

Isaiah 40:27-31 Revelation 1:4-5 and 22:13; Hebrews 13:8

September 1, 2019

Preached by Philip Gladden at the Wallace Presbyterian Church, Wallace, NC

**All In God's Time
IN THE END, GOD . . .**

Let us pray: Eternal God, through the written Word and the spoken word, may we know your living Word, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

If you look up “alpha male” in the dictionary, you’ll probably find a picture of our almost 8-year old black and tan, long-haired dachshund, Holden. When Nancy went to pick out a puppy in early 2012, the breeders told her that this particular puppy had chewed through the enclosure and led all of the other puppies out of the pen. And Holden has never looked back! He’s the first one out the door, even pushing our poor 18-year old red dachshund, Heidi, out of the way. He won’t let me sit next to Nancy on the couch – he has to be in between us.

We’re familiar with the concept of an “alpha male.” According to the online “Urban Dictionary,” an “alpha male” is “the leader of a pack, herd, etc.; the dominant male; the main source of population.” According to the science of ethology, which is the study of non-human behavior in natural conditions, “alphas may achieve their status by superior physical strength and aggression, or through social efforts and building alliances within the group, or more often, simply by breeding and being the parent of all in their pack.”¹ Many of these characteristics can be applied to human alpha males.

I suppose it makes sense that if there is such a thing as an “alpha male” there would be an “omega male,” but I had never given it much thought. Sure enough, the “omega male” is seen as the opposite of the “alpha male” and is described as “a fun-loving but non-aspirational individual who is reluctant to ‘grow up’ by embracing the classic social imperatives like marriage, family, and holding down a regular job. The omega male is a man who, defying all male stereotypes, doesn’t have the desire to be the most outstanding performer or take the lead in a particular situation. Typical omega male traits include an intense interest in a particular hobby, which consequently draws his time and energies away from the conventionally ‘important’ things in life, like work or romantic relationships.”² In the interest of full disclosure, it has been pointed out that there can also be “alpha and omega females.”

But you get the idea – in English we would say “all the way from A – Z” if we were talking about covering the whole range of something. But, using the Greek alphabet, we would say “from alpha to omega.” The name “alpha” is derived from the Phoenician word *aleph* (which happens to be the name of the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet), which means “ox or lead animal.” You would think “omega” would have some similar important meaning, but it simply means “big O,” to distinguish it from the other “o” sound in the Greek alphabet, the letter omicron (which means “little O”).

We usually talk about “the alpha” **or** “the omega,” but in the Bible, the phrase is “the alpha **and** the omega.” Sometimes the same idea is expressed as “the beginning and the end” or “the first and the last.” The phrase is used to describe God in the Old Testament and God and Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Listen to some examples from both testaments and notice the repetition.

- Isaiah 41:4 – “I, the Lord, am first, and will be with the last.”
- Isaiah 44:6 – “Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts: I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.”
- Isaiah 48:12 – “Listen to me, O Jacob, and Israel, whom I called: I am He; I am the first, and I am the last.”
- Revelation 1:8 – “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.
- Revelation 1:17 – “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever.”
- Revelation 2:8 – “These are the words of the first and the last, who was dead and came to life.”
- Revelation 21:6 – Then he said to me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.”
- Revelation 22:13 – “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

Today’s sermon is the last in this summer series called “All in God’s Time.” Six weeks ago, on July 14, we heard God’s Word from Genesis 1:1 – “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth” and from John 1:1 – “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” We might say that was “the Alpha” – “In the beginning, God . . .” This morning we have heard God’s Word appropriately enough, from Revelation 1:4, in the last book of the Bible – “Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come . . .” Over the summer, we have heard about how God is at work in our lives and in the world “from alpha to omega, from beginning to end, from first to last.”

The psalmist says of the Lord, “Long ago you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you endure; they will all wear out like a garment. You change them like clothing, and they pass away; but you are the same, and your years have no end.” (Psalm 102:25-27) The prophet Isaiah says, “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.” (Isaiah 40:28) And Revelation describes God as the one “who is and who was and who is to come.”

We might think that God is some kind of static cosmic force, written in stone. Ah, but here’s the interesting, encouraging, and challenging truth about our God “who is and who was and who is to come” – over and over again in both the Old and New Testaments, the eternal, unchanging, rock-solid God is the very God who is always creating, always bringing something new into being – ultimately, in Jesus Christ, life out of death. So let us not mistake God’s eternal nature, his unchanging person, his

rock-like presence, his continuity through the years for some kind of status quo. No, that's what we as humans are prone to do – etch it in stone, cling to the past, resist God's call into God's future – and in the meantime, put our trust in the things of this life which, as the psalmist says, “will perish and wear out like a garment.”

Over the years, I have very rarely preached from just one Bible verse. To do so runs the risk of “proof-texting” and trying to prove a preconceived notion. After all, as William Shakespeare wrote in *The Merchant of Venice*, “The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.” So, to preach from a collection of single Bible verses may be a dangerous thing to do. However, I think I'm on pretty solid ground, as we've already seen how, again and again in the Bible, God is described (either by himself or by someone else) as “the first and the last, the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega.” Which brings us to another single New Testament verse this morning, a verse that in different words says the same thing as “Alpha and Omega, beginning and end, first and last” – “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8)

But we know that Jesus Christ is not some static historical figure, stuck in the past, for he is “the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.” He is the first and the last, and the living one. He was dead, but now he is alive forever and ever. And this is all done in God's time – in the beginning, until the end, and even now.

There's another story in the Bible in which God reveals something absolutely fundamental and amazing about who he is and what kind of God we have. When Moses heard the voice from the burning bush calling him to lead God's people out of slavery, Moses wasn't too excited and tried to get out of the job. So, Moses said, “If I come to the Israelites and say to them,

‘The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name? what shall I say to them?’” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” He said further, “Thus you shall say to the Israelites, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” (Exodus 3:13-14)

God's name is a verb! “I AM WHO I AM” is an attempt to translate the Hebrew verb *YHWH*. The footnote next to Exodus 3:14 in your Bible probably says something like, “Or *I AM WHAT I AM* or *I WILL BE WHAT I WILL BE*.” It's like trying to nail Jello to the wall! And isn't that a wonderful thing? As hard as we try, as much as we would like to, we can't tie God down, we can't keep him in a box, we can't limit what God is doing and will do. God is and was. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today. But God is to come – and God always has, always does, and always will do new things in creation and for God's people.

There are so many hymns we could have sung this morning that have to do with God's eternal nature, but the ones we are singing tell the message of “the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”

You might think of “Now Thank We All Our God” as a Thanksgiving hymn – and it certainly is – but it's a wonderful song of praise and glory to our God “who from our mothers' arms, hath blessed us on our way with countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.” We prayed “may this bounteous God through all our life be near us . . . and keep us in God's grace . . . and free us from all ills in this world and the next.” We sang

“All praise and thanks to God . . . the one eternal God, whom heaven and earth adore, the God who was, and is, and shall be evermore.”

And, of course, we will sing “Holy, Holy, Holy! all the saints adore Thee, who wert, and art, and evermore shalt be.” Now, we don’t usually talk that way – “who wert and art and evermore” – but it’s another way to say “the Alpha and the Omega,” the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

Aurelius Prudentius Clemens was a lawyer, a judge, and court official for the Roman Emperor Theodosius in the late 4th and early 5th centuries A.D. When he was 57, thinking his previous life had not amounted to much, he left public life and began to write poetry and hymns. His best known and loved poem/hymn is the one we sang this morning as our second hymn, “Of the Father’s Love Begotten.” He wrote it sometime in the 5th century A.D. Originally, the song had nine verses which told the story of our redemption through Jesus Christ. Verse 1 is about Christ’s eternal nature. Verse 2 – about creation. Verse 3 – about the Fall from grace. Verse 4 – redemption and the virgin birth. Verse 5 – linking the Christ child to prophecies. Verse 6 – praise to the Messiah. Verse 7 – final judgment. Verse 8 – men, women, and children singing praise to God. Verse 9 – a song of victory to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.³ In the first and last verses we sang this morning, you hear Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end: “He is Alpha and Omega, He the source, the ending He, Of the things that are, that have been, and that future years shall see. Evermore and evermore! Christ, to Thee with God the Father, and, O Holy Ghost, to Thee, Hymn and chant with high thanksgiving, and unwearied praises be: Honor, glory, and dominion, and eternal victory. Evermore and evermore!”

We are used to hearing “In the beginning, God . . .” I decided to name this sermon and end this sermon series with “In the End, God . . .” The three dots at the end are important. They are called an “ellipsis” and are typically used to indicate that something has been omitted. However, an ellipsis can also be used to help advance the story. And that’s appropriate, because God’s story in God’s time is not over. The three dots are like a statement of faith. They say “We believe God . . . will, can, always has, still does, and always will . . .”

To God – the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last – be the glory! Amen.

Let us pray: Alpha and Omega, you make your home with us, you dry our tears and quench our thirst, you are the tender love that welcomes all people. Come and dwell among us, and make all things new. Amen.

NOTES

¹ “Alpha Male” at www.urbandictionary.com and “Alpha (ethology)” at www.en.wikipedia.org.

² Kerry Maxwell, “omega male” at www.macmillandictionary.com.

³ Kevin DeYoung, “Of the Father’s Love Begotten,” December 11, 2015 at www.thegospelcoalition.org.