

Don't Get Caught Up in Last Days Hysteria

Everywhere I go today I meet Christians who are wringing their hands and fretting about how dark the world has become. Some are conspiracy theorists who say the world's economy is controlled by dark forces. Others are convinced that recent astronomical phenomena signal the end of the world, and they are stocking their garages with food to prepare for Armageddon. If I suggest that Jesus might want to pour out the Holy Spirit in a fresh way on this generation, some people get angry. They want God to hurry up and judge America!

Why so much pessimism? It's partly because many people have exchanged their passion for God for a misguided fascination with doomsday eschatology. They latch onto Bible prophecy "experts" who make a living speculating about things nobody knows for sure. And this sky-is-falling mindset never produces good fruit. Here are four reasons we should avoid an unhealthy overemphasis on the end times:

1. It's distracting. Nowhere does the Bible give us permission to speculate about when Jesus will return or when the world will end. He gave us one major focus: To reach everybody with the gospel. Evangelism should be our obsession. The healthiest churches I know are those that are winning the lost, discipling new converts and investing their people and money in reaching nations.

Churches that become consumed with eschatology drift into weirdness, and they eventually lose sight of the Great Commission. Jesus' last words to His followers were clear: "You shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Yet when He ascended into heaven, the angels rebuked the disciples because they were staring into the clouds. They

said: “Why do you stand looking into the sky?” (Acts 1:11). In essence they were saying: “Don’t sit around and wait for Jesus to return. Get busy doing what He told you to do.”

2. It’s depressing. I don’t go to church to hear one person’s opinions about Islamic terrorists, why weather patterns are changing, or how European bankers plan to manipulate the world economy. Why focus on the negative? Do we believe in the lordship of Christ, or not? I have read the book of Revelation, and it ends with Jesus on the throne! He is the victor—no matter what men conspire to do or how hard they fight against His authority.

Churches that only talk about blood moons, wars in the Middle East, the Antichrist or the date for America’s demise leave no room for the joy of the Lord or the hope of His ultimate triumph. My Bible says we have a future and a hope. We have the promise that, as the gospel is preached, “all the earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord” (Num. 14:21). Why should we be pessimistic about the future when we know Christ will overcome all His enemies? People who focus on doomsday theology are killjoys who derive morbid pleasure from spreading fear and anxiety. A gospel without hope is not the gospel!

3. It’s deceptive. A group known as the Adventists predicted that Jesus would return to earth in 1874. When this didn’t happen, the group’s leaders covered their error by suggesting that Jesus appeared “invisibly” on that date. A theology developed around these ideas that is still accepted by Seventh-day Adventists. In the 1970s, when Americans were so worried about gas shortages and war in Israel, author Hal Lindsey sold millions of copies of his book *The Late, Great Planet Earth*—and he predicted the world would end in a few years. Many other Christians have made similar predictions—such as the Y2K scare in 1999 or Harold Camping’s infamous warning that the world would end on May 21, 2011.

We have no business setting dates for the end of the world. God alone sets His timetable.

Jesus said of His return: "Concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (Matt. 24:36). If anyone claims to know when the world will end, you can be sure he is a false prophet. What we should be telling people is that Jesus died for them, and that they have been given a chance to receive His forgiveness while they are on this side of eternity.

4. It's divisive. Christians have different views of the end times. Some are post-millennialists while others emphasize the Rapture. This is not something we should be arguing about because no one has the full revelation of the future. I tell people I am a "pan-millennialist." I believe it will all "pan out" in the end! I am not as concerned about how the last days will unfold as I am about how many people I can take to heaven with me. We should all be united in our desire to share Christ with others.

I know Jesus will return one day, and it gives me great comfort to know that all heaven will say of Him: "The kingdoms of the world have become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). Let's live our lives as if He were coming back today, but let's work as if He weren't coming for 100 years. Let's stop hoping for judgment and instead pray for mercy for our wayward country. Let's stop being so negative and instead show people the supernatural joy that only Jesus gives.

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