

**(For Monday, November 27, 2017) Do you dread the End Times? Really? Why?**

*“The LORD roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth quake. But the LORD is a refuge to his people, a stronghold to the people of Israel.”* (Joel 3:16, ESV)

This part of Joel’s prophecy deals with the Valley of Jehoshaphat, when God will bring judgement upon all those who have rejected him and abused his Elect. From time-to-time I am asked by believers if I think we are living in the “End Times.” It’s a question that’s difficult to answer succinctly. From one perspective, we have been living in the End Times ever since the Incarnation. On the other hand, if by asking me this question people are enquiring whether I think we are near the Apocalypse, my answer is, “No, I don’t think so. But to be honest, I’m not particularly worried about it.” The reason for my emotion is pretty much summed up in this verse from Joel. Yes, there will surely come a day when the world as we know it will end, and God will enact his judgement. But I also know that Our Lord, who is mighty so save, is the ever-lasting refuge for his faithful.

With that kind of promise from He who has never lost a single soul of those he has drawn to him, is there really anything we should be afraid of, even the end of this world?

**(For Tuesday, November 28 , 2017) Do you seek the peace of others, or just yourself?**

*“For my brothers and companions’ sake I will say, ‘Peace be within you!’”* (Ps. 122:9, ESV)

Such an evocative verse, and one that brings to the surface the collective nature of salvation. When God established his original Covenant with Abraham, it was for the collective good of the Redeemed. (See Gen. 22:18) And when a prominent individual in the Children of Israel committed a grievous sin, the entire nation bore the burden of condemnation (See 2Sam.24:10-15) John Donne was right: no man is an island. Mankind did not participate in his own creation. But we are indeed most active in the preservation of each other’s welfare. We were created by God, and then given into the care of each other. The peace that passes all understanding is a most precious gift. But do we understand that this is a gift for which we must constantly intercede to be given to those we love (and even to those we don’t!)?

**(For Wednesday, November 29, 2017) Who are your people?**

*“Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”* (1Pet.2:10, ESV)

It’s fascinating that DNA testing kits like “23 and Me” are wildly popular. It would seem that a large percentage of the public yearns to know who “their people” are. It’s understandable. Identifying a particular cultural heritage grants an individual a kind of claim to certain historical events, and even some stereotypical character-traits. Since through our salvation, you and I have now become a particular people, it’s interesting to think about what our character-traits might be. Are we to be known as coming from hard-working, industrious stock, which is a trait often associated with people of Germanic origin. Are we to be frugal, like the stereotypical Scot, or gifted in music and dance, which is often a characteristic attached to people from various African cultures? The Apostle Peter seems to think that God’s people are to be known more than anything else as a people of unbounded mercy; a people who shows mercy to all around us, because we have realized the limitless love and mercy granted us by the passion of Our Lord on his Cross.

What about you? Do you exhibit the DNA of the Kingdom in your dealing with others?

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**(For Thursday, November 30, 2017) What's your pay grade in the Kingdom?**

*"And to them he said, 'You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.'" (Mt.20:4, ESV)*

I didn't realize it until I was preparing a recent Bible-Study on the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard, but have you noted that Jesus only makes a contractual agreement citing a specific compensation with the workers he hired first, in the early morning? With all the rest, the rate of pay is simply assumed; the workers go to work with a clear conviction that The Master will compensate them fairly, according to what is "right." The other key characteristic about this Parable is that, since God is absolutely righteous, then each worker must have been compensated precisely fairly for the work he/she did. And since regardless of the time spent in the Vineyard, each worker is given the same monetary reward, this leads us to the inevitable conclusion that some other kind of compensatory system must be at work here. God, who is absolutely righteous, could only have given each person his actual due. So, could those who worked longest in the Vineyard have received some kind of reward that has nothing to do with money? I think so.

Have you ever stopped to think that the very work that you and I are privileged to do for the glory of God is, itself, its own reward?

**(For Friday, December 1, 2017) ) Have you considered how many blessings you and I receive each day that we will never know about?**

*"Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?" (Mt.20:15, ESV)*

The various English translations of this verse don't really do justice to the original language of the New Testament. Because the Greek in the final part of this verse says something like this: *"Or are you envious because you have the evil eye?"* Hmm... The "evil eye" would seem to be that broken part of our humanity which always wants to evaluate ourselves against those around us, to see whether we really are getting "a fair shake." And when we start making that kind of comparison, that's when it becomes so easy to become resentful because of the blessings that come to others – blessings in which it seems to us we don't share. This is truly a tragic facet of the human psyche. We are so concerned as to how we stack-up against others, in our own view, or from the perspective of those around us. But the truth is, the only perspective that counts in the end is the way our God sees us. Anybody else's viewpoint is insignificant, in the eternal scheme of things. And when we believe we don't receive our fair share of God's blessing, it is a conclusion which we reach with such limited vision. You and I will never realize with our paltry human minds and sight just how many blessings God showers upon us every day. There are probably countless times in each day when God intervenes invisibly in our lives to shift the universe just a little bit, so that you and I don't meet disaster, or pain, or some kind of ruin that would certainly engulf us were God not constantly on guard for our welfare.

Have you realized what David meant when he proclaimed "He shall not suffer your foot to be moved"?

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