writing to the persecuted church at Smyrna. He calls Himself the First and the Last. He breaks it down again and connects it to human suffering, just like He did in chapter 1:17-18. On both occasions, when He described the implications of

being the First and the Last, He connected it to human suffering, with the confidence that there would be a resurrection and an eternal reward that would far exceed the loss of human suffering related to our obedience.

He told the church at Smyrna, in verse 8, “I am the First and the Last” (Rev. 2:8, paraphrased). This is just what He said back in chapter 1. He said, “I was dead. I had the ultimate experience of human cruelty. I get human cruelty. They beat Me. They did horrible things, beyond just physical pain.”

Beloved, before the cruelty of His torment related to the cross, He was rejected, ridiculed, by His disciples. They fled in fear. The leadership of the nation rejected Him. His own family didn’t believe Him. It’s the most remarkable story of this brilliant Man who was rejected on every single point. There were a few ladies who stayed true to the end. Praise God for the ladies! There’s always that one gal who won’t be turned to the right or to the left. I’m serious.

One guy says, “Well, women aren’t supposed to be in ministry.”

I said, “Without woman in ministry, church history would have stopped somewhere back there. What are you talking about?”

“Well, I know the sovereignty of God. It wouldn’t have stopped.”

I say, “They’ve kept the thing going for 2000 years.” OK, I’m off the subject. I’m serious about that.

Verse 9. “I know your works” (Rev. 2:9). “I know your tribulation. I know your poverty. I know your works. I know you work hard, because when I was a man with a fleshly body, I worked hard. I get your works. I get it. No one else understands what you’re doing and your labors. I get your works. I did it. I worked hard My whole life and mostly no one appreciated it. I understand your tribulation. Why? I went through it. I was rejected by My family, My friends, My nation, the synagogue.” In Nazareth, the town He grew up in, they were going to throw Him over the cliff!

He says, “Your poverty” (Rev. 2:9b). He’s talking about physical poverty. He says, “I grew up in a poor family. I understand. I get what you’re looking at. I understand those things. I take note of them all, your faithfulness, even in the midst of this resistance: the hard work, the pressures against you, and even the lack of resource.” Yes, I believe we should believe God for fullness. Whatever God gives me, I always believe Him to double it in every arena. If He doesn’t, I just keep believing Him for it. “Double everything. When You double it, double it again. If it doesn’t work, I will stay steady. Keep doubling it. I will keep loving You and keep asking You to double it.”

In other words, I’m not in a “woe is me,” get-down-in-the-dirt-and-grovel mentality. I want to go for everything, but I want to stay steady when the seasons don’t work out the way I think they should.

“BE FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH, AND I WILL GIVE YOU A CROWN OF LIFE”

Here’s the shocker, here in verse 10. “Some of you, My beloved Smyrna, My church at Smyrna, some of you will suffer in the days ahead. You don’t know it, but I know it. Your works are going to be hurt. The thing you’re working for will be interrupted by the devil. I get it. Some of you, you’ll go to prison for Me. Others of you, you’ll be killed. You will be tested. Be faithful unto death. Some will die, some will go to prison, some will have trouble. I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10, paraphrased).

He's not promising breakthrough in every area. The preachers will promise you breakthrough on everything. Jesus doesn't promise us in this age breakthrough in everything. I think it's good to give the vision of breakthrough. We have to put it in context that we want a bigger heart first. I want the breakthrough on everything, and I teach on breakthrough, but we don't want to seduce people with a version of Christianity that is mostly earthbound in this age: getting a few more friends, more money, and a bigger ministry. You get all that and you die. Then what? Again, I want those things, but I want something way more than that. I want the crown of life. That's not synonymous with being born again. This is in addition to the free gift of salvation.

DON'T MAKE FULLNESS IN THIS AGE THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF YOUR LIFE

Page four. Beloved, something bigger is going on in your life. There's a man who has the last word on the works of your life. The little, weak works that no one pays attention to, they move Him. You obey Him with your attitude and no one sees it: that's a work. You serve in the most unnoticed way, in the smallest, little area because you love Him, not to get applause from men. He sees that and it moves Him. Something bigger is going on.

We can overcome fear by this revelation of Him as First and Last: when we understand He has the last word and the last word is in the age to come. That's when the last word is manifest. I want to be anchored to that last word. That last word of my value will be fully manifest then. He has the last word on it now. I can feel a little of the power of it, but I won't see the fullness of who I am to Him until then: the last word on the value of my works and my obedience; the last word on my desire to walk in humility because I love Him that people may or may not see. The last word is down the road and it's in His mouth and it's in His heart. I want to live with that hope anchored in my spirit. I want to live for another age.

I want to make as much impact in the kingdom here, but never lose sight of the fact that this is my seventy-year internship. I have a 1,000-year ministry coming after my seventy-year internship on the earth. I don't want to lose my larger ministry because of my internship. Beloved, we're all interns right now. Billy Graham filled up many stadiums. I have news for you: he's still an intern. He is. When Billy Graham crosses over, he will enter into a whole new dimension on the earth. I'm talking about earthly ministry. He's an intern right now.

Whatever God has ordained for us, it will come to pass in this age. Again, the seasons can trick us. Don't lock into exactly what the breakthrough looks like in this age. Go for fullness, but don't be offended when it looks different. Never give up. Press in. Don't make fullness in this age your ultimate goal of life. Make a big heart and fullness in the age to come even your bigger priority.

I don't have to pick between the two. I'm going for both. I do them in the right order by the grace of God. Again, I lose my way plenty of times. That's what repentance is all about, and the blood of Jesus.

LEARN TO SEE GOD AS THE FIRST SOURCE IN YOUR LIFE

Beloved, He has the last answer. Here in paragraph E, I'll say this. Most believers see other people as the first and the last in their life. I've been pastoring for twenty-five years. Most believers love God, but they see their leaders as their first source. In the marketplace, the government, the church, the home, the neighborhood, the sports arena, they see their leaders as their first, as their source. They seem as their last. When the leader shakes their head and says, "No," they say, "I might as well quit."

I say, “No, they’re not the first and last. I promise you they’re not.” Whether they’re flattering you or accusing you, they don’t have the final word.

Well, some focus on Jesus as the First, the source, but beloved, there’s more.

They don’t know Him as the Last: the One who has the final word in the age to come about the quality of the way we lived and what our true success is.

He has the last word. What a blessing, to know Him as First and Last. Not just as First, as the source of blessing only, but as the final vindication forever that comes from His mouth. I want to know Him as the Last.

“THE FAITHFUL WITNESS, THE FIRSTBORN FROM THE DEAD”

Roman numeral VI. We’re out of time, so I’m just going to give this to you really fast. I have it written out there. Revelation 1:5. This is a few verses earlier. John describes Jesus. This is one of the most significant descriptions. We’ll take a whole session on Friday night to look at this. John describes the glory of Jesus in one of the most concise and precise ways. You can look at it on your own. I’ll just read through it and make a couple of comments.

First, in verse 5, he talks about the preeminence of Jesus. He says, “He’s the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth” (Rev. 1:5). That’s His preeminence. His is the First and Last in all truth. He’s the First and Last in the realm of the resurrection. He will be the First and Last in authority as the ruler over all the kings of the earth. He’s the First and Last in all three of those arenas. He has the preeminence.

Then He tells us how He feels about us. I think, “Why would a man so great feel so greatly about someone so weak and powerless as I? You’re so preeminent. You’re the First in truth, You’re the First in the resurrection, You’re the First in eternal world government. How would someone like You feel about me?”

John said, “I’m glad you asked. He loved you and washed you to such a degree. How far does love go? He made you kings and priests. He washed you so thoroughly because of His love. He set you on a throne as a king and He brought you near to God like He is as a priest” (Rev. 1:5b, paraphrased). That’s how far His love will go.

What do we do with this kind of love? How do we respond to One like that? He says in the end of verse 6, “We give glory to the Father. We magnify the Father because of all the extravagance given to us. We lock in to magnify His Father” (Rev. 1:6, paraphrased).

We throw our life into this ultimate truth of the Father’s dominion on the earth. John said, “The Father wants dominion on the earth.” The Father doesn’t want dominion on the earth just like it is now. His throne is in heaven. He wants to bring His throne down to the earth. He wants His dominion on the earth in the natural realm with His throne, with His tabernacle among men (Rev. 21:3). At the end of the millennial kingdom, He brings His throne to the earth. He will be seen openly in the natural realm. His dominion will be exercised in and through the people who voluntarily love Him because they’re so grateful for what Jesus did. The Father’s greatest desire is to have open dominion over every sphere of life.

We want to be a part of that. We throw ourselves into that now, knowing that in the days to come that will be openly seen.

AGREE, ASK FOR REVELATION, AND KEEP THE PROPHECY

Paragraph D. For every one of these thirty descriptions, I use the acronym A-R-K. Here's how we apply it. First we agree with it. We make simple declarations. "Thank You. You're the First and the Last." Don't raise your hand, but how many of you have said to Jesus in the last year or in your whole life, "Thank You that You're the First and the Last"? If you talk to Him about it, the Spirit will touch you on that subject.

I like to agree with Him. "Thank You. Thank You. You're the First and the Last."

Then R: "Holy Spirit, reveal this to me. I have need of teaching. Teach me about Him."

Then K: Jesus urged us to keep the prophecy, talking about the whole book of Revelation (Rev. 1:3, 22:7). "I commit to live under Your leadership as the First and the Last." Beloved, you need to really say these things—not once, but as a part of your lifestyle. I like to speak to Him these thirty descriptions. Some of them I hardly understand. I just say them anyway because they're in the Word. Then I say, "Holy Spirit, show them to me." Whatever little understanding I have, K, I say, "I want to keep this element of the prophecy. I want to respond to it."

I like to say, "Thank You, Your eyes are like fire. Thank You, You hold the stars in Your hand." What does that mean? We'll look at it on Friday night. Stay plugged in.

MINISTRY TIME

Amen. Just by nature we don't connect with Him as First and Last. It's not in our natural mindset. We work at it; we fill our heart with the Word. We speak it to Him. We realign our heart over and over and over. We ask the Spirit to teach us.

I want to pray for specifically those who are at the Stand Conference right now. I would like to pray for anyone who is in leadership at any level. If you're over five people: the home group, the children's church—I tell you, the children's church is as significant as big church. Maybe you're leading a youth group out in the community. Ten people, three people, I don't care: if you're in leadership and you would like prayer, come and stand on these lines.

Here's what we're going to pray: to realign your heart with the revelation of Jesus as the First and the Last. Remember, He said it three times: "Write this. John, write this. Make this known."

You're committing to make it known to other people. I can't tell you what doesn't warm you. I can't warm your heart, even by the grace of God, with that which doesn't warm my heart. "I want my heart warmed by this," is what you're saying. Then, by the grace of God, He will use you to warm the hearts of others.

Pray your own prayer, quietly, in your own words. You're saying, "Lord, I want to know You as the First and the Last. I really do."