

# In the Beginning—In the End—Now

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Genesis 1:1-5, 26-27; Romans 11:33-36; John 20:1-18

During the summer after the fourth grade I attended Vacation Bible School. I really had no choice, since my Dad was the pastor, but in reality I enjoyed Bible School. During one of the opening assemblies a retired judge spoke to us, and I still remember his words. They are the only thing I remember from all my years in Bible school. He said: *“In the beginning God (pause). Remember that. It is the most important thing you will ever need to know.”*

After all these years I believe more than ever that he is right. The fundamental starting point for our existence as human beings is God. *In the beginning God.*

Today is Easter Sunday, when we focus on the resurrection. I believe we could reformulate the opening words of the Bible to be the closing words as well.

*In the beginning God—and—In the end God.*

These are the two realities that encompass our lives like two giant bookends and provide the context for our understanding of life. Life has its beginning in God, and when we come to the end, we entrust ourselves to God.

The Apostle Paul puts it in a bit different way in my favorite passage in the New Testament. In Romans 11:36 we find this doxology.

*For from [God] and through [God] and to [God] are all things. To [God] be the glory forever. Amen*

God is the source of all, the means by which all exists and to God belongs all the glory. In the beginning, God; and in the end, God; and all that happens in between is through divine grace as well. This is the foundation stone of all theology *and* anthropology. Our lives make sense within this greater context.

In the beginning, God—from God;  
in our daily existence, God—through God;  
and in the end, God—to God.

Several years ago my youngest son asked me: *“Papá, why do people want to live forever?”* I asked, *“Chris, you don’t want to be given new life after you’ve died?”* *“Yes”,* he replied, *“but I don’t want to sit around singing hymns for all eternity!”* After a good laugh I told him, *“Neither do I, but I don’t believe heaven is just one eternal worship service!”*

On Easter Sunday, when we talk about the resurrection from the dead, visions of heaven dance in our head. What are your visions of heaven? We all have fantastic ideas of what resurrected life will be like, but have you ever asked

yourself what resurrected life is for? Chris' question is really on target. Why do you want to be resurrected?

I believe that if we go back to the beginning, to God's creating of humanity, we will grasp a clearer picture of what God has in mind for resurrected life.

*Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness... So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:26-27)*

One of the clearest meanings of this passage is that **life is a gift**. Life comes from God, and it comes to us as a gift. Life is not a right, nor is it an inherent property. Life is not some eternal essence that is poured into a human body. Life comes from God, and we experience life as a gift.

When we affirm that humanity is created in the divine image, one of the most fundamental implications is that our lives make sense only in relation to God. Many people leave God out of their lives completely and then attempt to find meaning. But at its most basic level, life makes sense *only* in relation to God. This is our primary relationship.

Our secondary relationship, which actually functions as a secondary primary relationship, is with others. Every other human being we come in contact with is created in God's image just like we are, and this fact gives them an equal human dignity to our own. Our lives make sense in relation to our Creator God, and to our fellow God-imagined human beings. Therefore, the path to meaning and to fulfillment is living in right relationship with God and others.

Life is a gift, and **life is relational**. Purely self-centered living is empty and meaningless. Do you want proof? Just go to an amusement park by yourself one day, and then on another day with a friend. Both experiences are fun, but going with a friend is fulfilling.

This relational aspect of life is actually at the core of the central problem of human existence, which according to the Bible is Sin. In its essence Sin is idolatry, and idolatry is exalting the ego to take the place of God. In other words, idolatry is violating the two primary relationships that make our humanity human—placing ourselves above God, others and the creation.

Life is a gift; life is relational; **and life reflects the character of its Creator**. We are to reflect God's character; that is, as God is, so are we to be. We find this truth affirmed throughout Scriptures. God is holy, just, righteous, true, merciful and loving. We could add many more adjectives, but the point is clear. God's character sets the standard for our character, because we are created in God's image.

Now this makes us uncomfortable because we all know how far we are from God's character. We are messed up! The divine image in us is distorted, so this sounds like an impossible standard.

However, this is what the Gospel of Jesus Christ is all about. The core objective of God's plan of redemption from beginning to end is the restoration of our damaged divine image, which in turn enables us to reflect God's character. God became incarnate in Jesus and made redemption available in order to restore us to our God-intended condition. Our primary relationships are re-aligned from self-centeredness to God-centeredness. When we come to Christ God actually makes a change within us, and God gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit works to restore our damaged divine image, to produce the divine character in us and to re-align our relationships.

This is the *through God* of the doxology in Romans. God takes the initiative and provides a way for us to be restored according to God's original intent. God made us in the divine image in order to live in love and relationship with us. In Christ God removes the barrier of sin and makes possible the restoration of the divine image and restores the relationship of love. We are renewed and reconciled in Jesus Christ. All of this is *through God*.

Now the resurrection begins to make sense. When God raised Jesus from the dead, this signals that God has taken care of Sin definitively. Paul teaches that God actually destroys both Sin and Death through Christ, and the resurrection demonstrates this divine victory. God gives new life as a gift, and this new life includes a restored divine image. In the risen Christ we see true humanity restored, and the fundamental human relationships are renewed: our relationship with God, with others and creation.

*In the beginning—God. In the end—God.* The beginning gives us the clue to the ending. Our lives are a gift from God. And when we come to the end, we entrust ourselves to God. In a sense it is a going home to our true humanity. Jesus is the first person to be raised from the dead, and he is the basis of our hope. We can face death with hope and confidence because of the living, resurrected Christ.

But God is not only our beginning and our hope at the end, God is also very much at the center of our Now!

*In the beginning-God.*

*In the end-God.*

*Now-God.*

God is not just about the beginning and ending of life. God is about the every moment of our daily existence. Truly human life is God-centered. It is not God obsessive or God exclusive, but it is God-centered. This is the most basic

message of the Genesis account of our creation. Our very life energy comes from God. The character of our existence is God-stamped, and the very reason for our creation is relationship. Before the Fall humanity enjoyed a natural, full relationship with God, but human egotism brought about a divorce and upset the equilibrium. The entire plan of redemption is God's effort to restore and reconcile. And in Jesus Christ God not only renews the relationship and restores the damaged image, God destroys Sin and Death itself. Hallelujah! This is what we are celebrating today.

The two endpoints of our existence—the beginning and the end—show us God's vision for our lives here and now. As persons in Christ, *today* we share the divine character. We are reconciled persons with a mission to reconcile those who are estranged. We are restored persons with a vision to restore those who are damaged. We have new life in the Spirit so that we may share this life with a hurting and dying world. And finally we are deeply loved persons who in turn love deeply.

*For from [God] and through [God] and to [God] are all things.. Go To [God] be the glory forever. Amen*

This morning I want to invite you to renew your connection to God. Whether you are a believer of over 50 years or a person of no religious commitment who got trapped into coming to an Easter service, I encourage you to reconnect with your loving Creator and Redeemer.

Diane is going to play one verse of a song to give you some time for personal prayer, and then I am going to lead a prayer for us together. Let us bow our heads and close our eyes.

Hymn: I Surrender All

Prayer:

Dear God, you are the very source of our life. We find our meaning in you and discover that we are made to live in a beautiful, loving relationship with you, with others and with the creation. God, this morning we want to reconnect with you. We acknowledge that you are our God and we are your children.

Thank you for dealing with our sin in Jesus Christ. Thank you for destroying both Sin and Death in Him. Fill us with the Spirit of Christ, so that we may be restored and reconciled. May your character shine through us in our daily living.

O God, this morning we recommit ourselves to your mission of restoration, reconciliation and love. We put you in the center of our daily lives.

O God, fulfill your purpose in each of us, for from you, and through you and to you are all things. Amen.

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Easter 2011  
Community Church of Madrid  
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