

Are you prepared for the end of the world? December 21, 2012 is supposed to be the magic date. That's less than two years away!

This date is supposedly based on a prophecy contained in an ancient Mayan calendar. At least that is what the sci-fi thriller film *2012* tried to tell us this past winter. Why we should take this prophecy seriously, I don't know. However, according to *The Complete Idiots' Guide to 2012* (yes, there is a book by that title), there are more than 600,000 websites devoted to this very theme. Beware, the end is near.

Does anyone remember Y2K? The dawning of the year 2,000 was surely the end of time, according to some alarmists. Likewise many Christians are convinced by such works as Tim LaHaye's *Left Behind* novels that the rapture (when believers will be taken up to heaven by Jesus) is near at hand.

Before LaHaye, of course, there was the book, *The Late, Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsey. This book, which was the best-selling book of the 1970s with more than 28 million copies sold, told how the birth of modern Israel signaled that we were in the "end times." Lindsey also predicted that Christians would soon be raptured. It's been almost 40 years now and nothing predicted in Lindsey's work has happened.

Another one of these "the world is coming to an end" books was one titled *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988*. That also came in a 1989 edition. Go figure.

People of every generation have awaited the end of time and the destruction of the earth. This is in spite of the fact that Jesus, the ultimate authority on such things, has already told us that no one knows when that day or hour will be (Mark 13:32). Jesus even cried out against those who kept looking for signs. "An evil and adulterous generation," he said, "looks for a sign." (Mt.

16:4) That hasn't kept a slew of authors from cranking out novels based on this fear-inducing theme.

Personally, I would rather go to a different account of the apocalypse. It is found at the end of the Bible. The book of Revelation has its own special effects. And some of it is frightening. It is written in heavy symbolism. The church was being persecuted when Revelation was being written, so the meaning of some of it had to be veiled. We don't know how much of it was intended to be taken literally.

The symbolism is sometimes disturbing, of course, but much of it is also awe-inspiring and majestic. We heard some of it in this morning's Epistle.

“Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

It's a shame that every apocalyptic thriller can't end like that. “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” Think how tears would flow in theaters across this land if people knew how the apocalypse really does end with the Creator of everything that is, or was, or ever will be wiping away the tears from His children's eyes. Hollywood is missing a real opportunity.

Sure, this world will come to an end some day, but the odds of it happening in our lifetime are probably quite remote. Every scientist will tell you that there will be an end to this universe some day. Nothing in this universe lasts forever. If God wills it, the end could be today, but chances are it is a long way off. I don't care what the Mayan calendar says, or Nostradamus, or Tim LaHaye or Hal Lindsey - this earth has been around for millions of years and may be around for millions of years yet to come. Nobody knows. But don't listen to me. Listen to Jesus.

Yes, this is indeed a scary world, but this is also God's world. Here is the good news for the day: Ultimately, God is in control of this world's destiny. Humanity can despoil the planet in a hundred different ways, but we cannot defeat God's over-all purpose for creation. Why is it we do not focus on those positive images of the future that the Scriptures contain? Are we afraid to allow hope into our lives?

Why do we not talk about the positive images from the Bible about the future? We've allowed extremists to extract a tiny portion of scripture to distort what the Bible really does say about God's plan for the world. They've gotten rich and they've lifted the rest of us up to ridicule.

What the Bible truly says about the future is this: God is in control of the future and God will not forsake His children regardless of what may come. We don't know what the future may hold, but we know Who holds the future. Yes, Christ told us he would return someday, but that should not be a reason for anxiety, but for great joy.

I understand that Hollywood recently decided to make an action movie called *The Three Bs*, based on the lives of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms. Bruce Willis signed up to play Beethoven and Mel Gibson agreed to play Brahms. When the casting director approached Arnold Schwarzenegger and asked him if he'd like to be in the movie, too, he thought about it a minute, then nodded and said: "I'll be Bach." Ah, the Killer B's.

Well, Jesus said *he* would be back someday. Jesus is our friend. Jesus is our redeemer. So his return can only be good news for those who love him. What's the big deal? In the meantime, we have all kinds of very real obstacles in the real world we have to face every day.

The real message of Revelation is that God will be with us regardless of our circumstances.

When the Book of Revelation was written, Christians were suffering miserably at the hands of the civil authorities. The writer of Revelation wanted them to know this was only a temporary situation. God would not forsake them for long. And that message of hope and faith is just as real today as it was then.

Last November the western world celebrated the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Czech revolution, aka “The Velvet Revolution.” It has been 20 years since the citizens of the Czech Republic overthrew its communist government. You may remember that this revolution was sparked by students in Prague who began chanting to the Communist party leadership, even while they were still in power, “You have lost already! You have lost already!”

The communists were still theoretically in power, but their days were numbered, and the students knew it. We, too, can say to all the forces of evil in this world, “You have lost already!” That is what the writer of Revelation was saying about those who were persecuting the early church, “You have lost already!” Even more importantly, the writer wanted all Christians to know that even when it seems evil has the upper hand, whether in the world at large or in our individual lives, God is still in control. God will never forsake us regardless of our circumstances.

On a trip to Williamsburg, Virginia, to celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary, Roy and Karen Pike slammed into a truck parked along the shoulder of the highway. They were killed instantly. And their three sons were orphaned.

Kevin, the middle son, age 17, told how in the ache of his loss, in the wilderness of his confusion, he discovered more than once the powerful presence of God. He went to talk with his pastor, and this is how he described the faith he had discovered. “Right now,” he said, “I see God as a shelf. Everything I love, everything beautiful in my life, everything that has given me comfort and security, everything on that shelf has been moved around, scrambled, changed or broken. But the shelf itself is still intact. God is that shelf, and I know that the shelf itself will never be broken.”

And that shelf will never be broken. As Christians, we know how the story ends. Tell them how it ends. It’s right there in Revelation: “Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”