

Nick Hall: Is COVID-19 Part of Prophesied End Times?

Is this the end?

Many people are asking that question these days.

The answer?

I don't know.

Humans are fascinated by the idea of the end times. That's why movies like *Independence Day*, *Armageddon* and the *Left Behind* series are so popular. Because we are painfully aware of our own mortality, we want to know how it's all going to end.

As the novel coronavirus sweeps across the world, many have wondered whether this disease is a sign of the end times—or whether it is the end itself.

I want to challenge us to respond appropriately during a time of crisis and fear. The Bible has a lot to say about the end times, so let's look to Scripture instead of movies for our answer.

The apostle Matthew writes in his Gospel:

“As he [Jesus] sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, ‘Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?’ And Jesus answered them, ‘See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains'” (Matt. 24:3-8,

ESV).

Wars, famines, plagues and natural disasters are signs for us to get ready. Every generation has looked at these tragedies in their own day and said, "This could be the end."

Jesus calls these events "birth pains." When women have babies, the first contractions warn them that the baby is coming. The pain is a sign of what is to come.

We don't know if the COVID-19 pandemic is a marker of the end or just a warning meant to get our hearts ready for Jesus' return. We should prepare our hearts, but we shouldn't be afraid.

Jesus tells us not to be alarmed. In fact, before he went to the cross, Jesus said to his disciples, "'I have told you these things so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But be of good cheer. I have overcome the world'" (John 16:33, MEV). The world doesn't need more fearful people; it needs people with perspective, peace and hope.

Here are three things we need to remember as we navigate these uncertain days:

1. Choose faith over fear.

The author of Hebrews gives us a definition of faith in Chapter 11, verse 1 (ESV): "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Our faith in Jesus is more than wishful thinking. It is the grounded belief that Jesus is alive and in control. It is the steady confidence that Jesus will one day right every wrong and make all things new. Every day, we get to choose whether we're going to trust our fear or be still and trust in God (Ps. 46:10).

2. Consider changes that this time should stir in you.

Choosing fear, anxiety and numbness only leads to more of the same. Use your time at home to reevaluate who and what you're living for. Ask yourself: What needs to change in my life? Am I living for things that matter? How can I replace fear, anxiety and numbness with trust in God?

3. Consider your relationships and talk about what matters most.

We don't fill hard times with discussions about movies, music and sports—we talk about the hard things. Quarantining and social distancing have allowed some uncomfortable and inconvenient things to surface in our lives. We realize that we are broken and have broken relationships that need to be mended. Now, as never before, we have been given the time to get right with others and to get right with Jesus.

Think about it: If we are followers of Jesus, the absolute worst thing this virus can do to us is to take us home to be with Him in heaven, where there is no more death, sickness, pain or crying. We can make the most of the time we have been given, because not everyone has that assurance. And in this time of crisis, we need to offer others peace, not panic.

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