

Are we REALLY living in the End Times? – Part II.

Welcome to the second Sunday in our sermon series entitled, “Are We Really Living in the End Times?”

Over the next few weeks we will be looking at some of the major viewpoints of the prophetic scriptures that **many** say tell us about the end of the world.

Some people believe that we shouldn't even try to understand the prophetic scriptures because we weren't meant to understand them. Other people believe that the scriptures have all been fulfilled and there won't be an “End Times”. Others believe that right now, we are living in times that the Bible predicted as the End Times.

The earthquakes, floods, famine, wars - they have all been predicted in the Bible and we are living, right now, at the very end of times. And others believe in different parts of all of these viewpoints.

This sermon series is not meant to scare anyone or for me to force my thoughts or opinions on you. But it is meant to challenge your current thoughts and beliefs about the end times, educate you about prophetic scripture, and to introduce you to viewpoints people have.

January 12, 2012. That's the date someone told me the world will end. But let's keep it just between us.

Who am I to say that isn't the day?

But you know, I have found over 70 different date predictions for the end of the world that haven't come to pass.

In the late 19th Century in America, there was a wave of enthusiasm for prophecies predicting the actual date for Christ's Second Coming.

People absolutely believed that they were living in the end times.

One person who was very outspoken about the end of the world was an Adventist leader named William Miller.

Miller first predicted that Christ would return, which would facilitate the end of the world, on 21st March 1842, but then revised the date to April 3, 1843. Over 3,500 of his followers jammed the Boston Advent Temple, only to be disappointed.

You might have thought that the movement would have died. I mean, the Bible does say that if someone makes prophecies in God's name and they don't come to fruition, then they aren't prophets of God. But it didn't die out. Rather, this movement continued to grow.

So Miller decided to recalculate his date for the Second Coming and soon publicized a new date - April 18, 1844.

Well, if you were unsure, the world didn't end on that date either. But, undeterred by these failures, Miller came up with a fourth date - 22nd October 1844.

For some reason this date really took hold. The date was publicized in the Adventist publication "True Midnight Cry." And, surprisingly, this fourth prediction of the End Times rallied his followers!

They began to spread the news of the new date of the second coming with an enthusiasm that had not been seen before. Churches which did not accept this message were denounced as agents of “Babylon” and called churches of the devil.

And - despite opposition from established, mainline religious groups -, thousands of people – including many clergy – began to defect to Miller’s group. As doomsday approached, they began to prepare.

One account notes that “fields were left un-harvested, shops were closed, people quit their jobs, paid their debts, and freely gave away their possessions with no thought of needing them ever again.”

Huge press runs of Adventist publications like “The Midnight Cry” warned the public that “The Time Is Short”. “Prepare to Meet Thy God!” and “The Lord is Coming!”

William Miller himself began peddling white “ascension robes” to the faithful, many of whom waited for the miraculous event --- in freshly dug graves.

{Walk away and restate}

But as we all know, the Second Coming did not occur on 22nd October 1844.

Again, this is just one example. For centuries people have been waiting for Jesus to come back and usher in a new age. For those of you who have read the letters from the Apostle Paul, you know that he even expected Jesus to return in his lifetime. And that was 2,000 years ago.

From the Apostle Paul to the present day, we have been looking for the return of Jesus.

Maybe he isn't coming back the way many have thought he would or maybe he already came back and we missed him.

Maybe he came back as a man, ended up in New York, stating he was Jesus Christ, and we locked him in a padded room.

One of the popular beliefs about the End Days believes that Jesus isn't coming back again. That all of the prophecies have already been fulfilled within the first century AD and there won't be an End Days as we think of it.

Many with this view, called Preterism, believe that there isn't a certain moment where the world will end, but rather the end times prophecies refer to the end of the Old Testament ways of doing things, especially the end of animal sacrifices for forgiveness of sins.

For the most part, Preterists believe that the Bible isn't predicting the physical end to the world, but a spiritual end to the world of the Jews as was known to them under the old laws.

Now there are different beliefs within Preterism, one is called Partial Preterism. Those that have a partial preterist view believe that most of the prophecies have already been fulfilled, but there will still be a day when Jesus returns, and that will be our Judgment Day.

But from the viewpoint of Full Preterists, Judgment Day already came in 70 AD.

They believe that it wasn't a judgment day for those all around the world, but only for the Jews. That God allowed the Roman Empire to destroy their temple. And this was because they turned their back on Jesus.

They say that the Bible supports their opinion 100%. That Jesus' own words said that he would be coming during their lifetimes.

Preterists say, as we discussed last week, some of the symbolism in the Book of Revelation was about people and events happening during the time it was written.

They believe the great beast mentioned in Revelation isn't some charismatic antichrist, but was actually code for the Roman Emperor, Nero Caesar. And the little beast mentioned in Revelation was the Roman General Titus that was responsible for the temple being destroyed.

Preterists use verses like the following from the Gospels to support their position:

- Matt. 10:23 - "Truly I say to you, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes."
- Matt. 16:27,28 - "Truly I say to you, there are some who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."
- Matt. 24:34 - "Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place."
- Matt. 26:24 - "You [the high priest] will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven."

They also use verses from other books of the New Testament :

- Rom. 13:11-12 - "You know what hour it is, how it is full time now for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand."
- 1 Cor. 7:29-31 - "Brethren, the appointed time has grown very short; from now on, let those who have wives live as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no goods, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the form of this world is passing away."

- 1 Cor. 10:11 - "On [us] the ends of the ages have come."
- Phil. 4:5 - "The Lord is at hand."
- James 5:8-9 - "The coming of the Lord is at hand. ... Behold, the Judge is standing at the door."
- 1 Peter. 4:7 - "The end of all things is at hand."
- 1 John. 2:18 - "It is the last hour ... we know that it is the last hour."

These are all very compelling. Preterists stand by these and say, "This supports our argument that these things have already come to pass."

Throughout all of the symbolism in the Book of Revelation, Preterists can point to specific things that happened in the very early church that fulfilled all of the prophecies.

But the opposite viewpoint is held by people called Futurists. And I know that several in this room are Futurists.

Futurists believe that there is still a wonderful message of hope for the followers of Jesus.

They believe that there will someday be a final battle between Good and Evil, like mentioned in the scriptures I read for us. And when that final battle happens, there will be a completely new world filled with peace and love. They say that the scriptures can't be already fulfilled because there isn't a new earth and a new heaven. We have never lived in a time of peace in this world.

But, we'll discuss the Futurists view in a couple of weeks.

So I want to leave you with this:

If the Futurists are right and there is something wonderful waiting for all of humanity – peace with God, that would be a wonderful thing to look forward to. Sure we have God in our lives now, but from their standpoint, let's focus on the future and look forward to having an even closer relationship with God.

But if the Preterists are right, and there won't be some future new age, do we lose hope for the future? Or can we already be happy and celebrate that we do have God in our lives right now – that we should fully embrace Him now, today, and not sit around and wait for some future event?

So no matter which viewpoint you take, I think it is best to embrace God today and start living in the peace and love he has to offer us now. If there is an even better future for the world, fantastic. If not, at least we didn't miss the relationship we can have now with God.

And that is one of the beauties of the mystery of Holy Communion. It is an opportunity for us to share in something we know for a fact Jesus talked about and even showed us.

It is a way for us to come together as the brothers and sisters in Christ, called the Body of Christ. No matter if we believe in the End Times or not, the important thing is that we show the type of love towards each other that God shows for us.

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