

“The First and the Last” (Revelation 1:10–20) (10.10.21)

Revelation 1:10–20 (NIV84)

¹⁰ On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, ¹¹ which said: “Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.”

¹² I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and among the lampstands was someone “like a son of man,” dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴ His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. ¹⁵ His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. ¹⁸ I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.”

¹⁹ “Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. ²⁰ The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.”

The word of God for the people of God.

LET US PRAY.

Title: **“The First and the Last”**

INTRODUCTION:

Last week, I told you that the Lord gives me signs, guidance, and affirmation when I am receptive. After service, during Fellowship time, I was speaking to John Zarych. He recommended to me that I watch a presentation by a Catholic nun about Saint Faustina and Spiritual Warfare. The basic premise is that Christians are in a war and they need to understand that.

On Monday morning, when I started worship planning for today, I opened up the book *Praying with Fire* that I have been using the last two month. There were two chapters left, but I had already preached both of the scriptures. One chapter was only about one year ago. The second chapter was five years ago, but I preached it for three weeks.

So, I searched my Logos Bible software library of 5,700 books for revival. I figured the *Revival Study Bible* would be a good place to start. After a few zigs and zags, I decided on the *Book of Revelation* – mainly because I have preached so little from it.

After making this decision, I received an email promotion from Revelation Media about a new movie. *The 7 Churches of Revelation: Times of Fire* film covers the island of Patmos and the first two of the

seven churches. It will be released in theaters nationwide tomorrow, October 11th and October 12th, and online beginning October 26th.

I watched both videos about Sister Faustina and Spiritual Warfare. I watched the sneak preview of the Revelation film. Then on Monday afternoon, I get a call from a man I never met. He is a friend of a friend and part of a large conservative church in Hammonton.

His wife is the principal at a school that is sponsored by one of the larger United Methodist Churches in South Jersey. He and his wife had met with the pastor of that church. They discussed the future of the denomination, that particular church, and the possible effects on the school. I was called at the suggestion of our mutual friend for more background on the status of our Annual Conference.

Apparently, this particular United Methodist Church has made inquiries about disaffiliation like we have. They were told that holding an opposing opinion about same-sex marriage and LGBTQIA+ ordination issues with the conference were not a reason for disaffiliation. Why? Because the United Methodist Church's Book of Discipline agrees with the traditional orthodox position that the inquiring church held.

That sounds a little crazy or like a Catch-22. A week ago Thursday, I received an email from a lawyer named Dan Dalton. He has represented many United Methodist Churches who have pursued disaffiliation. Dalton specifically mentioned this tactic of denial in his video explanations of the current climate of our denomination's internal conflict.

BODY:

There is no doubt that we need to hear a word from God. We need the Holy Spirit to speak to us. But, God has already done so over and over again, including today's scripture. This message is relevant to us right now.

➤ Jesus described in several ways:

○ I couldn't find any satisfactory picture to fit the description in verses 12-16.

○ What does it mean to be the First and the Last?

▪ From the Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary: "The Apostle John, because of his exalted Christology, can apply the same phrases to Christ that he used for God. He too is the first and the last, the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega. Elsewhere in the NT, Christ's role in creation is explicitly stated (John 1:3; Col 1:16). The idea of Christ as the Omega or the end is particularly appropriate in Revelation which depicts Christ as the means through which God's purposes are accomplished, not only as the slain lamb (5:9), but also as the victorious rider on the white horse (19:11-21)."

▪ Isaiah 41:4 (NIV84) Who has done this and carried it through, calling forth the generations from the beginning? I, the Lord—with the first of them and with the last—I am he."

▪ Isaiah 44:6 (NIV84 "This is what the Lord says— Israel's King and Redeemer, the Lord Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God.

- Isaiah 48:12 (NIV84)“Listen to me, O Jacob, Israel, whom I have called: I am he; I am the first and I am the last.”
- Jesus is speaking in Revelation 22:13. And also in Revelation 1:8 (NIV84) “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.”
- Conclusion: Jesus is God.
- The Living One
- They thought they killed him – resurrection.
- He is the source of life.
- Jesus holds the keys of death and Hades as the vehicle through which forgiveness is available
- The Seven Stars – subject to debate
- The Seven Golden Lampstands
- Jesus was in their midst
- Jesus’ voice speaks to and through the churches
- The US Church is imploding:

Seminary President Admits She Doesn’t Believe in Heaven, Miracles or Christ’s Resurrection

The president of a seminary founded in 1836 on the “infallible” Word of God says in a new interview she doesn’t believe in the bodily resurrection of Christ, the power of prayer, a literal heaven, or miracles.

Serene Jones, president of Union Theological Seminary in New York, made the comments in an [interview](#) with Nicholas Kristof of The New York Times for an article published Easter weekend. Although the author’s intent may have been to inspire readers, it also served to spotlight the leftward drift of many seminaries.

Union Theological Seminary’s founding [constitution](#) stated the seminary’s goal was to “promote” the “Kingdom of Christ.” Professors were [required](#) to affirm they believed “the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament to be the word of God” and the “only infallible rule of faith and practice.”

But as Jones made clear, the seminary is a very different school today.

She rejects a literal bodily resurrection of Christ.

“When you look in the Gospels, the stories are all over the place. There’s no resurrection story in Mark, just an empty tomb. Those who claim to know whether or not it happened are kidding themselves,” Jones said. “... Crucifixion is not something that God is orchestrating from upstairs. The pervasive idea of

an abusive God-father who sends his own kid to the cross so God could forgive people is nuts. For me, the cross is an enactment of our human hatred. But what happens on Easter is the triumph of love in the midst of suffering. Isn't that reason for hope?"

She rejects the idea that God miraculously heals through prayer.

"I don't believe in a God who, because of prayer, would decide to cure your mother's cancer but not cure the mother of your non-praying neighbor," she said. "We can't manipulate God like that."

She rejects the virgin birth.

"I find the virgin birth a bizarre claim," she [said](#). "It has nothing to do with Jesus' message. The virgin birth only becomes important if you have a theology in which sexuality is considered sinful. It also promotes this notion that the pure, untouched female body is the best body, and that idea has led to centuries of oppressing women."

Asked what happens when people die, Jones responded, "I don't know! There may be something, there may be nothing. My faith is not tied to some divine promise about the afterlife."

Asked how we can reconcile an "omnipotent, omniscient God" with evil and suffering, Jones responded, "At the heart of faith is mystery. God is beyond our knowing, not a being or an essence or an object. But I don't worship an all-powerful, all-controlling omnipotent, omniscient being. That is a fabrication of Roman juridical theory and Greek mythology."

When Kristof asked her if he can be considered a Christian after not believing in a virgin birth or resurrection, Jones answered, "Well, you sound an awful lot like me, and I'm a Christian minister."

R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., said Jones [rejected](#) the "entire edifice of orthodox, biblical Christianity."

"This is not Christianity," Mohler [wrote](#). "This is a new religion, a new god, formed in an image intended not to offend modern secular sensibilities. She has constructed a god from post-modern theology that in no way resembles the God of the Bible – the one true God."

"Why would anyone identify as a Christian minister and then deny the entire superstructure of Christian theology?" Mohler asked. "What we see here is a hope to replace biblical Christianity with a new religion without anyone noticing."

- The worldwide Church is under attack:
 - Voice of the Martyrs
 - (Tortured for Christ) fascism & communism & radical Islam
 - IDOP
- Do not be afraid:

- Scripture slides
- Karl Barth preached - Fear thou not! And the death of Jesus again embraced in clearer, stronger, more penetrating fashion than any of His words and deeds which His life preached and proclaimed, Fear thou not! You should not fear because you need not. Your fear rests upon an error, an illusion. You imagine you must be fearful. But that presumption is a fallacy. You must not fear, for there is no sufficient or necessary foundation for it. You are free to be and dare to be fearless. For that reason you should be fearless.

This week, we had our first Tuesday night Holy Communion Service in 18 months. Before service, I lit the altar candles. When these candles are brand new, they light easily and burn steadily throughout the service. Wanting to be good stewards, we don't throw away the candles after one use – we continue to reuse them until they are burned down. The problem is after that first time, when they are new, they do not stay lit very easily. Sometimes I have to light them a couple of times and sometimes they won't stay lit.

At that service, the right-hand candle wouldn't stay lit. I had held the flame from the lighter against the wick and was finally able to get it to take a tiny flame. My hope was that it would catch and grow and I even said a quick prayer that it would do so. But, it burned out.

After a hiatus of 18 months, you might have thought there would have been a pent-up demand; but, there were only eight of us there. Myself, my wife Carol who read the scripture, and John who led us in the music, plus five others. It seems to me that we are having a hard time keeping the light of Christ shining brightly.

CONCLUSION:

The Church is being undermined from within. The Church is being attacked and persecuted by the world. Jesus said that the gates of hell will not prevail against His Church. Gates are defensive – we the Church are supposed to be taking the battle to the Enemy. We are admonished, do not be afraid, be strong and courageous. Here are the lyrics to a long-time favorite hymn of the Church.

Onward, Christian Soldiers

1. Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,
with the cross of Jesus going on before.
Christ, the royal Master, leads against the foe;
forward into battle see his banners go!
Refrain:
Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,
with the cross of Jesus going on before.

2. At the sign of triumph Satan's host doth flee;
on then, Christian soldiers, on to victory!
Hell's foundations quiver at the shout of praise;
brothers, lift your voices, loud your anthems raise.
Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,

with the cross of Jesus going on before.

3. Like a mighty army moves the church of God;
brothers, we are treading where the saints have trod.
We are not divided, all one body we,
one in hope and doctrine, one in charity.
Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,
with the cross of Jesus going on before.

4. Crowns and thrones may perish, kingdoms rise and wane,
but the church of Jesus constant will remain.
Gates of hell can never gainst that church prevail;
we have Christ's own promise, and that cannot fail.
Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,
with the cross of Jesus going on before.

5. Onward then, ye people, join our happy throng,
blend with ours your voices in the triumph song.
Glory, laud, and honor unto Christ the King,
this through countless ages men and angels sing.
Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war,
with the cross of Jesus going on before.
Are the lyrics to this song just a vain delusion?

Evangelist Ray Comfort in his book, *How to Win Souls and Influence People*, quoted an alternative version by an anonymous author:

Backward Christian Soldiers

Perhaps much of the Church needs to consider dropping "Onward Christian Soldiers" and replacing it with something more appropriate:

Backward Christian soldiers, fleeing from the fight
With the Cross of Jesus nearly out of sight.
Christ our rightful master, stands against the foe
But forward into battle, we are loathe to go.
Like a mighty tortoise moves the Church of God
Brothers we are treading where we've always trod.
We are much divided, many bodies we
Having many doctrines, not much charity.
Crowns and thorns may perish, kingdoms rise and wane,
But the Church of Jesus hidden does remain.
Gates of Hell should never 'gainst the Church prevail
We have Christ's own promise, but think that it will fail.
Sit here then ye people, join our useless throng
Blend with ours your voices in a feeble song
Blessings, ease and comfort, ask from Christ the King
With our modern thinking, we don't do a thing.

If we, the church of Christ, are to be the voice of Jesus in this broken world, we cannot be afraid. Jesus is the First and the Last. In Jesus, we live and move and have our being. The Church is Plan A and there is no Plan B. Let me ask you, is your flame of faith still burning brightly or is it flickering and failing?

Amen and amen. Let us pray.