

# The Message of Revelation

by G. Campbell Morgan

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*The book of Revelation unveils Jesus Christ as the Alpha and Omega, the Lord God, and the Almighty, and reveals His central teaching, abiding appeal, and ultimate and progressive purposes.*

**Scripture:** Revelation 1:8, Revelation 21:6, Revelation 22:12

**Topics:** "The Power of God", "Unveiling of Christ"

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## Description

G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes the central teaching of Revelation as the unveiling of Jesus Christ, who is identified as the Alpha and Omega, the Almighty God. He explores the unveiled power of Christ, highlighting His roles as Priest, King, and Prophet, and the ultimate purpose of God to dwell with humanity while waging war against sin. Morgan encourages believers to approach the book with courage, reminding them of the promise of blessing for those who read and keep its words, while also cautioning against adding or subtracting from its message. The sermon serves as a call to the Church and individuals to understand their identity in Christ and the significance of the new creation.

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## Transcript

### A. THE PERMANENT VALUES

#### I. The Central Teaching. Unveiling

##### i. The unveiled Person. The Alpha and Omega.

##### a. The Identification.

1. The Lord God. The Almighty. i. 8.

2. God dwelling with Men. xxi. 6.

3. The coming One. xxii. 15.

##### b. The Vocation.

1. The Priest. Cf. ver. 5.

2. The King. The established City.

3. The Prophet. Cf. ver. 10.
  - ii. The unveiled Power.
    - a. Personal.
      1. Inherent.
      2. Acquired.
    - b. Instrumental.
      1. All material Forces.
      2. All spiritual Forces.
    - c. Effectual.
      1. Destructive.
      2. Constructive.
  - iii. The unveiled Purpose.
    - a. The Ultimate.
      1. God dwelling with Men.
      2. Men blessed in God.
      3. God glorified in Men.
    - b. The Progressive.
      1. At War against Sin.
      2. The Destruction of Sin.
      3. The Patience of even Justice.
- II. The Abiding Appeal
  - i. An opening Word of Courage. "Fear not."
    - a. The Vision producing Fear. i. 17a.
    - b. The Voice interpreting the Vision. i. 17b. 18.
    - c. The Vision inspiring Courage. i. 19.
  - ii. A closing Word of Caution. "I testify."
    - a. No Additions. Speculative Deductions.

b. No Subtractions. Unbelieving Denials.

## B. THE LIVING MESSAGE

### I. To the Church

i. This is preeminently

a Book for the Friends of Jesus.

ii. To know it is to be saved from Mistakes about

His Person.

His Power.

His Programme.

### II. To the Individual

i. The new Creation as revealing the Meaning of Life in Christ.

ii. The Processes as revealing the Principles of Life in Christ.

In attempting to discover the message of the book of Revelation, it is well that we should remember that differing interpretations of detail need not detain or trouble us, because its essential message is not interfered with, whatever view may be held as to how the book should be interpreted in such matters of detail.

There are at least four schools of interpretation of this wonderful book. I simply mention them in passing. They have been described as the Preterist, the Historic, the Futurist, and the Spiritual. The first affirms that in this book we have Jewish history to the fall of Jerusalem, and to the fall of pagan Rome set forth in symbolic form. The second interprets the book as giving an outline of events through the whole of the Christian era. The third treats the book as giving the events associated with the second Advent of our Lord. The fourth deals with the book as being entirely spiritual, declaring that therein in signs and by symbols we have the revelation of the principles of the perpetual conflict between good and evil until the winning of the final victory. I am not going to enter into discussion as between these views. I believe there is an element of truth in every one of them. I do not think either of them exhausts the truth. However full of mystery this book is, it is the only book in the Bible which opens with a distinct blessing promised to the man who reads it, and keeps its words. That fact at least should arouse our attention, and give us to see that we ought not to treat the book carelessly, or lightly, or pass it over. I admit quite freely the difficulty of interpretation in the matter of detail; and there is no book in the Bible which I have read so often, no book to which I have tried to give more patient and persistent attention. As I have said, all the views to which I have referred may be partially true. The present study, however, is not concerned with them.

The first word of the Greek document is the keyword to the message as well as to the content. That is the word Revelation, the Greek word Apokalupsis. We have anglicized that word and now speak of the Apocalypse. In the Greek there is no definite article. The book opens with the word Apokalupsis, which means quite literally uncovering, disclosure. A literal translation is not always a correct one; for we must always understand the use of the word as well as its root meaning. Quite literally this word apocalypse

means uncovering; far more beautiful and therefore nearer the truth for us is our word unveiling. That is the first word of the book. It is the key to the content, and it is positively, and inclusively the key to the message. An interesting fact is that this is the only occurrence of the word in the whole book; it is not found again. The word does not often occur in the New Testament. Paul uses it, and so does Peter. This is the one and only place in the writings of John where this word is to be found. It is as though it were reserved for this book. I do not mean that John reserved it, for it is quite possible that this book was written before his letters. It may be that if I could have talked to John the aged, after he had written the last of his words for his beloved children, I should have found that he did not know that he had never used the word but once, and only there. These are very human documents so far as the men who wrote them were concerned. It is in the recognition of the human that we come to the discovery of the Divine in the study of the Bible. While not now staying to enter into all that is involved, I believe that the Spirit presided over and led men in the arrangement of the Canon, as certainly as He presided over and led men in the writing of the books. I do not think the Spirit was withdrawn when the last inspired literature was given to the Church. I think the Spirit still presided over human choices until the Library was completely arranged. I repeat, therefore, that it is as though this word Unveiling were reserved for this book. We read the first word Unveiling; and it is as though the great doors swing open, and visions of glory appear, introduced by this word. We have been following from Genesis, through message after message, and at last we come to the final book in the library, and it opens with this word Unveiling. It is the ultimate book in the Bible; the final book in the Canon; and the attention is immediately centred upon a Person. It is "the unveiling of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show unto His servants, even the things which must shortly come to pass: and He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John." The Unveiling of Christ, the final truth about Christ is in this last book of the Bible. That is the key to its message.

Let us first consider the essential message. The central teaching is all suggested by the word Unveiling. This book is for the friends of Jesus. The proportion of our understanding of secret things is the proportion of our love ' for the Lord. There are too many things assumed here for the book to be apprehended by any save those who know the secret of the Lord.

First we have the unveiled Person; described as "The Alpha and the Omega" ; a phrase which occurs three times, and only at the most remarkable situations. The message concerning Him is concerned with identification and vocation. The threefold use of that title identifies the Person; and shows the vocation of that Person in human history. Let us observe the three occasions.

It first occurs in the eighth verse of the first chapter. The " Even so, Amen" of verse seven is not the language of the one speaking before; it is the introduction to the affirmation of verse eight, and should be read in close connection with it, and is more forcible, I think, in the older form, "Yea, amen. I am the Alpha and the Omega, saith the Lord God, which is and which was and which is to come, the Almighty."

The next occurrence is in chapter twenty-one, verse six, "They are come to pass. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end."

The third is in chapter twenty-two, verses twelve and thirteen, "Behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to render to each man according as his work is. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." That is the unveiling of the Person. The whole book is about that Person. Everything circles about that Person.

The first affirmation is characterized by simplicity; there is no ambiguity, there can be no mistake as to the meaning; "I am the Alpha and the Omega, saith the Lord God, which is and which was and which is to come, the Almighty." There is no verse in the Bible more explicit than that as a description of absolute and positive Deity. Thus in the first occurrence of the strange yet wonderfully symbolic and beautiful description. "the Alpha and the Omega," the first and the last, the beginning and the end, it is used of God Himself. He is described by the conceptions of the Old Testament, condensed into brief statements, "The Lord God, which is and which was and which is to come, the Almighty." All the titles of God in the Old Testament are represented in that description. The qualities of every Old Testament title for God are in that wonderful passage.

The next occurrence is in the chapter of the final triumph. The millennium is described in six verses in the twentieth chapter. Beyond it there is conflict, and a great assize, and then the Kingdom of the Son is established, which must not be confused with the thousand years. It is in that unmeasured period that the city of God, descending out of heaven, God dwells with men; and concerning that ultimate triumph the words are employed; "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end." The process began when the Word Who was with God, and was God, "became flesh and tabernacled among us (and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father), full of grace and truth." It will end with the ultimate victory. "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell with them. . . . I am the Alpha and the Omega." That again is evidently the language of God.

The final occurrence is in the promise, "Behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to render to each man according as his work is." Who now is the speaker? The answer is immediately given; "I Jesus have sent Mine angel to testify unto you these things."

The first reference is patently to the God of the Old Testament, the Sovereign Lord, the Almighty God, the Becoming One, Who is and was and is to come, the Almighty. The last is linked to that simple declaration, "I Jesus have sent Mine angel to testify unto you these things." Thus the identification is complete. Jesus is Jehovah.

In these connections the Person is unveiled as to vocation. The first declaration was made in answer to an ascription of praise; "Unto Him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by His blood." The answer was "I am the Alpha and the Omega, saith the Lord God, which is and which was and which is to come the Almighty." That reveals the Person as Priest.

The next was made in connection with the fall of Babylon. The ultimate victory is won; the Kingdom has come; then the word is again spoken, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end." That reveals the Person as King as well as Priest.

At the close of the book when the solemn warning is given that the words of the prophecy are not to be sealed, that the great teaching is to be the open secret of all those who read it ; then again the voice is heard, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." That reveals the Person as Prophet.

Thus the Person is Jehovah-Jesus, at once Priest, King, and Prophet. The whole of the Old Testament is answered. The Pentateuch sighs for a Priest, but never finds Him. The historic books cry for a King, but He does not appear. The prophetic books attempt in broken words to speak the Word, the abiding Truth; but they were never harmonized, and final. The Old Testament says, Humanity needs a Priest, a King, and a Prophet. Here we have the Priest, the King, and the Prophet unveiled; and He is the Alpha and the

Omega, the One from Whom all came, to Whom all proceeds, and through Whom the end is assured from the beginning. This One is the mystic, mighty, very God of Gods; and this One is Jesus, That is what this book teaches. No man can read it, and escape from the conviction that this is what the writer thought.

In the second place we have in this book the unveiled power of the Person; and it is revealed as personal, instrumental, and effectual.

The personal power is first inherent, and secondly acquired. He is, as we have seen, the essential Being ; and we cannot read this book without feeling the awfulness of the power of God. We are made conscious of how terrible are the powers which are against God, in the figurative language which describes them as beasts, dragons. That is only the first impression. The final impression is that all these beasts and dragons are in the grip of God and cannot escape Him. That is a revelation of the inherent power of the unveiled Person. Then there is the acquired power; we see not the throne only, but also the Lamb in the midst of it, as it had been slain. That is power won out of some mystery of passion and pain and suffering. The book opens with the anthem of this acquired power, " Unto Him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by His blood."

The instrumental power of the unveiled Person is also unveiled. All elemental forces, earthquakes, lightnings, thunders; forces of the air; plagues; He makes use of. Spiritual forces also ; angels, good and evil; all of them are under His command.

The effectual power of this One Person is seen to be both destructive and constructive. When we get rid of the idea that God can destroy, we get rid of the idea that God can construct. There must be destruction in order to construction in a world like this. The two activities are seen operating through all this book, and always through the same Person.

Thirdly we find the unveiled purpose, both ultimately and progressively.

The ultimate purpose of God is to dwell with men; man is to be blessed in God ; God is to be glorified in man. We do not find in this revelation any reference to the highest glory of all. We must go to the Ephesian letter for that and see the Church telling the wisdom of God to the ages to come. Here the glory is that of the Kingdom established in this world. This is the programme of God's final methods in the world. The ultimate note is that of the tabernacling of God with men; the city of God coming out of heaven; the realization of the Divine purpose on earth.

The progressive purpose of God is that He is at war against sin. He is destroying sin. I thank God for this book. Symbolic as it is, full of signs and wonders, the significance of which I have not yet been able to understand in detail; it nevertheless clearly presents this picture of God, the Alpha and the Omega, at war with sin; and it is as full of comfort as anything within the covers of the Divine Library. Persuade me for a single moment that God is going to make peace with sin, and I become the most hopeless man in the world. Let me see God with drawn sword fighting against sin; then I see a God of such infinite love, that I know that "though a wide compass first be fetched," the kingdom of the world shall become the Kingdom of this One.

The abiding appeal consists of an opening word of courage; and a closing word of caution.

When John was in Patmos he saw a vision of his Lord, a wonderful vision, symbolically revealing sublime things with which we are not going to deal in detail. When he saw that vision, he became as one dead ;

then there came to him the touch of the human hand, and the sound of the human voice, and the great "Fear not." "When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as one dead. And He laid His right hand upon me, saying, Fear not; I am the first and the last, and the Living One ; and I was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades. Write therefore the things which thou sawest, and the things which are." If you take the "therefore" out of the verse you have lost much. The "therefore" links the command to write with the great "Fear not." Write therefore the things you have seen, the things that are, and the things which shall be; write these visions and fear not.

Because I have said, "Fear not," therefore write. Write without fear. That is indeed a great word of courage to the man who writes the book, and to the man who reads the book. Be not afraid, because I am He that liveth, and I have the keys I Do you not feel that you could walk with Him through hell itself? Let us see the end of the whole matter. Let us watch the process of that righteous judgment that makes no peace with sin until it have established righteousness on the earth. Sin slew Him; but He slew sin. He was alive, and was dead; but is alive forevermore. The great "Fear not 1" I hear it now, not only through the reading of the book, but above the clamour of the hour in which I live, amid the clash of arms, amid all the babel of earth's confused noises. "Fear not." This unveiled Person fills the vision. It is He that was dead but is alive forevermore. "Therefore will we not fear, though the earth do change, and though the mountains be moved in the heart of the seas."

Then there is a closing word of caution, "I testify." No additions must be made to this book, no subtractions from it. No additions; no speculative deductions. Take the things written and attempt to understand them; ponder them, but beware of speculative deductions. No subtractions ; no unbelieving denials, no declaration that these things cannot be, because we cannot understand them. The Person as He is revealed; the power as it is unveiled ; the purpose as it is declared ; without addition or subtraction. That is the final caution of the book.

In making application of the message of this book first to the Church, I would say again what I have already said. This is preeminently a book for the friends of Jesus. To know it is to be saved from mistakes about His Person, about His power, about His programme.

No man who denies the absolute and final Deity of Jesus can accept this book, he must get rid of it.

No man who has any panic in his heart as to the issue can believe this book. There is no book in the Bible to which I turn more eagerly in hours of depression than to this, with all its mystery, all the details which I do not understand. I go back to it, to the throne, and to the Lamb as it had been slain; and my puzzled mind and troubled heart feel the healing virtue; and I hear the song, and am ready for another day's fighting, for I know that Jesus shall reign.

No man who reads this book expects that the world is going to be converted by gospel preaching without judgment. There must be a period of judgment. God will have the double harvest. There will be the harvest of evil; evil must work itself out to its final manifestation. It is not to be smothered. It is to be seen, not upon the housetop of the earthly city merely, but in the universe of God.

To the individual this book says, Behold the new creation; and by observing that understand the truth about thyself. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. Study well the beauty and the glory of life governed by this Person, and know the meaning of thy life in Christ. Study well the processes of life in the new creation, and understand the principles of thy life in Christ. Know that this new creation within thy experience can only come to its final perfecting, as God fights within thee against sin and slays it. The

ultimate victory is not reached in a moment. Pardoned, justified, made nigh, we are, in a moment; hut all the processes are necessary for the subjection of the territory, and the establishment of the Kingdom; thunder, earthquake, as well as the gentle and caressing touch of the dawning of the morning. Jesus Who is the Lamb in the midst of the throne is God; and in His presence is the place of worship; and in His power is the place of refuge.

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