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Over the time of the Australian Open tennis there was a lot about Margaret Court in the news. Australia's greatest ever tennis player. Winner of a world record 64 grand slam tennis tournaments including 24 singles titles, 19 women's titles and 21 mixed doubles titles. But it wasn't her tennis that put her into the public spotlight but her views on same sex marriage.

In 2017 she had written an open letter opposing same sex marriage and what QANTAS was doing and saying on the issue. In response Martina Navratilova tweeted "Thank you QANTAS for your support. Margaret you have gone too far. Shame on you. #wrongsideofhistory"

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It really does seem we Christians are on the wrong side of history doesn't it? A few years ago, Victorian Premier Jeff Kennett said something similar, he said that Christians were "people of the past". We have had our day. We were once relevant. But not anymore. And commentator after commentator is currently lining up to have a go at us. Because it will soon be obvious to everyone that we are truly on the wrong side of history.

So is this true? Will we spend the rest of our lives out of step with our friends and family? As time goes on will we as Christians be more & more isolated? Estranged? Ridiculed? Bullied? It is not an exciting prospect. It is not something to look forward to at all. Funnily enough we might find ourselves in a similar situation to the Christians of the early Church. Who found themselves in the middle of a thousand year reign of the Roman Empire. Who sought to crush the Christian Church. Who laughed at its mission. And seemed to hold all the power.

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And it is into this very same situation that the book of Revelation is written. And this book is saying to the Christians who are battered and bruised, you are not on the wrong side of history. You are not people of the past. God is the God of history. God is the one who invades history. And one day God's son will bring the history of the world to a close. Don't be discouraged, don't be afraid, don't give up. You are truly on the right side of history!

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Let's take a look at the very start of the book. "*The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, ²who testifies to everything he saw—that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.*"

God's solution is to give his people the book of Revelation. The revelation of Jesus Christ. A book that is not just about history or the future although it will talk about both subjects. It is not about me or the Church or the world even though we will find teaching about all these subjects in this book. It is about Jesus. It is a revelation from Jesus and it is a revelation concerning Jesus.

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So if you are feeling on the wrong side of history. If others are saying Christians are people of the past. Then you need not just a vision from Jesus & a vision of Jesus but an encounter

with Jesus. You and I need Jesus. That's where John wants to rivet your attention on as you read this book. ³ *"Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near."*

So in this first chapter of the book of Revelation Jesus will pull back the curtain and we will see Jesus in heaven, Jesus here on earth and Jesus in all his full glory. Starting with the

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1. The (In)visible (verses 4-8)

You see there is more going on than just what you can see, hear, touch and taste. Which is why John begins his letter to his fellow believers by saying, ⁴ *"John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you **from him** who is, and who was, and who is to come, **and from** the seven spirits before his throne, ⁵ **and from** Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth."*

There are more than seven Churches in Asia and more than seven churches that John has ministered to over the years but these are the ones that John initially writes to. For he knows that they need God's grace. He realises that they need God's peace. And so he points them away from Rome, away from their troubles, away from their persecution to God Himself. He is not just the Creator or the King or the Judge, he is the three in one.

For the Father is the one who is. The one who is here in the present. Lord of the present. Controlling the present. And he is also the one who was, who started the whole show off, the earth and all the heavens came from a command of his voice. And he is the who is to come, who is not dead and buried, not a spent force but the one who has plans and purposes for the future that are just about to come into view.

You can't see Him but God the Father is still in control. Rome might seem in control but it isn't. For as the curtain goes back the spotlight now moves from God the Father, to God the Spirit or the seven spirits before the throne. The Spirit is the one who brings the power of God into this world. Power to forgive, power to transform and power to grow the Church.

And, of course, then there is Jesus who is the faithful witness. The one who has shown us what God is really like. Jesus the firstborn from the dead, who died on the cross but on the third day rose to life to show us that death doesn't have the final say, death is not the one we need to be scared of because Jesus is stronger than death. Jesus is now the ruler of the kings of the earth. He rules Rome. He rules China. He rules our politicians. Our God reigns.

Friends, what you see in front of you is not everything that is going on. What you hear said in your ears is not always the truth. What you experience and what you feel is right and wrong is not always trustworthy. There is another layer of reality. Yes most people can't see it but the apostle John wants you & I to see it. To hear it. To believe it. To take it to heart.

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Think about it. The Roman empire has come and gone. The British empire has come and gone. The rule of communism has come and gone. But God is eternal. God still rules. God has gone nowhere. He is the one who loves us. He is the one who has freed us from our sins by his blood. He is the one who has made us to be a kingdom of priests. He is the Alpha and Omega. The first and the last. And he is the one who will one day come on the clouds. He

will put the whole world in its place. And if you are not on his side, trust me, you will be on the wrong side, the wrong side of history. John points us to the (in)visible and then he gets a
Verse 8

2. Visitor (verses 9-13)

⁹"I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom & patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. ¹⁰On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet"

Verse 9

John was on the island of Patmos. A Greek Island. Sounds wonderful doesn't it & if you were to go there today you will find that's its full of five star resorts and luxury villas. But John isn't there for a holiday, he is a brother and companion in his friend's suffering. For Patmos is a prison island & John has been sent there to work in the quarries, even though at this time he is probably in his late 80's or 90's. He has been caught up in Emperor Domitian's persecution of the Christian faith. But this Lords Day, this Sunday we find him in worship.

When he gets a visitor. Behind him there is a loud voice like a trumpet. ¹¹which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

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He is to write to these Churches that are in what we would call modern day Turkey, a letter, based on what he sees and what he hears. And so when John turns around what does he see? ¹²"I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³and 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."

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John sees seven golden lampstands. Now in verse 20 we are told what they are. They are the seven Churches. The Churches in Asia that he is to write to. John you see is going to use picture language, an awful lot of picture language throughout the book of Revelation. There will be dragons and bowls and wars and scrolls and seals and lambs and its all picture language. It's a picture that points us to something else.

Now when it comes to the lampstands you can see why this picture is being used. Christians are called to be salt and light. They are to shed the light of God onto a very dark world. And that's what these seven Churches are doing. Picture it with me. There in the midst of the darkness is the Church shining a light around itself. The wind is whipping up. The candles are flickering but the lampstands are doing what they are meant to be doing. They are lighting up the darkness all around it. But how is it able to keep shining?

Because among the lampstands is one like the Son of Man. Didn't Jesus call himself the Son of Man? And doesn't the book of Daniel talk about the Son of Man coming to the Ancient of Days, that is God and receiving all authority and power to rule over all peoples & all nations? You see Jesus now has the power to rule. Jesus is the King. And he is the one looking after the Churches. He is the one who is making sure there is oil for their lamps. He is the one who is protecting these Christians. He is the one keeping them safe.

Do you get it? These Churches, these Christians think that the world is against them. They

are being told that they are on the wrong side of history but it is just not true. Jesus is with them. Jesus is encouraging them. Jesus is protecting them.

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One of the great promises of the Bible is when God says I am with you. 365 times in the Bible it is said, "I am with you." Enough for one new verse every day of the year. And I could read them all to you but how about I just read one of them for you.

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Isaiah 43, *"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. ²When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. ³For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour;"*

Christian, you are not alone. Church you don't have defend yourself. I am with you. You think that the armies are in control. You think the politicians determine your future. You think the scientists know all about the world. You think the doctors will determine whether you live or die. You think the marketers know what is best for you. You think the social media influences are the ones you should listen to? No listen to Jesus.

You are not on the wrong side of history because Jesus has come into this world and he has invaded history. He is the one who has real authority. He is the one who is in control, even if you can't see him being in control. And because he is with you, he knows what is going on all around you.

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Now if we were to run ahead of ourselves and go to the next two chapters of Revelation we will see that Jesus speaks to these seven Churches and says I know what is happening to you. I see there is apathy among you and unbelief. I know that there is discouragement and compromise. I am aware of the persecution and the suffering that you are experiencing. And as you read through these chapters you see that what was going on in the early Church is still happening throughout our world today.

The troubles are the same, the challenges the same, the sin is the same, the hostility of the world towards faithful witness to Christ is the same. It's our world too, isn't it? When we look at the Church in the book of Revelation it's like looking in the mirror. We see ourselves there in its pages. And yet in the midst of the difficulties there we also find Jesus.

He is present among His people, walking in the midst of His churches. He is not an absentee landlord! He is always with us. Jesus is saying to us, "I know." I know your endurance & your struggles. I know your sin and your failure. I know your hard work. I know your love. I know your faith. I know your hypocrisy. I know your circumstances. I know."

Jesus hasn't forgotten us! He promised, didn't He, 'I am with you always to the end of the age'. I will never leave you nor forsake you.'" At times we will have our doubts about our faith. At other times we will get discouraged, it will seem like we are on the wrong side of history. But Jesus speaks to us. Jesus walks among us. Jesus is with us. He knows. So we look up at the invisible and we listen as he visits us and then we are blown away by the

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3. Vision (verses 13-20)

The vision of the risen Jesus. Now John had spent over three years with Jesus when John was a young man and Jesus was ministering in and around the country of Israel but he has never seen Jesus like this. There he preached & healed and suffered but here, here he rules.

“And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³and 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. ¹⁴The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire.

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¹⁵His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace & his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. ¹⁶In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.”

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Close your eyes for a second. Try and picture the scene in your mind's eye. This Jesus, this Son of Man, this one who has all authority and power he is dressed like a king. With a long and ornate robe, with a golden sash around his chest. And look at his hair as white like snow, he has a dignity about him doesn't he and a wisdom that only a long life will give you.

And look at his eyes like blazing fire, they are able to see everything, even in the deepest darkness. And his feet are like burnished bronze, he is able to step on anything, He will crush anything that gets in his way. And his mouth, his words are like a doubled edged sword, powerful, unable to be stopped or defeated or argued against. And his face well it is like the sun. You know that if you are to go outside and look directly at the sun you will go blind. Our eyes just can't cope with its power. All around Jesus is the light of the lampstands but the real light is not in the stars but the son. Not in the Church but the Son of God, Jesus.

This Jesus is not to be messed with. This is a figure of authority, of power, of majesty. In fact the only proper response to a vision of Jesus like this is to humble yourself and to worship Him. So John tells us ¹⁷*“When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.”*

Do you get the idea? We are not alone. The Church is not by itself. We are not about to be defeated by the dark forces of this world. We have one that makes Arnold Schwarzenegger look like a wimp looking after us. We have one who can even turn his death into a wonderful triumph. Even when Jesus looks defeated, he still has all the aces up his sleeve.

Friends, this picture of Jesus should fill us with awe, with wonder, with worship. This is not some weak, insipid character saying love your neighbour. This is Jesus with hair like snow, with eyes like a blazing furnace with a sword coming out of his mouth. This is not just our mate and friend, he is our Lord, he is our King, he is our boss!

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In the book, *The Lion, the Witch and The Wardrobe*, Susan is about to meet the lion Aslan, a figure of Christ. “Ooh” said Susan, “I thought he was a man. Is he – quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous meeting a lion.” “That you will dearie, and no mistake” said Mrs Beaver, “If there is anyone who appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they are either braver than most or else plain silly!” “Then he isn't safe” said Lucy? “Safe” said Mr Beaver,

“Don’t you heave what Mrs Beaver is telling you? Who said anything about safe? Cause he isn’t safe. But I tell you he is good. He’s the king.”

Jesus isn’t safe. But he is the first and the last. He is the living one. He was dead but now is alive. And John’s response is to swoon to the ground in the presence of such majesty. But the picture of Jesus I think gets even more remarkable. For what does this mighty king do when John falls down before him as if dead? He puts his right hand on him. He says “Do not be afraid.”

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Don’t worry that he already has seven stars, which stand for the seven angels looking after the seven Churches, in his right hand. Don’t worry that he is still looking after the seven lampstands, the seven Churches that cover most of modern day Turkey. Don’t worry this man Jesus is already ruling the world. The remarkable thing is that he cares for the individual. He still reaches down to John and picks him up. He speaks words of comfort and encouragement to the one who is his follower.

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And he tells them don’t be afraid because also in my hands are the keys to Death and Hades. Now in my pocket I have a bunch of keys. Keys to my house, car, even this Church. And with these keys I can access things that others can’t. But Jesus is the one, the only one with access to death and life, heaven and hell. This Jesus has majesty and mercy. This Jesus has power and privilege. This Jesus has transcendence and tenderness.

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Are we on the wrong side of history? Are we people of the past? Not if we are with Jesus. Not if he has us in his hands. Not if he is looking after us. Not if he has the keys of death and hades and he uses those keys to unlock our future eternity.

And friends that is why John has written this down for us today. To show us a vision of Jesus that will blow us away. To remind us that he is with us no matter what the difficulty we face. To lift up our eyes away from what we are currently looking at and putting our gaze away from others and onto to God, Father, Son and Holy spirit.

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And if we do that? There is grace for us. There is peace for us and there is a truckload of blessing for us. But let us end shall we at that verse. ³*“Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy.”* Well guess what, we have read it today, so that’s a good start, a really good start. But verse 3 continues and moves from the singular to the plural, *“and blessed are **those** who hear it”* (so this is also not just about you but about us) *“and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.”*

It is not just about hearing but putting these truths in our hearts. For at times you are going to feel alone. At times you will have your doubts. At times people will say that we are on the wrong side of history. At times we will feel weak. At times we will want to give up. But during those times we are to close our eyes and see afresh this vision of Jesus. We are to remember that Jesus has come and visited us and is now with us. And we are to remember even if God is invisible, he is real. He may not be safe but he is real. And he does love us.

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Wrong side of history, people of the past? That not us if we have a relationship with the one who was and is and is to come.