

# THE GOSPEL MAGAZINE

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## *Editorial*

ONCE AGAIN in the providence of God we are brought to the beginning of a New Year. What it holds none of us knows, but we can enter it in the confidence that the Lord will be with us each step of the way.

Let us for our encouragement lay hold of the promise given by the Lord to the Apostle Paul: "My grace is sufficient for thee" (2 Corinthians 12:9). Paul knew what it was to have his hopes crushed and his plans thwarted; he had what he called "a thorn in the flesh". What exactly it was we are not told, but he used language which suggests it was something painful and unpleasant. Perhaps the precise nature of his affliction has been withheld from us so that we may see how God can overrule every circumstance of life and that we may take comfort.

Paul made his affliction a matter of prayer; he was not content with praying once but repeated his request. His prayer was answered but not in the way he had expected. There are two ways of lightening a burden — one by diminishing the actual weight and the other by increasing the strength of the shoulder that bears it. So we find that Paul's thorn was not removed but its presence was sanctified and so he was enabled to turn his trials into triumphs.

The Lord Jesus Christ speaks of His grace as being "sufficient"; but His sufficiency is not just bare adequacy but is large beyond our expectation. He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.

If we trust Him we shall find that His grace is indeed sufficient for our needs. He never fails those who commit themselves to Him.

# Alpha and Omega

A Sermon by the Editor

*“And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely”*  
(Revelation 21:6)

WE CAN IMAGINE John on his sea-girt island of Patmos. There he was longing for the voice of fellow-believers and hearing only the cry of the gull, the moan of the wind and the fret of the sea, but to John was given a wonderful experience because there on Patmos the Lord Jesus Christ revealed Himself in a very wonderful way to the exiled apostle. You remember how in the beginning of this Book the Lord Jesus appeared to John and said: “I am the First and I am the Last and I am He that liveth and was dead and, behold, I am alive for evermore and have the keys of hell and of death”. Four times over in the Book of the Revelation we have the Lord Jesus saying, “I am Alpha and Omega”, in chapter 1 (verses 8 and 11), in our text, and then in the last chapter of all — “I am Alpha and Omega”. I expect you know that those are the last letters of the Greek alphabet. It is as though the Lord Jesus was saying, “I am the ‘A’ and I am the ‘Z’”. What wonderful illustrations the Bible brings before us in so many ways. The Bible illustrations are so easy to understand; for instance, when the Bible represents God’s Word as a hammer, we know full well that it is a force that has shattered our self confidence. “Is not my word like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” And so this wonderful title of our Lord is simple and yet it is profound. It tells us what Christ is in Himself and what He is to all His people. He who is the “A” and the “Z”, the Alpha and the Omega, He is our eternal, unchangeable Lord. He is the Lord of history, working out His purposes. He is the end of faith, just as He is its beginning. Let us look, then, at this lovely verse, “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end”. Let us apply this title to our Lord and expound it. We can see that —

## He is the Beginning and the End of the Physical Universe

By time-honoured tradition we read on this particular Sunday the account of the Creation, and there, behind it all is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Agent of Creation. John in his Gospel says, “By him were all things made”. He made the fig tree as well as blasting it, as you remember from the Gospel story. No wonder that He could give sight to the blind man because He first made the optic nerve and the retina. It was no wonder He could give hearing to the deaf because He first set the drum of the ear. You remember how he cured the man with the withered arm — and no wonder, because He first made the bone and strung the muscle. “By him were all things made.” We remember that as we look around

**God's handiwork in the Creation. Yes, He is the beginning of the Creation and He will be its end.** No wonder then in this Book of the Revelation we find the **redeemed** in heaven saying, "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God **Almighty**, just and true are all thy ways, thou King of saints". Is it any wonder that the Psalmist takes up the words and says, "Oh Lord, how manifold are thy works"?

But the same hand that built the universe will one day pull it down. This is the thought here at the beginning of this very chapter. John says: "I saw a new **heaven** and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; **and there was no more sea.**" Oh there are those that think that man will destroy the world. They are wrong. We know that man does have tremendous power in nuclear weaponry but that is not how the Bible says the world will end. The same hand that built it will destroy it. "He is the beginning and the end" of the physical universe.

### **He is the Beginning and the End of the Bible, the Alpha and the Omega**

He is the theme of both Testaments and if you take Christ out of the Bible it is like the Louvre without the pictures, or the Tower of London without the Crown Jewels — a mere shell if you take Christ away from the sacred page. He is its theme. He is its beginning and its end. Take the Old Testament: it is preparatory, but it speaks of the Christ who was to come. He is the centre of the Old Testament just as He is the centre of the New. Christ crucified is set forth in these Old Testament sacrifices and every sacrifice was a confession of a Saviour that was to come. The morning and the evening sacrifices, the altar, the mercy seat, the scapegoat, the day of atonement — all these are types and emblems of the Christ who was yet to come. It was the Christ of whom the prophets spoke. At times they spoke as through a glass darkly, sometimes they spoke of His sufferings and sometimes of His glory that was to follow — but Christ is its theme, the beginning and the end. I ask you, what is the Bible to you? Is it just a book containing moral precepts and good advice? It is that, but it is far more than that. If that is all you see in the Bible you are rather like someone studying the solar system and leaving out the sun in your reckoning: Christ is the centre of the Volume. What did our Lord say to the people of His day, to the Jews? "Search the scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me." He is the beginning and the end of the Scriptures. Then we can say —

### **He is the Beginning and the End of Salvation, the Alpha and the Omega**

Salvation is all of Christ. Christ's Incarnation and Death and Resurrection are the corner stone on which the whole plan of redemption rests. He Himself said, "I am the way, the truth and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me". Paul was inspired to write: "There is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all, to be

testified in due time." He is the beginning and the end of salvation. No mortal man could stand in his own right before God. We must come in the Name of Jesus. We must stand on no other ground, pleading no other plea but that Christ died for sinners, "of whom I am chief". The garment of Christ is the only robe that can cover us, the Name of Christ is the only name by which we can obtain admission to heaven. "There is no other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved," and we must be content to come to heaven solely by free grace, simply as believers in Christ. How we must also beware of adding nothing to Christ. There are those who say, "Yes, Christ and the Church" or "Christ and our good works" or "Christ and our offerings" or "Christ and the sacrament", but not so, He is the beginning and He is the end of salvation. A Christless religion is utterly useless. This is why we must go a step further and say that —

### **Christ is also the Beginning and the End of the Christian Ministry**

A sermon that has nothing about Christ in it is an utter failure and a minister who devotes his pulpit to anything but Christ is an imposter. Whatever great theme we may discuss, Christ must be the beginning and Christ must be the end and men need to know of Christ as the Light of the World. They need to know of Him as the Sacrifice, the God-appointed Sacrifice for sin. They need to know of Him as the Rock — the Rock of Ages — the Balm for all their woes, the Guide for time and for eternity, and if we should live till the age of Methuselah we should never exhaust this great theme of the Lord Jesus Christ. When men are tempted we need to tell them of Christ, the Shield from temptation's hour; when men are troubled we need to tell them of Christ the Friend that sticketh closer than a brother. When men feel the burden of their sins and their guilt, we need to tell them of the pardon that Christ provides, for "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin", and when men are dying and when the sands of time are fast slipping away we need to tell them of Christ the Resurrection and the Life. Oh! let Christ be the burden of our talk and the inspiration of our prayers, the theme of our song. This must be ever the theme of the Christian ministry if it is to be worth its name. The great work of the ministry is to exalt Christ. We are ambassadors to carry tidings to a rebellious world. Splendid buildings are all well and good in their way, but if Christ is not preached in them they are only empty shells. He is indeed the beginning and the end of the ministry.

### **Christ is also the Beginning and the End of Heaven**

He is the most honoured Personage in that blessed land. In this great book from which our text is taken we read of Christ there being in the very centre of all, "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world", and the praise of Christ will be the eternal song of all the inhabitants of heaven. There they sing, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive wisdom and honour and glory and power and majesty" and the service of Christ will be the occupation of the inhabitants of heaven. We shall there attend on Him without distraction and work without

**weariness.** There are those who think that heaven is the place of idleness, but the **New Testament** does not leave us to believe that. There is a work to do, there is a service to render for Christ even there, and the presence of Christ will be the **everlasting enjoyment** of heaven. "They shall see his face" and then we shall say:

"My God how wonderful Thou art,  
Thy majesty how bright;  
How beautiful Thy mercy seat  
In depth of burning light."

You remember the psalmist said: "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness." He is "the altogether lovely one". "I am Alpha and Omega." Yes, in the midst of change, **He changeth not**, because He has neither beginning of days or end of life. How thankful we should be that Jesus Christ is "the same, yesterday and today and for ever". The seas of life may ebb and flow, but He stands immovable as the rock. From first to last the believer is in the hands of the unchangeable Christ who says, "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end".

### **Christ the Fountain of Life**

Notice the second part of the verse: "I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely."

Here is Christ's simple offer of life. His words are addressed to those who have the sense of need. "I will give *unto him that is athirst* of the fountain of the water of life freely." You will know, I am sure, that thirst is one of the metaphors that the psalmist and the prophets take up to describe the longing of the soul after God. Psalm 42: "Like as the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?" Or you remember Isaiah invites those who are thirsty to take of the water of life: "Ho every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." If you have no money you are welcome, yes, thrice welcome, come, welcome to you. This is the thirst that the Jews felt when Peter was preaching on the Day of Pentecost when they were pricked in their hearts and said, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?". There was a thirst, a God-created thirst that only Christ could satisfy. Now what water is to physical thirst, Christ is to the souls of men. The world's best does not satisfy, but He satisfies all our desires and fulfils all our expectations. It is not for nothing that the psalmist says, "With thee is the well of life and in thy light we shall see light". Christ is the fountain of living water which God has graciously provided for thirsty souls and from whom there flows a boundless stream, an endless supply. "Living water" — this was the great message that the Lord gave to the woman at the well of Samaria when she came to draw water. He asked her for a drink. There was a hesitancy on her part and He said, "If you knew who it was that asks, you would give it Him and He would give thee living water". We all have particular needs, but we all have a

spiritual need which only Christ can meet. Remember Christ's great words at the Feast of Tabernacles, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink", and as we cannot live physically without water, so we cannot live spiritually without Christ. Do you know anything of this thirst? There is the word, "I will give unto him who is athirst (who knows his need) of the fountain of the water of life freely". There are many today thirsting for one thing or the other, for money, for pleasure, for success, for fame, but these things do not satisfy, they do not quench the thirst. They are like salt water. They only intensify it and many apply for their real need by worldly things.

Well, here is a promise to the thirsty, and a promise sure of fulfilment. You remember in Isaiah 44 it says, "I will pour water upon him that is athirst and floods on the dry ground". Or the Sermon on the Mount, when Christ said, "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled". Do we thirst, thirst for the things of God? Well, here is the great invitation: "I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely."

Turn over to almost the last words in the Bible and here we get the word yet again, verse 17 in the last chapter: "Let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely." There is the invitation. Have you availed yourself of it? Do you feel your need? May God give us such a need, a consciousness of that need. And what is the remedy? How does it become our own? Safe is the hand that carries the living water to our lips, how simple is the remedy and yet how reluctant men are to take it! God gives and we take. "I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely."

Now Dr. Horatius Bonar gave us his testimony and put it this way:

"I heard the voice of Jesus say,  
 'Behold I freely give  
 The living water, thirsty one,  
 Stoop down and drink and live'.  
 I came to Jesus and I drank  
 Of that life-giving stream,  
 My thirst was quenched, my soul revived  
 And now I live in Him."

May we by God's grace have such a testimony that we have drunk of the fountain of the water of life freely. It is free; it is all of grace, but it is only to those who recognise their need. "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely."

M.H.

"Faith never rests more calmly or peacefully than when it lays its head on the pillow of God's omnipotence."

J. C. Ryle