

It was a few years back that I ran in to a series of advertisements in Time Magazine for Timex watches. On three separate pages were given the hair-raising stories of three different people. **William Lamm** was scuba diving when he was sucked into an offshore water intake pipe for a nuclear power plant. He traveled 1,650 feet at 50 mph before he was shot into a canal at the power station. **Rodney Fox** was attacked by a 1,200 pound Great White Shark. He fought off the shark by gouging out its eyes, but not before it tore open his entire upper torso, requiring 500 stitches. He still has a scar the shape of the shark's jaws. Finally, here is **Helen Thayer**, age 52. She skied to the magnetic North Pole with her dog. She pulled a 160 pound sled for 27 days and 345 miles, surviving seven polar bear confrontations, three blizzards, near starvation and several days of blindness. I call these people survivors. Their survival stories become striking illustrations of the amazing Timex watch. Like a Timex watch, survivors can take a licking and keep on ticking. As we move into this Christmas season and the New Year to come there are challenges that overwhelm us. They may be **personal** challenges: the collapse of the farm economy, a life and death struggle with cancer; it may be **relational**: your marriage may feel like it could unravel; it may be **political**; the Mid-East Global Threats, the danger of a no-holds bar N. Korean conflict. No matter what we are going through the book of Revelation is going to give you a vision that will help you face the future with faith-fed confidence. Not just a Timex survivor but a biblical overcomer. The book of Revelation will show you how. It gives us the vision of the victor. We are given a picture of An Invincible Person and extended An Unshakable Promise.

I. AN INVINCIBLE PERSON. John tells us in vs. 10, "*On the Lord's Day [i.e., Sunday], I was in the Spirit.*" Exiled on that dungeon like penal colony type Alcatraz on the island of Patmos, the Apostle John was lifted up in the Spirit. Suddenly, a voice summoned him with such arresting power that it sounded like a trumpet [vs. 10]. In vs. 12 we read that John turned around to see who was speaking to him. The person he encounters is the reigning, omnipotent Christ [vs. 13], one like the Son of Man. Try to crawl inside the Apostle John's skin. He was blinded, stunned, seized with total shock before the ascended Christ.

HIS PRIESTLY ROBE AND GOLDEN SASH. The impressive robe and golden sash emblazoned about his chest suggests Christ's status as our great High Priest.

HIS KEYS OF CONQUEST OVER DEATH: At his waist [vs. 18] were the keys of death and Hades. Before this champion, death is swallowed up in victory.

HIS WHITE SHOCK OF HAIR: The hair white like wool [vs. 14] suggests robust and mature wisdom, like Albert Einstein's shock of white hair [cf. Leviticus 19:32; Prov 16:31]. There may be times that we might feel we're struggling. We're in a labyrinth. We don't know what step to take next. Jesus knows the way and will show the way. He has our future all mapped out for us. All we have to do is by faith and prayer tap in to his vast reservoir of wisdom. His hair is white as snow, brilliance beyond belief.

HIS BLAZING EYES: We read further that Jesus' eyes were like a flame of fire [vs. 14]. Jesus' eyes flash to and fro throughout the earth. Here is omniscient scrutiny. Nothing can obstruct His penetrating glance. His X-Ray Vision can invade the deepest recesses of your heart. Before Him our lives are an open book.

HIS FEET OF RED-HOT TRIUMPH. Christ's feet of red-hot glowing bronze stand ready to crush the wily serpent Satan and every empire that opposes His reign.

HIS VOICE OF THUNDER. Jesus' voice, like the roar of rushing waters [vs. 15], seize John with awe, like the lightning crack of thunder. Christ's tongue vs. 16 says is like a mighty Thracian double-edged sword thrust between His lips. Christ's words are not limp. His words conquer. With this sword of justice and might Revelation 19 says, Jesus smites the nations.

HIS BRILLIANT FACE THAT OUTSHINES THE SUN. And the face of the Son of Man? John says it was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. Now Nero had placed in front of his new palace in Rome a Colossus, a gigantic statue of the sun god. Only cocky Nero put on the face of that sun-god his own features. And on the coins dispersed throughout the Roman Empire, Nero represented himself with a radiant crown, the emblem of the sun-god. But John exiled on the isle of Patmos, knew a glory that outshone the sun, a glory far greater than puny impotent Nero, the blinding glory of Jesus Christ.

Think! What does Jesus Christ look like now? I like Christmas crèches as much as anyone. But there is a temptation secularize our Christmas celebrations. We like to pray to sweet little 8lb. 6oz baby Jesus [Will Ferrel in *Talladega Nights*]. Is Jesus a teeny little baby in the cradle people like to coo, cuddle and control each Christmas and then put away with the rest of the Christmas ornaments? Is Jesus an effeminate cross-tortured wimp? Still stapled to the cross? Is Jesus an emaciated halo adorned contemplative? Is Jesus a Godspell clown? Is Jesus a world class Olympic look alike, fit, trim, and handsome? What's the biblical picture that should shape our vision of Jesus?

The Bible shatters our pint-sized pre-resurrection pictures of Jesus. Something happened after Easter, after Jesus ascension and enthronement to change the appearance of Jesus [Luke 9:29; 24:35; Mark 16:12]. He had a different face. He was ablaze with glory. Paul encounters Jesus at mid-day on the road to Damascus. "*I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companion. We all fell to the ground*" [Acts 26:13-14]. John sees the face of Christ, "*like the sun shining in all its brilliance,*" and suddenly John falls over like a dead man [vs. 17]. The blazing eyes, the thunderous voice, the sword thrust through his lips, the sunshine of His face convince me that the Jesus who reigns at the right hand of the Father is no wimp. He's cosmic. He's seismic. There's thunder in His footsteps and lightning in His fists. Jesus is Victor! He's tough. I love this picture of a young child petting a ferocious, life-threatening rhino. It's trust that gives us the courage to get close to the fiercest force in the universe, Jesus Christ and not get scared.

II. AN UNSHAKABLE PROMISE. Jesus is tough. But he's also tender. John was frozen with fear. But Jesus tenderly touches John. He wakes him from his comatose state and says, "*Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive forever and ever. And I hold the keys of death and Hades*" [1:17-18]. If I would sum up the message of the book of Revelation, it would be this: It's **a tract of triumph for troubled times**. Daily the lives of John's "companions in suffering" were in jeopardy. From the time of Nero, Christians were imprisoned, crucified, raped, and shredded by wild animals. Was there any hope when the beast, the Caesar himself dictated who could buy and sell? Was there anything to look forward to when the harlot Rome got intoxicated with the blood of the saints?

This is the message of comfort and hope in Revelation. It's three unshakable phrases in John 16:33. *"In this world, you will have tribulation. But be of good courage. I have overcome the world."* This is the central thrust of the entire book of Revelation. It's written on every page. Jesus is Victor. Jesus reigns. Jesus is Lord! Though the dragon and his beast would thrash about attempting to snuff out seven little churches in Asia Minor, the All-powerful Lord holds the seven stars in the palm of His hand and walks amidst the seven churches that shine in this dark world like seven golden candlesticks. No power, not even Caesar's can snatch God's people out of His hand. Jesus, not Caesar is Lord!

Fix your faith on the massive Colossus, Jesus Christ. It's Jesus who gives us the guts to go the distance, to press on when everyone else is ready to give up. Jesus gives us the courage to take a licking and keep on ticking. *"This is the victory that has overcome the world," John writes, "even our faith"* [1 John 5:4].

Look at it this way: Jesus announces in 1:8 and 22:13 *"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End."* Look at the diagram on the screen. In the first century world letters represented the elemental powers of the universe. So Jesus represents not just the first and last powers, the Alpha and the Omega, the A & Z. He represents all the powers in between. That is, Jesus Christ is the sovereign Lord of all. He is sovereign over the beginning of history as **Creator**, sovereign over the end of history as **Consummator**, but also sovereign over every stitch of time between the beginning and the end as our triumphant **Comforter**. [Dr. Robert Mounce, NICNT, The Book of Revelation, p. 73]. Not only does Jesus Christ light up the end of history. He lights up history's tunnel every step of the way.

Life is a mixed bag. We're stuck between the already and the not yet. We have a checkered stretch of tunnel yet to travel. There will be blood and sweat and tears and scandals in St. Paul, scandals in Washington D.C., scandals in Willmar, Prinsburg & Raymond. Expect terrible plagues, natural catastrophes and bloody battles. This book contains all that. Some people are gloomy pessimists. The glass is half empty. Other people are bright optimists. The glass is half full. Christians are neither. We're triumphant realists. The glass isn't near full. There's plenty that's ugly, evil, unjust, and disgusting about life here and now. We've got much work to do. We must roll up our sleeves and clean up the mess. But Jesus is alive! Jesus is Lord! And Jesus is coming back. The mess will be cleaned up. Christ will make all things new. And our cups will be full and running over.

What scares you to death as we move out into 2017 and beyond? Isn't it good to know that you belong body and soul in life and in death to your faithful Savior, Jesus Christ? There's no one in the universe more powerful than Jesus, and no one who loves you more. When earthquakes [physical or psycho-social] erupt, we feel powerless. Like a relentless Dad, Jesus will stop at nothing to dig through the rubble and rescue you. But more than a human father, Jesus will marshal all the forces of heaven and earth to rescue His children and usher in His Kingdom. He's more than a helpless baby. He's an invincible person--*"[He] has all authority in heaven and on earth."* He makes an unshakable

promise. Don't be afraid: *"I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

There's a command that appears 365 times in the Bible...once for every day of the new year. It's this. Fear not! My friends, Jesus reigns. History is in His hands. He will triumph! Don't give in (succumb) to the fears. With the vision of the Victor burned into soul, you're not only a survivor, you're an over comer. You can take a licking and keep on ticking. Listen we've read the end of the book. And it says, the Lamb wins. And if the Victorious Lamb wins and you belong to Him, you are a winner. Believe it. Receive it. Live it.