

The Big Problem with the Any-Minute Rapture

Like many of you, I long for the Lord's appearing, and my greatest dream is that He will return in my lifetime. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! But I have a real problem with setting dates for His return. And I have a real problem with the mindset that He could return at any moment. Let me explain why.

To be clear, none of us know when we will die, and in many cases, our deaths will be sudden and unexpected. So, at all times, we should live in readiness to meet the Lord. That goes without saying.

But when it comes to predicting the day (or year) of the Lord's return, the first problem is that, to date, every single prediction, without exception, has been wrong. The failure rate is 100%. Why should anyone believe the next prediction when all previous predictions have been wrong? Based on what new, definitive data? (For the record, I've seen some of the "data," and I don't buy it for a second.)

The second problem with date-setting actually explains why every previous prediction has been wrong. Simply stated, God never intended us to set dates, and He has not given us sufficient data in His Word for determining the year, let alone the day or hour of the Second Coming.

Without question, we *should* know the times and seasons of His return as it draws near (according to 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, we *will* know). Paul plainly tells us that the final rebellion must come first and that the man of the sin (aka the Antichrist) must be revealed. Only *after that* will we be gathered together to meet the Lord in the air and escort Him to earth. (Please take a moment to read 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18 followed by 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8, and note the use of

the same Greek word *parousia*, “coming” or “arrival,” in 1 Thessalonians 4:15 and 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 8, all describing the same event, the Second Coming.)

Jesus also said this: “There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near,” (Luke 21:25–28).

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You can be sure of this: when all these things are unfolding in front of our eyes, we will not have to speculate and wonder. God will make Himself perfectly clear to His children. We won’t have to pull out our secret Bible decoder ring. The signs will be as clear as the rising sun, at least for all those who have eyes to see.

Until then, our focus should be on bearing fruit for the Lord in the here and now, not on getting out of here as quickly as possible. As Jesus prayed for His apostles, “My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one” (John 17:15).

The Father knows how to protect us from the evil one in this world, and when His wrath is poured out on sinners and rebels, He will give us a way of escape and provide a refuge for us (see Isaiah 26:20-21, which ties in with Luke 21:36).

Ultimately, though, there’s another big problem with the idea that, at any time in history, Jesus can burst on the scene and take us out of there.

Is there no story line? Is there no larger plan? Is there no mission to fulfill? If Jesus came 1,000 years ago (and many predicted He would) or 30 or 40 years ago (as others predicted He would), wouldn't that have left so many things still undone?

There are still several *billion* people who have never once heard the name of Jesus (or, if they heard the name, have no idea what it means or to whom it refers). Does God not care about them? Does the church suddenly disappear without them even having the opportunity to hear the good news? Is that how the Lord ends this part of the story? Certainly not.

It's like listening to an orchestral piece consisting of three main movements, only to have it stop suddenly partway through. What was that? Or it's like reading a spellbinding novel, only to have it end just as the plot is being developed, or watching a master painter at his craft, only to leave the picture half-finished. What happened?

Surely that is not in keeping with the character of God or the way He has acted in history. Surely, the idea that, suddenly, without any warning or sign, we are suddenly zapped out of here—in the middle of the symphony, so to say—makes no biblical sense at all.

And what about the state of the church? Will the prayer of Jesus for our unity and our glorification in Him go unanswered (see John 17)? Will we suddenly disappear from the earth in the midst of scandals, divisions and defeats? And, in a moment of time, will we be transformed from a largely carnal, powerless and worldly church into “a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless”? (See Ephesians 5:27, where Paul says that Jesus will present a church like this to Himself.)

Really now, have we seen the best that God can do through us and to us? Is *this* the climax of the story, the glorious

ending that the Master planned out from eternity past?

Everything in me, as His child, pushes back against this idea. Surely, we will see a greater demonstration of His power on the earth before the end comes. Surely, we will see a greater harvest of lost souls. Surely, we will become more unified and loving in Him. Surely, Jesus will receive more glory through us, on this earth, before He returns.

To be sure, the Lord could accomplish 100 years of work in one month. That is who He is, and He said through the prophet Isaiah that He would hasten things in their proper time (see Isaiah 60:22). So I am not one to say, "The Lord's coming will be delayed for many centuries." May He come quickly!

✖ I am simply saying that, at the moment: 1) we are not yet at the finish line; 2) our concentration should be on doing the Lord's work today, even with a multi-generational mentality, rather than on us getting out of here; and 3) there is beautiful story the Father is writing, and it still has some chapters to go, some of which we will get to write, with His help. The dreams and visions He has put in our hearts will come to pass!

On with it, then, until He comes. We have lots of work to do for Him *today*. That's where our focus should lie, not on setting dates for His return *tomorrow*.

Michael Brown's book *Why So Many Christians Have Left the Faith* will show you how to respond to difficult questions biblically and stay rooted in your faith even when others seem to be abandoning theirs. {eoa}

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