

**Alpha and Omega: Lord of Our Past**

**Basic beliefs are crucial to one's direction in life. Think about it. They guide how we raise our children, how we treat other people ... really, all the decisions and choices we make. Those foundational beliefs also point the way to our ultimate destination. Whether we are fully conscious of those beliefs or not, they color how we perceive life, the world, and God; and *that* is what guides our choices and decisions.**

**I had a friend, now passed away, who was an MD (family practice, then anesthesiology) who confided in me that he spent a good portion of his life providing a very comfortable lifestyle for his family, in which he did not participate because he was at work so much. He lamented that he had not been more diligent in attending church and making sure his children were there. He felt he'd missed the opportunity to teach them what is most important in life and for making life choices.**

**[In the early years of adulthood, people are very busy with their lives, pursuing dreams, maybe getting married, starting a family, and very soon life is so filled with tasks, ambitions, obligations, and challenges, that there is little time to reflect on one's foundational beliefs. It's often not until we get a little older that we realize all those things, though important, are not the true purpose of life]**

**Life can be likened to a large jar filled with sand, pebbles, rocks. Into it you pour all your accomplishments, experiences, career, education, jobs, relationships, etc. represented by sand and pebbles. The larger rocks represent the foundational things, the eternal things ... the big stuff of life. If you wait 'til you've put all the sand and pebbles into the jar, it's mighty hard to fit the bigger rocks in.**

**Last week, I introduced this series of messages with: *"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty," Revelation 1:8.* Alpha and Omega are the first and the last letters of the Greek alphabet, so God is saying here that He is everything from A to Z. **God is the one who holds the past, the present, and the future ... who is, and who was, and who is to come.** Many places in the Bible remind us that God has our lives in His hands, from birth to death and beyond.**

**I am talking about the foundational meanings of life – the big things, the core beliefs that steer your course. Most of the time these beliefs go unexamined, or not examined very clearly. That's a shame. I am reminded of a quote from the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates: "The unexamined life is not worth living." I hope these messages (today and on the next several Sundays) will stimulate us all to examine what we truly believe and how we live, and what we live for. If we don't give serious consideration to our basic beliefs we will easily be drawn to ideas and lifestyles, that pull us away from our Maker.**

**These are beliefs that we don't usually bring up in casual conversation – they're hard for many of us to put into words. So, I hope I can give some words that express for you, what we, believe about life, our destiny, and the destiny of all humanity.**

## **Before Time Began**

Among the world's peoples there are any number of beliefs and philosophies about life and the meaning of life. Christians proclaim that God, Creator of the universe and of time, has been around since before time. Yes, God is even older than dirt. And, that **Jesus, ... is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation... He is before all things, and in him all things hold together, Colossians 1:15, 17.** He is the human face of God, as timeless as the Creator. Jesus is not a philosophical precept or speculation, but an historical person – the real thing, a fact. Christians believe that He was with God, one with God, from before time. “The timeless has entered into time, for the purpose of transforming time, so that the chasm between the great beauty of the eternal and the brokenness of the human condition might be overcome.”<sup>i</sup>

**When we proclaim Jesus Lord of all, we mean that He is Lord of all creation and of time itself.** He is Lord of the past, with all our errors, failures and sins, which He can forgive. He is Lord of the present in which we can choose to grow like Him. And He is Lord of the future, assuring us of his undying care into eternity. Today, I want to spend a few minutes talking about Jesus and our past.

## **Jesus Can Heal Your Past**

You and I cannot undo the past ... but we can stop the past from undoing the present. Since Jesus is Lord of all time, He can enter the past to bring about healing. I'm not saying all of your past needs healing – in fact, we would do well to look at our past and count our blessings and victories on a regular basis. Nevertheless, the last time I checked, the number of people ever to walk this earth without sin is still one. And **because of that One, Jesus Christ, your yesterdays with its sin can be redeemed.**

“The past” is a very small phrase for something representing everything that has happened up until this very moment. Sometimes we qualify the word past with adjectives like recent or distant or forgotten, but even then, it's hard to know how distant *distant* is supposed to be.<sup>ii</sup> Nonetheless, the Lord, who is timeless, can cover it all.

The past is important. Tradition – family, country, church – is one important guide for how we live today. Our past colors our present – in how we view the world, God, and people. The past can also be a burden that we carry – something that really hinders our moving forward in life. Right here I am talking about our relationship with God. For some, their relationship with God has been warped by experience with church or Christian people. No doubt, like me, you have met people who carry great wounds still, or at least scars, from the times church or Christians they knew hurt them. Maybe you've been hurt yourself. Sometimes people say things that sound judging, or even do and say downright mean things. I too, have been wounded by church people, and I suppose I have done my share of wounding. But once you realize that Jesus stands above all that, and that His followers are a gathering of wounded sinners, you will be able to step back from your pain, just enough, for His healing touch to reach you. Once the healing begins you will be able to confront your own past, with all its foibles, mistakes, wounds, and sins; you will be able to ask God to reveal to you those mistakes

and wounds you are not conscious of; and **as you are healed and forgive those who've wounded you, you will receive forgiveness for those you've wounded.**

Maxie Dunnam shares a story about a friend, visiting an orchard one day in the state of Maine, He saw trees weighed down with apples to the point that branches had to be propped up to keep them snapping. When he exclaimed about it, the owner said, "Go, look at the tree's trunk near the bottom." He saw that the tree had been badly wounded with a deep gash. "That is something we have learned about apple trees," said the owner of the orchard. "When the tree tends to run to wood and leaves and not to fruit, we wound it, gash it, and almost always – no one knows why – this is the result; it turns its energies into fruit."

Close observation will show that we know many wounded trees in the human orchard – those who experience intense suffering, but in their suffering discover the great realities of life and begin to produce the fruit of the Spirit.<sup>iii</sup>

Think a moment of all the instances you were hurt by someone, and when you did the hurting – sometimes unintentionally. Think of the moments in your life when you didn't follow God, let alone acknowledge Him. How much time would all that add up to? Confess it all. Repent of it. Before we were ever born, Jesus was provided as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world. **If Jesus can take away the world's sin, surely, He can take care of yours.**

You don't have to let all that stuff plague your mind because there is now no condemnation in our lives because of forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Your yesterdays are not only covered, but wiped clean. Our sins are remembered no more. **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 water without cost from the spring of the water of life.'** Rev. 21:6.

### **The Past Matters**

The past matters. Your past matters. Our past matters. **All the events of the past have a telling impact on our life today and our future.** There is one event from the past that, I believe, has had the most profound impact on all human life, and your life, in all time and forever. That event is Jesus' resurrection, and yes, I know I am making a very audacious statement here.

It's no small thing to embrace the reports of Jesus' appearance after rising from death. Many folks couldn't (and still cannot) accept that God might act in this way, to raise Jesus from the dead. We know that even Jesus' own closest followers had trouble accepting it... until He came to them personally. Many reject that Jesus literally rose from the dead – they would rather speak in metaphorical or philosophical terms about resurrection. **But it is the literal and bodily resurrection of Jesus from which we derive all the metaphorical and philosophical notions about new life.** Recall how Thomas – the one who doubted – received the proof he asked for: he saw and touched the wounds in Jesus' hands and side. The risen Jesus was the very same Jesus they had walked with. (See John 20:24-29) **Jesus said to Thomas, *Because you have seen Me have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed,* John 20:29.**

To affirm the resurrection of Jesus is to affirm that natural laws can be broken – and why can't God do that? Is not God the One who created nature? Now, if the system of nature can develop a crack and let God's light shine through, then surely the systems of

human order and existence can also develop a crack, and let the light of hope shine through. To embrace the resurrection is to embrace the greatest sign of hope we have.

Further more, to believe in Jesus' resurrection is to believe that God really does act in peoples' lives. If Jesus was raised from the dead then we have a chance also; not only for the reality of eternal life, but also for eternal living today in lives of goodness, pleasing to God. **We don't have to be weighed down by sins of our past because Jesus broke the power of sin** (whose consequence is death), and through Him we can rise to a new life with God our Creator.

Saul was *"breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord."* Then he met the risen Jesus, repented, and embraced resurrection. Saul became a new man through Jesus – he became Paul the great evangelist who shared new life found in Christ. If you've been taking God for granted, or ignoring God, or even mocking God for most of your life, be like Paul. Repent of those things of your past, receive Jesus. His resurrection will lift you into new life. (I suppose we ought to hear testimonies of people who've experienced this.)

### **Your Personal Resurrection**

The gospels don't end with the resurrection of Jesus and then His ascension into heaven. The disciples experienced new life as they proclaimed Jesus' Resurrection (read the book of Acts of the Apostles). Think of all the lives they have touched, on down to us. **Resurrection touches you, your past, and your destiny.** The resurrection of Jesus brought to those disciples long ago, and now to us, the absolute conviction that God is real, alive; that good indeed triumphs over evil; that life triumphs over death.

All that Christ wrought for you and me on the Cross is wrought in you and me. The free committal of ourselves to God gives the Holy Spirit the chance to impart to us the holiness of Jesus Christ.<sup>iv</sup>

The devil will accuse you, someone may bring up your ugly past and throw it in your face, you will be tempted to deny Jesus, but do not shrink. You are heading toward your Omega; your life is heading toward Him who is to come, and because He is with you now, you will be faithful to the end. Abraham, called out by God to go to a new land, didn't head toward the promise because He was perfect. He headed toward the promise because He was sure: he trusted God. **We don't enter 2023 because we are confident that we have it all together. We face 2023 with confidence because we trust God our Savior to be there.**

In Him our sins of yesterday are forgiven, so that we can walk with Him in freedom today. Next week I will reflect more fully on what it means to walk with the Timeless One in that very thin slice of time we call "the present."

***... there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death, Romans 8:1-2.***

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<sup>i</sup> Erling Duus, *The Tragic Sacred Ground*, 1988.

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ii Matt Rawle, *The Redemption of Scrooge*, 49.

iii Dunnam, *Perceptions*, "Damaged Trees in the Human Orchard," 27.

iv Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest*, "March 21," Westwood, NJ: Barbour and Company, 1984.