

Are We Really Living in the End Times???

The End Times. What does the future really hold for us?

During this sermon series we are going to look at the Bible in a way some of you may never have looked at it before.

We are going to take a journey, if you will, and see what the Bible says about the End of Times. Is there really such a thing? Does the Bible REALLY predict the end of the world?

We are going to look at several different views of scriptures over the next few weeks and try to understand for ourselves if we really are living in the End Times. And what it all means for us today.

To me, it all starts with prophesy. The Bible is packed with prophesy. We have what we call the Major Prophets, the Minor Prophets, Jesus also gave us some prophesies, and there is prophetic scripture throughout the entire Bible.

Now much of it has already been fulfilled thousands of years ago, but many believe there is still quite a bit of unfulfilled prophecy throughout the Bible – and especially in the last book in the Bible, that mysterious book called Revelation.

And just to clarify, it is Revelation – singular.

Now before we really start digging in and looking at prophecy and especially the Book of Revelation, it is important for us to know the different viewpoints people have of that book.

These viewpoints aren't just shared among different denominations, but even among Methodists. Just in the Greater Tucson area, we have 43 active pastors. If you ask the 43 pastors about the Book of Revelation, you will probably get 43 different answers.

Even among our Fundamental Christian brothers and sisters, who talk about the End Times more than most other denominations, well, they don't always agree about several aspects of Revelation.

So feel free to disagree with anything I say during this sermon series. The purpose of this series is not for me to force my ideas and thoughts onto you, but the purpose is to educate all of us to the different viewpoints about prophetic scripture and then we can decide for ourselves if we are Really Living in the End Times.

So before we just start talking about the signs, I thought it would be good for us to review what the most common theories are concerning the Book of Revelation.

There are five main views that we will discuss.

- 1) The first view is that all of the events in the book have already happened. They look at the symbolism and they look at history and say that it has all already happened. This view is called Preterism (Pret-er-ism) Many with this view don't believe there will be an "End Time."
- 2) The second view is very similar to the Preterist view and is called Historicism (his-tor-i-sism)

Historicists (his-tor-i-sis) believe that much of the Book of Revelation has happened, but they believe that it is still happening today, with more to follow in our future.

They believe that the events started around 70 AD and we still are living in and have been living in the times referenced in the Book of Revelation.

John Calvin and Martin Luther are said to have this view. Many people with this view also believe that there won't be one Antichrist, but several evil antichrists in the world throughout the centuries.

- 3) The third view is that the book is just so full of symbolism and poetry that it doesn't really predict anything. Or if it does, it isn't meant for us to fully understand and we shouldn't try.
- 4) The fourth view of Revelation is that it is all just secret code. It was written to give Christians in that time hope and peace without worrying that the authorities of the time would know they were talking about them.
- 5) The fifth view of Revelation is that it is totally prophetic – about the end of the world. People who hold this view are called Futurists or Dispensationalists. (Dis-pen-sation-alists)

This is a very popular view today. Many of our Non-Denominational churches have this view. Many who hold this view believe there will be a person that is the Antichrist. They believe there will be somewhere between 3 ½ years and 7 years of affliction and distress when the Antichrist appears. They call this time the Great Tribulation.

Many Futurists also believe that Christians that are alive when the Great Tribulation happens will be taken up to heaven while they are still living. The word they use to describe this “taking up” is called The Rapture, which you may have heard of before.

These are the main views we will look at over the next few weeks. Some of it will confuse us or maybe it already has. Some of it may make us question our faith, some of it may challenge what we have always thought about the End of Times.

I encourage you not to miss any of the topics during this series as I have structured them in a way to help us grow in our knowledge and our faith. If you do miss one, please visit our website and download the sermon you missed.

What has really intrigued people about the Book of Revelation, is that, for many, it contains prophecy for the future. A prophecy that some believe we might be able to see unfold in front of our own eyes.

As a whole, humans have been taken in by wanting to know the future. To go along with our theme and this concept, I want to read for you the first couple of paragraphs that Hal Lindsey wrote in his book, "The Late Great Planet Earth."

I am not sure what it is about fortune telling, or knowing future events, but I know many of us here have been taken in by it. Many of us have visited a psychic, heard of Nostradamus, or have read our horoscope in the paper, or enjoy a fortune cookie, or watch TV shows like Medium, or even the Psychic Friends Network.

We just have a great desire to know what is going to happen in the future.

I think that's why so many people are drawn to the prophetic teachings of the Bible. I mean, what if there are prophecies straight from God about our future? That would be great!

Now, Mr. Lindsey is a Futurist. This book, "The Late Great Planet Earth" changed the way many people think about Christianity and future events. It helped to prompt many people to come to Christ.

But you know, there are no shortage of books when it comes to understanding the book of Revelation and other prophetic scriptures. I have a lot of books here, and this is just a very small sampling.

How many here have heard of the novel, "Left Behind?" It was an entire series written by the futurists Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. Like "The Late Great Planet Earth" it also helped to prompt many people to come to Christ.

But I want to preface this sermon series by saying, it doesn't matter what view you have. It doesn't even matter if you don't have a view or opinion.

I have literally seen devout Christians almost start a fist fight over their views of the prophetic scriptures in the Bible.

We won't burn in Hell for having the wrong view of prophecy. We might just be surprised.

The important thing to remember is that God loves us. He is so much more than just words in the Bible. He is more than we can fully understand.

And you know what? He knows it. He won't be upset if we don't fully understand his prophetic scriptures.

But as being a part of the Bible, I feel prophetic scriptures are important to study, and quite frankly, they are fun to study. But we have to remember that God's love is what we need to be excited about.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, said, "We may not always believe the same, but we should all love the same."

So it doesn't matter if you believe in The Rapture or if you believe that there will never be an end of the world. It just matters that we trust God and love God.

So, with all of that being said, let's take a few minutes and look at one of the viewpoints about the Book of Revelation and the End Times.

The first one I want to discuss has to do with those that believe we shouldn't try to interpret the prophetic scriptures.

This group believes that when we try to interpret the symbolism that it loses its meaning. Whether we look at it as being symbolic of the times it was written or for future events. That when you try to decipher the code you take away its very essence.

The Book of Revelation has a lot of symbolism in it. It is commonly believed to have been written by the Apostle John and it came to him in a vision or series of visions - and that could be one of the reasons for all of the symbolism.

Let me read an example for you out of the Book of Revelation (Chapter 13).

Don't try to figure out what the symbolism means, just listen to the words and try to visualize the story. Open your hearts and minds and just enjoy it for what it is.

Talk about symbolism! Anybody get lost during that reading? This is why many people believe that we shouldn't even try to decipher what these symbols mean.

Some would say that the first beast was Nero Caesar who was the Roman Emperor around the time this book was written. Some believe John couldn't mention him by name for fear of death.

While others believe that this scripture is talking about the Antichrist coming into the world. The ten horns and crowns refer to future kingdoms that will be set up when the Antichrist comes into power. And they believe the other beast is something called the False Prophet.

So you can see why many people feel that we shouldn't even try to decipher this. I mean, is it supposed to be taken literally, symbolically, is it history or prophesy, all of the above, none of the above?

Don't worry if it doesn't make any sense to you today. For most of you, it shouldn't. We will talk more about it over the next few weeks.

But you may be asking, why should we even try to understand it? Why not enjoy the text for what it is? The end of the book of Revelation gives us a message of hope and peace. Why not just accept it and leave it as it is?

We could - right now - all decide that is where we stand. Let's not try to dig into this book. Let's leave it as poetry and symbolism that we don't fully understand and just accept it for the good news that Christ loves us. And that would be okay.

Now, if you believe that and are comfortable with that, then you can take the next few weeks off if you like. But, even if you do feel that way, I think it would be a good idea to come back anyway and learn what others believe, and why they believe it. You may strengthen your own opinion or even change it!

Next week we will look at what the Preterists have to say about the Prophetic Scriptures and why so many people have that view.

No matter what your opinion or view, let's all open our minds these next few weeks and grow together in our faith and knowledge.

Pastor: Mark Maddox
520-780-4889
pastor@umcSanctuary.org
www.umcSanctuary.org