

(The Names of Jesus) 3. The First and the Last

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Transcript

“I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.” (Rev. 22:13.) As we think of the friends of life, how few there are that were linked with our earliest associations and memories! There was a period when every friendship began, and many of those we love the best we only knew for the first time a little while ago. But here a Friend addresses us who was before all other friends, who loved us long before we knew the love of brother, or even mother; long before we were even conscious of our own existence. “The Lord has appeared of old unto me, saying, Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love.” Jesus is indeed the First.

And then, how many of those that were the first in our life are not the last? The very mother, on whose sweet face our eyes gazed before they recognized any earthly countenance, has long since passed from our view. Only a few of the friends of youth remain, and how many of the fondest attachments of life have been like rivers that run into the desert and are lost amid the sands. But here we have One who will be there at the close, who will remain when all others have passed away; for Jesus is the Last.

Amid the passing years and the passing forms of loved ones and the changing scenes of life, how sweet it is to know that Jesus is the First and the Last! Let us gather up by the help of the Holy Ghost some of the precious lessons of this wonderful name that covers all the present and the future.

The First

1. This expresses the eternal pre-existence of Christ. We find Him constantly declaring this in His own addresses in the Gospel of John. “He was before me,” is the witness of John to Him. “I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world,” is His own testimony. “Before Abraham was, I am.” Even in the Old Testament we have some sublime pictures of the eternal Christ. “His name shall be . . . The everlasting Father (or the Father of Eternity),” is Isaiah’s picture. “Whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting,” is Micah’s picture. “The Lord possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, before ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth. . . . When He prepared the heavens, I was there: when He set a compass upon the face of the depth . . . then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him: and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him; rejoicing in the habitable part of His earth; and my delights were with the sons of men.” This is Solomon’s inspired picture of the eternal Logos, His ancient love to the world, and the men that He was coming in the fullness of the ages to redeem.

2. This expresses His preeminence. This also is most clearly taught by the Holy Ghost in the Scriptures and claimed by Christ Himself. "That in all things He might have the preeminence," is the Father's purpose regarding His dear Son, for His is the preeminence of deity. He is higher than all men, higher than all angels, very God of very God, the brightness of the Father's glory, the express image of His person, the King of kings and Lord of lords. There is no doubt that this is what He claimed Himself, and for this claim His life was threatened again and again by the Jews, and taken at last in His final judgment and crucifixion. "He ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God," was their charge. The hands into which we commit our souls are divine and infinite hands. The ransom which has been paid for our sin is of the infinite value of deity. The grace that is sufficient for our full salvation is the grace of the infinite God. The kinship to which He has raised us is nothing less than to be partakers of the divine nature, and sons and heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ. Let us not fear to bring forth every diadem and crown Him Lord of all.

3. This expresses His relation to the work of creation and providence. This thought is expressed by the Apostle Paul in his epistle to the Colossians in these strong and significant words: "For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him: and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist." This expresses Christ's relation to the natural creation and to the affairs of Providence. It was through His hand that the material universe was framed, and it is by His constant superintendence that the whole machinery of Providence is carried on. By Him all things consist, or, literally, "hang together." He is the cohesive force that holds the whole universe in order and harmony. All power is given to Him in heaven and in earth. Like the Roman centurion, all beings and forces are at the service of His will, and He can say to this one, "Go," and he goes, or to this one, "Come," and he comes, and to all things, "Do this," and they do it.

To Him we ascribe all the sublime descriptions which Jehovah gives us in the Old Testament of His sovereign power and glory. Every robe of majesty and might will fit the Son of God as perfectly as the Father, for it is He that does according to His will in the armies of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay His hand from working, or say, "What are You doing?" In the midst of the throne ever sits the enthroned Lamb, while all angels and all creation sing in adoring reverence and love, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing. . . . Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sits upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever." This is our Christ: the first and the last.

4. This expresses also His relation to the Bible. Christ is first in these sacred pages. The one object of the Holy Scriptures is to reveal the person and portrait of Jesus. This is the key to its interpretation; this is the glory of its pages "Jesus in the story of creation, already planning the new creation; Jesus supreme above the ruins of the fall; Jesus in the ark, the rainbow and the dove; Jesus in the sacrifice on Mount Moriah, the ladder of Jacob, and the story of Joseph; Jesus in the Paschal lamb, the desert manna, the smitten rock, the smoking sacrifice, the fragrant incense, the suffering scapegoat, the enrobed priest, the golden candlestick, the sacred ark, the sprinkled mercy seat, the hovering cherubim, the awful Shekinah, the glorious tabernacle and all its ministries and furniture; Jesus in the land of promise, in the temple of Solomon, in the story of Joshua, the Psalms of David, the throne of Solomon, the visions of Isaiah, and the panorama of ancient prophecy as it unfolds toward the advent, the manger, the cross and the throne; Jesus in the apostles; Jesus in the Apocalypse. The testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy. The face of Jesus can be traced like water lines in fine paper back of every page, for He is the Alpha and the

Omega: the first and the last of this Holy Book.

5. This expresses the relation of Jesus Christ to redemption. He is the first in the plan of salvation. Long ago He was heard exclaiming, "Lo, I come. . . . I delight to do Your will, O my God." It has all been accomplished through Him, and His glory is all to return to Him, and He is forevermore to stand as the center and head of God's grandest work—the restoration of a ruined race, the salvation of sinful men. Christ is not only first in redemption: He is all. This winepress He has trodden alone; none can share with Him this glory. His was all the cost; His alone the honor shall ever be. No name is so sublime in heaven as the Lamb, no song so loud as that which celebrates His redeeming love, and therefore all that receive this great redemption must give Jesus the supreme glory, or they cannot share it.

6. This expresses His relation to our individual salvation, for every soul must acknowledge Jesus as the first. "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you," He tells us. The first desire to come to Him came from Him. The very hunger that longed for Him was His grace beginning to enter our hearts. He has loved us with an everlasting love, and, therefore, with loving-kindness has He drawn us. Not only has He pardon for us when we repent, but He is exalted to give repentance to Israel and the remission of their sins. Not only will He fulfill our earnest prayers, but He makes intercession within us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Not only will He meet us in blessing if we will come to Him, but He will even take our will, and work in us both to will and to do His good pleasure. His arms reach down to us at the lowest depth. His grace is beforehand in all its manifestations. Christ will take us at the very alphabet of Christian life, and from the very beginning will count us His disciples, and then will set us free. Let us fully learn this precious truth, and always take Him for the very thing we need the most and the first, and even the very thing for which we ourselves are responsible and yet insufficient; and He will not only do His glorious part, but He will enable us to do ours.

7. This expresses the relation of Christ to our Christian life and work. This is the true aim of a consecrated life—to make Jesus first. Let us give Him the first place in our heart, in our thoughts, in our aims and motives, in our plans, in our affections, friendships, occupations, our business, our pleasures, our families, and our whole existence. Let us come to Him first for help always. Let us bring to Him the very first beginnings of temptation. Let us catch the lions and the dragons while they are young, and so shall we trample them under foot; and we shall never see any old lions if we do so without fail, for they will all be disposed of before they have time to grow formidable. Let us take to Him the merest thing that needs help, whether it be for soul or body, for secular business or sacred experiences. Jesus first—let this ever be our simple watchword, and life's tangles will all be unraveled, will not have time to grow serious, and so the touch-stone which will settle every question of perplexity and duty will be Jesus first. Shall I do this? Shall I please this person or Him? Shall it be something else, or shall it be Jesus first? Oh, how this will consecrate, elevate and glorify our lives, and enthrone Him and us with Him in a kingdom of constant peace and victory! Beloved, shall we bring the crowns and lay them at His feet, and write on everything: "Henceforth, Jesus first."

The Last

1. This implies the eternal existence of Jesus. He is, as He Himself expressed it, alive for evermore; or, as the old prophet put it still more sublimely, the Father of eternity. It is glorious to have one that covers all the future and has in His hand the scroll of every destiny and the control of every future event. The Lamb in the midst of the throne holds the sealed book of all our destinies, and for evermore can fix every event of our existence. No matter what is coming, Jesus is coming with it. Though it be trial, temptation, or death,

He will be there. The heavens and the earth shall pass away, but He will remain. The friends we have known will disappear, but He will abide. We will change; but He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The things we commit to Him are committed against that day. The interests that He is guarding are safe forever. Beyond the smiling and the weeping, beyond the parting and the meeting, He stands in eternity with our title and our crown safe in His keeping. How often have we felt that the present sorrow or even death were nothing if it were all safe beyond, if it would be all safe at last! Blessed be His name! He is the last, and His mighty works reach beyond all present vicissitudes and guard our treasures and trusts for evermore. The things He gives us will stand. The things that are linked with Him are eternal.

There is One amid all changes Who standeth ever fast; One who covers all the future, The present and the past; Jesus is the Rock of Ages, The first and the last. Jesus is the first; Jesus is the last; Trust to Him thy future, Give Him all thy past; Jesus is the Rock of Ages, The first and the last. 2. Christ will finish His work in us and carry to consummation all that He begins. Therefore, He is called "the author and finisher of our faith." "He which has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." "The Lord will perfect that which concerns me." "My sheep hear my voice," He says, "and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." He takes us forever, and He will not leave us until He has done all that He has spoken of to us. He never leads His flock out to desert them in the hour of need. He never leads us out into the difficult enterprise without promising to stand by us and crown our work with success. He says of every true enterprise begun in His name and at His bidding, "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands also shall finish it; and you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me unto you."

3. Christ is not only the finisher of our life and work, but Christ Himself is the end and substance of all things. When we are done with things and people and see Him as He is, we shall find that His heart is the fountain of all love, His smile the substance of all joy, His life the life of all life, Himself the first and the last of everything, and we shall have nothing that is not part of Him and linked with Him. Every face we see shall simply reflect His beauty. Every joy we feel shall be but a radiation from His heart. Every glory we wear shall be but a reflection of His holiness. Every throb of our immortal life shall be but a pulsation of His being, and Christ shall be all, and in all, and we shall have reached the last line of the old chorus, "Everything in Jesus, and Jesus in everything." So let us step out writing over every day and hour and moment, "Jesus first," and we shall find surely that Jesus is "the last."

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