

What Are the End Times?

Acts 2:1-21

The Day of Pentecost, May 20, 2018

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

There are a whole bunch of people who say a whole bunch of things about the end times. They say it on the internet. They say it on the radio. They say it on the television. They publish countless books about it. When I was a child the famous book about the end of the world was Hal Lindsey's, "Late Great Planet Earth." That book is now so far out of date that it barely is worth mentioning, much less trying to refute. New books are published all of the time on this subject. Has the "Left Behind" series run its course yet?

Some people even separate from their own congregations and start new congregations because of disagreements about the end times. Some people even start whole new denominations of Christianity because of their beliefs about the end times. Believe it or not there are even so called Christian denominations whose founders predicted the end of the world inaccurately and when the Lord did not return when they said that He would they changed their predictions and kept their new denomination.

With all of the stuff out there it is hard to know what to talk about when it comes to preaching on such a subject. Some of you have heard people tell you that the temple must be rebuilt in Jerusalem in order for the end to come. In other words Jesus will not return again in glory until the temple is rebuilt in Jerusalem. Some of you have been told that there are certain events that still have to take place in the Middle East in order for the end to come. Some of you have been told that Israel in the Middle East is God's chosen people the true Israel of which the Scriptures speak and some of you believe that. Some of you have been told that Brexit is part of God's plan and some of you have been told that Brexit scrapped a lot of books about the end times because Brexit did not fit into their end of the world scheme that they had worked out. Sometimes these people perform elaborate calculations using numbers from the book of Daniel, Ezekiel, the Psalms, and Revelation to work out the precise date of when the end times will get started and more importantly when the end times will end.

With all of this verbiage being spewed about the end times it is not surprising that some of us have only a vague notion of the end times. We think that the end times will be a period of history just before the Lord returns again in glory and that period of time in history will be filled with things that are the most terrible and horrible things that have ever happened in human history. Then we read some things in the Bible and listen to some of these people talk about the end times and we begin to wonder whether or not we are living in the end times. Could it be that we are living just before the return of our Lord Jesus Christ? Could it be that He is coming soon even by our human standards of expectation?

The prophet Joel lists what needs to take place in order for you to know that you are living in the end times.

First, the Lord will pour out His spirit on all flesh.

Second, the sons and daughters of those who receive the word of God will prophesy.

Third, the youths of those who receive the word of God will see visions.

Fourth, the elderly of those who receive the word of God will dream dreams.

Fifth, God will pour out His Spirit on His slaves and they will prophesy.

Sixth, God will give wonders in heaven above and signs on the earth beneath.

Seventh, the sun will be transformed into darkness and the moon into blood.

When those things happen the end of all things has come. The Lord will return.

Well, on the Day of Pentecost God poured out His Spirit on His male slaves and on His female slaves. The Holy Spirit came upon the whole company of the disciples. The company of the disciples was a group at the time of about 120. They included men and women. Therefore one of the qualifications of whether or not we are living in the end times was already met in Acts, chapter 2.

Once they had the Holy Spirit they began to prophesy. Even in the Old Testament prophesy included a lot more exhortation to repentance than it does foretelling the future. Thus exhortation to repentance includes a prediction of the future. The prophets would tell Israel, "Repent of your idolatry. If you don't, you will suffer exile." And so the people did. The prediction of the future was for the purpose of getting them to repent in the present. If they had repented, the prophet would have delivered a message of mercy and grace. The prophets often delivered messages of mercy and grace once the people had repented. They would promise that the people would sit under their own vine and fig tree, and eat the labor of their hands and other blessings. In that case the prediction of the future comforted and encouraged. The prophets predicted the future, but always for the sake of the present.

Once the slaves of the Lord had the Holy Spirit they began to prophesy. They warned the gathered people against their sins. They did so by prophesying the judgment of God on them if they did not repent. They did so by promising the favor of God if they did repent. As in the Old Testament so also in the New Testament a prophecy is given for the sake of rebuke and comforting in the present.

Well, that means that the sons and daughters of those who have received the Word of God prophesy. Your children prophesy. They have the Holy Spirit and they prophesy. Your children have been taught the Word of God such that they can predict the future for the sake of the present. Your children are able to prophesy that the Lord Jesus will return again in glory to judge the living and the dead. Your sons and daughters have the ability to predict that the Lord will judge the living and the dead after He raises the dead. Your sons and daughters can prophesy for the sake of exhortation in our present day and age. They exhort those around them to forsake their sins and turn to God on the basis of the prophecy that the Lord is returning soon. They can offer words of comfort and salvation to those who repent of their sins and by receiving that Word come to faith in Jesus Christ. So your sons and your daughters prophesy. And this is also what is meant by your youths seeing visions and your elderly dreaming dreams. All that is meant by those phrases is that God will bestow on His people irrespective of their age supernatural revelations of His will which they will then announce to all people.

In this way the Spirit of God will come on all flesh. It does not come on all flesh all at once. God first pours out His Holy Spirit on his slaves. His slaves then announce His Word to the nations. The nations repent and are baptized. When they are baptized, they receive the Holy Spirit. So by the end of Acts, chapter two, all of those people from all of those nations were baptized and they received the Holy Spirit. They would have then taken the Word of God that they had heard back to their homelands and spoken it there. And as baptism went forth on all flesh so the Holy Spirit went forth upon all flesh.

God has given wonders in the heavens above. The greatest wonder that He has given in heaven above is the ascension of His Son. It is possible for us to miss the true significance of the Ascension of Our Lord. We think that since He is God, it makes sense for Him to ascend. But the Bible is very specific that He was taken up from the earth and a cloud hid Him from their sight. Jesus was still God and man after He rose from the dead. That is how He could present His hands and His side to Thomas after His resurrection. That means that Jesus is still divine and human right now. That means that there is a human being who has ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of the majesty in heaven. Our authentic humanity is seated at the right hand of the Father. It is the first time in the history of the creation that this has taken place. Our Lord is of two natures or to say it differently, He is of two races: one human and the other divine. That means that there is an authentic human being sitting at the right hand of the Father. In

order to get there this authentic human being ascended into heaven. There is the sign in heaven. A human seated at the right hand of God. Humanity is now exalted back to the place from which it had fallen.

God has also given signs on the earth below. His signs include the signs worked by the prophets in the Old Testament, but also the signs which were much more numerous, worked by our Lord. Then those same signs were worked by the apostles after He ascended into heaven. Our Lord healed the sick. His apostles healed the sick. Our Lord escaped those who wished to harm Him until His hour had come. His apostles escaped harm and imprisonment until their hour had come. Our Lord raised the dead. The apostles raised the dead. Our Lord shook the earth where the disciples were meeting on one occasion when they had begun to suffer for the sake of the name of Jesus Christ.

Even the fire and the vapor of smoke have occurred over and over again since the Lord ascended into heaven. The fire and smoke of the destruction of the temple by the Romans followed by every fire and every smoke that has taken place in the violent human history since then.

Now I realize that there is more that can be said, but I usually preach only on one passage of Scripture at a time. I realize that I could have talked about the temple and how God has already rebuilt the temple, it is simply not a structure in Jerusalem. In fact all of you have seen the temple of God already and no I don't mean our church building.

I realize that there are other prophecies to be considered including our Lord's own words about His return and the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. I realize that, but the prophets and the apostles live in fellowship with each other. Therefore they live in fellowship with the prophet Joel and according to the criteria that Joel sets forth at God's behest, you are living in the end times. All of the prophecies have already been fulfilled. They have been fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost and on every day since then. The only thing left before our Lord's return is the sun turning into darkness and the moon to blood.

You no longer need to speculate about whether or not you are living in the end times. You no longer need to read the paper or watch the news and think to yourself, "I wonder if we are living in the end times." The prophets and the apostles have already told you. You are living in the end times. You have been living in the end times for the past two thousand years. The darkness of the sun and the blood of the moon before our Lord's return may happen at any time.

And the interesting thing about living in the end times is this: in spite of all of the terrible things that happen in the end times that produce the fire and smoke, it is in this time that everyone, no matter where you come from or what your background is, everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.