

# Bright Morning Star

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[ 0 : 00 ] I would love to know how spending the last 10 weeks in the last book of the Bible has impacted your soul.

And in particular, I would love to know how your understanding of Jesus Christ has changed, how it's stretched, how it's been opened up, and how you now are understanding what it means to follow Him in this world at this time.

I mean, that, after all, is what the last book of the Bible is all about, Jesus making Himself known to us, breaking through to us. We've been emphasizing all along in this series that the title of the last book of the Bible is the Revelation of Jesus Christ, or more literally, the Apocalypse of Jesus Christ. And you've been hearing us say that apocalypse is a wonderful word. It's a wonderful word. Sharon and I were driving along Main Street, and we're crossing Terminal, and there in the bus stop, there was this advertisement for a play, How to Escape an Apocalypse.

And Sharon's first reaction is, no, no, no. It's how to embrace an apocalypse, how to enter into apocalypse. Because an apocalypse means lifting of a cover, pulling back, opening of a door, or pulling back of a curtain, so that what is already there and has been there a long time, but ordinarily hidden, might be now manifest and known.

[ 1 : 26 ] The title of the last book of the Bible is The Breaking Through of Jesus Christ from Hiddenness. It's all about Him. The revelation of Jesus Christ, by Jesus Christ, about Jesus Christ.

Now, if you've been here for this 10-week series, you know that Pastor Ken asked me to launch the series by working through the first chapter of the Bible. And now he's asked me to wrap up the series, for now anyway, by working through the last chapter of the book.

In particular, working through this section of the last chapter that follows Jesus' revelation of the new heaven and the new earth. This kaleidoscopic picture he gives us of the city of God that is on its way.

So I invite you this morning to give your attention to both the introduction to the revelation of Jesus Christ and the conclusion to the revelation of Jesus Christ. We're going to read from both of those parts.

In the introduction, we're going to hear the Apostle John again tell us who he thinks Jesus is. And in the conclusion, we're going to hear Jesus tell us who he thinks Jesus is.

[ 2 : 36 ] So, hear the word of God, Revelation chapter 1, verses 1 through 8. The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his bondservants, the things which must shortly take place.

And he sent and communicated it by his angel to his bondservant, John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is the one who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it, for the time is near.

John, to the seven churches that are in Asia, grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before the throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who loves us and released us from our sins by his blood. And he has made us to be a kingdom, priest to his God and Father. To him be the glory and dominion forever and ever.

Amen. Amen. I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

[ 3 : 54 ] And then from chapter 22, beginning at verse 6. And he said to me, these words are faithful and true. And the Lord, the God of the spirits of prophets, sent his angel to show to his bondservants the things which must shortly take place.

And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is the one who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book. And I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things.

And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things. And he said to me, do not do that. I'm a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren, the prophets, and of those who heed the words of this book.

Worship God. And he said to me, do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. Let the one who does wrong still do wrong. Let the one who is filthy still be filthy.

Let the one who is righteous still practice righteousness. And let the one who is holy still keep himself holy. Behold, I am coming quickly, and my reward is with me, to render to everyone according to what he has done.

[ 4 : 56 ] I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city.

Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters and everyone who practices and loves lying. I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you these things for the churches.

I am the root and offspring of David. I am the bright morning star. And the spirit and the bride say, come. And let the one who hears say, come.

And let the one who is thirsty, come. And let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost. I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book. If anyone adds to them, God shall add to him the plagues which are written in the book.

And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city which are written in the book. He who testifies to these things says, yes, I'm coming quickly.

[ 5 : 58 ] Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen. Let us pray. Living God, we believe that you inspired these words that we just read.

We believe that you inspired this whole magnificent document that we've been working through. But we especially believe that you inspired these words that we just read. And I pray now in your mercy and grace that you would bring us into the reality to which these words point as never before.

For we pray it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. I am the bright morning star.

Revelation 22, 16. I, Jesus, am the bright morning star. It is the last self-designation Jesus uses in the book.

It's the last title Jesus is recorded to have claimed for himself. It's the last of his audacious I am sayings.

[ 7 : 09 ] It is not the last word he speaks to us. That last word is a command and a promise. Look, I am coming quickly.

Look. As we've seen, this is the major exhortation of the revelation of Jesus Christ. Look, I am coming. Not just I will come, as wonderful as that way of putting it would be.

But I am coming, even now, in process, even now. I am coming. And in his coming, he tells us who he is.

He tells us who he is for us in the time before he comes. He tells us who he is in the present moment so that we can understand the present moment correctly.

I am the bright morning star. I, Jesus, am the bright morning star. Now, why choose this title as the last one to name?

[ 8 : 14 ] I mean, why not leave us with that hugely audacious triple title he also speaks in the conclusion of the book. I am the alpha and omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.

That's a great place to leave us. Alpha and omega. Alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. First and last.

Not just a repetition of alpha and omega, but expanding on it. The first and last of any alphabet. The A and the Z. The first and last of any sequence we can imagine. And beginning and end.

Again, not just a repetition. I am before the first and I am after the last. The word beginning is the word archay, which comes into the English language in words like architect and archetype.

Archay means head or source. I am the head of everything. I am the source of all life. Amazing claim. The word translated end is telos.

[ 9 : 17 ] Telos means the goal or inherent destiny. I am the goal of everything. I am the inherent destiny of everything. This, by the way, is why Jesus Christ is inescapable.

We meet him there in the beginning and we meet him there in the end. He's there in the beginning as the source of all things. He's there in the end as the inherent destiny of all things.

He's the end because he's the beginning. No matter what direction we turn, we're going to run into Jesus. No one can finally avoid Jesus. No one can run from Jesus.

I mean, no one can finally run from the source of their existence and no one can run from the inherent destiny of their existence. This is a great comfort for those of us who have loved ones in the far country.

I am the archay and the telos. I am the great inescapable reality of the past, the future, and the present. But he does not leave it at that. As wonderful as that would be, he goes on to tell us more.

[ 10 : 19 ] Why? Why not leave us with that triple title? Why not leave us with that great self-designation ringing in our ears? Because he really wants us to understand the present moment correctly.

So he continues, I am the root and offspring of David. You might know that David is the greatest human figure in the Old Testament. It's to David that God makes the most world-impacting promises.

It's to David that God promises an everlasting kingdom, a kingdom of justice and mercy, a kingdom of abundance and creativity, a kingdom where all human relationships really work.

I am the root of David. Jesus is claiming to be the source of all the great expectations around David. The ideals of David's kingdom emerge from Jesus long before David comes on the scene, long before Jesus comes into the world.

And I am the offspring of David. Jesus is claiming to be the one in whom all the expectations are fulfilled. All the ideals of the everlasting kingdom are realized in Jesus.

[ 11 : 26 ] I am the one bringing the kingdom of heaven to earth. In the midst of all that is happening in the world, I am causing the everlasting kingdom to come. But Jesus does not leave it at that, as wonderful as that would be.

He goes on to tell us more. Why? Why not leave us with that great kingly claim, ruler of the kings of the earth, as John puts it in chapter 1? Why not leave us with that great self-designation ringing in our ears?

Again, because he really, really, really wants us to understand the present moment correctly. So he goes on to say, I am the bright morning star.

That is what he wants ringing in our ears in the time before he comes. I am the bright morning star. Why? Why does he choose that self-designation as his last? Why bright morning star? It was 96 AD, or thereabouts, that John, the writer of the last book of the Bible, first heard Jesus make this claim.

[ 12 : 36 ] In 96 AD, things appeared to collapse in John's life all around him. John, then in his senior years, is arrested and is exiled to the prison island of Patmos, just off the shore from modern-day Turkey.

We know that the Roman government maintained rock quarries there, to which they sent criminals and political troublemakers, many of whom would spend the rest of their lives there. Up until 96 AD, life for disciples of Jesus living in the Roman Empire was difficult enough.

But in 96 AD, it got more difficult. Frightening would actually be the word. In 96 AD, the pressures began to intensify and became more widespread. Now, as we've noted throughout the series, the emperor at that time was a man named Domitian.

Domitian was a profoundly insecure man. And as I said in the first sermon in the series, I'll say in the end, all dictators, all would-be dictators, are profoundly insecure human beings, as we see played out on television right now.

Profoundly insecure. Who lived in a morbid fear of a coup. So to compensate for his insecurity, he orders that all the Roman citizens are to worship him, as Domini et Deus, Lord and God.

[ 14 : 01 ] In 90 AD, he changed the name of the Roman Empire to Imperium Artenum, the Eternal Empire, and he gave himself the title Everlasting King.

To this day, in the ruins of the city of Ephesus, where John had been arrested, you can still see the ruins of the Temple of Domitian, the place where all Roman citizens were to go and were required to worship the emperor.

Citizens were obligated to go to the temple, take a pinch of incense, throw it on the altar, and say the words, Kaiser Kurios, Caesar is Lord, the words that paid homage to Caesar as God. Now, for most citizens, this was no big deal. I mean, most Romans were polytheists. So what was one more God? They could take part in these ceremonies without troubling their conscience. But not John, and not thousands of others, of disciples of Jesus. They could not abide by the emperor's edict. Respect Caesar? Okay. Pay taxes to Caesar? Okay.

[15:05] Worship Caesar? No way. No way. There is only one Kurios, one Lord, who is worthy of unqualified allegiance. And John was not about to bend his knee to a mere mortal who put himself where he does not belong.

So John graciously refuses to cast the incense and say Kaiser Kurios. He is, therefore, from the perspective of the state, an atheist. John's simple little act of Christian discipleship challenges the ideology of empire.

He's judged to be a subversive. He's arrested and sent to Patmos. Now, as we know, John is not the only disciple suffering at that time. In city after city, disciples are being personally threatened. Many are being boycotted in their business. Many are being killed. And on top of all that, heresy and immorality are gaining footholds in many of the young congregations. Not hard to imagine, is it? All of this posed a huge theological crisis. Persecution, heresy, immorality in the churches all seem to call into question the central affirmations of the gospel.

[16:15] Jesus' first sermon, one line, The time is fulfilled. The kingdom of God has come near. Where now is the evidence? Jesus is risen. Death has been conquered.

Where now is the evidence? Jesus is Lord. The Nazarene reigns. Where now is the evidence? John is unjustly incarcerated. Can't Jesus take care of his disciples?

If Jesus has won the victory over sin and evil, why do the forces of sin and evil seem to gain the upper hand on Jesus' people? It's in that context, John in exile, churches meeting behind closed doors, that John first hears Jesus say, I am the bright morning star.

It was 35 years ago, in 1981, that I first heard Jesus make this claim. Oh, I'd heard the words many times before, but it was in 1981 that I finally heard.

It was the year that the walls seemed to cave in around me. I was experiencing constant tightness in my neck and stomach. I was alternating between not being able to sleep and wanting to sleep all the time.

[17:32] I found myself daydreaming about how I could meet an accidental death. It felt like night, even on the brightest of days. The irony was that there was nothing in my life that should have led to that state of being.

God had given me a wonderful woman as my wife, and God had given me and Sharon a wonderful little boy as our son. I was pastoring one of the fastest-growing churches in Southern California, and I was in demand as a Bible teacher.

But there I was, engulfed in a dark cloud, wondering if I wanted to go on living. For nearly 12 months, I fought the Depression, all the while carrying on my pastoral duties.

Through the prayers and love of Sharon, through the prayers and love of trusted friends, through the insights of a godly counselor, I began to understand this depression. I learned that it can be due to a number of things.

Some sort of chemical imbalance in the brain, anger unresolved and turned inward, much loss, and broken expectations, leading to the fear of more loss.

[18:39] Through the counseling process, I came to see that I was very angry, but I was trying to deny it. I grew up in a family system where anger was not processed well.

In fact, where anger was thought to be wrong, and especially wrong for a godly pastor. And yet I was angry. Really, really angry.

But not dealing with it. I also came to see that I was experiencing a great deal of loss. Not so much in my own life, but identifying deeply with other people.

I ached for all the pain in the world at that time. I ache for all the pain I feel in the world today. I ache for the pain I feel in this room right now. And I came to see that I had unrealistic expectations of myself.

You're now going to conclude I'm nuts when I tell you this. In those early years of ministry, I thought that a person who loves Jesus with his whole being, who's filled with the Holy Spirit, who seeks the kingdom of God as first thing, I thought such a person should be able to do all the aspects of

pastoral ministry, do them all with a high degree of excellence, do them all with joy, do them all without stepping on anybody's toes, and do them all without getting tired.

[ 20 : 03 ] Like, where did I get those expectations? Recipe for massive fatigue and deep despair.

Anyway, I worked hard those 12 months to get at the root of the darkness. I had come to believe what Dr. Archibald Hart had told me, that the way out of depression is through.

The only way out is through. So, I pressed through. And after 12 months, it appeared that I had come through. So, the elders of the church gave us a three-month leave to get away and rest and study and write.

So, Sharon and I and our son David, 18 months old at the time, headed off to the mountains of Colorado for our ideal break. And to my horror, the depression returned and deepened.

As we drove across the deserts of California and Arizona, I found myself wanting to let the van we were driving simply drift into the other lane, into the path of oncoming trucks.

[ 21 : 09 ] The darkness was so great, I could bear it no more. And what kept me on my side of the road, besides the grace of God, was looking in the rearview mirror and seeing Sharon and David in the back of the car. Once in Colorado, the depression deepened even further.

I woke up every morning, daydreaming of how I could go on a hike and accidentally slip off a high rock, ending the darkness once and for all. By the tenth week of our ideal break, the darkness was so great, I was begging God to take me.

If the depression wouldn't lift, then please let me die. Then late one night, I was reading through the last book of the Bible, my favorite book.

And I finally saw, I finally heard, I finally felt what Jesus is saying to us on the last page of his book. I am the bright morning star.

I am the bright morning star. What was Jesus saying to John as he sat on the rock piles of Patmos? And what was he saying to me that night in Colorado? And what is he saying to you and to me in the context we find ourselves today?

[ 22 : 19 ] In the Roman world, the morning star, Venus, was the symbol of victory and sovereignty. Roman generals, before going to battle, would appeal to Venus for help.

Temples for Venus are erected all over the Roman Empire. And Caesar's legions would wear her sign on all their standards. By calling himself the bright morning star, Jesus is announcing his victory and his sovereignty.

In the Jewish world, the image of the morning star would recall a prophecy given by a man named Balaam recorded in Numbers 24, 17. A star shall come up from Jacob.

A scepter shall come forth from Israel. The prophecy was taken to refer to Messiah who would come and overthrow injustice and oppression and bring about the shalom of God.

By calling himself the bright morning star, Jesus is declaring that he has come and that he is fulfilling these biblical prophecies. He is bringing in Messiah's rule. But how does this title help John when there is no evidence, no visible evidence, that this is all true?

[ 23 : 29 ] The answer lies in the astrophysical phenomena of the morning star. That night in Colorado, I was reading a book. I recommend anyone who goes through a depression do a lot of reading.

I was reading a book entitled *Idols of Our Time* written by a former member of the Dutch Parliament and professor of economics named Bob Gautsfarb. That night I read these lines.

The morning star often appears between two and three at night when the darkness is complete and the faintest sign of the morning is not yet visible.

Let me read that again. The morning star often appears between two and three at night when the darkness is complete and the faintest sign of the morning is not yet visible.

Gautsfarb continues, so small that it threatens to vanish, the star seems unable to vanquish the overpowering darkness. Isn't that how it often feels?

[ 24 : 32 ] Gautsfarb continues, so small it threatens to vanish, the star seems unable to vanquish the overpowering darkness. Gautsfarb continues, yet when you see the morning star, you know that the night has been defeated.

There may still be four or five hours of night to go, but when you see the morning star, you know that it's just a matter of time until the sun rises. You know that the night has been defeated.

Then Gautsfarb writes this, for the morning star pulls the morning in behind it. Isn't that a powerful image? The morning star pulls the morning in behind it just as certainly as Jesus pulls the kingdom

in behind him.

Do you see now why Jesus chose this title as the last recorded word to his church? The morning star only appears when the night has reached its deepest darkness.

But when the morning star appears long before any tangible evidence that this is the case. Let me say that again. The morning star only appears when the night has reached the deepest darkness.

[ 25 : 59 ] But the morning star appears long before there's any tangible evidence that this is the case. What then is Jesus saying to us in his last great I am?

Do not judge by appearances. Things are not only as they seem. Because I have come into your world, because I have been born into your darkness, because I have lived your life and died your death and been raised from your grave, because I'm alive and because I'm here with you, faint as my presence may be, you know that contrary to appearances, the night has been defeated.

And using the morning star title, Jesus is declaring that he is the victor. He is declaring that the messianic age, the age of the kingdom, has come. The night is almost over.

The day is very close at hand. Then why, after his declaration to John and to us, do the powers of the night have such influence?

Is it that his gospel, so small it threatens to vanish, is not all that powerful after all? No. No. No. A thousand times no.

[ 27 : 19 ] The fact is, the turmoil and the upheaval is happening precisely because his gospel is all he claims it to be. Really?

Yes. The night is being invaded by the day and the night is resisting with all its might. You see, as long as drug lords can operate in the darkness, they go about their work calmly.

As long as human traffickers can operate undercover, they go about their work calmly. But once they are exposed, once they have to now work in the daylight, they either repent or they will do all they can to extinguish the source of daylight.

Thomas Torrance of Scotland put it this way. It is because the kingdom of God has already invaded this world and is breaking up the kingdoms thereof that evil is provoked to such bitterness and its final desperation.

What we're witnessing in our time is evil in its final desperation. It's getting worse because evil knows it's lost and it's bringing to bear all it can. All that evil out there is a sign of its desperation, not a sign of its victory.

[ 28 : 39 ] Are you with me? It's not a sign of the victory of evil. It's a sign that it's desperate and it's going to bring all the evil it can to bear.

The ferocity of the night does not negate the claim that Jesus is the light. It validates it. The night knows it has been overcome and it's doing everything it can to reverse the victory of the day.

I'm the bright morning star. When you see me in your life you can know that even though it is still dark the night has been defeated because the morning star only appears when the darkness is as dark as dark can be and when the faintest sign of day is not yet visible.

But when you see the morning star you know that soon and very soon the star is going to pull the morning in behind him. Look, I'm coming. Yes, I'm coming.

I'm coming quickly. I'm the alpha, the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. I'm the root and offspring of David and I'm the bright morning star. He saves it for last so that we'll understand the present moment correctly.

[ 29 : 53 ] When we see Jesus the morning star we can dare to resist the ways of the night. You know that when the night is over you do not need to play the game by the rules of the night.

The night no longer sets the agenda of our lives. When you see Jesus the morning star you can dare to walk in the ways of the morning. We can now play the game by the rules that are going to be set in the dawning day and we can choose actions which people judge to be naive and weak.

The dawning day now sets the agenda. And when we see Jesus the morning star when we see him in the picture faint though he may be we can dare to hope.

In the face of all that is going on in the world today in the face of all that is going on in your life and my life right now I hear Jesus say I know that often my gospel and I seem so small against the powerful ideologies that seem to rule the world.

I know. I know that often my gospel and I seem unable to vanquish the massive forces that seemingly rule the world. I know. I know that often my gospel and I are judged as so irrelevant.

[ 31 : 11 ] I know. I know. I know. I hear it. But look at the morning star. Look at me. Fix your eyes on me.

For when you see me in the midst of it all you know the night has reached its greatest degree of darkness and I am even now pulling the kingdom of God into your world behind me.

Blessed be his name. Soon and very soon we are gonna see the king soon and very soon we are gonna see the king soon and very soon we are gonna see the king alleluia alleluia we're gonna see the king were the king come soon come come come come come