

“In The Now”

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Mark 13:1-8 = Mark's Apocalypse

James Howell, pastor of Myers Park UMC in Charlotte, NC says he remembers back in 1975 that some of his friends were certain Jesus would return during the month of August. One day in early September, Howell proclaimed to his roommates, “Well, I guess Jesus didn’t come back.” “how would *you* know?” was the reply. “We’re still here.” “Yeah, but we’re the ones who got left.”



So they decide on a test. They choose the person they think most likely to go. Glo Vandewater seems the logical choice: very sweet, devout, holy. They haven’t seen her in a couple of weeks. They drive out to her house noting her car in the driveway.



They ring the doorbell. No answer. They knock. No answer. Crestfallen they turn back to the car.

Just as they reach it, Glo’s voice pierces the silence: “Hey, guys!” She’s been in the back yard all along. Howell continues:

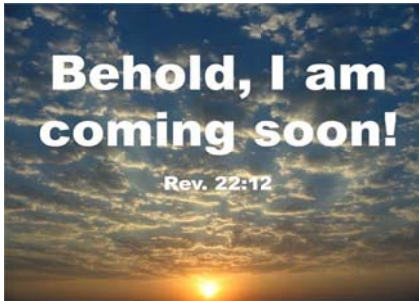
“I hate to admit it, but between the unanswered doorbell and her calling out to us, I was kind of wondering: ... “Why didn’t anybody come to check to see if I was still around? What am I doing with my life?”¹

Trying to predict the time of rapture, who will be taken and who will be left is pretty much wasted energy.

Bill Nieporte a Baptist Pastor and friend has recently circulated a meme on Facebook which says simply: “The Rapture is not in the Bible.”² He is right. Despite Hal Lindsay’s *Late Great Planet Earth*, and despite all the hype of the *Left Behind* books and movies, the Rapture is actually not Biblical. It is fake news, a creation of a narrow, sectarian mind.



Despite all the supposed Biblical support offered, the rapture is actually a false doctrine. You won't find it anywhere in any of the faith statements from the Ancient Church to the Modern.



Now don't get me wrong. Jesus will return "to judge both the quick and the dead" ~ an essential belief found in our faith statements from the very beginning. Yet, that fact of Jesus' return does not mean God's plan for us is to focus our attention on being taken out of this troubled world. Indeed, a careful look at those passages in Matthew and Luke which say "**one will be taken and another left**" indicate that the ones left are the good ones and the ones taken are evil.³

Throughout Scripture, God's plan is for us to *tikkun olam* in Hebrew. Our job is to "repair the world" not abandon it nor seek escape from it. We are to build God's kingdom in this world, not invest all of ourselves and our faith in another one we reach through some euphoric whirlwind.

We are not the first to miss Jesus' point ~ so did the disciples. John Calvin said in his commentary on Mark 13:

• "As the vast size and wealth of the temple, like a veil hung before the eyes of the disciples, did not permit them to elevate their faith to the true reign of Christ which was still future, so [Jesus] affirms ... that those things which occupy their attention will quickly perish."

John Calvin

Commentary on Mark 13



Jesus uses the temple as an object lesson. He's saying: **"Do not put your trust in these buildings."** Because **"Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."**

Jesus' counsel is not to put your trust in things, buildings, real estate, even church sanctuaries, but instead to trust in the faith, in God's community, in the reign of God breaking in.

Jesus doesn't want us to build more buildings ~ Jesus wants us to build more spirit. Jesus doesn't call us to plant more churches ~ Jesus calls us to plant more communities of God.

That's because people move, buildings don't. Demographics change, but buildings can't.

All this talk about the temple being torn apart stone by stone means simply: Permanence is an illusion. Only God and God's realm move with ever changing people landscapes. Churches which want to remain a part of God's community change (that terrifying word), change with the world.



Jesus wanted to shock the disciples out of their complacency. Jesus wants to shock us too, shake us out, disabuse us of our misguided belief in permanence. As one commentator on this passage has said:⁴

- "At least, I know I have sometimes needed to be disillusioned so that God could freshly configure my life around God's kingdom."

Brad Roth

We should note this. At GPC, this interim period between installed pastors will be ending soon, but don't get complacent: the only thing permanent today is transition. Wise churches know this and are in a constant state of re-formation to ever more closely live out and reveal God's realm.

In my High School Sunday School class in Pampa, TX, by my junior year the curriculum ran out. So our teachers asked us what we would like to study. We students conferenced and came back to our teachers with two choices: sex or the Book of Revelation. They chose sex as the least terrifying of the two.



As a result, I have always had a fascination with the forbidden fruit of apocalyptic literature in general and the Book of Revelation in particular. I made it a major study in University and Seminary.

Consequently I have taught classes on the Book of Revelation in several congregations. The first day of class I say to disillusion any rapture-hunting students: "if you are here thinking the Book of Revelation is a crystal ball, that I am going to pinpoint the date of Jesus' return, you've come to the wrong place." With that, more than half the class usually drops out.



'Apocalypse' means 'revealed' but it has nothing to do with predicting the future. Rather it is revealing God's will for the present. Apocalyptic and prophetic are not scary words about a dystopian future, even though our culture has made them such.

Prophets are not clairvoyants nor psychics, not palm readers nor soothsayers. Jesus was clear no human will ever gain that knowledge:⁵



- "But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son"

Matthew 24:36

In this time between Jesus' leaving us and his future unknown time of return, the mandate is clear. As Pastor Lawrence's youth pastor growing up has said:

“We should live our lives
as if Jesus is coming tomorrow,
but we should plan
as if Jesus is coming in 10,000 years.”

Rather than being predictors, prophets are the moral conscience of a society, who “reveal” what is happening in the present that displeases God. The prophet speaks for God about the consequences of that displeasure:

“Because of your immorality and breaking the covenant, God is going to punish. Turn back, repent now and save yourselves from judgement.”

The purpose of prophet and apocalyptic is not to live *in the know*, but to live *in the now*. The Bible is a Way to live in the now. The purpose

of apocalyptic and prophetic is to draw us back into the covenant community of God, by encouragement, or even by disillusionment, to “freshly configure our lives around the Kingdom of God.”

Not to live *in the know*
but to live *in the now*.

The Bible is the Way to live in the now ~ the real world, the world today. The Bible is the Way to build God's realm and reign in the real world, to “repair the world” and make actual the kingdom of heaven on earth.

¹ *Pulpit Resources*, 28.4, p. 33 for 19 November, 2000

² Bill Nieporte in a 11/13/2018 meme on Facebook

³ Matthew 24:40-41 and Luke 17:34-37

⁴ Brad Roth, *Christian Century* October 24, 2018, p. 21

⁵ Matthew 24:36