

FOUND FAITHFUL
Matthew 24:42-46

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Perhaps you remember the apocalyptic prediction which declared with full confidence that Judgment Day was May 21, 2011. The message was, “Mark Your Calendar.” That year, the billboards attracted the attention of Amarillo residents. I was interviewed by a local television station, inquiring into the accuracy of such prophetic predictions.

This campaign, with thousands of worldwide billboards and other avenues of advertising, cost millions and millions and millions of dollars. And, Harold Camping, the false prophet – I’m not being harsh; he made a prophecy and it was false – didn’t have any difficulty finding supporters. In fact, his Family Radio had about 350 paid staff members operating 66 radio stations nationwide (not counting international partnerships). By some reports, the 89-year-old civil engineer, theologian wanna be, collected \$80 million in contributions for his ministry between 2005 and 2009.

The followers had been financially faithful. In fact, Robert Fitzpatrick is reported to have spent his entire \$140,000 life savings on 1,000 subway car placards and bus stop ads which warned, “Global Earthquake: The Greatest Ever! Judgment Day, May 21, 2011.” (“Harold Camping should publicly apologize for wrong doomsday prediction, says Christian,” www.christianpost.com)

Another follower of the false prophet, 27-year-old Adrienne Martinez, was planning to go to medical school but, after listening to Family Radio, decided to give up her dream because of the destined doom. She and her husband, Joel, quit their jobs and moved to Orlando, where they spent their time reading the Bible and distributing tracts. Regretting their blind devotion, they pined, “We budgeted everything so that on May 21 we won’t have anything left.” (“Harold Camping...”, www.christianpost.com) Maybe nothing left but a feeling of foolishness.

Now Camping was sure; he was absolutely certain. I quote, “God has given so much information in the Bible about this, and so many proofs, and so many signs, that we know it is absolutely going to happen, without any question at all. There’s nothing in the Bible that God has ever prophesied...that holds a candle to the amount of information to this tremendous truth of the end of the world. I would be absolutely in rebellion against God if I thought anything other than it is absolutely going to happen without any question.” (Al Mohler, “The End Is Near? Harold Camping’s False Teaching” www.crosswalk.com)

Camping said that he came up with the precise date through a “mathematical calculation that would probably crash Google’s computers.” The formula involves dates of floods, the signals of numbers

in the Bible, multiplication, addition, and subtraction thereof. (Al Mohler, “The End is Near?” www.crosswalk.com)

It should have been a red flag when the calculations only made sense to the apocalyptic engineer himself. When the prediction did not happen, his Family Radio played soft church music, offered mundane devotionals about life advice, but said nothing about the failed judgment day. If you had visited the network on Saturday, a sign on the door would have read, “This office is closed. Sorry we missed you.” Finally, he opened his front door to a reporter on Sunday, May 22. Camping told Will Kane, of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, that he was flabbergasted that the Rapture did not arrive as predicted and that “it has been a really tough weekend.”

Indeed, my friend, a tough weekend of your own making. No earthquakes. No plagues. No calamities. Sunrise. Sunset. The earth defies your doomsday.

I’ve always been intrigued by our nation’s thirst for second coming theology. First of all, every prophet who ever made a prediction has been wrong. So why would anyone believe the next predicting prophet?

Maybe you’re not really guilty of falling for a particular prediction. But many of you have way too much interest in reading about world events on the one hand and Ezekiel, Daniel, or Revelation on the other – trying to decipher if not the exact date, at least the direction.

Why so much interest in the end time? Here it is – some of you aren’t going to like what I’m going to say, but it’s the truth. We have a disproportionate interest in end time prophecies because we prefer the mystical and the exciting over the clear and costly.

Now, what do I mean by that? We’d rather search through Old Testament prophecies, run rough shod over their historic context, string them together to chart out the events of the second coming in a controllably predictable pattern. Such pseudo-Bible study is so much easier than reading our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount, and thus trying to live by the costly demands of discipleship. If I said that tonight I was going to start a study in the book of Ezekiel to unlock biblical prophecies relevant for today, we’d have to get out chairs to seat the people who were looking for a simplistic secret. On the other hand, if we put up billboards advertising, “Learn about Christ’s call to costly discipleship,” we could probably meet in a Sunday School room tonight.

It’s a whole lot easier to follow the rise and fall of nations, trying to pin one as the bear and the other as the dragon, than it is to honestly confront the anger in my heart, the lust in my soul, and the greed in my loins. To follow Jesus’ teaching means that I must take up my cross daily and follow Him, that I must deny myself in order to be His follower. Well, that doesn’t sound so exciting. Give me a seminar on secret prophecy over the Sermon on the Mount. Give me the dazzling. Don’t give me real discipleship. That’s the way Western thinking goes.

That’s it. When I show you what it really means to follow Jesus, you don’t want to do it. “Pastor, thanks a lot for that kind of preaching, but I was really wishing there was another way.” So you buy the books at the bookstore, looking for that new teacher, that new seminar, that new secret truth. You listen to satellite radio, hoping to discover the other, new, more exciting way.

There is none. Read the demands of Christ. Read the writings of the Apostle Paul. And be a follower of Jesus.

I have a Ph.D. in biblical studies and have sat for years at the feet of some of the best theologians in the world. And I'm going to let you in on the real secret: There is no secret. That's it. Costly discipleship takes faith and obedience.

It's the same with fitness and health. We all know how to control our weight and bless our bodies: eat fruits and vegetables, exercise daily, and get enough rest. But sometimes, in a state of insomnia at night, I'll turn on the television and – man, look at the gliders and riders and pills and promises. People will order it all, call in by the thousands – yes, the tens of thousands – because reality is too hard. They are simply looking for a shortcut, another way.

Doomsday discipleship is a failed shortcut to the reality of costly discipleship. I'm going to tell everything you need to know about the second coming of Jesus. You can throw out your postmillennial, amillennial, and premillennial, charts and categories and listen to these words of truth from God's word.

I. The Second Coming is a definite event.

There are a lot of passages in which Jesus Himself declares that he will come again. Go home and read Matthew 24 and 25. It says at that time “the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the nations of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30).

Or Matthew 24:31, “And He will send forth His angels with a loud trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.”

And Mark and Luke and John say similar things.

Mark 13:26 says, “They will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.”

Or Luke 21:27, “And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”

And don't you remember John 14, when Jesus said, “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me, that you also may be where I am.”

And in Acts, at the ascension of Jesus, two men in white robes, divine beings, said to the disciples, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand there looking into the sky? This same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

And in the preaching of the earliest apostles, Acts 3:19, Peter declares, “Repent, then, ... that God may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, even Jesus, who must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as He has promised long ago through His prophets.”

And it’s not just Peter. It’s Paul. Look at 1 Thessalonians 4:15. “According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive and who are left to the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first.”

Oh, it’s also predicted by the author of Hebrews (9:28). And James, the brother of Jesus (5:7-8). And the writer of 1 Peter (1:7). The writer of 1 John (2:28). In fact, I can say with full confidence that the second coming is one of the most widely taught doctrines of the New Testament.

II. We don’t know when.

Period. End of story. Any time anyone tells you when Christ is going to return, mark that one off your calendar. Not going to happen. Jesus said that no one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven nor the Son, but only the Father (Matthew 24:36-44; Mark 13:32-33). Or in Acts 1:7, “It is not for you to know times or dates which the Father has set by His own authority.”

The New Testament teaches that the Second Coming happens when least expected. He comes like a thief in the night, and, therefore, you are to forever be watchful (Matthew 24:44, 50; 25:13; Mark 13:35; see Matthew 24:36; 24:42; 25:13).

III. The Second Coming is imminent.

It could happen today. It could happen tomorrow. There is nothing else that has to happen in world history or needs to be fulfilled in biblical prophecy for Him to return. Jesus said, “Be ready. You don’t know when it’s going to happen. Be expectant.” The biblical passages say that we must be eagerly awaiting, for the Lord’s coming is at hand – perhaps at any moment.

Romans 8:19-25, says that we and all creation eagerly await with hope the return of Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:7 says that we are “awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Philippians 4:5 says, “the Lord is near.”

And in James 5, the brother of the Lord said, “You too be patient; strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do not complain, brethren, against one another, that you yourselves may not be judges; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door.”

IV. We are to be found faithful.

When Christ returns, He expects to find us working for His kingdom. He expects to find us faithful to His church, His people (Matthew 24:42-51; Matthew 25:14-30 [v. 19]; or Matthew 25:31-46).

Now, there is the New Testament theology about the second coming of Christ that you can hang your hat on. (1) It is a definite event. (2) We do not know when it shall occur, for it shall occur when you are least expecting it. (3) It can happen at any moment. (4) We are to found working.

The sad part of the May 21, 2011 fiasco is that atheists came to a very faulty conclusion. They have somehow equated Camping's false prophecy with historic Christianity. I heard one atheist who said to Fox news that this was proof that Christianity was wrong. In fact, Reuters reported that atheists gathered in different parts of the country and had celebrations and get-togethers to mark the failure of the prediction. In the very city where Camping's network is based, over 200 people gathered at an atheist convention where speakers joked about the failed Judgment Day.

Was Harold Camping a false – even if well intentioned – prophet? The answer is yes. Does that disprove historical Christianity and the authentic return of Christ? Not at all.

Suppose there were a group of anti-basketball dunking believers who held with their whole heart that a basketball could not be dunked in a ten-foot goal. No way. No how. Nobody. They were absolutely certain that dunking a basketball is an impossible human achievement. Let's suppose for a moment that I made the brash claim that I was going to actually dunk a basketball. I promised it. I guaranteed it. I set the date for the dunking. Let's suppose the Family Life Center was standing room only, with folks gathered in the stands and around the track. In fact, the fire marshal was concerned about the crowded conditions. At the appointed time, Robby Barrett, our minister of education, goes over to the microphone and announces that Dr. Batson is about to dunk the basketball. All of you believe your faithful pastor would not make up a lie, you told your friends to come and watch. It is going to happen. And I really do give it my best shot. But I'll let you in on a secret: I have never in my life dunked a basketball, and I will never in my life be able to dunk a basketball. So when I try and fail, some of you are saddened that the prophecy is false and that my basketball prowess is not as published. The anti-dunk theologians would be jumping up and down shouting it had been proved and confirmed that no one could dunk the basketball, that my failure was final proof and complete evidence that the truth they lived by – that the basketball would never be dunked – had been confirmed.

But wait, my failure to dunk the basketball no more confirms their false assertions than Harold Camping's mathematical mess confirmed that Christ will not return or that God does not exist. In fact, his false prophecy proves that God was right all along. No man knows the day or the hour.

Suppose about the time that most of you were leaving the gym, just about the time the anti-dunkers are throwing the confetti and shouting for joy, LeBron James walks into the Family Life Center, palms the ball in his hand, and runs and slam dunks the ball with ease and style. My inability, my ineptness, my basketball blunder says nothing about the ultimate dunker.

That's a silly story. But it's no more silly than the atheist saying that May 21, 2011 confirms there is no God. Any professor of logic would tell you it does no such thing. It only confirms that Harold Camping did not understand the God who exists, nor His word.

There is no hidden meaning to the word of God. There is no numerology, or *gematria* that will reveal to you some hidden truth in scripture. The Bible is written in clear, revealed truths. There are no mathematical computations needed to understand the word of God. The message is clear. It's the message of Jesus.

Repent, for the kingdom of God is truly at hand.

Take up your cross daily and follow me!

USA Today, Wednesday, May 18, 2011

“Apocalypse believers wait vigilantly for the end after months of preparing; skeptics carry on”
www.washingtonpost.com

“Harold Camping speaks after Rapture fails to begin on May 21” www.washingtonpost.com

“As hours tick by, “Judgment Day” looks a dud” www.reuters.com