

## **Are These the Endtimes?**

There was a song that was popular when I was a kid called “life gets teejus, don’t it? It went something like this: “the sun comes up and the sun goes down; the hands on the clock go round and round; I just get up and it’s time to lie down: life gets teejus, don’t it?” I expect we all can relate to that song about now. As we’re shut up in our houses every day, the sun comes up, the sun goes down, the hands on the clock go round and round... We can’t go out to eat and we’re sick of television. There aren’t any ball games to watch and it’s gotten to the point where it would even be a pleasure to watch the tribe lose. We take all the precautions we can but fear still niggles at us that the virus might find a way into our homes. Life gets teejus.

We wonder how this could happen here. We have access to the best healthcare in the world and we’re still under siege. It doesn’t seem fair! I mean, we’re the good guys, right? So what’s going on? Some people are starting to wonder if it’s the end of the world. Really. Some members of our congregation have asked me if I think these are the endtimes and Jesus is about to return. So I thought I would try to answer their questions and put this whole affair into its proper perspective.

First of all, are these the endtimes? Jesus’ disciples asked him that question almost 2000 years ago. “Teacher,” they asked, “when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?” “He replied, ‘watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am he,’ and ‘the time is near.’ do not follow them. When you hear of wars and revolutions, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away...nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and so, plagues in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.” So wars and revolutions and false prophets and earthquakes and famines and plagues are going to be signs of the endtimes. The key thing in what Jesus said is this: “these things must happen first, but the end will not come right away.” So we have to distinguish between “the endtimes” and “the end.” The endtimes, Jesus said, are the times during which all these things will take place. The endtimes come first and the end will come later. Well, all these things have been taking place for quite a while, so we must be living in the endtimes—right? Right. Ever since Jesus walked the earth we have been living in the endtimes. The endtimes began when Jesus said that the kingdom of God was at hand. Some of the signs were given when nature went into convulsions after he died on the cross. The sky turned black at noon, there was an earthquake, rocks split, tombs burst open and the dead came to life. And earthquakes, famines, plagues, wars and revolutions are going to continue until the end comes.

And what will happen at the end? Jesus says, "The sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky and the heavenly bodies will be shaken. At that time the sign of the son of man will appear in the sky and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the son of man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other."

When Jesus returns to judge the earth, the sign of his coming will be unmistakable. It will be a day of rejoicing for all those who have believed in him, but a day of unspeakable terror for those who have rejected him. So the endtimes are here, but the end is not. And God alone knows when that will be. All Jesus told his disciples was that it would come when the gospel has been preached to all nations, so if you want to keep it from coming, keep sharing the gospel!

The question is: what do we do in the meantime? One of the best places we can go to find an answer to that question is the *Book of Psalms*. The Psalter is a wonderful instruction manual for living our lives during the endtimes—between Jesus' ascension into heaven and his return in glory. Our Psalm for today, *Psalm 33* is a perfect example. In its first words, it describes what the life of a believer should be—and can be: "Sing joyfully to the Lord you righteous; it is fitting for the upright to praise him. Praise the Lord with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre. Sing to him a new song; play skillfully and shout for joy!" In other words, **praise the Lord!!!** This is as good advice as you'll ever get: spend your days praising God in every way you can think of. After prayer, praise may be the most important thing we can do in our relationship with God. That is why the word, "praise," occurs 321 times in 150 psalms—a little over two times per Psalm. There's a reason for this: it is good to praise the Lord! Not because the Lord needs it but because you do. The more you praise the Lord the more the Lord will fill your heart with praise, and a heart filled with praise is a heart filled with joy. This should not be too difficult for you to do because no matter what your circumstances are, you have a lot to thank and praise God for—beginning with your life itself. The Psalmist writes: "for the word of the Lord is right and true; he is faithful in all he does. The Lord loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of his unfailing love." Our problem is that we're so used to enjoying God's bounty and his blessings that we take them for granted. The first time I saw Niagara Falls, I was stunned by the sheer volume of water plunging down into the river below. I've often wondered what would it have been like to be the person who discovered Niagara Falls. On the other hand, someone who drives by Niagara Falls on their way to work every day hardly notices them. The Pacific Ocean, with its four-mile depth and vast expanse is marvel to imagine, but it's only flyover time for tourists headed for Hawaii. The wonders of God's creation surpass our power of imagination, yet we barely give them a thought. But if you

set your mind to re-imagine them, you will regain a sense of wonder. If you set aside a few moments each day to thank and praise God for the glory of his creation; it may seem artificial and mechanical to you at first, but before long you will begin to truly “feel” the thanks and praise you are offering. You will learn a wonderful secret: thankfulness begets more thankfulness and praise begets even more praise. The Psalmist continues: “by the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. He gathers the waters of the sea into jars; he puts the deep into storehouses. Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the people of the world revere him. For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.” And so here is your proper perspective: God is God and you are not. Yet along with all the other marvelous things he has created, he created you and you are a marvelous creation too! More than that, you are a priceless treasure in his eyes. Isn’t that worth thanking and praising him for? “The Lord foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples. But the plans of the Lord stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.” Man proposes but God disposes. We can align our will with his will—or we can kick against the goads. You can swim with the current of a river or you can try to swim against it. One way puts the power of the river behind you and impels you forward; the other way pits you against the river and it will be all you can do to stay in one place. God’s will is a mighty river that will either propel you ahead or stop you in your tracks. But is there a role for us in this drama? The Psalmist continues: “from heaven the lord looks down and sees all the sons of man; from his dwelling place he watches all who live on the earth—he who forms the hearts of all, who considers everything they do. No king is saved by the size of his army; no warrior escapes by his great strength. A horse is a vain hope for deliverance; despite all its great strength it cannot save.” The sources of power available to us in this world amount to nothing in God’s scheme of things. The king’s army, the warrior’s strength, the stallion’s speed and power—all of them are nothing apart from God. All earthly sources of power will fail you in the end. “But the eyes of the lord are on those who fear him, on those whose hope is in his unfailing love, to deliver them from death and keep them alive in famine.” Fear God and place your hope in him and he will sustain and deliver you. So let go—and let God. He is our help and our shield during this time of pestilence and economic confusion, just as he has always been and will always be. And so, the psalmist concludes: “We wait in hope for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice for we trust in his holy name. Lord, let your unfailing love be upon us, according as we have hoped in thee.” What should we do as people who live in the endtimes and await the return of our Lord? Pray to God, praise God and place your hope in him.

As we pray to God he gradually conforms our will to his will and we will find that we are working with him rather than against him. As we praise God, he fills our heart with praise and gives us joy. And as we place our hope in God we are not disappointed, because he is always true to his word. So praise the Lord! Amen.

And now the peace of God that surpasses our understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.