

Y is for Y2K



Is the way that the world runs today the way that it has to be?

What would it take for the world to work a different way?

Can you imagine something better than democracy or an economic system after capitalism?

In December 1999, I got a call from a newspaper reporter. They were calling pastors and religious leaders in our city to see what we were telling our people about Y2K.

When the article came out I was the only pastor who was telling their people not to worry and that the real fear was people panicking and doing stuff like pulling all of their money out of the banks.

This was especially odd because I was part of a denomination that majored on eschatology and was very *end-times* focused.

I had multiple friends in that group who made major purchases (like extra freezers) in preparation.

One close friend went in with another family and bought a trailer full of food and supplies and had it parked in a remote location ... but then they had to worry about guns in order to protect the trailer in case of societal breakdown.

The alarm and drastic measures are telling. There is something about the way that we have been taught to read the Bible that makes us especially susceptible to panic. By **calling the Bible ‘the word of god’(see W)** and **not distinguishing genres (see G)** we end up creating a tight little system of *end-times* expectation that repeatedly fails us.

I became a *bible-believing* Christian during the cold-war era.

Communist Russia was our biggest threat and ‘Christian’ bookstores and TV shows were filled with very specific projections about how current events lined up with biblical prophecy.

I was taught to read the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other – because they lined up!

Not understanding that apocalyptic literature in the Bible is a critique of their time and contemporary *present* order and a hope of future deliverance makes us vulnerable to panic in ours.

We are taught that apocalyptic elements in the Bible are predictive instead of prophetic critique and this is creating the problem that leaves us so susceptible.

In my short lifetime I have seen so many predictions come and go. I have seen layers and layers of moving onto the next thing a passage means without even acknowledging that 6 months ago we were told it was something different.

There is a sort of amnesia required to stick with this way of reading the Bible for more than a couple of years.

I have seen more than 40 antichrists come and go. Everyone from foreign leaders to Popes to Presidents have been said to be the Antichrist.

This exposes a second problem with eschatological expectation. Every time I hear the phrase 'the Antichrist' I know I am in trouble. The person has not done a close reading of the Bible.

If you read **the 4 passages in the New Testament** in which this phrase appears you will be left asking why we think that a world leader is this character. The answer is that in eschatological readings there is a great deal of amalgamation.

Amalgamation happens when you take a character like 'antichrist' and blend it with an Old Testament character like 'the prince' from Daniel 9 or a the bad-guy from Revelation 13. You take all of the villains in all of apocalyptic literature and meld them into one *super-baddy*.

I just had a talk this weekend with a denomination leader about how *end-times* expectations have changed in their lifetime. We talked about young leaders and how different their eschatology is from 50 years ago. My hope for the next 3 decades is that sincere people of faith get fatigued on this *unfulfilling* way to read the Bible and this next generation is released and empowered with an understanding of genre

that does not leave them susceptible and vulnerable to panic over sensations like y2k and franchises like Left Behind.

The world is in too great a need for really great people to be distracted by thinking that apocalyptic is A) predictive and B) about the 21st century.

Link: [previous post about the book of Revelation \(see R\)](#)

Here we have 2 crippling problems to confront – and the problem is that they compound the effect of each other intensely.

The more minor problem is the one that we have touched on above: a loss of *the prophetic* or our Christian imagination.

The major, and more hideous problem, is something called “final forms”. We live in an era where systems have become so solidified, concrete, and assumed that are assumed to be ends in themselves.

- Capitalism is the pinnacle economic system.
- Democracy, while flawed, is superior to all others.
- Nationalism will never be topped or undone.

They are final forms that, once invented or introduced, are here to stay.

And there is an ominous implication:

- Christianity is purported to be in its final form.

The faith we have today cannot be reexamined, tinkered with, or questioned. It is written in stone and unchanging.

In fact, it gets worse – true Christianity was found in the early church and the answer to our current problems is to get ‘back’ to that kind of a faith.

Come this Sunday at 9 to hear the rest ...