

Surviving the End of the World

RECENTLY I've seen a lot of people predicting that the world, as we know it, is about to end. People may no longer walk the streets carrying signs saying "Repent – the end is near!", but that message is still being proclaimed in blogs, websites, news articles, and even on television.

Some of the theories are utter nonsense. For example, one person suggested that the BP oil spill in the Gulf would trigger an explosion of all the oil buried beneath the ocean, which would in turn blow up the whole planet and cause a mass extinction event. That had zero chance of happening, and as it turned out it did not happen. The oil spill was certainly a disaster, but it did *not* kill every last person on the planet.

Other theories are more plausible and should be taken more seriously. For example, some people have pointed out that our electrical grid is vulnerable to solar flares. The power grid in the United States depends upon around 350 high-voltage transformers. These giant machines alter electrical voltages so that electricity can be transmitted over long distances. (Without them you'd have to live right next to a power plant. It is very difficult to efficiently transfer electricity over hundreds of miles.) These units weigh more than 100 tons and take years to build. If a solar flare were to destroy them (or even take out just some of them) it would shut down the nation's power grid for years. Can you imagine what life would be like without electricity? Estimates suggest that the damage would be in the trillions of dollars and around 60% to 90% of the country's population would die.

What is the risk of a solar flare of that magnitude happening? As it turns out, solar activity peaks every 22 years. In the most recent cycles the high-energy particles and X-rays from the Sun have either missed Earth, just barely grazed it, or were too weak to do any damage. However, in 1859 and in 1921 massive storms *did* strike the Earth. At the time they had little impact because there was no power grid in 1859, and in 1921 the grid was in its infancy. But if the 1859 or 1921 storms were to hit today then our grid would go down and we would all die. In 1859 it didn't really matter if people had power or not because nearly everyone lived on farms, and the farms didn't need power to operate. That is not the case today. Going without power for even a single day is a huge inconvenience; if the power was shut off *forever* it would be more than just inconvenient – it would be fatal.

There is no way to tell if a massive solar flare is in our future. What is not disputed is that our planet has been hit by massive solar flares in the past, and one day it will be hit by them again. Our power grid has not been hardened to survive such an event. If it happens our grid will go down and it will not come back up. What happened in 1859 and 1921 will eventually happen again. It may not happen in the next few years and it may not happen in the next decade. It may not even happen in our lifetimes. But it *could* happen at any time, and if it did happen then the world as we know it would end.

Another possibility is terrorism. If a terrorist were to obtain a nuclear weapon, put it on an inexpensive cruise missile (the type that can be purchased for ~\$100,000 on the black market), and fire it off the coast of the United States (so it wouldn't even have to be smuggled into the country), they could detonate the nuke around 20 to 25 miles above the nation. That would produce a massive electromagnetic pulse that would have the same effect as a massive solar flare – the power grid would go down, it would not come back up, and we would all die. Our electronic equipment (like our cars and computers, for example) has not been hardened against an EMP and would not survive.

There are already several rogue states with ties to terrorism (like Iran and North Korea) that either have nuclear weapons or will have them in the near future. It also may be possible to obtain nuclear weapons on the black market; some Russian nuclear facilities are not particularly well-guarded and many nukes been "misplaced". An EMP-causing nuke could be launched tomorrow, or it might not ever happen. But, like a rogue solar flare, it could happen at any moment and end our civilization.

Yet another possibility is inflation. The government has been spending tax dollars in a way that

has never been seen before in history; we now have administrations that spend *trillions* more than it actually receives. To put that number into perspective: if you spend \$1000 per day you would have spent \$365,000 by the end of the year. If you spent \$1000 per day starting in 0 AD and wanted to spend a billion dollars, it would take you until the 28th century to do so. If you wanted to spend a trillion dollars you would have to go through that process *999 more times*. A trillion dollars is an unbelievable amount of money! A trillion one-dollar bills, laid end-to-end, would reach from the Earth to the Sun – a distance of *93 million miles*. It is an unfathomable number. In the Milky Way galaxy there are “only” around 400 billion stars. There aren’t even a trillion stars *in the entire galaxy*.

The reason the government can spend that much money is because other countries are willing to lend it to us. Nations like China are willing to take what amount to IOUs from our government. We get their money and they get interest and a promise that we’ll pay them back someday. At some point it will become impossible to pay the interest on the money we owe. Some nations such as Japan are already in that position; Japan’s national debt is 200% of its GDP (meaning Japan owes *twice* what the *entire country* can produce in a year), and over 60% of their budget is spent paying the interest on that debt – and that is with an amazing interest rate of just 0.05%! It doesn’t take a genius to realize that at some point interest rates will go up, the country will default, and the Yen will become worthless.

The same thing could happen here. All it would take is for China to wake up one day and say “You know what? The US has \$95 trillion dollars in unfunded liabilities and debt. I’m going to sell off my bonds and invest my money in a country that isn’t spending like drunken sailors.” At that point the market would become flooded with dollars (which would make them nearly worthless) and the purchasing power of the dollar would drop to zero – a process known as hyperinflation. Overnight the savings of millions of Americans would be wiped out, their 401ks would become worthless, and Americans would find themselves unable to purchase anything. This would be followed by massive unemployment, societal collapse, rioting, and death.

All it would take is for one major holder of our debt to decide to invest their money somewhere else, and that could happen tomorrow. If it did then the house of cards would collapse and our country would be destroyed. We would become a third-world nation virtually overnight.

Of course, that might not ever happen. A solar flare might not ever happen. An EMP terrorist attack might not ever happen. Things may just keep on going as they are now, day after day, year after year – just as they have for the past century. Yes, the world might end this afternoon, but the chances are it won’t. (At least, that’s what we hope.)

I’m sure there are other doomsday scenarios out there but let’s stick with these. Let’s say that, for whatever reason, you believe that the end of the world is imminent. You’ve read the reports and you’ve seen the writing on the wall. Now I’m not saying that any of this is likely; personally I think there’s no way to know what the future holds. Anything is *possible* but that does not mean that anything is *likely*. But, for the sake of the argument, let’s say you are convinced that it’s all about to come crashing down. What do you do?

This is obviously a little different from being afraid that your teenage son might total your car. You can’t just go buy “end of the world” insurance. How do you respond to a threat of that magnitude? Is there a way to “hedge your bets” so that you can survive the end of civilization itself?

Believe it or not, there are actually Biblical principles that we can apply to this. I think the most striking one can be found here:

Matthew 6:34: “Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”

In other words, Jesus told us to not worry about tomorrow. Just focus on today and tomorrow will take care of itself. I will admit that seems like really bizarre advice. Does Jesus actually *mean* that?

Apparently so! Look what Jesus said in the verses just before that one:

Matthew 6:25: "Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?"

26 Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?

27 Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?

28 And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:

29 And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

30 Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? Or, What shall we drink? Or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

32 (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.

33 But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

In what is one of the most astonishing passages in the entire Bible, Jesus actually commands His followers to "take no thought for your life". He *commanded* them to not worry about the future – to not be concerned about food, water, or clothing. In fact, Jesus actually chided His disciples for their lack of faith, pointing out that God knew they had needs and was more than able to provide for them! As verse 33 explains, Jesus wants us to be focused on just one thing: serving God. When our focus is on building God's kingdom He will supply us with whatever we need. As Jesus pointed out, the birds don't sow crops or harvest fields but God still feeds them. We can trust God to feed us as well.

Now this doesn't mean that there won't be suffering; 11 of the 12 apostles died a martyr's death. Jesus told us that in this life there would be tremendous hardships. He never said life would be easy – in fact He said it would be painful, difficult, and full of trials. *But God does not want us to worry about tomorrow.* God is bigger than tomorrow; He knows what's coming and He will take care of us. We don't know what the future holds but we do know Who holds the future – and that's really all we need to know.

This seems to fly in the face of reason. After all, isn't that just being irresponsible? Even Proverbs 22:3 says "A prudent man forseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished." What we forget is that God wants us to hide ourselves *in Him.* God wants to be our strong tower, our mighty refuge, and our defense. 2 Chronicles says this:

2 Chronicles 16:9: "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him."

Do you see that? It is so easy to forget that *God wants us to put our trust in Him.* That's not just a cute phrase that we recite on Sunday mornings; God actually wants us to trust His ability to take care of us. He wants us to believe that when times are tough God will be there. He doesn't want us to think "Well, tough times are coming but I've got it covered." He wants our thought to be "Tough times are coming but God will take care of me. I'm going to stay focused on serving God and let Him deal with

the future.”

People think that the phrase “God helps those who help themselves” is a Bible verse, but it's not. To us that may seem irresponsible. After all, shouldn't we at least try to do something? I've seen many people recommend stockpiling a six-months' supply of food and water, or investing heavily in silver and gold. While I'm not against taking precautions it's worth nothing that the Bible has a different take on things. It doesn't seem to think that silver or gold is of much value when the world is ending:

Proverbs 11:4: “Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death.”

Lest we think that this is talking about the Great White Throne judgment, Ezekiel expounds further on this topic:

Ezekiel 7:19: “They shall case their silver in the streets, and their gold shall be removed: their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the Lord: they shall not satisfy their souls, neither fill their bowels: because it is the stumblingblock of their iniquity.”

You might be thinking “That doesn't make any sense! Surely having lots of money stored away would be a great asset when civilization is collapsing!” Proverbs gives us a hint as to why this doesn't work:

Proverbs 13:8: “The ransom of a man's life are his riches: but the poor heareth not rebuke.”

In other words, if civilization has collapsed and you are the only person around who has food, water, and money, what do you think is going to happen? Do you think your neighbors are just going to sit around and starve to death while they watch you eat? It's much more likely that they'll try to kill you and take your food from you. Having food when no one else has food is very similar to painting a big target on your head that says “Shoot me”. Even if you have guns and are able to keep your neighbors at bay, it's unlikely that you'll be able to keep a squadron of soldiers at bay. Someone is going to find out that you have food, and then large numbers of highly-armed people are going to come and seize it.

As far as gold goes – sure, it seems like a great investment now, but what do you think will happen if hyperinflation hits? In 1933 the United States government made it illegal for people to own more than \$100 worth of gold. Anyone who had stockpiles of gold were forced to exchange it for paper money. This law was not repealed until 1974. If the government was broke and had nothing to spend but worthless paper money, do you really think they wouldn't pass that law again? All they'd have to do is pass a single law and then – bam! – they can legally confiscate all your gold. So yes, owning gold *could* help in the day of disaster – right up until someone decides to steal it.

Interestingly, the Bible does not depict stockpiling things in a very flattering light. It's true that in the case of Joseph stockpiling food on a national basis led to millions of lives being saved. However, the key there is that Joseph *wasn't stockpiling food for himself*; he was doing it for the benefit of entire nations. Individuals who stockpile things for their *own* benefit are routinely criticized in the Bible. For example, look at what James says:

James 5:1: “Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.

2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten.

3 Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.

“Heaping treasure together for the last days” is something that James is *criticizing*. It's not listed as an admirable trait. Jesus illustrated this in a parable:

Luke 12:16: “And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:

17 And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?

18 And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater: and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.

19 And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.

20 But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?

21 So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

What did this person do that so angered God? When the Lord blessed him with great wealth the man didn't give it to the poor to help them – instead he decided to stockpile it all for himself so that he could lead an easy, comfortable life. Jesus said that the Christian response was to be quite different. Notice what He says in this passage:

Luke 3:9: “And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.

10 And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then?

11 He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.”

Jesus warned the people that bad times were coming. However, when people asked Christ what to do about it He didn't say “If you have two coats, keep one as a spare because it's going to get ugly out there.” Instead He told people to *give away their spares*. If they had two coats they were told to give the second one to someone who needed it *right then*. If they had extra food they weren't supposed to store it up – they were to find a hungry person and feed them. That is not a stockpile mentality.

It's very rare for God to save people by having them store up huge quantities of food and water ahead of time. The only examples that come to mind are Noah (in which the whole world was destroyed by water and Noah had to live on a boat for a year), and Joseph, who we've already mentioned. In both of these cases the purpose of the stockpiles were to save the lives of *others*; in the case of Noah it was to ensure the survival of the human race. However, in other cases the Lord Himself provided in times of great distress. Elijah didn't survive the drought by having lots of food stored up; instead God sent *birds* to feed him, and when that failed He sent him to a widow who had *one cup of flour left*. That one cup of flour miraculously fed three people for *months*. The Israelites wandered around in the desert for 40 years, and they survived because God rained down food from Heaven for them. How much food did He send? Just enough to meet their immediate need.

God wants us to lead radically different lives. Jesus said this:

Matthew 6:19: “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and

rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:

20 But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal:

21 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Jesus does not want us to lay up great fortunes here on Earth – in fact, He strictly prohibited it. He wants us to invest our time, money, and energy into God's kingdom. If we have more than we need then God wants us to give it to people who need it. God does not want us to be distracted by what may or may not happen tomorrow; instead God wants our focus – and our heart – to be centered on serving Him. God wants us to *trust Him* when it comes to what might happen tomorrow. Don't worry about it; don't fret about it; don't wonder where your next meal will come from. God knows you need food and He will provide.

The question is, if something bad happens and the world as we know it comes to an end, who are you going to be looking to for deliverance? Are you thinking "Well, I've got all these things prepared so I'll be fine" or "God will take care of me"? Are you depending on yourself to get through it or are you looking to God?

This doesn't mean that you'll survive. A lot of Christians died when Rome was sacked. A lot of Christians died in the Black Plague and in the two World Wars. But God wants us to trust Him with our future and with our lives. While we are here on Earth He will watch over us, and when our work is done the Lord will bring us home. Above all He wants us to trust *Him*, not ourselves. As Paul said:

Philippians 4:19: "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus."

The question is, do we really believe that? When the power grid is down, and our cities are burning, and the grocery stores have no food, and our homes are empty – when it comes right down to it, do we *really* believe that God will supply all our needs, or do we think that it's all up to us?

That Being Said...

I know someone is going to read this and think "Well, if the Lord is going to supply all my needs then I'm not going to go to work anymore! I'll just sit at home and let food rain down from the sky." Or "If God will supply all my needs then I'm not going to take my medication anymore. God will just miraculously heal me." Or "If God will supply all my needs then I don't need to use my umbrella. God will miraculously move the rain so I don't get wet."

I hope you realize how foolish that is. There is a *tremendous* difference between trusting God to meet your needs and refusing the deliverance that God has already provided. When it's raining you can use an umbrella – God has provided you with a way to avoid getting wet. Expecting God to do something miraculous when He's already provided you with a solution is just being insulting. At the same time, expecting God to miraculously heal your broken leg when you can just go to the doctor and get it treated is insanity – God has provided doctors and hospitals. The same goes for jobs – if you have one then God has already given you a way to put food on the table. Rejecting God's deliverance just because you'd rather be provided for in some other, more comfortable way is foolish. It dishonors God.

The "end of the world as we know it" is quite another matter. While you can take all sorts of precautions (and I have no problem with that) it must be realized that, honestly, there's very little you can do. The gold, food, and water you stockpile can all be taken from you. Angry mobs could storm

your house and kill you. *Lots* of things could happen that could defeat your best preparations. The chances are good that no matter what you do, if something happens that wipes out 90% of the country's population, you are going to be a part of that 90%.

But God doesn't want us to worry about it. He knows we have needs, He knows what they are, and He is more than able to take care of them. God wants us to say "Lord, my future is in Your hands. I'm going to keep serving You and let You deal with tomorrow." There is tremendous peace in giving our tomorrows to God and spending our todays following Christ. There's very little we can do about tomorrow, but there's a lot God can do about it. Let Him handle it.