

Don't Freak Out

If you're reading this article after May 21, 2011, I can say authoritatively that radio Bible teacher Harold Camping got it wrong. The world didn't end as he predicted. (I hope you filed your income tax return by April 15!)

Camping caused a stir earlier in the year when he announced that Jesus would return and rapture His church on said date in May—based on his calculations of lunar cycles and the Hebrew calendar. I don't know if his guess had anything to do with the Japan earthquake, the supermoon of March 19, the bombing of Libya or the fact that we are now paying \$ a gallon for gas.

I do know that Camping has joined a growing group of people who insist on setting dates for the Lord's return—even though the Bible says clearly that this kind of prophetic meddling is off-limits.

Jesus knew some know-it-alls would claim to have the inside scoop on eschatology. That's why He said *nobody but God* can accurately predict the end of the world. "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone," Jesus said in Matthew 24:36 (NASB).

The real problem is not Harold Camping. It's the gullible people who fall for every doomsday prophecy that comes along. Twenty-three years ago millions of Christians bought the late Edgar Whisenant's book *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988*—and made us all look silly. We'd do better reading the Bible, which gives clear guidelines on how we should view the future:

1. Jesus didn't call us to fear. Many Christians have a Chicken Little mentality. Like the faithless spies who were frightened by Canaan's giants, Christian pessimists view the world with a glass-half-empty perspective. They focus on what

the devil is doing rather than on how God is working by His Spirit.

Every time there's an earthquake, a freak storm, a blip in the financial markets or a burp in Israel, it always means one thing: "THE END IS NEAR!" How sad that Christians, of all people, can be so negative when we have the best news on the planet.

I'm not saying wicked people won't get worse or that banks won't fail at times or that we should adopt a Pollyanna worldview that ignores the threat of evil. But please read the last chapter in the Bible. The devil isn't taking over. We win!

2. The future is about world evangelism. Before Jesus ascended, the disciples asked Him if it was the time when He'd restore the kingdom. Jesus answered: "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority" (Acts 1:7, NASB). He then refocused their attention on the priority of evangelism and sent them on a mission to the ends of the earth.

Jesus told us what is important. He didn't call us to set dates, predict Armageddon or obsess over conspiracy theories. There is one thing He wants us to be obsessed with: sharing our faith so others can have eternal life.

Christians in China understand this. They endure severe religious persecution, yet they are reaching 25,000 people for Jesus every day. Christians in Muslim nations meet secretly, yet their churches are growing exponentially. It's tragic that here in the United States, where life is comparably comfortable, believers get sidetracked and are often less passionate about what really matters to God.

3. Our future is secure. It's true that the earth is shaking today. (The March 11 quake that rocked Japan was one of the most powerful since seismic record-keeping began.) National

debt is rising and terrorist groups are busy. Scary headlines make us all jittery.

But Christians shouldn't freak out every time a gloomy cloud appears. Despite disasters, radiation leaks, financial crashes, wars or rumors of wars, the throne of Jesus Christ is secure. I don't need to know what day Jesus is coming back. My prayer is that I can take as many people as possible to heaven with me when He splits the sky.

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