



HG196 *The I AM Sayings Of Jesus*
I AM The Alpha And Omega

Revelation 1:8 & 21:12-16

Home Group Study Notes

8 March 2020 - Revd Dr Stephen Dray



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION
BEFORE THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group
with you, along with any previous notes and other
resources which might be helpful for your discussions.*



Welcome (10 mins)
Ice Breaker

You might try the old party game of putting names on people's backs and they have to try to work out who they are!



Looking Upwards (10 mins)
Worship

Play quietly a worship song about Jesus and quietly prepare minds and hearts to meet with him in fellowship and around his Word.



HG196 *The I AM Sayings Of Jesus* **I AM The Alpha And Omega**

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Home Group Sermon

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With virtually his last words in the Bible, Jesus makes the astonishing statement that constitutes our text: 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end' (Revelation 22:13). Usually we cherish 'last words' and, given the occasion, we would like to think our last utterances are the sentiments that those present remember us by and, perhaps, live by. Doubtless that was true of the risen, ascended and glorified Jesus. So he expects us to 'pin back our ears'.

Getting Personal

But to understand Jesus' words, and especially their importance to us, we need to go back to the beginning. In Genesis 2:4 we are introduced to 'Yahweh Elohim'. These two words are usually translated in our Bibles as 'LORD' (capitalised) or Jehovah and, in the case of the second, as 'God'. We might, therefore, suggest that while 'God' is the surname, 'Yahweh' is his forename. This is an early and powerful reminder that 'our' God, the true God is a personal God, he has a personal name and, as we shall see, he relates to us person to person.

At once we are alerted to the fact that the God of the Bible is no distant deity, largely inaccessible to human beings like ourselves. He wants us to know him by name (as he knows us by name) and to enjoy, yes, enjoy, his fellowship. The immediate sequel demonstrates this: he plants a garden in which he, and those whom he has made, can enjoy the communion of lover and beloved. As the old hymn puts it, making it very personal:

*'He walks with me, and he talks with me,
And he tells me I am his own;
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known.'*

Of course much has taken place since the Garden to undermine that relationship. But the personal God still wants us to know him by name and enjoy shared intimacy. His purpose for us is unchanged.

Solitude and Silence

But now to one of the ‘naughty’ passages in the Bible! When I was a boy, typical of a young boy, I enjoyed the reading of Exodus 3 because it referred to the ‘backside’ of the desert to which Moses led his father-in-law’s flock! As I grew older, I realised that this passage was remarkable for several other reasons. First of all, it describes God making himself known to Moses in solitude and silence. Much is left out of the story, but perhaps it reminds us that to know intimacy with Yahweh (I insist on calling him by his personal name!) we need to give space and time to him so that his still, small voice can be heard. However, at the heart of this story lies a mystery that has preoccupied students of the Bible down the centuries.

What’s in a Name?

The puzzle is this. Moses asks for God’s name, having already recognised that the ‘God of the ancestors’ had revealed himself to him in the bush that burned but was not consumed. And, as we have already seen, God has already in the Garden effectively said, ‘call me Yahweh’. So why does Moses ask ‘Yahweh’ for his name and why does Yahweh then answer, ‘I am who I am’?

The best answer to the first question would seem to be that Moses is asking Yahweh to explain what the name means. In the ancient world a person’s name was often believed to reflect something about who they were and names were sometimes given to reflect upon some early characteristic of the baby or child (as with Esau and Jacob... even Moses himself) or to express some hopes for their future. So Moses is wanting to get a ‘handle’ on Yahweh, to gain some understanding of him upon which he and others can build their faith.

But to answer this question is to raise another second one; what does ‘I am who I am’ mean? Now Yahweh helpfully draws attention to the fact that his name is related to the verb ‘to be’ (the consonants of the verb and the name are identical in Hebrew). However, the answer as to its significance is elusive. It could, and probably does, hint at Yahweh’s changelessness and reliability. As the song puts it, ‘there is no shadow of changing with thee’. Nevertheless, it appears best to translate Yahweh’s words as ‘I will be whom I will be’. If so, Yahweh somewhat side-steps Moses’ question to say, ‘Wait and see!’

Of course Moses already had the stories of his ancestors to help fill out the answer. The experiences of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah and their sons, Jacob and his descendants and Moses and his family’s testimony, all filled out part of the picture- as if Yahweh was saying ‘I am like that’! But Yahweh was doing more, he was telling Moses that he and those who followed him down the centuries (ourselves included) would discover him in the intimacy of his actions and his words towards us. This is why we need to give ourselves space to hear from him in the Bible, to fill our minds and hearts with the testimonies of others and to trace his finger through and in our own often convoluted lives.

There we meet him personally- though much remains inscrutable. He will be who he will be. He cannot be ‘boxed’.

Jesus, the I AM

In recent studies we have seen that Jesus, apparently self consciously, takes this name of God and applies it to himself in the great ‘I am’ sayings. Earlier in the book of Revelation it is not clear whether God the Father or the ascended Jesus speaks when saying ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega’ in 1:8. Similarly, it is not clear in 22:5, 6 who is speaking when one says ‘I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end’. That God is speaking, is in no doubt. Who is speaking can be contested.

But our text is unambiguous. For Jesus now applies directly to himself those phrases that earlier have pointed to Godhead. Very simply, Jesus is saying I am ‘Yahweh Elohim’; I am the God who revealed myself to Moses and his ancestors and descendants and am revealing myself to you. And this, we note, is his final word about himself. If there is one thing, says Jesus, you must grasp about me, it is that I am God. This is a non-negotiable as far as he is concerned and it should be as far as we are concerned too! He is claiming that we enjoy fellowship with God in and through him alone.

Alpha and Omega

Jesus adds to his claim to deity three phrases that appear to be in parallel:

Alpha and Omega, First and Last, Beginning and End.

How are we to understand these words?

Often in the world of the ancient Hebrews phrases were placed in parallel to one another as being similar but subtly different. Here it would seem that the second two phrases are intended to explain what Alpha and Omega mean. ‘The first and the last’ seems to point to Jesus’ eternity, to emphasise that before everything and should all disappear as it were into a mist, he is I AM. In the context of the original hearers of the book of Revelation, this would have been remarkably comforting; it should be to us! He is the unchanging and ever-living friend, whatever the world throw at them and us.

However, the words ‘the beginning and the end’ seem to make a slightly different point. They relate less to eternity as to time and to progress within time. It is as though Jesus is claiming to be the author of all and the end to which everything is headed. It is to suggest that he was the one who created the world for fellowship with those he had made (it was he who walked in the Garden) and the final drama will be when, despite all that has taken place to destroy his purpose, it will be accomplished. He will reign, his kingdom will come. And therein lies our hope and our confidence. Isaac Watts once wrote:

*Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
does its successive journeys run,
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.*

*To him shall endless prayer be made,
And praises throng to crown his head.
His name like sweet perfume shall rise
With every morning sacrifice.*

*People and realms of every tongue
Dwell on his love with sweetest song,
And infant voices shall proclaim
Their early blessings on his name.*

*Blessings abound where'er he reigns:
The prisoners leap to lose their chains,
The weary find eternal rest,
And all who suffer want are blest.*

*Let every creature rise and bring
The highest honors to our King,
Angels descend with songs again,
And earth repeat the loud Amen.*

The Last Word

We have come a long way in our study. But we can conclude with a summary. Jesus is the Lord of all. He existed before all things, he created all things and he will remain, the unchanging God when all else has passed away. And he is the beginning of the story, creating all things that he might enjoy intimacy with those he created. And he is the end of the story, because, despite every set back, he is still there that we might enjoy communion with him and his kingdom is secure however dark the days that precede the end. And all this is possible because the One who John saw in his vision had become incarnate and ‘as the lamb of God’ had taken away the sin of the world and restored the fractured relationship between himself and those he had created. To answer Moses’ question, ‘This is your God’!

Emmanuel Church Text for 2020

**“The Lord Your God is with you. He is mighty to save.
He will take great delight in you. He will quiet you with
His love. He will rejoice over you with singing.”**

Zephaniah 3:17



Looking Upwards (40 mins)

Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

1. What is in a name? When you know someone by name, how does it change the nature of your relationship with them? How does it help your relationship with God to know he has a 'forename', Yahweh?

2. Moses experienced new intimacy with Yahweh when he had space and time to recognise his presence and to hear his voice? How can we best achieve this individually?

3. Moses was reminded that Yahweh had already been at work in his past and the past of his ancestors. Can you share something about your past or your family's past that tells you something about him?

4. Yahweh is the God of his journey and ours. What are some of the best ways we have found to help us detect the ‘shadow of his presence’?

5. Jesus is Yahweh-God of our journey. What support can we personally obtain from those things that are revealed about him in our text?

6. Jesus is Yahweh. How should this shape our attitude to others’ views of him? How should this shape our witness to him?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an opportunity to share, not something you have to do, however, 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours or church, which you would like to share (please be sure not pass on anything that is confidential or which you think the person concerned would not wish to be shared) for:

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?

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