

**“Have a Confident New Year”**  
**Revelation 1:1-8**  
**December 27, 2015**

---

**INTRODUCTION:**

As we come to the final Sunday of 2015 today and look ahead to the coming year, we have a similar need to that of John’s first readers of Revelation. He was writing to churches in Asia that were battling some significant fears because of an upsurge of persecution. The year is A.D. 96 and John the apostle, now in his mid-80’s, is in exile on an island in the Aegean Sea called Patmos (1:9). He had been sent there because of his refusal to utter the simple words *Caesar Kurios*, “Caesar is Lord.” The Caesar at this time was a man by the name of Domitian. An earlier Roman emperor, Nero, is infamous for feeding Christians to the lions, but the persecution by him was limited mostly to the city of Rome. It is likely that both Peter and Paul were crucified during the time of Nero, around A.D. 67. Domitian was an emperor who, according to one commentator, was “a profoundly insecure man who lived in morbid horror of being overthrown.” To compensate for his insecurity, he demanded that everyone throughout the Roman Empire worship him as Lord and God. All that was required as an expression of this worship was to go to a temple, offer a pinch of incense while uttering the words “Caesar is Lord.” John was not about to allow any rival to the Lord Jesus, preferring death to such a diminishing of the glory belonging to Jesus. Domitian was not reluctant to kill any who refused his demand of worship. In A.D. 92 he had some 40,000 Christians killed, including Paul’s disciple Timothy. The authorities likely chose not to execute John in order not to make this aged church leader a martyr. So they exiled him instead.

We may not be experiencing persecution like John and these early Christians, but we do battle fears as we look ahead to a year that is completely unknown to us presently. This strange book was written not to satisfy the curiosity of twenty-first century Christians about the end times, but to bring comfort and hope to God’s people of all ages in the fears we battle. Our need is to have Jesus revealed to us, and that is what this book does, as indicated by its name. It is the **“revelation of Jesus Christ”** (v. 1), by which I take John to mean not the revelation authored by Jesus but the one about Jesus. If we are to face the new year with confidence instead of fear, what we need is not more money, better church programs or better political leaders. There is nothing wrong with any of those, but it is only when we have Jesus revealed to us in a fresh way that we develop a renewed confidence in him, the Alpha and Omega.

**I. Jesus Is the Beginning**

When God is quoted in verse 8 as saying, **“I am the Alpha and the Omega,”** it is referring to God the Father. But it describes God the Son as well. Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, and the meaning is that God is the first and the last and everything in between. He was already present at the beginning of all things and he will bring all things to his appointed goal. God is sovereignly in control of all things. This claim is made four times in this first chapter (4, 8[twice], and 17). In verse 17, we read the application of this truth as Jesus says to John and to all of us some of his most oft-repeated words—**“Fear not.”**

What does it mean to say that Jesus is the Alpha, the beginning? It means that he has existed eternally. It means that he created everything in the universe, including time itself. He stands above time and he stands above all else. This is why he is portrayed later in this first chapter as having hair that is like white wool. White hair is an indication of advanced age and the experience and wisdom that ought to accompany it. Jesus is older than the hills. Think how much wiser you are now than just twenty years ago. If you could live the last twenty years over again, would you do anything differently? Probably all of us would, because we have learned some things over the years. If instead of twenty years of experience you had 20 billion, your wisdom would be immense. Such, and more, is the wisdom of Jesus.

It also means that he is the beginning of our new relationship with him. Our salvation was his idea, not ours. He is the “hound of heaven,” hunting us down relentlessly to bring us back to himself. In the words of verse 5, he **“loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood.”** He is also the first of a new race of immortal human beings, **“the firstborn of the dead.”** Jesus now has a body that will never suffer any disease or illness. Knee surgery, hip replacement, chemotherapy or antibiotics will never be needed on his body. His is the first body like that, but it won’t be the last. At his coming, all who trust in him will receive a body like his. It will be the body you have always wanted.

## **II. Jesus Is the Middle**

Jesus is not on sabbatical, waiting and hoping for things to turn out as he wants them to. He is actively at work to bring things to the outcome he has determined should happen. Consider the little word “must” in verse 1. This revelation is **“to show to his servants the things that *must* soon take place.”** This is the language of divine necessity. It must take place because God has decided that it should take place. And when God wills it to happen, it happens because he is in control of all things. As Paul says in Ephesians 1:11, he **“works all things according to the counsel of his will.”** The “all things” is not limited to the big things, but includes even the smallest details, down to the movement of every atom in his universe.

We see the authority of Jesus to control all things in the statement in verse 5 that calls him **“the ruler of kings on earth.”** Jesus controls who becomes king, or president. Daniel 2:21 says, **“He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings.”** We may have some fear about who gets elected as president next year, but God has no such fear. Not only does he control who becomes king, but he also controls their decisions and actions once they begin to rule. Do you remember the story of King Abimelech in Genesis 20? It wasn't Abraham's best moment. He and his wife, Sarah, went to Gerar where Abimelech ruled. Out of fear and a desire for self-protection, Abraham lied to the king and said that Sarah was his sister. So Abimelech took her into his harem. But God appeared to Abimelech in a dream and threatened him with death if he did not give her back untouched to Abraham. When Abimelech rightly claimed his innocence because of not knowing that she was Abraham's wife, God said something interesting to him. **“Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, and it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her”** (Gen. 20:6). God was in complete control of the actions of this pagan king who did not know or acknowledge him.

Jesus emphasized his authority during this current age right before his ascension in what we call the Great Commission. He tells his church to make disciples based on the fact that he has been given all authority, both in heaven and on the earth. Jesus has authority to claim citizens out of the kingdom of darkness and into his own kingdom. Our call to people to believe in Jesus is based on this authority. Betty Carter told me an interesting story this week about her father, Kennedy Smartt, who fought in the European theater at the end of World War II. He was once sent out alone on horseback, with no weapon, to round up horses that had escaped their traces while pulling wagons belonging to the German army. As he was searching for the horses, he came face to face with 150 armed German soldiers. These soldiers at that time knew the war was over, and their chief concern was to surrender to the Americans instead of the Russians. So when they saw that he was an American soldier, they stood up, raised their hands in the air and surrendered to him. He motioned to them to follow him, and he rode back to his platoon, still unarmed, with 150 prisoners in tow. We go about our assignment of making disciples with the confidence that Jesus has been given all authority to claim citizens out of Satan's kingdom. We declare to them the good news, and Jesus, by his power and authority, brings those he has appointed into the kingdom.

### **III. Jesus Is the End**

Jesus is not only in control of the beginning and the middle, but the end as well. John turns our attention to that end in verse 7, where he speaks of the

second coming of Jesus. **“Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.”** His return will not be like his first coming, when he came in weakness, humility and obscurity. It will be glorious, which is indicated by the coming with the clouds. It will be visible to everyone on the earth, even his enemies. Committed atheists will see the glorious return of Jesus. Those who are just too busy for Jesus now will see him then. World leaders will see him. All the Muslims, Hindus, Jews and secularists of the world will see him. And they will realize in the blink of an eye that they are in trouble. They had lived their lives with more important priorities than Jesus, but now see their fatal mistake. The result, we are told here, is that they will wail, knowing that the time of mercy is past and only judgment remains.

For those who know Jesus, however, this end will be the beginning of our eternal happiness. We say, **“Even so. Amen.”** We welcome the appearing of Jesus because he is the one who, according to verse 5, **“loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood.”** To any who receive him, whether white or black, rich or poor, man, woman or child, he will forgive our sins and welcome us into his eternal kingdom of joy and peace. In the words of the prophet Micah, **“he will tread our iniquities underfoot”** (7:19). Can you picture that? My known sins such as envy, selfishness, pride and laziness, as well as my far more numerous unknown sins, will be crushed into oblivion by the nail-pierced feet of Jesus. So if Jesus were to return in this visible glory before this worship service concludes, I would welcome his appearing with joy.

How about you? Is your life directed to the right end, the end described here in the second coming of Christ? In his book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey’s second habit is to start with the end in mind. He begins that chapter with an exercise asking us to imagine attending our own funerals and also to imagine what we would want four people representing different areas of our lives to say about us. It’s a very good principle except for one thing. He doesn’t go far enough in defining the end. The important thing isn’t what people say about us at our funeral, but what Jesus says about us at his glorious return. Every last sin must be paid for. The only question is that of who pays for the sin. It will either be Jesus or the sinner. The only way to get to hell is to trample the cross of Jesus. For those who do so, the return of Jesus will mean the deepest mourning imaginable. That’s the end we need to keep in mind today and always.

## **CONCLUSION:**

We need to apply this now. Notice that verse 3 pronounces a blessed happiness on the one who reads, hears and keeps what is written here. You’ve now read it and heard it, and it’s time to keep it. What is the dominant fear in

your heart today? I was thinking about that this week as I was attempting to apply this passage to myself, and I realized that my fears often operate just below the surface. It's not that I'm thinking about them all the time or even most of the time. As a matter of fact, I usually don't think about them at all. But they dominate like a future trial for a guilty criminal. Two fears came to my mind. I've always enjoyed being physically and mentally active, and I realized that I have a deep-seated fear of losing either physical or mental health to the point that I have no choice but to be largely inactive. And then I realized as I was talking this over with Wendy and one of our daughters that part of this fear is rooted in another, that of isolation. So I fear being sick and alone. And I also realize that I have no guarantees from God that I won't die sick and alone. What I do have is the powerful "**Fear not**" of Jesus (v. 17). It is powerful because it is accompanied by his statement that he is the Alpha and Omega, the first, the last and everything in between.

It makes a great difference that Jesus is saying this. I've mentioned before how when I was in seminary I would drive from Philadelphia, where my seminary was located, to Memphis, where my parents lived. It was a trip of almost exactly one-thousand miles, and I was always making such trips in cars that seemed on the verge of breaking down. On one particular trip to Memphis, I didn't think I would make it. The engine would just stop and not restart without waiting 15-20 minutes. Then when it did start, it would shut down again after about 45 minutes to an hour of operation. This happened for about the last four-hundred miles of the trip. When I finally made it home, I took the car to a mechanic, knowing that I was going to have to get back on the road and drive that same car back to Philadelphia. Two people voiced the same words to me, words that said in effect, "Don't be afraid; it will be fine." The two people were my mother, and my mechanic, after he did some repairs on the car. Whose voice do you think was more reassuring to me? I knew that my mother loved me, but she knew nothing about cars. My mechanic didn't love me, but he knew a lot about cars. Because of his expertise, his words were far more reassuring to me. When Jesus tells us, "**Fear not,**" we are hearing from one who both loves us and who is in control of all things.

I've been re-reading *The Hobbit* this Christmas, and I was struck by Tolkien's words just as Bilbo the hobbit was walking down that secret passage to Smaug, the dragon. As he began hearing the noise from Smaug's snoring and feeling the heat from his dragon breath, he paused out of fear just before entering the dragon's den. Tolkien writes, "Going on from there was the bravest thing he ever did. The tremendous things that happened afterwards were as nothing compared to it. He fought the real battle in the tunnel alone, before he ever saw the vast danger that lay in wait." This is your moment to fight the real battle alone as you head into a year of challenges you do not yet know. Hear the "Fear not" of Jesus' voice as you take your fears to him and live with a bold confidence, not a self-confidence but a Jesus-confidence.