

Revelation 1.9–17

The First and the Last

Amington

Sunday 3 May 2020

The Names of Jesus [1]

Names

I *had* planned a spring and summer focusing on prayer, reading this book < *hold up How to Pray* > together, running the Prayer Course which is based on it, teaching about prayer on Sundays, encouraging us to explore new and different ways to pray. We'll still be doing a bit of that – watch this space – and if you want to get this book and read it yourself, go for it.

But for our teaching we'll be looking the names of Jesus in the book of Revelation, for two reasons.

First, who Jesus is *matters*, it makes a real difference.

Second, although some of the images in Revelation might be confusing, John's message is simple: 1) keep going, 2) the Lamb (that's Jesus) – *the Lamb wins*. And I think that's an encouraging message that we need to hear today.

The Beginning and the End

What's the longest journey you've ever been on? When Jess and I went to New Zealand it took 37 hours door to door.

< Put up pictures of journey to NZ >

You can see here the rather unflattering descent into exhaustion as we travelled halfway across the world. At the beginning we were so excited – by the end we just wanted somewhere comfortable to collapse and sleep!

Sometimes it felt unending, but *that* journey had *a* beginning and end – however Jesus is *the* beginning and *the* end.

It's like he's always travelling, so we join him, whatever journey we go on, and he delivers us safely. We never journey without him, and he never leaves us; no matter what happens, he is always by our side: he is *the* beginning and *the* end.

The Alpha and The Omega

John also calls Jesus the Alpha and Omega – the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet – like saying Jesus is the ‘A to Z’.

< *Hold up A-Z* >

Remember these? Back in the olden days – approximately ten years ago – we all had to rely on road atlases and books like this to find anywhere. Now? I don’t use a paper map except when I’m out walking. These books were particularly popular because they are comprehensive – *every* street, *from A to Z*.

No street is too big, too small, too wibbly, too straight, too wide, too narrow, too long, too young, too old to be in the A-Z.

And it’s like that with Jesus.

No-one is too *anything* to be included in Jesus’ book. He is the Alpha and the Omega – we can all be in his family.

The First and The Last

In our passage today Jesus calls himself **the First and the Last** (17). He is before, he is brighter, he is bigger than *everything* – from persecution to pandemics. His **the First and** he is **the Last**.

< *Hold up birth certificate* >

This certificate marks *my* beginning. I was my parents' first child, my grandparents' first grandchild – as Jess was in her family – and we all know when it comes to children 'first' really means 'best'.

But Jesus is *the* first.

But does that matter? Yes! Why? Jesus tells us himself – his first words to John – in fact his first words in John's vision – are these:

‘Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last.’

Revelation 1.17 (NIV)

Jesus was here before any troubles, big or small, and he'll be here long after they've gone.

He's never late – he is the first – and he never leaves early – he is the last – he is with us *always*, and *no matter what*.

And that means we do not need to be afraid.

Jesus is the only solid ground, the only strong tower, the only salvation – Jesus, and no other.

Jesus – and no other – is *the* first.

Jesus – and no other – is *the* last.

So if you're with him, if you're in his family, you don't need to be afraid. The more we focus on *him*, the more our fears fade away.

'Turn your eyes upon Jesus,' the hymn goes, 'And the things of this earth' – things that delight and terrify – 'will grow strangely dim, in the light of his glory and grace.'

'Do not be afraid,' Jesus says – to *you, today*, **'I am the First and the Last.'**

Amen – may it be so in each of our lives.