

"The Alpha and The Omega"

The resurrection of Jesus is important for every single one of us. In Christian faith, the resurrection is not a stunning but peripheral miracle in the story of a great spiritual leader. It is the dramatic demonstration in history of the reality of who Jesus is and the power of what he has done. In **Revelation 1:8**, we read the words; *I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.* Then John is given a vision of the risen Lord so powerful that John falls down as if dead. At the end of that, in **Revelation 1:17-18**, Christ lays a hand of comfort on John and says, *Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.*

The classic Easter greeting echoes the words of the first witnesses to the resurrection: "He is risen!" This passage also tells us that...

I. JESUS CHRIST IS THE RISEN LORD AND THE SAVIOR OF ALL WHO TRUST IN HIM.

The Alpha and the Omega mentioned in **verse 8** is the A to Z of the Greek alphabet. This idea is repeated in **verses 17-18** in slightly different terms when he says he's the first and the last then adds *the living one. I died, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.* Jesus says he's the source and center and end purpose of all things. And he died, and behold, he is alive forevermore. So you can see the significance of this for today! It's also powerful that the vision that comes between these two statements is full of imagery from the Hebrew Bible: The lampstands, the "one like a son of man"– hair like white wool - His eyes like a flame of fire, his voice like the roar of many waters these images call to mind the visions of the prophets, especially Daniel and Ezekiel.

To say I am the Alpha and the Omega, to manifest these images and then say *I am the first and the last and the living one. I died, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.* Well, it means the resurrection of Jesus is the vindication of his whole life, and the fulfillment of all the promises of a Savior found in the Old Testament Scriptures. This all comes toward the end of the Bible because it is drawing the whole story of the Bible together with Jesus at the center.

This Easter, consider the fact that there was a long history in Scripture of prophets foretelling a Savior who would one day come to save his people. In the days of Jesus, people were longing for that Messiah or Savior to come. The Romans occupied Israel and most of the known world. The people who hoped for a savior mostly thought of him as a warrior king who would throw out the Romans.

Over time multiple self-proclaimed messiahs tried to fit that expectation. They rose up and gathered a following. Then the legionnaires marched in to crucify the leader and slaughter the rebels. Modern people struggle to believe in Jesus because the skeptical mindset has a hard time with the miraculous. In those days, the lack of the miraculous is what made so many self-proclaimed messiahs so forgettable. There was nothing supernatural about them.

One day a strange man strolled up out of the desert from the Jordan river valley. He wore animal skin clothing, lived on what he could forage, and preached a pointed message. He was called John the Baptist. To people depressed by the political situation, turned off by the hypocrisy of the religious establishment, who had checked out spiritually, he did not just bring a message of sympathy designed to console them. He told them to repent, to turn back to God because the Messiah was coming, and if they didn't get their hearts right, they would not be prepared to recognize him when he arrived.

Then he came. Jesus walked out of the hiddenness of the tiny village of Nazareth and came to John, who said: "This is him; the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." Stories began to spread about Jesus. He performed miracles of compassion. He gave sight to the blind, healed the deaf and paralyzed. The reports were too widespread and well-reported to be dismissed. He was fascinating but confusing. He didn't color inside the lines. He fit the prophecies but did so while not fitting into the widespread expectations. You couldn't say he is for this party or that party - he was something else. He critiqued the religious traditions and stressed the heart's relationship to God.

He made such outrageous claims that he couldn't be dismissed as just one more spiritual teacher. He claimed to be one with God, to have the power to forgive sins, and grant eternal life to whoever believed in him. His claims were either the blasphemous lies of a deceiver, the crazy delusions of a lunatic, or else, they were absolutely true, and he was the true Lord and Savior. His life backed up his words. Crowds flocked to him. The authorities were scared of him.

The irony for modern skeptics is that the final movement in the drama of his earthly life, his crucifixion, was precipitated by a miracle that was too credible for his enemies to deny. Just outside of Jerusalem, he raised a man named Lazarus from the dead several days after he had died and been placed in a tomb. Word spread, and then it got back to the Jewish religious and political leaders. They decided that if Jesus were allowed to continue, all the people would follow him, the Romans would clamp down, and they, the leaders, would lose their power and position. So they made plans to kill Jesus.

After Jesus was crucified, anxious religious leaders set a guard over the tomb. The intimidated disciples were afraid they might be next. The despondent women felt their hope for a better world had died with Jesus. No one was in a place physically or emotionally to try to start a conspiracy or steal the body. His closest disciples didn't stand by him when he was alive. Why would they risk their lives on a hoax once he was dead? There was nothing to expect or do other than the sad, slow work of anointing the lifeless body of Jesus. *So how did that happen that people for thousands of years have been celebrating the death and resurrection of a carpenter from a small village named Nazareth?* We're not celebrating today because someone died on the cross. Lots of people were crucified. We're here because someone who lived a miraculous life of love said that his dying would be for our salvation, and after he died, he would rise again. It was such an amazing claim. Neither his enemies nor his disciples took him seriously, but he did it!

There is nothing comparable to the resurrection of Jesus in any other religion in the world or with any other religious leader. The evidence is multi-layered and has been often discussed and debated: 1.) The tomb was empty. 2.) He appeared to men and women singly and in groups over a period of time in various settings and situations. 3.) He interacted with them and ate with them. 4.) Many of these eyewitnesses were skeptical at first, but the evidence compelled them to believe. 5.) No skeptics or enemies could produce a body. They never have. 6.) The disciples could not have overcome the guards at the tomb. They would not have tried because they were afraid for themselves. 7.) If they had hatched a conspiracy, they could not have pulled off the appearances, and they would not have later suffered and given their lives for something they knew was a lie. There were too many people involved. 8.) Every alternative theory for what happened with Jesus, that his disciples hallucinated or conspired, or that he swooned and revived, have been examined and discredited.

Dr. Ian Hutchinson is a professor of nuclear science and engineering at MIT. He wrote an article titled, *Can a Scientist Believe in the Resurrection?* In it, he explains how he is not alone and has other Christian colleagues at MIT who are scientists who absolutely believe in the literal, historical resurrection of Jesus Christ. He says, “*Science does not and cannot disprove the resurrection. Today's widespread materialist view that events contrary to the laws of science just can't happen is a [philosophical doctrine], not a scientific fact... In the case of Jesus' resurrection, we must consider the historical evidence.*” For him, the historical evidence is compelling. He is risen.¹

Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the living one who died and is alive forevermore. The resurrection is his vindication. It is the demonstration that he is all Scripture says he is. Think about the implications of that!

I have come across a widespread discussion recently about people, especially younger people who have some background in the church, falling away from their faith and or the church. The hip word for this now is deconstruction. These are people who say I used to be a Christian, but I am deconstructing my faith. I'm taking it apart. Now, when asked why they are deconstructing their faith, two of the most common answers are these. 1.) I have come to feel that there are things in the Bible that offend me. Some examples might be the Bible's teaching on gender, sex, sexuality, or marriage and family. It might be the Bible's teaching on salvation through faith in Jesus alone. But something that didn't use to trouble me so much now offends me. Here's another often-stated reason. 2.) I have been turned off by the failures of Christians. I find Christians to be judgey or hypocritical, or even I was personally hurt by the church in some way. I thought it was interesting that Tim Keller, the former pastor of Redeemer Church in New York City, posted something on Twitter that related to this. He said: “*When people tell me that they once were believing Christians but now have rejected it all – I often ask them (after long, close listening) why they originally believed Jesus rose from the dead and how they came to decide that he now didn't. They usually say it's a helpful question.*” Is the significance of that clear?

There are a lot of people today who act as if they should approach their view of the Bible and Christianity on the basis of what they like or don't like. Well, here's a question to consider. Are you seriously saying that because there are parts of the Bible and the teachings of Jesus, you don't like that, or because you see inconsistency in Christians, you know that, therefore, Jesus could not have risen from the dead?

Most people will say, "Well, no, I'm not claiming that!" Okay, well then, if he did rise from the dead – then doesn't that mean you have to set aside your likes and dislikes and even hurts and listen to him? If Jesus was raised from the dead, your feelings - no matter how strongly you feel them - are not the Alpha and Omega or even all that relevant when it comes to the question of what is true or right. If Jesus was raised from the dead, then that means he is Lord, he is "*The Alpha and The Omega*," and you are just overcome whatever offends you in the Bible and give yourself and your allegiance to him. You have to trust in him and follow him, not your own limited perspectives or your emotions.

What Scripture says and what the evidence supports is that Jesus Christ is the Risen Lord and Savior of all who trust in him. The resurrection of Jesus calls for a response from all of us. Toward the end of Revelation

II. EVERYONE IS INVITED TO COME TO CHRIST TO TAKE THE WATER OF LIFE.

The next time Jesus is identified at The Alpha, and the Omega is toward the end of the book of Revelation. **Revelation 21:6** reads, *And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty, I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment.*

There are two things to understand about this invitation – first,

A. This is an offer with eternal consequences.

In some ways, the wording of the offer toward the end of Revelation is so gracious that you might miss the frightening urgency of it. Coming at the end, not only of Revelation but the whole Bible, it sums up the ultimate choice you have to make. The background for this invitation is that we all need salvation. That's what the idea of "the water of life" pictures. This is your greatest need ever.

The whole book of Revelation, again, the whole Bible, tells us that in ourselves, apart from faith in Jesus, we are not all right with God. A lot of modern people don't think about sin very much. The words sin and sinner seem outdated and irrelevant to many people. But all the original words for sin simply mean to fall short of God's standards or to step over God's boundaries. We foolishly minimize the importance of that, but the Bible doesn't. We tend to compare ourselves with people worst than us and then proudly give ourselves a passing grade. But Jesus said that doesn't work with God. Our sins bring his judgment.

Revelation is full of warnings about God's judgment. Some people seem to live with a vague ambiguity about where they are at with God. That's, at best, a dangerous place to be, and there is no need to be there! There is no need for uncertainty.

This is an offer with eternal consequences and

B. This is an offer for everyone.

Revelation 21:6 says, *And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty, I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment. **Revelation 22:17** says, And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price. You don't earn it because the price was paid for you by Jesus. **Revelation, 1:5** To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood. Later in **Revelation 5:9**, there is a vision of people in heaven, and it says, And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood, you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation." To ransom, someone means to set them free by paying the price for their freedom. Jesus died to pay the price for you! He paid the penalty that we deserved to pay for us.*

So for us, the water of life, the gift of salvation, is free. Paul said the same thing in **Romans 6:23** *For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Or listen to what Ephesians says, **Ephesians 2:8** For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. There is a story in the gospel of John, John 4, where Jesus meets and asks a woman at a well for a drink of water. It turns out she has had one failed relationship after another, trying to satisfy her soul's thirst for love. **John 4:10** tells us that he said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." That's the same offer he offers all of us. A right relationship with God and with his love that cannot only satisfy your heart also give you eternal life is yours for the believing and the asking.*

CONCLUSION

1. Maybe you have thought this life is all there is. You imagine death is like pulling the plug on a computer. You just shut down. There is nothing that follows and nothing to fear. So you just live the best you

can and try not to think about it. The resurrection says this life isn't all there is. The resurrection demands you repent and believe the gospel.

2. Maybe you thought: "I don't know if there is a God, and if there is a God, then he has no real relevance to my life." "I can't know anything about him, and I'm not accountable to him." The resurrection means you have to realize God is real and he cares. You are small and weak and broken, but your little earthly life matters to him, and he died and rose again for your redemption. So because Jesus rose again, you have to change your way of thinking and believe in Christ.

3. Maybe you are thinking, "Yes, Lord, I believe all of this." I wonder if there isn't something very personally challenging and encouraging in the message of the resurrection for you today. Where is it that you are discouraged, defeated, disappointed? Maybe you have been hurt or wounded. The emotions can be so persistently heavy. And yet, believing in the resurrection means that without denying any of the hardships, you can affirm that everything will be made not only right but glorious in the end. Jesus was mistreated, hurt, and murdered, and yet, he is the Alpha and the Omega, *the living one, who died and is alive forevermore*. Believing in the resurrection means believing that, for those in Christ, everything, every big and little thing, will be made good and right and beautiful and meaningful, just like Jesus was raised up and glorified.

Here's another question where is it that there is something to do or to stop doing, something to give, to risk, to obey that is not easy, but all your objection or hesitancy should melt away in light of the resurrection and because Jesus is the Alpha and The Omega for you?

I found myself reflecting this week: *"I've trusted Jesus for my redemption, but where do I need to trust in him today?"* Easter reminds us that even the things that look the darkest give way to life and light through the power of Christ and the love of God. Act on your belief by trusting him with your life. Commit your life and your cause to him. Maybe some of you have *never* really believed in Jesus in the sense of trusting in him. If so, the message of Easter is an invitation to come to Christ, to say in your heart, *"I turn to you. I'm trusting you as my Lord and my Savior. Let's respond to him now.*

Amen

A Prayer Expressing Faith in Christ

Savior! I trust in you and thank you from the depths of my soul that I can call you, Savior, Redeemer, and Lord. You are the Alpha and the Omega, You died and behold your death is my salvation. My trust, for my Salvation is in you and you alone. I was thirsty but as I turn in faith to you my Savior I receive the water of life, without payment. You fully paid for my sins for me and your triumph over death and the grave so gloriously reveals your victory and establishes my assurance. Amen

A Prayer for Spiritual Renewal

Lord Jesus, Help me to live a life of deep faith in your ultimate triumph, sacrificial love, continued presence, enthroned lordship and overflowing goodness. Continually enable me to see, with eyes of faith, the reality of who you are flooding my life with lavish grace from eternity past to eternity future and all through this present life as well. "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever! Amen

¹ Ian Hutchinson, "Can a scientist believe in the resurrection? Three hypotheses." *Veritas Forum* (3-25-16)