

In Awe of My Timeless Saviour

Psalm 110:1-7; Hebrews 7:1-28

Reformed Church of Wainuiomata, 16 May 2021, 16:30

(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen with due acknowledgement)

Intro

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

It was the year 1995. We were fresh migrants to New Zealand, and so were Annette's sister, Sandra, and her family. They were living in Tokoroa, and we in Auckland.

Well, it was some time during that same year that Sandra rang me. This is what she said: "Pieter, we have become friends with our neighbours." "They're very kind people from India." "They're Muslims." "So, Pieter, could you please help me with an answer from the Bible?" "You see, yesterday, our neighbour lady said to me, 'Sandra, if you could show me where the Bible says that Jesus is *God* – especially, if you could show me from the Bible where Jesus *Himself* says that He is God – then I will believe you.'"

So, excited by this challenge...

- I thought of all the things Christ had taught and done: of His *teachings* that surpassed the human mind and moved the heart; and of His *healings*, especially of how He once in a home in Capernaum told a paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven!" Then, straightaway, to prove to the critics that, *as God*, He did have the authority to forgive sins, Christ healed that paralytic!
- And I thought of how Christ *raised the dead* – and of how He *Himself* rose from the dead! I mean, who but God could do such things!?
- And I thought of John 20:28 where the risen Christ finally caused Thomas the Doubter's doubt to crumble so that, in absolute awe of Christ, Thomas exclaimed, "My Lord and my *God*!"
- And I thought of Colossians 2:9 which says, "*For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.*"¹
- And I thought of John 1:1-3, "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and *the Word was God*..." etc.!

But that very kind Muslim lady in Tokoroa would not be happy with these evidences! And she would not understand that "The *Word* was God" meant that "*Jesus* was God." No, she wanted to hear where Jesus of Nazareth *Himself* said it straight-out and clearly: "I am God!" So, I scanned the New Testament, and rang Sandra back later that same day, and gave her the short answer – more or less the answer given under point 3 of this sermon.

My brother & sister, what does it do to you & me to know that Mary's Son, Jesus of Nazareth, apart from being 100% human (yet without sin), was/is also 100% God?

Well, does not such knowledge cause you to stand in awe of Him? What's more, is it not so that such knowledge assists you and me in defending our Christian faith with kind words of confidence and firm conviction?

Now, of course, as indicated before, there is a variety of ways in which the Bible gives witness to our Lord Jesus' divinity. But there are also those Bible passages that speak of His *timeless existence* – and *these* are the passages I have selected for writing this sermon. I mean, what else does Christ's timeless existence indicate but that He is *God*!?

¹ Also cf. Col 1:19, "*For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell*" (ESV).

And so, here are the three points of this sermon...

- **Alpha & Omega**
- **Priest Forever** (According to the Order of Melchizedek)
- **I Am Who I Am**

Alpha & Omega

My brother & sister, in Revelation 22:12-13 the Apostle John gives us the words of our Lord Jesus where He *Himself* says, “Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward *is* with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”²

What do the words, “Alpha and Omega” mean?

Well, *Alpha* is the name of the first letter in the Greek alphabet, and *Omega* is the name of the last letter in the Greek alphabet. Thus, as Revelation 22:13 indicates, “Alpha and Omega” means the same as “the first and the last” and as “the beginning and the end.”

Perhaps you ask, “But what do these words have to do with time or timelessness?”

Well, look, when Christ uses these words to describe Himself, is He not revealing that He was *before* all created things, and that He will still be *after* this created order *has come to an end*? Thus, is it not so that, by calling Himself the Alpha and Omega, the risen and ascended Christ is revealing to us that He is on either side of time – i.e., before time began and after time will have ended? And what does this mean but that He is God?

But let’s look deeper into this title, for there’s more to it! You see, is it not so that in the Old Testament, *Yahweh* used this very same title for Himself where we read in Isaiah 44:6, “Thus says the LORD (Yahweh), the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD (Yahweh) of hosts: ‘I am the first and I am the last,’ and there is no God besides Me”³

Thus, what conclusion do we come to when Yahweh and our risen Lord Jesus use the same titles for themselves? Well, does this not say that Christ reveals Himself as one with God?

My brother & sister, what does this truth do to you and me?

And what would this truth have done to that kind Muslim lady of Tokoroa?

So far, regarding the title “Alpha & Omega” as witness to Christ’s timelessness.

Priest Forever (According to the Order of Melchizedek)

My brother & sister, already more than a thousand years before the human birth of Christ, King David of old sang about the God-promised Messiah (Christ) who would come! Yes, inspired by the Holy Spirit, David sang about the One who would come from his (i.e., David’s) line.

And this is what David sang, “***The LORD (Yahweh) says to my Lord: “Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet”*** (Psalm 110:1)!

And then? How does verse 4 of that song go?

Well, here is *how* it goes: “***The LORD (Yahweh) has sworn and will not change His mind, “You (Messiah/Christ) are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”***”

Did you hear the *time word* in this verse? Yes, did you notice the word *forever*? “***You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.***”⁴

² NASB. Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible quotes in this sermon/article are from the NASB.

As for the title “Alpha and Omega,” also cf. Rev. 1:8 in which Alpha and Omega may refer to God; and 2:8 and 21:6 in which this title refers to our Lord Jesus Christ.

³ NASB (Emphasis mine).

⁴ NASB (Emphasis mine)

What does *forever* mean here? And who was *Melchizedek*? And what was the *order of Melchizedek*?

Well, the answers to these questions can be huge! So, for the sake of time and space, I will give just what is absolutely in line with the theme of this sermon/article.

You see, in the days of Abraham, i.e., about two thousand years before the human birth of Christ, Melchizedek was the king of a city called *Salem*. Now, in several ways, this Melchizedek was a type of Christ.

Here is the first one: The name *Melchizedek* means “King of Righteousness.” And his city’s name – the name *Salem* – means “peace.”⁵ So, Melchizedek was a type of Christ in the sense that Christ is *King of Righteousness* and *King of Peace* to the degree that Melchizedek – a mere human being – could never be!

But there is a *second* way in which Melchizedek was a type of Christ, i.e., Melchizedek was a *priest*. How do we know that? Well, because Psalm 110:4 and Hebrews 7:3 say so! But there is much more to Melchizedek’s priesthood than meets the eye. You see, whereas all the Old-Testament priests had to be able to prove that they were from the tribe of Levi (and even from the line of Aaron), Melchizedek was *not* from Levi’s tribe. In fact, Melchizedek lived about two-hundred years before Levi was even born! And so, because Melchizedek the priest was not of the line of Levi – and therefore not of the priestly order of Levi – he was a type of Christ.

How?

Well, is it not so that Christ, too, was Priest – and not from the tribe of Levi!? I mean, is it not true that our Lord Jesus was of the tribe of *Judah*? And is it not true that the Sovereign LORD (Yahweh) who decreed that all Old-Testament priests had to be from the tribe of Levi, also had the authority to decree that Melchizedek and Christ should be priests even though they were *not* from Levi’s line?

Thus, the second reason why we say Melchizedek was a type of Christ, is because both he and Christ were priests from an order which was not from Levi.

Well, here is a *third* sense in which Melchizedek was a type of Christ, i.e., in the sense that Melchizedek is priest *forever*! Now, someone might say, “Really!?” “Is it true that Melchizedek is still alive and still an acting priest!?”

The short answer to this question is, “No!” But here is a slightly longer answer...

You see, about Melchizedek, Hebrews 7:3 says, “Without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he remains a priest perpetually” (NASB).

You say, “Really!?” “Did Melchizedek not have a father and mother?” “Is he really without genealogy?”

The answer is that, when the author of Hebrews said Melchizedek was without father and mother and without genealogy, he did not mean it literally. All that the author of Hebrews does in Hebrews 7:3, is he argues from silence. Yes, he keeps Genesis 14:18-20 in mind – the only passage that tells us about Melchizedek, yet a passage that does not say anything (a passage that keeps silent) about Melchizedek’s mother & father.

And so, when Hebrews 7:3 says that Melchizedek was without father and mother – and therefore without genealogy – all that it means is that, whereas the ancestors of every other Old-Testament priest were known and could be verified, the ancestors of Melchizedek were

⁵ Cf. Hebrews 7:1,2

not known, simply because they were never mentioned!⁶ Thus, Melchizedek appears to have had *no beginning of days* (Hebrews 7:3)!

Thus, in the sense that God's people did not know Melchizedek's parents' names – in that sense was Melchizedek also a type of Christ. I mean, is it not so that according to Christ's *divine* nature, He had no human parents and no genealogy!? And even regarding Christ's *human* nature, it was only through Mary that He had a biological human parent!?

See how, because of the unknowability of his parents, Melchizedek was a type of the divine Christ?

Perhaps someone will now ask, "But what does Hebrews 7:3 mean when it says that Melchizedek has *no end of life*?" "Does it mean that Melchizedek is still alive somewhere today?"

No, my brother & sister, "although Scripture is silent about the death of Melchizedek, we nonetheless conclude that he died."⁷ After all, the author of the book Hebrews presents Melchizedek as a historical figure who only has some resemblances to Christ. That's why the word *like* is used in Hebrews 7:3, 15.

So, if Melchizedek was a real historical figure who died, why then does verse 3 say he has no end of life? And why does verse 8 then say about Melchizedek, "... *it is witnessed that he lives on*"? (NASB).

Well, the answer is: It is not Melchizedek *himself* who is living on, but it is his *priesthood* which is living on – a priesthood which is different to that of the levitic priests.

And how does Melchizedek's priesthood live on? Well, as Ps 110:4 indicates, it lives on in the priesthood of great David's Greater Son, Jesus Christ, about whom Ps 110:4 says, "The LORD (Yahweh) has sworn and will not change His mind, 'You (Messiah) are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.'"

Yes, as Highest Priest, Christ has brought the ultimate and ever-powerful sacrifice (Himself), and He is forever interceding on behalf of His loved ones (you & me)!

And what does *forever* indicate?

Well, does it not indicate that, apart from being a human being (without sin), Jesus Christ is *God*!?

I Am Who I Am

Is there a Bible verse that would give a clear answer to that kind Muslim lady whom we mentioned in the introduction? Yes, is there a Bible verse in which we hear our Lord Jesus Himself say it clearly and straight-out: "I am God!"?

Well, the closest you and I will find is in John chapter 8.

You see, this chapter tells us how Jesus was standing before a group of people who just would not believe that He was from God. They kept on saying that He was from the devil. Then they boasted that *they* were children of Abraham and that Jesus was not greater than Abraham – to which Jesus then replied (in John 8:58), "***Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.***"

See what Christ is doing here? In using the words "I am" to describe Himself, Christ does two things. Firstly, He reveals His preexistence – "...before Abraham was born, *I am*." And secondly, He uses for Himself the term "I am" – a term which Yahweh in the Old Testament

⁶ Cf. e.g., Kistemaker, Simon J. 2004. Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews. (In: Kistemaker, S.J. ed. New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI : Baker Books. p. 185), "We ought not to take this verse literally, for the author, reasoning from silence (Gen.14:18-20), is comparing Melchizedek with the priests who descended from Aaron. The writer expected a priest to establish and prove his priestly descent...."

⁷ Cf. Kistemaker (ibid:189)

had chosen as His own special term of self-identification. In fact, the Name *Yahweh* means as much as “I am” (short for “I am who I am”).

See? When Christ said, “Before Abraham was born, I am,” what else was He claiming but *preexistence appropriate only to one possessed of the nature of Yahweh!*?⁸

And the crowd with whom Christ was talking understood perfectly what He meant, for the next verse (8:59) tells us, “...*they picked up stones to throw at Him...*”

See how, in John 8:58, Christ Himself said that He is God – that He is timeless and one with Yahweh!?

And, of course, later in the Gospel of John – in Christ’s prayer to His Father – we hear Him talk about His preexistence. Yes, this is how Christ prayed (in John 17:5), “***Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.***”⁹

Conclusion

My brother & sister, it is true: Christ’s human body and human soul had a date of birth – i.e., at the time when He was born from Mary by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit! But His divine nature had no beginning. And His human & divine natures have no end!

And here is something beautiful! You see, even though Christ – like the Father and the Holy Spirit – is timeless, yet, He was (and is) able to also operate within time! Indeed, although *being in very nature God, He* (the Son, Christ) *did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness* (Philippians 2:6-7).

But He went even further! You see, here is the mind-bending thing: He who is so lofty, humbled Himself *and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!* (Philippians 2:8).

Why did the Timeless One do that?

Because He loved His own too much to stay safely “tucked away” in the timeless zone!

My brother & sister, you & I have just had the great privilege of having several Bible verses confronting us with the mind-bending timelessness of our Lord Jesus Christ! And in some of these verses, it was our Lord Jesus *Himself* who revealed that He is timeless – and, therefore, God!

So, I pray that what you & I have heard will move our hearts to, in great awe, receive Christ (or receive Him afresh) as our Saviour & Lord!

But what about that kind Muslim lady in Tokoroa? Would *she* have understood and believed the explanation of these Bible verses? Could anyone of non-Christian background understand & believe them?

Yes, I believe so, if in God’s will, these verses could be explained to them prayerfully and in great patience and humility.

AMEN (2655 words excluding footnotes)

⁸ Reymond, R.L. 1998. A new systematic theology of the Christian faith. 2nd revised ed. Nashville : Thomas Nelson. p.231.

⁹ NASB (Emphasis mine)