### “The Alpha and the Omega” Steve Finlan for The First Church, May 18, 2025

**Revelation 21:1–6**

1Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 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 and be their God; 4he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.”

5And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.” 6Then 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 as a gift from the spring of the water of life.”

**John 13:31–35**

31When he had gone out, Jesus said, ‘Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. 32If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. 33Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, “Where I am going, you cannot come.” 34I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35 By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

The promise that God will wipe every tear from peoples’ eyes probably builds upon the promise in Isaiah, from a portion that seems to be after the return from the Babylonian Exile: “he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death for ever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces” (Isa 25:7–8). What a remarkable promise. It’s not clear whether the shroud or sheet is death, or the *fear* of death, or *sorrow*. The latter could be implied by the line “the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces” (25:8). The shroud of sorrow lays heavily upon many people. We are told it will some day be relieved. So also are people oppressed by the shroud of death, and anxiety about death. But “death will be no more,” Revelation says (21:4).

It seems unnecessary to then say “See, I am making all things new” (21:5). Well, obviously! If death and sorrow are ended, that’s *really* new! It’s all a radical change in the conditions of living. “The first things have passed away” (Rev 21:4), it says. Indeed! Our spiritual needs will all be met. “To the thirsty I will give water” (21:6). That sounds like a permanent meeting of our spiritual needs.

We need to realize how new and stunning Jesus’ message was at the time it was uttered, where God was pictured as the father of every person, not just of the nation, and someone with whom we could have a relationship, even as we have with our earth fathers, but hopefully without so much psychological baggage or hurt feelings.

Jesus is the Alpha and Omega, the A and the Z, the creator of life on this earth, and the one who receives us after we pass on from this world. He’s also the one who understands what a human life is like, and what disappointment and pain are like, as well as joy and strong friendships. I think spiritual growth is the major goal in the afterlife. In fact, it’s really the major goal of *this* life, although people often forget that, and they get stuck at various levels of arrested development. We see it all the time, in spirituality, in philosophy, in politics, that people—and whole groups—get stuck. When people get stuck, they tend to not grow spiritually. Love grows cold. Thinking becomes frozen; attitudes remain unchanged; resentments fester.

Jesus wants to help our love to spring eternal, ever new. Near the end of his earth life, he gives the disciples an instruction he wants them to take to heart: He calls it “a new commandment, that you love one another . . . as I have loved you” (John 13:34). And it is *this* that will become the mark of the Jesus fellowship. The fellowship will be known by the level of love that is shown in the community. And indeed, the early church was famous for its atmosphere of love.

People had strong and spiritual relationships with each other, and with God as well. The church was a network of relationships, a place for learning how to love.

It’s interesting what Jesus’ test is, not whether we believe certain doctrines or teachings, not whether we have the right form of hierarchy and structure in the church, not whether we follow some kind of discipline or self-denial, but only whether we have a love that is notable and strong. *That’s* how people will know we are Christians. *That’s* the test we need to pass.

This will be the kind of love that is really at home in a place where death is no more, where our spiritual thirst is met with unending spiritual waters. But it’s also a love that can be at home here on earth, when we allow God’s will to be done on earth, as it is in heaven. This is another way of stating the great spiritual test: are you making earth to resemble heaven? Are you making heavenly love and spirituality a normal and everyday reality here on earth?

Angela Wolthuis tells the story of how she was cleaning up under her sons’ beds and she found a piece of chalk. Without letting her mom-mind take over, she just acted on impulse, going to the wall at the foot of the bed and writing out a note to her sons about her love and admiration for them. Heading back to her and her husband’s room, she also cleaned out beneath the bed, and then stared at the wall. Dare she write a love note to her husband in chalk? And she did. When her husband came home, the two boys enthusiastically told him about the love note their mom wrote to them. He enjoyed that moment with them, then came in his bedroom and saw the note at the foot of *his* bed, and a big smile came onto his face. Angela prays that she may continue to write notes of love on the walls of her husband’s heart, praying that their relationships to the heavenly Father may be basis of their relationship to each other (*Devotional Stories of Resilience and Positive Thinking*, 187–88).

Will we Christians be known by our love? Will we bring a little bit of heaven down onto earth? Will we allow love and insight to get us *unstuck* in all areas of our lives? Will our faith remove the shroud that is cast over all peoples? And will our faith help us overcome the fear of death? Then we would *really* see all things made new.