“***Alpha and Omega***” by S. Finlan, at The First Church, May 19, 2019—in four parts

**Revelation 21:1–4**

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth . . . . 2And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God . . . . 3And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; 4 he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more.”

This is a promise about the renewal, the beauty, and the comfort that will be present in heaven. It also promises that “the home of God is among mortals.” Does this mean God the Son, who *did* live a human life, and then returned to glory on high? That would be my guess, but the text doesn’t actually say so. I can’t impose my guess on the passage and pretend that I am certain about it. We have to face the fact that there is a *lot* of uncertainty in the Bible. The Bible doesn’t always explain itself. We better be honest and admit that, and be humble about it.

Now it *does* say there will be peace in heaven and on earth, a new Jerusalem will “come down out of heaven,” that there will be no more mourning or death. It sounds so perfect, but it’s hard to know what to make of some of this. It leaves many questions unanswered. Does it mean that there will be a time when humans will be born as babies and live here on earth and simply never die? Or does it refer to heaven, where we will have *spiritual* bodies that will not die? Again, it does not say. We cannot be certain what the author intends. It is best to respectfully study and keep an open mind, always willing to learn anew. All of us need to be *students*, that is, permanent *learners*!

But I *am* confident about the big idea, the major truth, presented here. The big idea is that God is good, and will eventually bring goodness to reign supreme in heaven and on earth. You can bet on *that*. That is certain.

**Revelation 21:5–6**

5 And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new. . . . 6I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life.”

Jesus is the one sitting on the throne, and Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega. Those are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, and Greek was the universal language of that time, so it is like saying “I am the A and the Z.” Jesus is the Alpha, that is, the actual Creator, as we are told in four different New Testament texts. The Gospel of John, says “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God . . . . All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:1, 3 RSV). Jesus Christ made this very world, the biology, the geology of this sphere! The Apostle Paul says “there is . . . one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (1 Cor 8:6). So, our very existence is through Jesus. He is the Alpha, which refers to his role as Creator or co-Creator. He is also the Omega, the one who will receive us in the end, and start perfecting us. He was there before the human race began, and he will be there when this sad and foolish race is *finally* brought in line with God’s will.

Jesus was there at the beginning, and he will be there at the ending, for you. And the ending is just another beginning.

**John 13:31–33**

When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. . . .33Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me . . . but where I am going, you cannot come.”

The gospel passage talks about Jesus being glorified. That could refer to him returning to the glorious and spiritual state he had before he came to earth, and it might also refer to the influence of God that is coming into the world because of Jesus. God the Father is glorified through Jesus, the Son. But of course, he is thinking of his apostles here. He is warning that they will have to live without him. They won’t have to live without his Spirit, however, and that’s what he talks about not many verses after this, when he says the Advocate or Spirit of Truth will come, and will “abide with you, and . . . in you” (John 14:16–17). The Spirit is a subtle and invisible presence within you, that draws you to the truth.

**John 13:34–35**

34I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

This is Jesus’ last commandment. And what a great saying—*simple* but great. It is much like that saying earlier in his career where he said the great commandment was to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind,” and “your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 22:37, 39). You can let that be your rule in life. Sometimes, though, it is hard to *feel* loving, but you can still find your spiritual focus by praying a silent prayer, “God I want to do your will.” If you pray for the will of God, God will help you get aligned with it. And Jesus said “Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother” (Mark 3:35).

Jesus who is the Creator, is also your brother, and even your friend. He knows what it’s like to live an earth life, to be misunderstood by friends and family, yet he is confident in God’s unfaltering love, and he wants us to live with a similar confidence, even when tears and suffering do come. They don’t last forever. The will and the way of God—these are what last forever.

Remember the big idea. Whenever you read Scripture, or hear it preached, try to grasp the *main* idea. Here we see Jesus as the beginning and the end, and we hear of the afterlife that Jesus has prepared for us. There is the love we have for each other, the love we receive from Jesus, and the Spirit he has sent us to help us stay close to him. So I count *four* main ideas here, but you can remember them—Alpha, Omega, love, and Spirit—the Beginning, the End, the whole point of it all, and the inner guide. Love is the whole point. Spirit is the inner guide.