



Doomsday?

Proverbs 21-26

Matthew 24:6-14

Proverbs 3:21 *Hold on to your wisdom and insight, my son. Never let them get away from you. 22 They will provide you with life — a pleasant and happy life. 23 You can go safely on your way and never even stumble. 24 You will not be afraid when you go to bed, and you will sleep soundly through the night. 25 You will not have to worry about sudden disasters, such as come on the wicked like a storm. 26 The Lord will keep you safe. He will not let you fall into a trap.*

I'm sure like me, you've been horrified by the recent events in Japan. For some Christians it brings them to ask the question: if these are the last days, does such a horrendous earthquake and tidal wave indicate that Jesus' return is imminent?

I was interested in these verses I found posted by a friend of mine on Facebook. Here they are in the Message: *"There's no need to panic over alarms or surprises, or predictions that doomsday's just around the corner. Because God will be right there with you; he'll keep you safe and sound.."* Proverbs 3:25-26

After the events in Japan, there have been lots of predictions of the end of the world by all sorts of people. There are the Christian prophecy watchers who point to the glut of recent disastrous earthquakes and tidal waves to the coming of Jesus. Then there are the pagan and sect mystics and soothsayers claiming that this is Doomsday!

The whole of Japan is gripped with fear as the aftershocks come, as the false tsunami alarms ring and as they contemplate the explosions at the nuclear plant. The world is gripped with concern and fear. The Japanese prided themselves in their preparedness for a severe earthquake and tidal wave. They couldn't stop the tragedy. In the end they just "minimised the losses" or "reduced the risks". Can the human race play God? We try, but we're not very good at it.

But should we live in fear? The verses are a good reminder to those of us who are in Christ that we have a God who keeps us from the ruin that overcomes the wicked. He keeps us safe and sound as the Message puts it but I'm interested here in the more literal translation - he keeps our foot from being snared. As we walk through life, He keeps us from landing our foot in traps. What that doesn't mean is that life will be rosy all the time without problems or incident. It is just that we have a God who is able to give us the wisdom not to fall into the traps that so often lie in our way.

At this sort of time it is good to have the encouragement is that God is with us. We are part of His purposes and whatever happens on Earth, we can walk with Him knowing where the end will be because we know what that is - an eternity with Him.

That said, can these phenomena be seen as the beginning of the end of the world?. Here's the words of Jesus from Matthew 24:6 *You are going to hear the noise of battles close by and the news of battles far away; but do not be troubled. Such things must happen, but they do not mean that the end has come. 7 Countries will fight each other, kingdoms will attack one another. There will be famines and earthquakes everywhere. 8 All these things are like the first pains of childbirth. 9 "Then you will be arrested and handed over to be punished and be put to death. All nations will hate you because of me. 10 Many will give up their faith at that time; they will betray one another and hate one another. 11 Then many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. 12 Such will be the spread of evil that many people's love will grow cold. 13 But whoever holds out to the end will be saved.*

14 And this Good News about the Kingdom will be preached through all the world for a witness to all nations; and then the end will come.

Natural phenomena and human conflict are only birth pains - signs and pointers to the return of Jesus. Arguably we've had plenty of all in the last 100 years. We also have our dose of false prophets and persecution. We now have the technology that makes the gospel reach all people. Could this be the end time? It's difficult to know actually. The disaster in Japan is a natural phenomenon and scientists are unable to determine if these natural phenomena are increasing over the period recording has been available. The conflicts of the last couple of decades have been nothing to the loss of life in two world wars. So Jesus says *You will hear of wars and rumours of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed.* What's the message? Look, listen but don't go over the top.

So is Jesus returning soon? God knows but it is not for us to know the exact time, just to see the signs of the times with one thing in mind, to be prepared. People have been looking at the signs of the times and concluding that the return of Jesus is imminent. Some like the fall of Jerusalem passed millennia ago, others like the re-establishment of the Jewish state have been more recent.

As Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:2, the coming of Jesus will be like a thief in the night. We don't know when the burglar is going to be on the prowl so we make preparations. Fulfilled prophecy reminds us that we need to be prepared.

The incidence of natural phenomena also remind us afresh to expect and prepare for the return of Christ. How does that affect us?

We wait with expectancy Jesus is returning? Great!

We warn with urgency Jesus is returning. There is a whole generation who aren't ready; who don't know Christ. It reminds us of the simple fact that without Christ people are lost if He should return very soon. If they die without Christ they are lost anyway unless they accept Him. These natural phenomenon are a wake-up call to the church that we have a mission. The return of Christ is a fixed phenomenon. Our job is not to "hasten it" because we can't. One of the reasons why Zionism was so well supported by Christians in Europe and America was that they thought that in pushing for a Jewish state of Israel, they would hasten the Lord's return. We can do things, but we can't change God's timing. The emphasis to us is not to be omen watchers, but to follow the command of scripture and be prepared whatever the day or time God has chosen. Our only response should be to realise afresh our mission to preach a message of salvation, because that is what the good news is – rescue and that's the business we are in.

I end with a reminder from Proverbs 3: 21 *My son, do not let wisdom and understanding out of your sight, preserve sound judgement and discretion; 22 they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck.*

Too true in these days of information or rather, misinformation. Maranatha! Even so come Lord Jesus!

*Preached by Mark Reid
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