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Is the end going to be tomorrow?

When is the end going to happen is a surprisingly regular question! Even Jesus Christ himself was questioned about this.

In the gospel according to Mark, at chapter 13 and verse 32, we read his response:

³² “But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.”

That response, clear though it is has not stopped people asking.

There is a time, and the time is now.
There is salvation, and salvation is now.

We shouldn't laugh at all, but back in 2011 I couldn't help doing so when I read about Pastor Camping in California.



Harold Camping told everyone in his congregation that the day of the second coming was going to be on May 21st (2011). Everyone was going to be taken up “in rapture”. This is an odd thing for any Christian preacher to do particularly as Mark chapter 13 verse 32 says that no-one knows the time of the second coming. Yet Harold didn't seem put off by that.

More remarkably many followers sold everything.

One entrepreneur in California offered a pet-minding service for those being taken up in the rapture. Those taken up didn't want to leave this earth feeling that their beloved pets would not be looked after.

The entrepreneur told reporters afterwards that Harold Camping's followers were disappointed twice – once when the rapture didn't happen and the second time when they discovered that he didn't give refunds when they collected their pets.

Harold didn't give up – He said he got his calculation slightly wrong – It's going to be October 21st 2011. Hopefully before then his own Bible reading got him as far as Mark chapter 13 verse 32, or any of the other similar passages, then he could have read out that Scripture to his own followers: Nobody knows the time except for the Father.

There is a time, and the time is now.
There is salvation, and salvation is now.

At Church the lectionary is the set readings for each Sunday, and as I write now at the start of November 2020, it has just been Matthew chapter 25. That passage is relevant again to this very question about the “second coming”.

The gospel of Mathew at chapter 25 says this:

'At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish and five were wise. ³ The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. ⁴ The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. ⁵ The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

⁶ At midnight the cry rang out: 'Here's the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!' ⁷ Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ The foolish ones said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' ⁹ 'No,' they replied, 'there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.'

¹⁰ But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

¹¹ Later the others also came. 'Lord, Lord,' they said, 'open the door for us!' ¹² 'But' he replied, 'Truly I tell you, I don't know you.'

¹³ Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

The word telling us to “keep watch” is our Lord Jesus Christ telling us to constantly be ready for his return. When we live our lives in constant readiness then it is actually really hard to do. None of us are perfect at it. We tend to get pushed around by secular society demanding its interpretation of equality, even if sometimes it isn't actually equality.

St Paul wrote in his second letter to the Church in Corinth about constantly being ready for God amongst us. You can find this passage in 2 Corinthians chapter 6.

As God's co-workers we urge you not to receive God's grace in vain. ² For he says,

“In the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.”

I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

³ We put no stumbling block in anyone's path, so that our ministry will not be discredited

We are both co-workers for, and with, God, and now is the time of God's favour on us so we have no need to go running after secular wants and wishes. We have everything we need in the Christian faith in, and with, God. A big part of “being ready” is simply doing what God wants as God's co-worker.

It's really tempting to just socially go with the flow and do whatever society sees as acceptable. None of this passage tells us to do that. It is precisely because the early Christians did not go with the flow, and did not do everything that society thought was acceptable, that they were both noticed and criticised, beaten and punished. The same is then true for us.

There are Christians today who are criticised and punished for their faith. There are examples today such as the Christian couple who were refused the opportunity to adopt a child because of their faith. I think of the doctor who lost her place on the adoption advisory panel because of her Christian faith. I'm sure all of us can think of other examples.

I don't think there has ever been a time in history that Christianity has not been criticised. I know we think that there was a time last century when this was considered a Christian country but I don't think it really was ... even then we needed revival.

Part of the message God gives to us in 2 Corinthians chapter 6 was that we are to develop our relationship with each other and love each other for that is what others will see in this church of ours. Yet as they look in - it won't be plain sailing for us and sometimes we will find our faith criticised.

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