

What Should We Make of All This?

“It’s a sign of the times”. If I received a nickel for every time I heard someone say this as a reaction to an event or disaster, I would be richer than Bill Gates. People in the Christian community say this all the time. But, is the statement true, valid, and biblical? Is this _____ (fill in the blank) God’s judgment or could it be we just live in a sin-cursed and fallen world? What is the answer to all this? Should we look around and see “signs of the times” in every disaster and pandemic and war we hear about?

When people refer to things being a sign of the times, this is many times in reference to Christ’s second coming. We are getting closer to His coming, so they say, and so the world is getting worse and worse and so these are signs of His coming. After all, with every passing day, we are getting closer to when Christ will come back, right? **No!** The Bible actually leads us to the opposite conclusion.

Why do I conclude this? As Bible-believing, independent Baptists, we believe Christ’s appearing is imminent. What does imminent mean? It can mean “close” such as, God is imminent or omnipresence (being everywhere present). Death is also imminent to all of us as we don’t know when it will claim our physical lives. Christ’s appearance is as imminent as death. Just as we don’t know when we will die, we do not know when Christ will appear to rapture the Church. We are no closer to either event one day to the next. No event needs fulfillment for Christ to rapture His Church since Christ’s ascension in Acts 1:9.

Notice I used the word “appearing,” not “coming.” Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. This describes the event of Christ’s appearance when the Church will be raptured in order to protect the Church from the coming judgements of the Tribulation period. Christ’s appearing and coming are two different events.

Why do I conclude this? The event described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 is NOT found in the book of Revelation from chapters 4-22. Revelation 3:9 may refer to the rapture as it refers to “the hour of testing which is about to come upon the whole world” (vs 10). But the point is, once we get past the first three chapters of Revelation, the event described in 1 Thessalonians 4 does not match any description of any event in Revelation 4-22.

People may point to Matthew 24:9-31 or Revelation 19:11-21 as proof texts that specific things need to happen before the rapture or these are signs of its closeness. Firstly, if we read the descriptions in these two references, we see these things are not happening currently. Second, even if things are getting worse, find solace in Christ’s words from Matthew 24:4-8, “And Jesus answered and said to them, See to it that no one misleads you. For many will come in my name saying I am the Christ, and will mislead many. You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. But all these things are merely the beginning of birth pangs (NASB).”

When you combine Matthew 24:4-8 with what Jesus says in Luke 13 about bad things happening in the world, we can conclude that the events that are happening are neither “signs of the times” nor proof of God’s judgment against individuals. I don’t conclude the coronavirus is a judgment of God, I have no hard

proof or evidence to convince me of that. On the contrary, we just read that the Bible itself leads us to the opposite conclusion.

To further prove we are not closer to the rapture today than yesterday, we will consider what the apostles taught. Look at 1 Peter 4:7 and Philippians 4:5. Both references tell us the Lord is near. We can conclude both Peter and Paul believed Christ could have appeared during their lifetimes. In the book of Revelation, John writes that Jesus tells us He is coming quickly (3:11, 22:7). So Peter, Paul, and John all agree in this; Christ's appearance is imminent; it could happen at any time.

So why do bad things happen if they are not signs of the times nor God's judgment? Look again at what Jesus says in Luke 13:5 in reference to accidents and disasters that happen and claim people's lives. He says; "unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." The reason or purpose for God allowing bad things to happen (whether it's war, famine, sickness, disease, and sins committed one person to another) is this - repent or you too will perish. When we watch or read the news, we may be shocked and despaired and discouraged. We ask, "why?" and "where are you God?" God desires everyone to repent and turn to Christ for salvation. That is why. To conclude that these things happen because God is reacting to what you or I did yesterday is irresponsible and unbiblical. Jesus says so here in Luke 13. We don't want to spread any unnecessary worry or anxiety or fear. If you are one who concludes what we see in the world is a sign of the end, or that we are being punished for our individual sins, stop it! That is not helpful in anyway. Jesus did not conclude that, neither should you.

So what should we do? Habakkuk 3:18 and Philippians 4:4 both agree - Rejoice! Look past what you see in the world that causes you to wonder why or where God is in the midst of it. No matter what happens, keep your eyes fixed on Jesus (Hebrews 12:2). Don't worry about what happens. Don't wonder what will happen tomorrow. All this world has to offer is death and decay. Look heavenward toward the eternal, never fading life God offers to all who "confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart God raised Him from the dead" (Romans 10:9). In the salvation found in Jesus Christ, we can ALWAYS rejoice. This world is not our home (Hebrews 13:13-14, 1 Peter 2:11). In agreement with Habakkuk and Philippians, Hebrews 13:15 says; Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name." Praise God for ***who*** He is and ***what*** He has done (His salvation and His promises of heavenly reward). Look to Him and you can praise Him.

I pray for God's protection for all of us from not just coronavirus, but sickness in general. God bless and stay safe.

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