

Instead of Spreading Last-Days Fever, Let's Share Jesus

As if the COVID-19 pandemic weren't enough to spark fears of the end of the world, Russia's invasion of Ukraine poured gasoline on this fire. Everywhere I go Christians ask me if we are on the verge of World War III. And most of them don't like my answer: *I don't know. But I'm not worried. I'm keeping my eyes on Jesus no matter what happens!*

Ever since I began seriously following Jesus in the 1970s, Christians have been spreading last-days fever. They love to speculate on who the Antichrist is, when the rapture will happen and what our government is doing secretly to stamp us all with the mark of the beast. During the pandemic, people spread rumors that the COVID-19 vaccine is a satanic plot; now Vladimir Putin's war is supposedly the precursor to Armageddon.

If I suggest that Jesus wants to pour out the Holy Spirit in a fresh way in the midst of these challenging times, 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. This sky-is-falling mindset never produces good fruit. Here are four reasons we should avoid an unhealthy overemphasis on the end times:

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. NASB 1995). When He ascended to heaven, the angels rebuked the disciples because they were staring into the clouds. They said: "Why do you stand looking into the sky?" (Acts 1:11b). In essence they were saying: "Don't sit around and wait for Jesus to return. Get busy doing what He told you to do!"

It's depressing. I don't go to church to hear one person's opinions about Islamic terrorists or how Bill Gates or George Soros plan to kill us all. 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. 14:21b).

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!

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.

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.

Let's live our lives as if Jesus 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. {eo}

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