

# Vision of the Cosmic King

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning, everyone. It's great to be with you in church this morning or joining with you online to kick off this season of reflection and celebration and looking forward to what God has next for us as a church.

So be grateful if you've got your Bibles, open up to Revelation chapter 1. That'll be fantastic. In May 2017, Australian tennis legend and now Pentecostal Christian pastor from Perth, Margaret Court, wrote an open letter opposing the support of same-sex marriage by Qantas Airlines.

It received a whole heap of feedback at the time. And one of the feedbacks, one of the responses to Margaret's letter came from another tennis great, Martina Navratilova.

She tweeted on her account, thank you, Qantas, for your support. And Margaret, you've gone too far. Shame on you.

And it came with a hashtag, the wrong side of history. It feels like that sometimes, I think, as a Christian, particularly in the modern West, that we are on the wrong side of history.

[ 1 : 19 ] That is, history was for, sorry, Christianity was for times past, but we've kind of grown up as a society and now we just leave it behind. You need to get new ideas, new thoughts about life and how life works.

Our society has been moving further and further away and even over the time of Vision 2020, in the last 11 years as a church, it has rapidly moved further and further away from Christian truths.

The foundation, in fact, of our society. The Christian worldview is not just regarded as outdated. It's not just the wrong side of history.

It's viewed as wrong in some circles and, amongst other circles, even deviant. Church attendance is falling.

Christians in society are sinking into the shadows, hoping not to be identified as such, just wanting to stay under the radar. So the question is, before us, as we just reflect on the past and as we look forward to the future, what future does the Christian faith have?

[ 2 : 25 ] What future does the church have in our culture? What we're doing in this series, in terms of celebrating what God has done in the past and his work amongst us in the last 11 years, and we also start to form a path for what is next for us as a church, is this moment of this season we're in right now, this term, nothing more than just the band playing on the Titanic as it sinks, entertaining us as we go down.

But we're almost at the end. Is that what's happening for us? Well, obviously, I think no. But what we need to see as a church, what we need to see as Christians, and we need to see it again and again and again and again, what we need to be convinced of again and again is that Jesus is reigning.

He's alive as much as you and I are alive, even more so that you and I are alive, and he is reigning over all that is still. He's resurrected, ascended, and he rules the universe.

We need to have him speak into the situations in our lives, in our society, in our church. We need to know that God is right now on his throne in control in heaven, and unlike us right now with masks on our faces and silent in the singing, he is surrounded by myriads and myriads and myriads and myriads of angels, beings far greater and glorious than us, on their knees, singing at the tops of their voices, declaring his praise and worthy because he is so far even beyond them.

He is so great and glorious. So right now when we can't sing, he is hearing the thunderous roar of that singing around his throne. We need to see the way that this God who is so patient will one day pulverize wickedness and injustice and obliterate those who oppose him and set up his kingdom for the eternal joy of all who trust him.

[ 4 : 42 ] What we need in this season is the book of Revelation and these verses which are in front of us right now. So I'd be grateful if you had your Bibles open, Revelation chapter 1. If you have to, if you're using an electronic device, shut down every other app.

Shut down your notifications. You need to be focused here right now. Go to the St. Paul's app. Shut down every app apart from this one. Get to the St. Paul's app and there's a bit of an outline there for our message today.

Three points I want to get to. First of all, which king is on the throne? See, the message of Revelation was so essential for the first recipients of this letter about 2,000 years ago.

The first recipients of this letter were Christians living in the Roman Empire. They were living in the Roman Empire and they were facing the biggest nightmare of their lives.

The storm clouds of persecution were building for them. The might of the Roman Empire was against them.

[ 5 : 55 ] Now this is important. By the time the book of Revelation was written, the Roman Empire had been around for 600 years.

And it still had another 400 years to go. What that means is the Roman Empire lasted four times longer than the British Empire, the Communist Empire, and the American Empire combined. Four times longer. It is so embedded in terms of its power. The world has not seen anything like it. And when John writes this word that we have in front of us now, Christians were facing the might and the glory of that empire.

Romans 1 verse 9. Sorry, not Romans. Revelation 1 verse 9. The second half of it tells us that John was exiled on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

Now these days, Patmos has around about 3,000 inhabitants. And it is full of five-star resorts and luxury villas. It's a great place to go for a holiday.

[ 7 : 21 ] In John's day, it was a prison island. It was a prison island for the Roman Empire. And John is an old man. And he is sentenced to work in the quarries, breaking stones on Patmos because of his faith in Jesus Christ.

And John is, if you like, typical of the hardship that many Christians were facing and were about to face. Were about to face because of their emperor, Domitian.

Now we all hear of the emperor Nero and the way that he sort of set himself against Christians. Domitian was, Nero was just sort of like a start.

Start of the persecution. Domitian was a nasty piece of work compared to Nero. According to the Roman writer Suetonius, the Roman emperor Domitian, who was emperor when John wrote these words, was both physically unimpressive and a moral catastrophe of a man.

Just to, I mean, I could give you a big long list. But here's a couple of things. He had many, many affairs with married women and eventually stole someone else's wife to be his own.

[ 8 : 44 ] His own brother Titus fell ill while on a campaign and he ordered his entire army to leave him alone to die. His own brother. He seduced his married niece, got her pregnant, and then she died from the abortion that he demanded that she have.

This moral catastrophe of a man was physically unimpressive. He was particularly sensitive about his boldness. When what would be called nowadays a court joker made a joke, entertained the crowd, and made a bit of a passing shot at his boldness, Domitian had the guy executed straight away.

He was particularly sensitive about his baldness, his growing pot belly, and what was described by historians as his spindly little legs. But he demanded that the entire Roman Empire referred to him as Lord God.

And Christians were suffering extreme hardship because they refused to have this Roman emperor as the dominant reality of their lives, as the point of their lives.

And so he threw the full force of the Roman Empire against them. His persecution was horrendous. He would have Christians laid out on the ground, have a horse attached to each arm and leg, and get the horses whipped so the horses would bolt and limbs would be ripped from torso.

[ 10 : 22 ] And then the crowds would watch the person die in agony. Some others, he would have them holes drilled into their skulls and molten lead poured in on their brains and watch them die that way.

Others were mercifully thrown to the lions and torn apart. It was quicker. This is what these Christians are facing.

And yet, they faced it with fortitude, with peace, and even joy.

How did they do that? Because it is a historical fact they did. It's a historical fact that lives throughout the whole Roman Empire were changed when Christians died this way with fortitude, peace, and joy.

And others wanted to know, how is it that you can live and die like that? How is that possible? Historical fact.

[11:37] This, in fact, was written about Christians not long after Domitian's reign, but it was about Domitian's reign. This is a Roman writer.

They loved everyone. They loved everyone, but by everyone they are persecuted. They are unknown, and yet they are condemned. They are put to death, and yet they are brought to life. They are poor, and yet they make many rich. They're in need of everything, and yet they are bound in everything. They are dishonored, and yet they are glorified in their dishonor.

They are slandered, and yet they are vindicated. They are cursed, and yet they bless. They're insulted, and yet they offer respect. And when they do good, they are punished as evildoers. When they are punished, they rejoice as if they are somehow brought to life. And so Christians, when punished, daily increase more and more.

[12:39] That is, the might of the greatest empire in the world could not stop them. So how did they do that?

How did they live and die like that? Well, it's because they were captivated by the cosmic king. Revelation 1 was so important for them, and it's important for us.

It reminds these suffering Christians who is, in fact, the dominant reality of their life, the cosmic king, Jesus Christ. Have a look at how he is described here.

Verse 4. Him who was and who is to come. Verse 5. Jesus Christ, the firstborn from the dead and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

Verse 6. The one to whom power and glory belong forever. And then we have in verse 8. I am. This is Jesus' declaration. I am the alpha and the omega who is and who was and who is to come, the almighty.

[13:53] Verse 8 there is one of the most comprehensive statements in the entire Bible of the divinity of Jesus, of exactly who he is.

During his ministry years, he consistently made these sorts of claims, claiming that he, in fact, was God himself. It's claims that no other religious leader has ever claimed.

You know, Buddha, Muhammad, others have claimed to speak on behalf of the divine. None of them dared to take the step of actually declaring that they were, in fact, the divine, that they were, in fact, the God, the almighty, the creator.

Now, I don't have time this morning to unpack all of that. In fact, I do have time, but you don't have time for me to unpack all of that for us today. Other times we do, and we will again into the future. But I want you to know that this church here at St. Paul's, if you're watching me online, this church here at St. Paul's exists, that you might grapple with that claim of who Jesus is. It is so, so essential for you to understand who Jesus is.

[15:00] And we would be delighted. In fact, our missions team, I'd be delighted. Our missions team would be delighted to lead you through exploring this claim and the many other claims of Jesus Christ and the Christian faith.

We want you to know him. And so please send us an email. Get in contact with us. Our missions team, Adrian, would be very glad to pursue that with you.

But Jesus describes himself here as the Alpha and the Omega. That is, that's the first letter and the last letter of the Greek alphabet.

He is, as we see a little bit later in chapter 1, he describes the beginning and the end. He's the first and the last. The Bible tells us that he existed before the universe was formed and he is its creator. He is, if you like, the starting point of all that is. He is the origin of all that is. As the beginning of the Bible tells us in Genesis chapter 1, in the beginning was God.

[16:10] When all things started, God was already there. Now, every single one of us has a starting point.

I don't mean, you know, your birthday. I'm not referring to that. I mean your starting point. The starting point of life, of how life came to be.

How we exist. The starting point of existence and how we derive our life and our meaning and our purpose from that starting point. It's the beginning point from which we explain the world as it is. What's your starting point? We've all got one. What is your starting point? Whatever your starting point is, it will fundamentally determine how you live.

And especially it will determine how you handle tough times in life. Secularism declares there is no divine starting point.

[ 17 : 21 ] It declares that everything that exists now started because of a random act, random collision of atoms and stuff and gas.

And so therefore, all life as it exists right now is an accident that happened billions of years ago.

And life, existence, is therefore a collection of events and chaos.

It's the only explanation of life that they have. There is no meaning. There is no purpose. If you want to be a true secularist.

And it means therefore that we are left to our own devices to determine our own path, our own meaning, our own purpose.

Everything is subject to the elements in which we exist. We cannot plan on a future whatsoever.

And therefore, we live, we breathe, we die, we're gone, and that's it.

[ 18 : 36 ] So you better make the most of it right now. And so in Western society, personal happiness is the highest goal of life. Because there's nothing else.

I might as well enjoy while the earth spins and I stand on it. And so there is therefore no explanation for hard times.

There's no way to endure hard times. Because it's not the purpose of life. If, however, there is a creator at the beginning, then it's essential that we discover his truth, his purpose, his meaning.

And we are told here that Jesus Christ is the starting point. He's the starting point. We're also told here that he is the end point.

He is the omega as well. He created the universe. And the universe is orientated towards him as the starting point and the end point. He has built everything for him and around him.

[ 19 : 55 ] All things are for his glory. All things are for his knowledge. All things are for his service.

We are built for him. And as long as we connect our life, our existence, our understanding with him, there is hope.

He didn't just start history, but all of history is rushing towards him. So what we think our starting point and our end point are will determine how we live now.

And Christianity declares that if Jesus Christ is your starting point and he is your end point, and an end point that I must add never actually ends, it goes on living with him forever, then he is your point now.

He is the point. And the good news here is that the source of all our hope and life and meaning and purpose is not just a cosmic king who rules, but he's a cosmic king who rules and is present.

He's close. He's not a distant divine being. This cosmic king is close. He's approachable. And this is good news for the imprisoned John, for the persecution Christians in the Roman Empire, and for Christians around this world in a thousand hard places right now.

[ 21 : 31 ] It's good news for the suffering, for those who are tired, for those who are weary, for those who are running out of steam, for those who are confused, disheartened, for those who are disenfranchised, for those who are insecure.

We need to see Jesus Christ, the risen, ascended, cosmic king, as ruling and present. So, in verse 12, John turns to see whose voice it was that sounded like a trumpet in verse 10.

Verse 20 tells us the interpretation of what he saw in that moment.

And that is, what he saw was the cosmic king standing in amongst the churches, standing right in the churches. He's not just merely as a king over the churches.

He's not distant away from it. He's not standing outside the churches. He is right there in the middle of his church. Now, I'll unpack this probably next week. But the idea of seven churches, he's not just a promise here for seven churches.

[ 22 : 43 ] The number seven in the book of Revelation is complete. So, the idea here is that he is amongst his church, his global worldwide church. And John saw, according to verse 13, one like a son of man.

In Daniel chapter 7, it's a reference to Daniel chapter 7, verses 13 to 14. The term son of man or one like a son of man refers to a great ruler. So, when John says that he saw one like a son of man

standing in the middle of the lampstands, he means he saw someone with dominion and glory and kingly power.

The one who stands amongst the churches is the one who received from the ancient of days a reference to God himself, dominion and glory and kingdom rule and power and authority in heaven and on earth.

That is, all of God's divine rule has been given to this one like the son of man. And in verse 13, we also see this son of man was dressed in a robe, reaching down to his feet and with a gold sash around his chest.

Now, the robe here is similar to the robe in the Old Testament, where it is almost always refers to the robe of the high priest.

[ 24 : 12 ] So, Jesus is not just the son of man as the cosmic king. He's not just the son of man from Daniel 7, who receives everlasting dominion and rule over all nations and time and eternity.

We also see that he is the final high priest who brings all of the work of the temple to an end.

He is the almighty cosmic king who mediates between humanity and God. And he does that, as we see in verse 5, by giving his own blood.

He gave his own blood once and for all to put away sin once and for all, the sacrifice of himself. This is a king who gives of himself.

These early Christians willingly put their lives on the line and some of them died horrible deaths because Jesus, the cosmic king, gave his life for them.

[ 25 : 27 ] And verse 5 says, To him who loves us. He loves them. In fact, in the original language, it is in the present tense.

He loves them now. He loves you now. In the present, right here, right now. They are so blessed because this cosmic king, in complete comparison to Domitian, gave his own life for them.

And he has freed us from our sins by his blood. Verse 5. Those who sin, those who live life as if they are their own little Domitians, set themselves up as the cosmic kings, making everything, making them the point of all of life.

The Bible declares deserve to die eternally. But Jesus steps in as the high priest, the cosmic high priest who dies on the altar for our sin.

He cancels our obligation to pay the penalty for our sins against God so that we might be reconciled with God and live with him forever. See, the blood of Jesus frees people from lust and greed and pride and anger and every other enslaving sin that makes us, me, you, the point of life.

[ 27 : 00 ] The blood of Jesus breaks the power of canceled sin. He is the loving, sacrificial, cosmic king.

And in verse 14, John describes his eyes were like blazing fire. You see, the eyes of this son of man, this cosmic king, are not the clouded eye of fading glory.

It's not like this Jesus is from another world, from times past. He's not on the wrong side of history. His eyes are the eyes of sharpest clarity and purification. They miss nothing that happens in his universe from time and eternity. They're exploding with energy.

We all know, I'm assuming you know, but I just declare you all know, the dripping eye that's about to sleep, you know, about to drive off to sleep, and the resentful eye and the grumpy eye and the half-shut scowl and the bad mood eye.

[ 28 : 09 ] You can look in someone's eye and you know when you've ticked them off. We all know what it is. But we also know the eye that is alive with wonder and excitement and hope and expectancy and energy and Jesus' eyes were like a flaming fire.

Know today, 2,000 years after John saw this vision, that Jesus is God, he is on the throne, he is as alive then as he is today.

He is the cosmic king, he's not tired, he's not burnt out, he's not fatigued, he's not scrambling for answers. His eyes are aflame with the flashing fire of inexhaustible energy and hope and love.

He sees everything that will be and has been. Nothing takes him by surprise, nothing can make him love you less or love you more.

When Jesus thinks about his plans for you, when he thinks about his plans for this church and for this country and for Christians all across the globe, beyond this day, he's not hesitant, he's not tired, he's not bored, he's not scrambling for answers.

[ 29 : 39 ] His eyes are aflame of fire with utter exhilaration and passion and enthusiasm for the work that he began 2,000 years ago on the cross and will bring to completion when he comes with

the clouds, as we are told here in Revelation 1.

It will go ahead, nothing will hinder it and it excites him. Let me tell you, this year I have been tired because I don't know the future.

constantly making decisions and changing and shifting and when I think about what St. Paul's needs to do next, I get tired thinking about it.

Not Jesus. Not Jesus. Now friends, if you haven't quite grappled with it yet, this is a worldview-shaping passage.

Worldview-shaping passages. Now there are two ways to approach God. Really only two ways you can approach God. Either he is the means to your end or he's the end and everything else is the means.

[ 30 : 58 ] And religion is one way to approach God as the means to your end. religion is doing certain things in order for God to do certain things for you.

I loved watching Flora's video this morning and seeing the work of God in her life and the transformation of needing to be a good student to someone who now rests in the sovereign grace of this Lord Jesus Christ.

Love to see that. In the past I've described religion as treating God like a cosmic vending machine. You put in your offerings your sacrifices in the hope that God will spit out what it is that you truly value.

What is your true point in life? So in other words you use him to get to your point and inevitably the point has something to do with us gaining our glory for ourselves in some way.

In one way or another it becomes about us being little Domitians. The other way to approach God is to see that it's all about him that he is in fact the cosmic king and we discover our point we discover our joy we discover our freedom when we pursue him surrender to him and so my last call here is for us to worship to know and to serve the cosmic king.

[ 32 : 50 ] Our cosmic king is not just a ruler he's a loving relational ruler as I've said and when John gets this vision of Jesus here what we see is he falls to the ground as though he is dead.

That is what we see here is it's a position of submission it's a position of worship Jesus Christ is to be worshipped he's not the means to your end he is the end he is the omega he's the starting point of your life he's the point of your life every human being has the choice of either living life as little Domitians or surrendering to the true cosmic king secondly Jesus wants you to know him I think this is really important for everyone and I want to say particularly for those of you who are Christians and really struggling with it right now this year has just put you on tender hooks and you're really struggling to follow him what happens here is God gives John on the island of Patmos a revelation and this revelation is not just for

John this word is not just for John we are told in verse 11 write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches see the point of John writing it down is to transmit to the seven churches and ultimately to us the experience that John had of seeing Jesus that's the point now can you imagine John sitting on the island of Patmos suffering breaking rocks in the quarry as an old bloke every bit of him hurting and he gets his vision of the cosmic reigning Jesus how much his soul must have lifted at that point and John wants us to see what he sees he appears to John and says write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches John gets the vision we get the book that's the point he wants us this cosmic king wants us to come to him through his word to us he wants us to seek him in his word he wants to know him by his word he wants us to gaze on him and all of his majesty in his word to steadily gaze until the point that our hearts are lifted and we feel deeply encouraged he wants us to know how blessed we are to call this cosmic king our friend our lord so I want to ask you what would it look like for this

Jesus to become the point of your life the dominant reality in your life what would it look like for the things of the bible his word to us where we get to gaze on him constantly where we find out the way things truly are to have his world view as the creator and the purpose of all life and existence what would it look like to have the things of the bible to be more real for you than the news media than what you watch on television than for the internet and social media what would it look like for his narrative to dominate your life more so than academics from universities and their opinion on world view what would it look like for the scriptures for God's word to you to dominate your world view and to be the point of interpretation of all things I want to ask you as

I've already done are you losing heart are you weak because you aren't commuting with is it because you're not commuting with him in his word in this season this year which world view which

narrative grand narrative has dominated your daily existence I want to speak to you particularly if you're at home watching from this I'm not speaking to you if you've got a particular medical issue I want to specifically point out those who just finding right now it's just a whole lot easier to do church at home just don't want to do that battle anymore it's much more comfortable convenient to sit on the lounge with a cup of coffee in my pajamas and do church which world view is dominating your reality right now who is the king over your life right now thirdly as the cosmic king

[ 37 : 53 ] Jesus Christ also wants us to serve him whatever dominates your life whatever is your starting point your end point whatever is your point whatever it is that you're putting your offerings in the cosmic vending machine whatever it is that you're grabbing at the bottom as your point whatever it is it will require you to sacrifice everything for it Jesus is no different but he's the only king the only point who has first served us and given everything to us and so our service of him is always freedom in verse 6 we read Jesus has freed us from our sin and made us a kingdom and priests to serve his God and father that verse is an allusion to the moment when God's people were gathered at Mount Sinai to meet with

God to hear his law to receive it and to enter into covenant relationship with him and God reminded them in that moment that he had freed them from slavery in the same way we are reminded here that we are freed from sin and then in Exodus 19 he describes his people as a kingdom of priests that is Israel's role as he saved rescued people was to make God known to the world and to bring the world to the sacrifices that would free them from their sin through blood Israel's life together was to display the glory and the goodness of God's reign over their life if you're a Christian you belong to Jesus we are his people as the church and our allegiance is to him our life together is to attract people to him we are to bring people to the sacrifice the only sacrifice that frees us from our biggest problem sin we are to bring people to

Jesus death on the cross for them proclaiming the good news of the benevolent cosmic king who offers us life forever with him is central to the mission of this church and as just not just in the past but as we move forward into the future we are in the service of the cosmic king and therefore that proclamation of that good news is central to your identity as one of his children we are to herald his return and his priestly service by making by that that's not easy in our generation it seems to be getting harder we face misunderstanding apathy even hostility Christians are regarded as people from another era wrong side of history and yet we serve the cosmic king who has all of history in his hands the encouragement here is that despite the difficulty that you're facing in your life despite progress in your own conquering of sin and dealing with sin is slow despite the movement against the gospel and the church

Jesus is with his church now with his church he is with us he is the son of man who reigns with dominion over all that is he reigns over secularism he reigns over Islam he reigns over communism he reigns over everything every individual that sets up against him he's the one with power over all that is both seen and unseen and so friends I want to encourage you whatever your position is right now to gaze upon Jesus and let his royal power and his priestly forgiveness and his fiery hope his fiery hope fill you with confidence afresh that treasuring Jesus is never ever a vanity I got to say I was bursting this morning both the early service and this one as we sang crown him with many crowns

I'm so grateful for our teams our corporate worship team here and what they do in working to just lift our hearts to Jesus they certainly did it for me this morning even though I couldn't sing I was bursting so all that could happen was I burst it out of my eyes instead if it wasn't coming out of my mouth but those words all hail redeemer hail for you have died for me your praise and glory will never fail for all eternity let every throne before him fall come to the cosmic king and worship and serve and love him