



JESUS IS COMING—SO WHAT?

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Micah 4

INTRODUCTION

When I worked in Downtown Pittsburgh, or as we called it, “Dahntahn,” I saw a lot of interesting characters. I’m talking there was a guy who always wore a bright-colored, three-piece, longtail velvet suit with a top hat. Once a year, we had the furry convention where people showed up in animal costumes and literally acted like whatever furball they dressed up as. And you thought Portland was weird.

The most interesting characters, however, were the soapbox preachers. They seemed more like protestors than preachers. I haven’t seen a lot of them in Atlanta. Do you know what I’m talking about? These are some of the more zealous angry Christians who hang around a corner. Often, they carried signs with them. Signs that would say, “Jesus will return soon!” “The End is Near!” As a Christian, I didn’t have a problem with the message. What I didn’t care for was their delivery. There was always an ominous tone attached to it. It was as if Jesus’ return seemed like a bad thing, or we should be scared when He does. I always thought His return was supposed to be a good thing.

And every time I saw those men and women on the corner, I always wondered, “So what?” Yeah, Jesus is coming back someday, but so what? They never said why that’s important or what we should do about it. So, for that reason, I think most people simply ignored the soapbox preachers. Sure, it didn’t help that they were a bit over the top, but they never

preached the “so what?” Jesus is coming back someday. So what? What are we to do about it?

To be fair, it’s easy for me to get on their case, but if we’re honest with ourselves, are we, and when I say “we” I mean those of us who profess Jesus as our Lord and Savior, all that much better? Think about it, every week, we confess in the creed we believe Jesus will come again someday but do we really know why that’s important? Do we know why we feel the need to remind ourselves every week?

It’s not just the creed. Throughout the year, we also read prophetic and apocalyptic passages in the Bible, like that from Micah 4, which tells us that there will be an end of time as we know it; a latter day. Other places call it the Day of the Lord. A day when Jesus will return and turn this world on its head. But do *we* know why that’s important?

It kind of reminds me of when I was in seminary. We were studying this topic. In academics, it’s called the “Parousia,” which is a \$5 word that simply means “arrival” or “Jesus’ second coming.” We were going over the various views: Amillennialism, Pre-millennialism, Post-millennialism. A heated debate grew in a class. Well, one boneheaded student (and I know he was boneheaded because it was me), out of frustration, just yelled out amid the debating, “What does it matter? If we believe in Jesus and we believe He’s going to return, shouldn’t we be pan-millennialist and trust that it will all pan out in the end?” To which the fiercely divided suddenly unified in unequivocal “No!” That was the only thing they agreed on that day.

You see, I couldn’t answer the “So what?” question. I believed Jesus was coming back, but I couldn’t tell you why that was important in my present life or what I was supposed to do with that information. My solution was to ignore it, but that wasn’t the right answer.

So can *we* answer the “So what?” Do we know what we’re supposed to do with these apocalyptic texts? And, as a quick aside, apocalyptic simply means revealing. They’re passages which reveal something about God and His future. So why do we have them? And what are we to do with them?

Let's start with what we're not supposed to do with them.

WHAT WE'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO DO

In general, I find that when it comes to these apocalyptic passages, people in the Church fall into one of two groups. The first group merely looks at these texts and doesn't know what to do with them. So, they put them on the back burner. It's like they're the B side of the Bible (Yes, I'm old enough to know what a B side is). It's not that they don't believe them. It's just that they have been waiting a long time for them to come to fruition, so they don't seem all that relevant to our present lives. They can't answer the "So what?" question, so they ignore them. That's what I was doing in seminary.

But did you know that nearly 25% of the Bible is made up of apocalyptic or prophetic texts? It seems to me that if God intended for us to put these writings on the back burner, He wouldn't have made them such a large portion of His Bible. So, we can't ignore them or see them as irrelevant. In fact, 2 Peter 3 warns us not to become complacent or indifferent to the coming of the Lord. It's important that we seek out the relevance of these passages to our lives and faith. That's group one; they ignore these texts.

Then there's group two. This group is on the other end of the spectrum. They think there are hidden messages within these passages; little Easter eggs that can only be discovered through secret codes and formulas. In general, they look for details on the exact times and ways these things will occur. Lots of people have claimed to have cracked the Bible code. For almost 2000 years, Bible students and scholars have attempted to crack some secret Bible code. But, for 2000 years, every person has been wrong.

Unfortunately, for these individuals, in all their study of the scripture, none of them took Jesus' words in Matthew 24 very seriously, "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." You see, Jesus made it clear, these texts do not serve as some crystal ball. So, therefore, I would say the purpose of these apocalyptic texts

is not to get us to dig out some deep hidden message with a secret date. But then, that still leaves us with our question: what's their purpose? What's the answer to our "So what?"

THE ANSWER TO "SO WHAT?"

What do we do with a text like Micah 4 that we just read? A text that describes a future day when God will establish His house and His city. A house and city that will be the most important place in all the world. A day in which people from every nation will walk away from their false gods and turn to the true Lord. A day when there is no longer any need for armies or weapons because God will have established His perfect peace and His justice. A day when you won't have to worry about hearing boring sermons or bad jokes from the pulpit anymore because the Lord Himself will be the one who will teach us. It sounds lovely, right? But what are we to do with it in the here and now?

Well, I think vs. 5 gives us one of the best answers, "[Therefore,] though the nations around us [presently] follow their idols, we will follow the Lord our God forever and ever." In other words, one of the main reasons, not the only reason, but a big reason why God gives us texts like Micah 4 and other apocalyptic passages is that they're meant to encourage us to live out our present lives in anticipation of our future hope. They remind us that the way things are now in the present is not how they will always be. And, so our hope is not to be found in anything this world has to offer us. It's not in getting our candidate elected to office, nor is it in finding a cure or vaccine to whatever plagues us. It's not in how much we have in our retirement and savings accounts, nor is it in our country's military strength. It's not in our ability to remain a leading nation. It's not in our success nor the success of our children. Our hope, our only hope, rests in knowing that the same Lord who rose from the dead, thereby conquering sin and death, will return someday to put all of creation back into order. That's our hope, and we're to live our lives anticipating that great hope.

I know it seems like we've been waiting for that day forever, and at times it feels like it may never come, but, again, Peter reminds us, "Don't be fooled by the Lord's "slowness." Slowness is relative. With the Lord, a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

And so, while we wait, Micah 4 reminds us of this hope and reminds us that we are called to live out that future hope in the present. This means we're called to be a foretaste of that future kingdom. As citizens of this future kingdom we are to stand out as a beacon of what's to come.

It makes me think of one of my favorite restaurants, a place called "The Pearl." It's in Rosemary Beach Florida. It's a swanky little place off 30-A. One of my favorite things about this place is that before you order your cocktail or an appetizer, they bring you a spoon hors d'oeuvre. The chef packs an entire little microcosm meal onto a little spoon. And they are always delicious, and they always leave you wanting more. But that's the point. They're not meant to be filling. They're meant to give you a little foretaste of the grandness that is to come. They are meant to whet your appetite and get you excited for the even greater things ahead.

Like The Pearl, these texts call us to be God's hors d'oeuvre. We're to be a foretaste of what's to come when Jesus returns: to offer people a glimpse of the great hope to come. So, while the rest of the world might follow false gods and idols, "we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever" as a testimony of the hope we have in Christ's return.

So, what does it practically look like for us to live out God's future in our present? Let's look at Micah for some examples.

EXAMPLES OF GOD'S FUTURE IN OUR PRESENT

In the first verse it says, "the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and it shall

be lifted up above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it" God's house will be lifted up on the highest hill. Now we can't build God's house on the hill, but Jesus tells in Matthew 5 we can be the light of the world, like a city on a hill." We can point people who do not know Jesus to true faith in Him. We can live out our faith in the Gospel boldly for others to see. I think now more than ever people need to see authentic Christian faith boldly lived out as light in the darkness.

Verse 2 goes on, "and many nations shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." So, this tells us, not only are we to study God's word, but we are to take the word out into the world. We're to stand firm in the word. We're to share the word. As St. Paul puts it, we're to "Stand firm in the faith; Be on guard; be courageous; be strong." Stand firm in the word.

Verse 3 continues, "He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide disputes for strong nations far away; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore;" It's an image of justice and peace. If you want to get into an argument in the Church right now, just bring up the question of how we are to be a people of God's peace and justice right now. It's literally tearing apart the evangelical Church. This topic could be a sermon in and of itself. So, here's the thumbnail version. Psalm 34 tells us if we want peace, we have to pursue it; be intentional. Proverbs 13 shows us the enemy of peace is pride. To be a person of God's peace means to be a humble person. And, finally, Jesus explains to us in John 14, being a people of God's peace is only possible when our relationship with Jesus is square. Share peace.

Last verse. Verse 4 says "but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid, for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken." We see here God extending his charity and love. How do we do that in the present? I like how C.S. Lewis put it, "Charity means love in

the Christian sense. But love, in the Christian sense, does not mean an emotion. It is a state not of the feelings but of the will; that state of the will which we have naturally about ourselves, we must learn to have towards other people." To be a people who live out God's future in the present means to be a people who share God's love and charity in the here and now.

CONCLUSION

Jesus is coming back. So what? Here's what: be bold, stand firm, share peace, and extend love. Live with anticipation of what's to come. Live as a foretaste of the greatness Jesus will bring.

It's not an exhaustive list, but it's a good start. It's a good start for us as we live out God's future hope in our present time. That's a good start in our effort to point the people in the right direction who do not have the hope we have. It's a good start for giving people a foretaste of what's to come when Jesus returns.

As we celebrate in this Easter season the hope we were given in the past, let the words of Micah, and others like it, remind us of the hope we have in the future. Let them encourage us to live out our present lives fully confident in the future hope that we have in Christ. And let them give us the confidence to boldly say, "Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ is coming again." Amen



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