



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

7643 Huron River Drive

Dexter, MI 48130

734-426-8480

Somewhere Between First and Last

November 23, 2008

Dr. Matthew J. Hook

Revelation 22:13-17, 20-21

Rev. 22:13 "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." 14 Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city. 15 Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying. 16 "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star." 17 The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost. [READ TOGETHER] 20 He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. 21 The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all. Amen."

We have now just read the last words recorded in the Bible. The end of the epic, meta-narrative that was written over 1600 years on 3 continents in 3 different languages containing the unifying message of the living God that has had more of an impact on civilizations across cultures than any other. But did you ever think that while the beginning and end of the book are completed, the *middle* of the book is still being written?

In looking at "First Things First," I couldn't ignore the 3 times in the book of Revelation that Jesus Christ says to John "I am the Alpha and Omega," the beginning and the end. God created all, and everything that is created will find our beginning and end in Him. Recently a terrific movement has been created by John Eldridge's book "*Wild at Heart*." Eldridge writes that "every man is created with a battle to fight, an adventure to live, and a beauty to rescue." In one study he shows clips from great epic movies like *Braveheart* and *Gladiator* and *The Patriot*, which give us glimpses of male spirituality at its best: full of courage and adventure and strength. I love epics like those! The problem is that's not really *my* life...

I *want* a battle to be won, an adventure to live, and a beauty to rescue. I *want* to be like Maximus. I *want* to be like William Wallace. Heck, I'd even be Frodo Baggins! But that lived out adventure doesn't seem to be my life. Do you think Maximus ever vacuumed? Did William Wallace ever take out the trash? (Maybe he'd have cut the grass, but not the trash!) I don't know about your life, but my life is not an epic. My chariot is our 1995 Odyssey minivan. Seriously, in all reality, you know what our biggest battle is? Our weight. *Our* biggest battle is with the person in the mirror! Not tyrants. Not out-and-out evil. Not epic empires. And truth be told, you may not be sure you'd re-rescue the beauty you rescued a few years ago. ☺ Besides, she doesn't *want* to be rescued now! At least not by you! ☺

Maybe *you've* met people, and their life really *is* like an epic. You're so jealous. (Even though you can't say that cuz you're a Christian) but you're so jealous. These epic guys, they fight corporate battles. And church battles. And they rescue beauties. You want to say "Don't talk to me, because you know what I have going on big? NOTHING. I have a small business. I have a small family. They don't even like me." Maybe the romance is gone... And if there *is* some giant script out there, God didn't give me a part...

And yet, when we put first things first, when we live that way, you get this faith: that there's this greater

story. And there's a 4th act coming: One day, every knee will bow and every tongue confess that *Jesus Christ* is Lord! Scripture tells us there really *was* a battle and there really *was* an adventure and there really *was* good and evil, and a script and a plan that God had: A spiritual adventure. And we really *did* live right through the *middle* of all of it. And the question is, how do you keep that in mind...when you are at home changing diapers? Or when everything's blah or worse? How do you wake up every day and remember **"This is an epic. And I've been written into the script. And God has a significant plan for me!** And there's something going *on*. And I may be between jobs right now. And I may have kids with extra struggles, and I have extra struggles. You're going to have to shut down your business. Or your working for some giant company in which people just come and go and get downsized?

How in the world can we remember the powerfully significant truth that the Son of God Himself has said "Come."? That from the beginning, or just after the beginning God created a way for us to return home, even after we messed it up? And we've all been given a script. We *all* have a part to play in this story of all stories; the one that every other story is based on. **You have a part to play in the greatest story ever told.**

You have this one and only life to write your portion of the middle of the book. How do you get it right? How do you live by the compass and not the clock? With one simple truth that has revolutionized my thinking of the minutia of my day: **Jesus Christ is the Alpha and Omega**, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last, and you and I are somewhere in between. If you could keep this front and center, when your biggest adventure is getting to work on time, or when there *is* no beauty or the beauty doesn't want to be rescued, at least by you, I want you to know this: On those days, because God is first AND last, and because God loves you and created you as His child, you can know "I'm still in the script." Don't let the story shrink down to your size. Your part is vital. But problems come in our chapter:

One problem is that sometimes you feel forgotten. Like you fell out of God's script, and there's no story, no messiah, just life, one day after another? And no one seems to notice... Another problem is we forget the plot. We think having the most stuff is the omega of the script, so we run for fame, recognition, and the comfort of upward mobility. Another problem is we don't see God anywhere in our lives, so we forget. Yet our scripture says it: When you have no idea that anything significant is taking place in your life, remember *God* is first...and last.

If you need a greater adventure in your life, try this. Ask: **What would you do if you were confident that God was with you?** What would you be willing to attempt? What would you be willing to give? What would you give up? Who would you be willing to forgive, knowing God is with you? How would you live, knowing this is all true?

Are you being faithful where you are? Our job as Christ-followers isn't to *understand* it, it's to wake up every day, and say **"What would someone in my circumstances do TODAY, if they were absolutely confident that God is with them, that God is Alpha and Omega?"** Jesus said it: "Love. Forgive. Worship no other gods. Trust in me. Help the poor. Seek what I seek." That means I'm *not* going to leverage, manipulate, or figure out my life *my* way, I'm just going to keep acting my part, trusting God really is first...and last. Tomorrow, when I wake up, I'm going to ask the question: "What would someone with this job, with this wife, with these kids, with this house, with these talents, with these interests, with these opportunities do, if they knew God was Alpha and Omega?" If they were absolutely confident God is with them.

Do you know what hangs in the balance? NO. And you don't want to *miss* your part in the story. You don't want to wake up one day and look back at your life and say "Oh...how stupid was I. I kept trying to manipulate and control and make it happen and all I did was really miss it. You don't know what God wants to do through you, and you don't know what God IS doing through you. But God is up to something big. Your part is to wake up every day, and ask yourself "What would somebody like me do if they were absolutely confident that God is Alpha and Omega, God with them?"

Listen to this familiar verse again: "Jesus was on a hillside with a whole bunch of his followers. Then Jesus said *"All authority in heaven and on earth is given to me. And surely, I am with you always, even to the end*

of the age.” 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

When you’re in the dungeon I’m with you. When you’re standing in front of powerful people I’m with you. When your church is struggling, I’m with you. When your loved ones face death I’m with you. When you feel all alone I’m with you. When your health fails I’m with you. When you’ve been written off by your family I’m with you. When you don’t know where your next job is going to be, I’m with you. When you have all the wealth in the world I’m with you. When you have all the influence in the world, I’m with you. Nothing changes. You don’t have to know everybody else’s part. Remember Noah. Joseph, Hannah, David, and John. Remember the martyrs. That **although God is sometimes silent for long times, He is not absent.** And Jesus gives us this promise. He says “I’m going to live IN you.” So here’s the challenge: are you willing to live? Are you willing to love? Are you willing to lead? This week? As men and women confident, even in the minutia, in the up times and the down times, in the no-win situations, facing dead ends, are you willing to face all that confident that God is Alpha and Omega, that God is with you? So at the end of the day, you will be able to look back and see you played your role. You may ask “I didn’t even know I HAD a role! I didn’t know I had anything big going on in my life! But your heavenly Father will say “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

Heavenly Father, it’s easier to say it, than it is for any of us to walk out of here and do it. I want to pray for every mom here. That day after day, they would be confident that God is with them. For the business people here, who wonder about what they’re doing, I pray they catch a vision—what does it mean to wake up with my opportunity, my wealth, my influence, knowing that you are the first and the last? Father, give us all a fresh vision of what that looks like. And give us the courage to live with one another, to live out and experience the greatest story ever told. We look forward to that Omega day when you look back, and You will receive all the credit and all the glory. In Jesus’ name. Amen!

* Some thoughts from a message by Andy Stanley called “In the Meantime”.

STUDY GUIDE

Monday: Read all of Revelation 22.

Can you picture the living water of life? How does reading this prepare you for Christ’s final victory? Pray for your role in the epic script, that you would be faithful right where you are. Let your prayer be “Come, Lord Jesus.” (v.20).

Tuesday: Read all of Matthew 28.

This is the account of the first day of the week, what many call the first day of the new creation, when Jesus rose from the dead. How do the leaders fall and miss their role in the script? What about Jesus’ final words? Pray for someone to befriend, that you could one day disciple them, with Jesus’ help.

Wednesday: Read Psalm 23.

This Psalm of David may have been written as an old man, looking back over his life. Offer up to God all the valleys, shadows, and death around you. Offer yourself up to God, that you might dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Live that out today, as though you were already in God’s house.

Thursday: Read Hebrews 1:1-4.

This is a hymn to Christ, explaining how God’s revelation grew through the years, from forefathers, to prophets, to God’s Son. As Jesus become real to you? If so, when? Find someone who hasn’t heard your story and share it with them.

Friday: Read Colossians 1:15-23.

This is another hymn to Christ Jesus. Jesus wasn’t the “first-born” of creation. He was “firstborn” as in heir

of all. This is another description of Alpha and Omega. What things in your life or in the world seem more powerful than Jesus? How does it change for you to realize that even these things are under Christ's authority?