

Standalone message: The end or the beginning

Sunday, November 21, 2021

---

- *Taking a break from Acts until January. Starting Next Sunday we will enter the Advent season, and TODAY, in response to multiple requests, we will look at the question “IS THE END NEAR”... but really, the question could be “is the end near... AGAIN?”*

✠ The end is near... again?

- *It is fascinating just how fascinated- obsessed some might say- people are about the end of the world.*
- *The post-apocalyptic movie genre is HUGE. According to IMDB, there have been over 440 movies and documentaries that somehow relate to the destruction of some part of, or all of, the world.*
- *Things are especially bad for New York, which has been destroyed 77 times... in movies.*
- *But this isn't just about movies and fantasy. Thinking the world about to end is a persistent theme of humanity, going back thousands of years.*
- *Wikipedia has a highly referenced article listing 161 examples of people making predictions of the end of the world- and most of these are tied to Christianity in some way. Some of these are crackpots, but many were very influential and respected people and organizations. THIS INCLUDES...*
  - *Multiple Popes*
  - *In the 1300's the black death across Europe was seen by many as sign of end times*
  - *Martin Luther predicted no later than 1600*
  - *John Wesley- founder of Methodist church- 1836*
  - *Chuck Smith- founder of Calvary chapel movement- 'generation of 1948' would be last, 1981 at latest.*
  - *Y2k... LOTS of people... (LaHaye and Jenkins)*
  - *2012... LOTS of people.. end of Mayan long count calendar*
- *Here's the deal: as different in detail as all these predictions have been, they all have one thing in common. THEY WERE ALL WRONG. That should give us cause to be humble.*
- *WHY bringing this up? Because over past two years in particular, volume of sermons, ministries, teachers, internet voices claiming we are currently IN or on the cusp of the end times, has EXPLODED.*
- *Likewise, many sincere believers- including people within broader Trinity family- are looking around at the world, comparing what they see with whatever their understanding of the end times may be, and asking.. “IS THIS IT? Are we there? And for many, connected to question is the presence of great FEAR.*
- *BECAUSE, IF these are the end times, then the conviction is that things are about to get really bad.*

✠ Two big disclaimers

- *If you ask the internet 'are we living in the end times', you will find a bottomless well of material- much of it highly questionable- that will demonstrate, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that we are, and HERE is all the evidence, with more coming every day..*
- *I'm not going to try and refute that. It would take the rest of my ministry career.*
- *If you are convinced that the End Times- based upon whatever source you have- are upon us, I'm probably not going to change your mind.*
- *Second, if you have studied Biblical prophecy and you DO have your strongly held view, then you're probably going to object to something I say. The details and disagreements*

regarding Biblical prophecy are as numerous as the verses themselves, and I'm going to skip something here you think is important. Otherwise this would be a six month series, not a 35 minute sermon.

- **WHAT I want to do is humbly suggest the question 'are these the end times' is NOT most important question. This concept is important- it is throughout scripture- but it is not the MOST important thing.**
- **Likewise, as disciples of Jesus, if our concept of the end times is causing us to live in fear, then our perspective is NOT biblical.**
- **SO, we're going to look at a few key principles around this topic, and the FIRST is we need to have...**

#### † A humble approach to Biblical prophecy

A person who looks around at the condition of our world and asks "Are we living in the end times" is operating within a specific view of Biblical prophecy, broadly known as **Premillennialism.**

- **This is based off of short passage in Revelation 20 that describes a 1000 year reign of Christ here on planet earth.**

**Revelation 20:6** *Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.*

- **The premil view is that Christ will return PRIOR to this time, he will defeat Satan, and usher in the 1000 Kingdom of God where he will reign with believers here on earth, and at end of 1000 years there will be brief final battle between good and evil, followed by the final judgment, and then all of eternity.**
- **In this concept, what we think of as the 'last days' is the short period of events leading up to the second coming of Christ. These key events are the rapture, the tribulation, the great tribulation, and the 'day of the Lord', which is Christ's actual second coming.**
- **NOW- GREAT debate over the timing of the rapture in relationship to the seven years of tribulation.**
- **PRE, right before, MID, between trib and great trib, and POST, at the end, concurrent with Christ's return.**
- **Premil is dominant approach to Biblical prophecy in the Evangelical world, and view behind books like the 'Left Behind' series, 'The Harbinger' and the overwhelming majority of Christian 'end times' content you will find on the internet.**
- **NOW THAT SAID....**

#### † A few key attributes of premillennialism

- **A PESSIMISTIC view of the future**
- **View that leading up to the time of tribulation, things in the world will get increasingly WORSE. Plenty of Biblical evidence for this, as we will see in a minute**
- **Key thing- while faith in Christ has the power to bring transformation to individual PEOPLE, the Premill view does not believe it is God's plan for the gospel to bring transformation to the WORLD. This won't happen until Christ physically returns, 1K kingdom.**
- **A (mostly) LITERAL interpretation of Biblical prophecy**
- **View that the characters and events seen in prophetic scripture describe literal people and events, OR are metaphors describing literal people and events. Therefore, we can discern**

*if we are in the 'season' of the end times by looking at the events and nature of the world around us. KEY- most of these 'signs'- but not all- are negative in nature.*

– *One more thing....*

- Many proponents of premillennialism will state their view is the obvious, clear, and ONLY possible understanding of Biblical prophecy.

– *Even though there is GREAT disagreement over MANY scriptural issues by premill teachers.*

– *BUT HERE'S THE THING- WHY we must approach this scripture with HUMILITY. There are many SINCERE biblical scholars who LOVE scripture and LOVE THE LORD, who DO NOT agree with the premill view of biblical prophecy... who look at these same scriptures and reach a different perspective.*

† A possible other scenario

– *The two other major frameworks of interpreting Biblical prophecy are Amill, and POSTmill. These are similar but not the same, and primary contrast to PREmil is that the millennium- be it a literal 1000 years or just a metaphor- is happening NOW, Christ will return at the end of this time, not the beginning.*

– *GREATLY oversimplifying this, but the bottom line is that these views DO BELIEVE it IS God's plan for the Gospel to bring transformation to the world, and God's call for the church is to bring about this transformation of society NOW, so God's kingdom increasingly becomes on EARTH as it is in heaven.*

– *SO, while not denying the reality of tribulation and the brokenness of humanity, this outlook is fundamentally OPTIMISTIC about future.*

– *Where do I stand? I'm not dogmatic, but at least right now I would say the premil view best and most obviously fits with scripture. That said, when I look at the world around me, I really want to have a POSTmil outlook. I want to be an optimist, and I do believe the Gospel has the power to transform this world.*

– *Whether or not it will is up to God, but a hard premil view can temp us to give up on this world, and I don't want to do that. It would be a violation of both the great commission AND G commandment to do so.*

† NEXT... The humble lens of history

– *This is REALITY THAT MANY of the biblical signs of the last days (premil)- NOT ALL, but many, have been present for virtually all of human history.*

**2 Timothy 3:1-5** *There will be terrible times in the last days. <sup>2</sup> People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, <sup>3</sup> without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, <sup>4</sup> treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God*

– *That isn't a prediction of what develop leading up to Christ's return- that is a description of the HUMAN CONDITION. This is a reason from very first generation of church, many believers have looked around them and said, 'these must be the end times.'*

– *NOW, that said, there ARE signs, or markers, described in scripture you could argue have NOT happened, yet, or have just recently happened.*

– *As a result, inexhaustible supply of people, organizations, and events in our present or recent past that many seek to correlate to Biblical prophecy.*

- **The MAJORITY of these relate to the nation of Israel, but they range from the UN, to the EU, to modern technology, to occurrence of total lunar eclipse, or ‘blood moons.’**
- **PRIME example is establishment of the new state of Israel in 1948 is- although many honest people debate that point.**
- **But perhaps the clearest stated event to precede the ‘end’ is found in Matthew 24, when Jesus said...**

**Matthew 24:14** *And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*

- **Growing up heard this a lot- urgency to share Gospel with all nations, because once task was finished this would usher in end times, and the sooner the better!**
- **You may have heard the phrase that we may “hasten his coming.” This thought comes from 2 Peter 3.**

**2 Peter 3:10** *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare. <sup>11</sup> Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives <sup>12</sup> as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. <sup>13</sup> But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.*

- **We read this and think “we can speed up Christ’s return by how we live and what we do.” But here’s the thing about this chapter. This was written in the first century, and it was relevant to the original audience. SO, the church has been seeking to hasten the return of Christ for the last 2000 years.**
- **A little earlier in this chapter Peter says this:**

**Peter 3:8-9** *But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.*

- **In other words, Peter seems to be saying... “Don’t get ahead of yourself wanting this day to happen. God is patient, he is in control, and his desire is for everyone to come to know him.**
- **THIS gets to the main encouragement I want to give. WHAT IS OUR MOTIVATION for living holy and Godly lives? WHAT is our motivation for taking the Gospel to all nations, and why has God given us this calling?**

#### ✠ The calling of the Gospel

- **From one perspective, we are to bring gospel to everyone, with urgency, so we will hasten Christ’s return, and then be done with this evil mess already.**
- **Get this done so us believers can be raptured out of here and the rest of humanity face the consequences of its evil, Christ will return in judgment, and then we move into eternity free of the burden of this world.**
- **CHURCH! The biblical problems with that statement are MANY- but I’ve heard multiple messages over my life that implicitly or explicitly said this- and this is not an uncommon attitude with conservative Christianity today.**
- **ONE THOUGHT- if we DIDN’T see any signs of Christ second coming in the world around us, would we then be LESS urgent, or LESS motivated to share the Gospel? We shouldn’t be, but why?**

- **THIS IS the alternative! We are bearers of the GOOD NEWS of Jesus Christ because our world is full of broken, lost, and hurting people NOW. And these people- ALL PEOPLE- are precious creations of God, eternal beings who- LIKE THIS WORLD IN WHICH WE LIVE- MATTER TO THEIR CREATOR.**
- **You see, whether Christ returns tomorrow or in another 2000 years, we are Ambassadors to the LIFE GIVING message that ALL PEOPLE can be reconciled to God- that IN CHRIST they may be NEW CREATIONS, where old has gone, and the NEW- NEW ETERNAL LIFE IN CHRIST- has come! PRESENT TENSE.**
- **That's 2 Corinthians 5, and according to different ways Holy Spirit has shaped us and equipped us, THIS is hope we are called to bring into our world!**

– **REAL QUICK, consider two passages...**

**Ephesians 5:15-16** *Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise,<sup>16</sup> making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.*

- **Paul is writing to the first century church here, and he says the days ARE evil. The days have ALWAYS been evil- this is nothing new, and in fact, our days today, in some ways, are less evil than they were in Paul's time. ANOTHER passage...**

**Colossians 4:5-6** *Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.<sup>6</sup> Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*

- **In both of these passages, Paul urges the church to MAKE THE MOST of every opportunity. This is a call to an urgency of the Gospel, NOT just because we think the end may come, but because PEOPLE are in bondage, and Christ came to set the prisoners free.**
- **YOU SEE... TO ALL Nations, to ALL PEOPLE, THE HOPE OF JESUS stands as an invitation into REPENTANCE, GRACE, MERCY, HEALING, ACCEPTANCE, WHOLENESS, and LOVE.**
- **AND UNTIL GOD punches the ticket and CHRIST DOES RETURN, we do NOT have the option available to us to pull a Jonah, give up on this world, and just pray for God to bring it all to an end.**
- **NOW, full circle. But what about when a sincere believer looks at state of our world, and are filled with fear? Again, humbly, we need to look to God's word, and the presence of Christ that we SEE in God's Word, as our source.**
- **ANSWER TO FEAR is not understanding whether or not these are the last days. The answer to fear is CHRIST. TRUST in God. LISTEN AS WE READ**

✠ **The answer to fear**

- **Close with this. THERE WILL come a time, in God's sovereignty, when this age- the old order of things- will pass away. We see this in Revelation 21**

**Revelation 21:1-5** *Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.<sup>2</sup> I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.<sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.<sup>4</sup> 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."<sup>5</sup> He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!"*

- **Think about that. God says, I AM...**

✠ **Making all things new!**

- **CHURCH- God's work of making all things new won't start with the second coming of Christ. IT STARTED 2000 years ago with the RESURRECTION of Christ.**
- **God's work of New Creation began the day Christ stepped out of the tomb, having conquered sin and death... and it will continue until the Day Christ returns.**
- **AND UNTIL THAT DAY, be it tomorrow or in another 2000 years, we DO have the promise of Christ's return- but even more, we have the reality of Christ's PRESENCE, right now, in the midst of this life as it really is. AND, right now, Christ is carrying out His work of NEW CREATION THROUGH US, His church.**

**2 Corinthians 5:16** *So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: <sup>19</sup> that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us*