

The Same, the First and the Last

by H.J. Vine

The sermon emphasizes the importance of knowing Christ as the First and the Last, encouraging believers to grow in their relationship with Him and anticipate His return.

Scripture: Isaiah 41:4, Isaiah 44:6, Isaiah 48:12, Revelation 1:17, Revelation 2:8, Revelation 22:13

Topics: "Calling Upon God", "Knowing Christ"

Description

H.J. Vine preaches about the importance of calling upon the Lord out of a pure heart, following righteousness, faith, love, and peace, especially in difficult times as foretold in 2 Timothy 3:1. The sermon emphasizes the need for believers to maintain simplicity and grow in the knowledge of the Lord, focusing on calling upon the Lord Himself sincerely and intelligently, seeking a fuller knowledge of Christ for eternal blessings. The message highlights the desire for believers to know the Lord habitually and intelligently, seeking a deeper relationship with Him.

Transcript

Isaiah 41:4; 44:6; 48:12; Revelation 1:17; 2:8; 22:13 (N.Tr.)

As in days gone by, there are also now those who call upon the Lord Himself out of a pure heart, following righteousness, faith, love, peace together; and that, notwithstanding the "difficult times" in which our lot is cast, as 2 Timothy 3:1 foretells. To be rightly maintained in that path, simplicity and growth in the knowledge of the Lord are essential. Mark, it is the Lord Himself upon whom the sincere call (2 Tim. 2:22), rather than the Name, as is often said. To "know Him" was the earnest desire of Paul; and to call upon Him consequently becomes both habitual and intelligent.

Every believer has his beginning in this, and progress normally follows. No one should allow himself to be sidetracked. Grace and strength are supplied and we are told to be "strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus." It was a man that was born blind who became the subject of a work of divine power and grace. This eventually resulted in his becoming a worshipper in the immediate presence of the Son of God Himself (John 10). He knew the change which the Lord had brought about, and when the arguments of the religionists of that day failed to turn him from his simple confidence in Jesus, they ostracised him; but we read, "Jesus heard that they had cast him out; and when He had found him, He said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God? He answered and said, Who is He, Lord, that I might believe on Him? And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen Him, and it is He that talketh with thee. And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped Him." That was good progress from a good start, a rich result of a genuine

beginning.

"Ye did run well," wrote Paul to some who began rightly; "Who did hinder you?" (Gal. 5:7). Surely the heart's desire is to be unhindered; but having begun through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we would follow on to "know Him" increasingly, and not be diverted from simplicity as to Christ. Having been saved and justified freely by God's grace, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, we surely seek a fuller knowledge of the One in whom our eternal blessing is secured. What sad things might be said of any soul who did not seek this!

What more precious lesson could the Holy Spirit instruct us in, and what other instruction could produce more practical results in us well-pleasing to God? The apostle who wrote, "He has taken us into favour in the Beloved; in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of offences, according to the riches of His grace," also wrote in the same letter of "the edifying of the body of Christ, until we all arrive at the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God" (Eph. 1:7; 4:13). In this way souls will be happily sustained in calling on the Lord Himself sincerely, and true worship in His presence will flow responsively. To know Him produces this both habitually and intelligently in an increasing measure.

The desire is not new. Saints in Old Testament days longed for and sought after the knowledge of the Lord Himself. In these days, however, when the out-called from among the nations are formed into the assembly by the Spirit, when they have the honour of association with Christ in the period of His rejection by the world, when the Holy Spirit unites them to Him where He is accepted in heaven, when they know Him there as their glorified Lord, Saviour, High Priest, Advocate, and Head of the assembly, they certainly have Him made known to them in a fuller measure than was granted in olden days; for even before His ascension to God's right hand He said to some, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see: for I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them" (Luke 10:24); and when Thomas saw the Lord alive from among the dead, and did Him homage as his Lord and his God, Christ indicated still greater blessedness in the knowledge of Himself for those who are brought to Him now He is on high; for He said, "Thomas, because thou hast SEEN ME, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have NOT SEEN, and yet have believed." It was when He had gone up to God's throne, Peter wrote thus of those who believe on Him at the present time, "Whom having not seen, ye love." Yet it must be remembered that, long before this peculiarly favoured and parenthetical period, the knowledge of the Lord Himself was earnestly sought, as we said.

JACOB was blessed at Peniel (meaning the "Face of God"), where "a man wrestled with him until the rising of dawn," and Jacob said, "Tell, I pray Thee, Thy Name". He received His blessing, but not the name as he desired, and "Jacob called the name of the place, Peniel. For I have seen God face to face, and my life has been preserved" (Gen. 33:30, N.Tr.). MOSES asked, "Show me now Thy way, that I may know Thee"; and again, "Show Me Thy glory"; and He said, "Thou canst not see My face: for there shall no man see Me, and live." Yet He added, "Thou shalt see My back parts: but My face shall not be seen." And Jehovah descended and proclaimed the Name of Jehovah (Ex. 33:23; 34:5). MANOAH, when he would offer an offering to the Lord after "the man of God" had appeared to his wife, said, "What is Thy Name?" and the answer was, "Why askest thou thus after My Name, seeing it is secret?" or, more correctly, "Wonderful" (Jud. 13:18). It was ISAIAH who later wrote, "His Name shall be called Wonderful, . . . the mighty God!" And yet, although he said this of Him coming as "a child," in chapter 9:6, afterwards, with impetuous desire he exclaimed, "Oh, that Thou wouldest rend the heavens, that Thou wouldest come down to make Thy Name known"; but the Spirit caused Isaiah to add further words, which pointed on to this present period, as shown in the citation of 1 Corinthians 2:9, "Never have men heard, nor perceived

by the ear, nor has eye seen a God beside Thee, what He has prepared for him that waiteth for Him" (64:1-4). The godly constantly yearned after a fuller revelation of the Lord.

The full revelation awaited the due time when God would be manifested in flesh. It needs no explanation--it is plain enough to an ordinary man's mind--if the Lord Himself were to be fully made known to men He must come as Man. This He did. "The Word," who "was God, . . . became flesh and dwelt among us." Had He come in angelic or any other form men could not have understood. He came in an intelligible manner, in the right and proper manner, and in the way which He in grace and love chose; but before that we find Him speaking words which carry us a long way. Only He could speak as He did through Isaiah thus, "I am He" or "I AM THE SAME; before Me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after Me. I, even I, am Jehovah, and BESIDE ME THERE IS NO SAVIOUR" (43:10-11). "Thus says Jehovah the King of Israel, and his Redeemer the Lord of hosts; I am THE FIRST, and I am THE LAST; and beside Me there is no God" (44:6). "Is there a God beside Me? Yea, there is no God: I know not any." None but the Eternal One could speak thus; and, surely, when it would please Him to do so, He could and would reveal Himself. Bless His holy Name. In this way life eternal, the blessing of blessings, should be ours.

The truth as to Christ opens out to us the true meaning of all the Scriptures. When He rose from the dead, He expounded to those on the Emmaus road out of "all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27); and He afterwards opened the disciples' understandings to understand the Scriptures, having shown that the law, the prophets, and the Psalms, all spake concerning Him (vv. 44-45).

Clearly, then, Scripture itself shows that the knowledge of Christ is the explanation of all Scripture, and therefore of the remarkable verse in question, how Jehovah along "with the Last" is the Same! Just as might be expected, it is in the closing chapters of the Bible God and Christ are named together thus in various ways: "Priests of God and of Christ" (Rev. 20:6); "The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple" (21:22); "The throne of God and the Lamb" (22:3); and, it is added, "His servants shall SEE HIM," not "them," as might be expected; and it continues, "They shall see HIS face, and HIS Name shall be in their foreheads." We are told that Christ is over all, God blessed for ever, Amen" (Rom. 9:5); but the same verse tells us that "according to flesh" He came of the fathers of Israel; and we are also told He "became flesh"; and that He is "the last Adam" (1 Cor. 15:45). When He takes a place in creation or any other circle, the first place is His, because He is both Creator and Reconciler (Col. 1:16, 18, 22); and if we view Him entirely from the standpoint of His Deity, looking backward into eternity or forward into eternity, there is none before Him and none to come after Him, He is "the First and the Last"; but, as become flesh, as the redeeming Lamb, the Christ of David's royal line, the Son of Man "of Seth, of Adam, of God," the Man of God's counsels, He is the Lord of glory personally, and yet is "made both Lord and Christ" officially in exaltation (Acts 2:36); therefore it can be said not only that He is the First and the Last, but "with the Last," He is also "the Same." Without Him priesthood Godward on the part of man could not cause its sweet savour offerings to ascend. Without Him the temple nearness could never be enjoyed! Without Him the majesty of the throne of God itself would be still waiting for the glories of redemption through the Lamb whose blood was shed! even though the counsels of eternal love designed all before the world's foundation.

Even the world-kingdom to be established on earth soon is designated as that "of our Lord and of His Christ" (Rev. 11:15, N.Tr.), and it is significantly added, "HE (not they) shall reign to the ages of ages." As in other Scriptures the singular is used. Following again what the Spirit tells us concerning Him through Isaiah, we read (44:6) that the Lord is both Israel's King and Redeemer, Jehovah of hosts, the First and

the Last, beside whom there is no God; excluding altogether any thought of there being another. Then, in that third mention of the First and the Last (Isa. 48:12), we have His tender and forceful appeal to Jacob and Israel, His called, telling them who it is that has chosen them, and refined them; the One who had founded the earth and spread abroad the heavens, the One who so significantly says in verse 16, "THERE AM I!"--the Sent One of the Lord God and His Spirit; yet, as it is written, "I am He (i.e., the Same), I, the First, and I, the Last." What a stay this is to the mind of the saint of God, as well as to his heart and soul! How reasonable it is to faith when we thus find all God's designs centring up in such an One! "Let us reason together" were His own words. Sobriety of thought, steadiness, stability and soundness of mind result, while the true knowledge of His wonderful love, manifested in the sufferings and death of Christ on the cross, moves the heart to overflowing praise and worship, and causes us to exclaim adoringly, "We love because He first loved us!"

And then the full shining forth of this truth is disclosed to us by the Spirit in the Book of Revelation. There we behold it full orb'd, for it beams brightly from its manifest centre, our Lord Jesus Christ. In chapter 1:17 He says, "Fear not! I am the First and the Last, and the living One." This leaves us in no doubt as to who "THE SAME" of the Old Testament is. We find Him so named in Deuteronomy 32:39, first of all. "See now," He exclaims, "that I, even I am the Same, and there is no god with Me . . . I lift up My hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever!" Jesus says, I am "the living One"; and as once having "become dead," He adds, "behold I am living to the ages of ages!" This latter refers to the life which is His as having victoriously vanquished both death and the grave. Space forbids us following out the twelve verses in the Old Testament and the two in the New which mention Him as the Same, although they are full of instruction for saints who seek to grow by the true knowledge of God. The verses are: Deuteronomy 32:39; 2 Samuel 7:28; Nehemiah 9:6-7; Psalms 44:4; 102:27; Isaiah 41:4; 43:10, 13; 46:4; 48:12; 52:6; Hebrews 1:12; 13:8. "I am He" should read "I am the Same," meaning the self-existing One. See J. N. Darby's notes to Deuteronomy 32:9, Isaiah 41:2, and Hebrews 1:12, in his New Translation; and if first of all Psalm 102:27 be compared with Hebrews 1:12, the opening key to the other Scriptures will be found.

Again, we are told, "These things say the First and the Last, who became dead and lived" (Rev. 2:8). This is said to the assembly at Smyrna, which is exhorted to be faithful unto death, and He who had conquered death would bestow a crown of life. Finally, Revelation 22:12-13 identifies the One who is called Jehovah, the Same, Jesus, the living One, who became dead and lived, with the returning Lord, as it says, "Behold I come quickly . . . I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last." Both books which present the Lord as the First and the Last to us are prophetic, and this final mention is full of meaning. Revelation 19:10 discloses to us "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." These remarkable words give guidance again to lovers of the truth, for the prophetic Word is only to be rightly apprehended in connection with Jesus our Saviour and Lord. He is the Alpha and Omega of the whole revelation of God, the complete expression of God's language, the embodiment as well as the expression of the mind of God. He is also the Beginning of all that has received being, which can know no ending apart from Him who is the End, the One who compasses all in Himself. This is the First and the Last; before Him there can be none, for who can precede the first? And after Him there can be no other, for who can come after the last? The Creator-Word, who became flesh, who became dead, and lived, the crowned One, the enthroned One, yea, THE RETURNING ONE, who says, "BEHOLD I COME QUICKLY," fulfils in Himself all that is predicated in the inspired volume concerning "the glory of our great God and Saviour" (Tit. 2:13), for whose coming again and appearing we wait. Yes, yes, we have good reason to sing, and sing with gladness:

"This is our redeeming God!

Ransomed saints will shout aloud:

Praise, eternal praise, be given,

To the Lord of earth and heaven!"

Before He appears in great power and glory, however, before He takes up the distressed nation of Israel again, before He deals with the nations and the peoples of the earth and establishes the Kingdom of God and of Christ below, before He floods the world with Jehovah's glory, He shines for faith beyond the border of this world's atmosphere during the darkness of its moral night, cheering the waiting ones whom He loves so well, the assembly for whom He gave Himself; and His beauteous, welcome lustre beams for the watcher far over man's circumscribed horizon, as "the bright, Morning Star." Before the dawn of day He is its heavenly Harbinger! "And the Spirit and the Bride say, Come."

The final words of the Bible, the last two verses of the Book of Revelation, give us His own treasured tones, full of music to our hearts, and the response of His loved ones to Himself, also the Spirit's inspired desire in regard to all the redeemed: "He which testifies these things says, Yea, I come quickly. Amen; come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with all the saints." He loves all. He gave Himself for all. He intercedes for all, and He is coming for all His own. They are all His, and He comes to assert His claims of love and righteousness. They shall dwell with Him eternally, "for ever WITH THE LORD." He shall be abidingly "the Same" "with the Last," and we shall be with Him, too.

Meanwhile, may we be found increasing in the excellent knowledge of Himself, calling upon Him out of a pure heart, and watching as well as waiting for His return. Amen.

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