



With what happened in Japan and all the earthquakes and tsunamis recently - and predictions of the end of the world - don't you think we are getting close to The End?

This is another question I get asked quite often, particularly after some major disaster like Hurricane Katrina or the 2004 tsunami in Indonesia. There certainly seems to be some added fascination with The End after the earthquake and tsunami and nuclear meltdown in Japan. This added interest is largely due to a couple of well-publicized predictions that The End of the World will come either in 2011 (this year!) or 2012.

A small Christian group based in Tennessee claims to have figured out that the End of the World will begin on May 21 this year. If that were true we only have about a month and a half left! The other prediction that has gotten even more "airplay" in the media is that the world will end *next* year in 2012 (specifically, December 21). This guesswork is based on various interpretations of the Mayan calendar and things written by Nostradamus, a 16th century man who issued lots of prophesies of things to come.

As with any situation, it's always best to see what *God* has to say on the subject. He's the one in control of what happens anyway. People in our time are not the only ones interested in knowing when The End will come. Jesus' disciples asked him that same question. Here's part of his answer. (The bold-face type comes from me, not God)

*36 "But about that day or hour **no one knows**, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 37 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; 39 and **they knew nothing about what would happen** until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Matthew 24:36-39*

Personally, I always laugh when I hear that someone has figured out the exact day of the end of the world. I want to ask them "What part of "*no one knows*" don't you understand?" (Jesus said that *even He* doesn't know.)

Yet, we seem to have this need to want to know. Both the apostle Paul and apostle Peter address this in the Scriptures with the same answer as Jesus:

*1 Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, 2 for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come **like a thief in the night**. 3 While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them **suddenly**, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.*

1 Thessalonians 5:1-3

*9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. 10 But **the day of the Lord will come like a thief**. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.*

2 Peter 3:9-10

The saying that the end will come "like a thief in the night" is another way of saying that it will come unannounced beforehand. Thieves don't tell you when they are coming.

So, one answer that I typically give is this: "If someone says they know what specific day Christ is going to return, I can be fairly certain that He is not going to come that day." In other words, if lots of people are expecting it, then He hasn't come unexpected "like a thief in the night."

But, having established that it would be foolish of me to join in the speculation as to days and times, Jesus, Paul and Peter each tell us what we *are* to do as approach this "unknown" end of time. (Again, the bold type is my emphasis)

*42 "Therefore **keep watch**, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. 43 But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. 44 So **you also must be ready**, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.*
Jesus in Matthew 24:42-44

*So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but **let us be alert and self-controlled**.*
The Apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:6

*11 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to **live holy and godly lives** 12 as you **look forward to the day of God** and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. 13 But in keeping with his promise **we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells**. 14 So then, dear friends, **since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him**. 15 Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him.... 17 Therefore, dear friends, since you have been forewarned, **be on your guard** so that you may not be carried away by the error of the lawless and fall from your secure position. The Apostle Peter in 2 Peter 3:11-17*

In short, God has chosen not to tell us when The End will come, so that we always have the need to be ready for Christ to return. You don't want him to come back and catch you napping without faith or caught in the trap of sin. Jesus is the Master who has gone away and promises to return. The best way to ensure that you are doing what He wants when He returns is to make it your goal to *always* be doing what He wants. That way you will always be ready.

So, do I think the end is coming soon? It would not surprise me if it comes tomorrow. Neither would it surprise me if it doesn't come for another thousand years. (First-century Christians who looked around at the deplorable state of morality and persecution were convinced the end had to be just around the corner. And here we are still 2000 years later. Paraphrasing Peter's comment to those first-century Christians, "If He seems slow to come by your standards, remember that His delay is due to His patience, wanting everyone to come to repentance.")

I look at these predictions that The End is coming this May or next December and am reminded that God can use these "crazy" prognostications to make people think about The End and where they will be headed. He can use these to bring people to repentance and back to Him. And if that happens, as I suspect it does many times, then even though The End doesn't come as predicted God has used it to save people eternally. And that's a good thing.

By the way, my standard answer to the question: "I can say this with full confidence, The End is closer today than it was yesterday."

Thanks for asking,
Pastor David

Send your questions to pastor@livingwordlutheran.net