

SAVE THE DATE!

*Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.
(Matthew 25:13)*

Here we go again. Radio preacher Harold Camping claims to know the exact day of the rapture: May 21, 2011. He and his followers are spreading the word via radio, internet, billboards, traveling caravans of RVs and volunteers passing out pamphlets on street corners. Untroubled by a failed prediction of a similar kind back in 1994, Camping continues to use the Bible as a type of cosmic calendar that gives detailed information for the time of Christ's return.

If you are as old as I am you can remember occasions when similar prophecies created a similar hoopla. There was the frenzy in 1988 when the book came out "88 Reasons Why the Rapture is in 1988." When that prediction failed, the author wrote a new book, "89 Reasons Why the Rapture is in 1989." The year 2000 ushered in a new millennium and a chorus of agitated voices announcing the world's end.

Yes, there is a long and ignoble history of date-setting. The year 1000 dawned as many were in states of hysteria over the anticipated return of Christ on January 1. 1666 felt ominous for many Londoners as they fought the bubonic plague and experienced the Great Fire all in the same year. The fact that 1666 included the number of the Beast (666) only heightened the frenzy. William Miller predicted the end of the world in 1844. When it didn't happen, his followers called it The Great Disappointment. Then, of course, there are the Jehovah's Witnesses whose failed predictions of Judgment Day are too numerous to mention (1874, 1914, 1984...). Researchers have counted over 200 occasions where people have claimed to know the date of the end of the world.

I have only two problems with those who set dates: 1) They're always wrong and 2) Jesus said, don't do it! Actually Jesus had quite a lot to say on this subject. He specifically warned his followers not to be taken in by those who pretend to have "insider information" on this subject. His disciples once asked him specifically about the date of the end of the world (Matthew 24:3). In his lengthy reply (Matthew 24-25), Jesus, after warning about false prophets, said this:

But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.... Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. (Matthew 24:36, 42)

As for Harold Camping and those who want to set the date, the Bible has very strong things to say about prophets who prophesy falsely.

When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him. (Deuteronomy 18:22)

So, when *is* Christ coming back? Frankly, my real problem with Harold Camping is not that he is too radical. He is not radical enough! Though the Bible may not help decipher the exact date of Christ's return, it does tell us this: it will be soon (Revelation 22:7,12, 20)! In fact, he may come before the Benediction! Don't wait until May to get ready. That may be too late.

Pastor Stan