

“APOCALYPSE NOW – AND THEN”

SOME FOLKS HAVE GREAT FUN PREDICTING THE FUTURE.

DOING SO, HOWEVER, IS FRAUGHT WITH DANGER IF ONE’S PREDICTION IS WRONG.

THINK OF THE PREDICTIONS THAT MISSED OVER THE YEARS.

THE GREAT INVENTOR LEE DEFOREST ONCE CLAIMED THAT *“WHILE THEORETICALLY AND TECHNICALLY TELEVISION MAY BE FEASIBLE, COMMERCIALY & FINANCIALLY IT IS AN IMPOSSIBILITY.”*

AS RECENTLY AS 1977, KEN OLSEN, THE FOUNDER OF A COMPANY THAT WAS LATER ACQUIRED BY COMPAQ, SAID, *“THERE IS NO REASON ANYONE WOULD WANT A COMPUTER IN THEIR HOME.”*

THEN THERE’S THE FAMOUS AUDITION AT THE LONDON STUDIO OF DECCA RECORDS ON NEW YEAR’S DAY IN 1962.

15 SONGS WERE PERFORMED IN AN HOUR BY A BAND THAT HAD TRAVELED 10 HOURS TO GET THERE.

THEY HOPED THIS WOULD BE THEIR BIG BREAK BUT AN EXECUTIVE FROM DECCA SAID THEY WEREN’T BEING SIGNED BECAUSE – AS HE PUT IT – *“GUITAR BANDS ARE ON THEIR WAY OUT & THE BEATLES HAVE NO FUTURE IN SHOW BUSINESS.”*

YOU HEAR SUCH PREDICTIONS & JUST SHAKE YOUR HEAD & SMILE.

BUT THEN THERE ARE PREDICTIONS THAT MAKE YOU WINCE.

ON SEPTEMBER 6, 1941 JOURNALIST CLARKE BEACH WROTE THESE TRAGIC WORDS: *“A JAPANESE ATTACK ON HAWAII IS REGARDED AS THE MOST UNLIKELY THING IN THE WORLD, WITH ONE CHANCE IN A MILLION OF BEING SUCCESSFUL. BESIDES HAVING MORE POWERFUL DEFENSES THAN ANY OTHER POST UNDER THE AMERICAN FLAG, IT IS PROTECTED BY DISTANCE.”*

JUST 3 MONTHS LATER, OF COURSE, THAT ONE CHANCE IN A MILLION HAPPENED.

SUCH IS THE RISK ONE TAKES WHEN PREDICTING THE FUTURE.

THE PREDICTION MAY NOT COME TRUE & THE PREDICTOR IS LEFT LOOKING FOOLISH.

THAT DOESN’T SEEM TO BE THE CASE, THOUGH, WHEN PREDICTING THE *END* OF THE FUTURE.

PREDICTING AN “APOCALYPSE NOW” – NOT THE ROBERT DUVAL *“I LOVE THE SMELL OF NAPALM IN THE MORNING”* KIND OF APOCALYPSE, BUT THE R.E.M. *“IT’S THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT”* KIND NEVER SEEMS TO LEAVE SOMEONE LOOKING FOOLISH – AT LEAST NOT IN THE EYES OF THEIR FOLLOWERS.

IT IS A STRANGE PHENOMENON & PERHAPS THAT’S WHY EVERY GENERATION SINCE THE DAWN OF TIME HAS HAD ITS OWN FAIR SHARE OF DOOMSDAY PREDICTIONS.

WHEN PREDICTIONS OF THE END ARE PROVEN WRONG – WHEN THE PREDICTED END DATE COMES & GOES – THOSE WHO BELIEVED IT WOULD HAPPEN – SIMPLY RE-TOOL THE PREDICTION & LEND EVEN GREATER SUPPORT TO IT.

SOME OF THOSE PREDICTIONS ARE BASED ON SOME RATHER UNUSUAL SOURCES.

THERE WAS A ROMAN PRIEST IN THE THIRD CENTURY WHO PREDICTED CHRIST WOULD RETURN IN THE YEAR 500, BASED ON THE DIMENSIONS OF NOAH'S ARK.

IN 1809, A WOMAN NAMED MARY BATEMAN CLAIMED TO HAVE A MAGIC CHICKEN THAT LAID EGGS WITH END TIME MESSAGES ON THEM.

ONE MESSAGE SAID THAT CHRIST WAS COMING.

THE UPROAR SHE CREATED ENDED WHEN SHE WAS CAUGHT FORCING AN EGG INSIDE THE MAGIC CHICKEN.

IN 1910, THE VISIT OF HALEY'S COMET WAS, FOR MANY, AN INDICATION OF THE LORD'S SECOND COMING. IT WAS THOUGHT THAT THE EARTH WOULD ACTUALLY PASS THROUGH THE GASEOUS TAIL OF THE COMET.

ONE ENTERPRISING MAN, NOT WILLING TO LET SUCH AN OPPORTUNITY PASS, MADE A FORTUNE SELLING COMET PILLS FOR PROTECTION AGAINST THE EFFECTS OF THE TOXIC GASES.

NOW ALL OF THIS IS, I BELIEVE, VERY TIMELY.

HERE WE HAVE THIS LECTIONARY PASSAGE FROM MARK'S GOSPEL FALLING ON THE VERY WEEKEND THAT THE BLOCKBUSTER MOVIE "2012: END OF THE WORLD" OPENS.

IF YOU HAVE YET TO HEAR ABOUT THE MOVIE & ITS BASIS, I ASSURE YOU THAT YOU WILL IN THE COMING MONTHS.

IN FACT, UNTIL DECEMBER 21, 2012, YOU'LL BE HEARING ABOUT IT.

THAT'S THE LATEST PREDICTION OF THE END OF THE WORLD.

IT'S SUPPOSEDLY BASED ON AN ANCIENT MAYAN CALENDAR THAT ENDS ON THAT DATE.

A PROFESSOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS, THOUGH, WAS ASKED ABOUT THIS.

LISA LUCERO SPECIALIZES IN MAYAN CULTURES & SHE SAID, "*NO, NO, NO! WE'RE ALL GOING TO GET HEADACHES FROM ROLLING OUR EYES ABOUT THIS!*"

THAT DOESN'T MEAN IT WON'T BE FASHIONABLE, THOUGH, TO TALK ABOUT THE END OF THE WORLD AS WE KNOW IT UNTIL THAT DAY COMES & GOES.

IT IS YET ANOTHER PROPHECY OF THE APOCALYPSE.

THIS PASSAGE THAT WE'VE READ IN MARK'S GOSPEL THIS MORNING IS THE BEGINNING OF WHAT IS KNOWN AS "THE LITTLE APOCALYPSE."

THOUGH IT EXTENDS FOR THE ENTIRE 13<sup>TH</sup> CHAPTER OF MARK, BY COMPARISON TO THE BOOK OF REVELATION – THE MOST WELL-KNOWN APOCALYPSE – IT'S RELATIVELY SHORT.

APOCALYPSE SIMPLY MEANS "REVELATION."

THAT'S WHERE THE BIBLICAL BOOK GETS ITS NAME.

AN APOCALYPSE IS AN UNVEILING – A REVEALING OF THAT WHICH HAS PREVIOUSLY BEEN HIDDEN.

IT'S A VISION THAT GRANTS ITS RECIPIENT A GLIMPSE BEYOND WHAT'S GOING ON TO WHAT'S *REALLY* GOING ON.

THIS PASSAGE PRESENTS A FASCINATING SCENARIO.

WE'VE BEEN FOLLOWING JESUS FOR THE PAST SEVERAL WEEKS AS HE HAS APPROACHED & NOW ENTERED JERUSALEM.

THIS EVENT WOULD HAVE TAKEN PLACE ON TUESDAY OR WEDNESDAY OF HOLY WEEK.

NOW REMEMBER – THE DISCIPLES OF JESUS WERE ALL FROM THE REGION OF GALILEE.

THEY WERE FAR AWAY FROM HOME.

ONE OF THE DISCIPLES SAID TO JESUS, “*LOOK, TEACHER, WHAT LARGE STONES & WHAT LARGE BUILDINGS!*”

THESE ALMOST SOUND LIKE WORDS FROM A CHILD, DON'T THEY?

AND YET, THIS WAS PERFECTLY NATURAL FOR A MAN FROM RURAL GALILEE TO GAZE UPON THE WONDERS OF THE BIG CITY & BE OVERWHELMED.

HERE THEY WERE IN THE RELIGIOUS CENTER OF THEIR PEOPLE & THEY WERE OVERCOME BY THE MAGNIFICENCE OF WHAT THEY SAW.

SO WHEN JESUS TELLS THEM THAT “*...NOT ONE STONE WILL BE LEFT HERE UPON ANOTHER; ALL WILL BE THROWN DOWN...*”

THEY WERE ASTOUNDED.

HOW COULD THIS BE POSSIBLE?

OF COURSE IT WAS POSSIBLE.

SOME 40 YEARS LATER, EVERYTHING WAS DESTROYED & WE'RE LEFT WONDERING IF JESUS WAS PREDICTING THE LITERAL DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE OR WAS THIS AN END-TIMES PREDICTION AS WELL?

WAS HE SPEAKING OF AN APOCALYPSE *NOW* OR AN APOCALYPSE *THEN*?

IT WAS PROBABLY BOTH BUT I THINK IT'S CLEAR THAT OUR FOCUS SHOULD BE ON THE APOCALYPSE NOW BECAUSE CENTERING ON THE “NOW” PREPARES US FOR THE “THEN.”

THE GREAT BIBLE COMMENTATOR HALFORD LUCCOCK, WRITING ABOUT THIS PASSAGE, SAID, “*FIDGETY FUSSING ABOUT ‘THE LAST THINGS’ MUST NEVER DISPLACE THE FIRST THINGS OF JESUS – THE GREAT COMMANDMENTS: ‘LOVE GOD & LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ PREOCCUPATION WITH ‘WHEN’ – WITH ARRANGING DATES ON A CALENDAR - MAY CAUSE US TO LEAVE THE NEEDS OF PEOPLE FOR A CURIOSITY ABOUT SCHEDULES.*”

THERE IS AN INTERESTING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THIS PASSAGE & THE ONE WHICH IMMEDIATELY PRECEDES IT – THE STORY OF “THE WIDOW’S MITE” THAT WE LOOKED AT LAST WEEK.

BOTH JESUS – IN THAT STORY – AND THE DISCIPLE IN THIS ONE – SAID, “*LOOK.*”

WHAT THEY WERE CALLING ATTENTION TO, HOWEVER, WERE QUITE DIFFERENT THINGS.

THE DISCIPLE WAS SAYING, “*LOOK AT THE BEAUTIFUL, MASSIVE, IMPRESSIVE BUILDINGS!*”

JESUS WAS SAYING, “*LOOK AT THIS POOR WOMAN WITH A HEART OF GOLD – FAR MORE PRECIOUS & BEAUTIFUL THAN THESE GARGANTUAN WALLS WHICH SURROUND YOU.*”

FORGET THE APOCALYPSE OF “THEN” & FOCUS ON THE APOCALYPSE “NOW.”

FOCUS ON THE APOCALYPSE A POOR WIDOW IS FACING AS SHE MERELY TRIES TO SURVIVE.

WE THINK OF THE GRAND APOCALYPSE AT THE END OF TIME – WARS & CALAMITIES, BUILDINGS COLLAPSING & THE WORLD CAVING IN.

WE THINK OF THE FEAR & THE ANGUISH.

BUT WHAT ABOUT THE LITTLE APOCALYPSES THAT MUST BE ENDURED EVERY DAY IN OUR WORLD?

THINK OF THOSE IN THE MIDST OF THEIR OWN WAR WITH FAMILY, FRIENDS, CO-WORKERS OR NEIGHBORS.

THINK OF THE CALAMITIES BROUGHT ABOUT BY A GRIM PROGNOSIS FROM THE DOCTOR.

THINK OF THE BUILDING OF A LIFE THAT COLLAPSES WITH THE LOSS OF A JOB OR THE DEATH OF A MARRIAGE.

THINK OF THE FEAR & THE ANGUISH THAT MUST BE ENDURED BY SOMEONE FACING ANY ONE OF THESE APOCALYPTIC EVENTS.

FORGET ABOUT THE APOCALYPSE *THEN* BECAUSE THERE ARE APOCALYPSES *NOW* ALL AROUND US.

THEY’RE BEING ENDURED BY THOSE OUT THERE WHO ARE CLOSE TO YOU AND – YES – EVEN BY THOSE IN **HERE.**

PERHAPS YOU ARE ONE OF THOSE WHO FEELS AS IF YOU ARE IN THE MIDST OF AN APOCALYPSE NOW.

LIFE IS CAVING IN & THE END IS NEAR.

THE BUILDING OF YOUR LIFE IS COLLAPSING.

CALAMITIES & CHAOS CLOSE IN AROUND YOU.

LOOK, THOUGH, AT THE FINAL WORDS OF THIS PASSAGE.

JESUS SAYS, “*THIS IS BUT THE BEGINNING OF THE BIRTHPANGS.*”

WHAT IN THE WORLD DOES JESUS MEAN BY THIS?

MORE THAN HALF OF YOU OUT THERE KNOW WHAT HE MEANS MUCH BETTER THAN I DO.

THE BIRTH OF A CHILD IS PRECEDED BY EXCRUCIATING, UNFATHOMABLE PAIN.

AH, BUT THE RESULT – WHAT COMES NEXT – IS INCOMPREHENSIBLE JOY.

THAT’S WHAT JESUS IS SAYING ABOUT THE APOCALYPSE – WHETHER IT’S AN APOCALYPSE IN THE FAR DISTANT FUTURE OR AN APOCALYPSE YOU’RE FACING AT THIS VERY HOUR.

THE GREAT JEWISH WRITER ELIE WIESEL REFLECTS ON HIS CHILDHOOD IN EASTERN EUROPE & THE SUFFERING OF THE JEWS EVEN BEFORE THE NAZIS CAME.

HIS RABBI USED TO SAY, "ABRAHAM, THE FIRST OF THE PATRIARCHS, WAS A BETTER JEW THAN YOU. HE WAS A THOUSAND TIMES BETTER & YET THE MIDRASH TELLS US THAT HE ENDURED HARDSHIP BEYOND BELIEF. SO HOW DO YOU EXPECT TO BREEZE THROUGH LIFE WITHOUT A SCRATCH?"

DANIEL WAS WISER THAN YOU AND MORE PIOUS, YET HE WAS CONDEMNED TO DIE IN A LION'S DEN. AND YOU DREAM OF LIVING YOUR LIFE WITHOUT SUFFERING?"

IN THE END, THOUGH – WHEN THEIR OWN PERSONAL LITTLE APOCALYPSE WAS OVER – THINK OF THE JOYS & HAPPINESS & FULFILLMENT THAT CAME TO BOTH ABRAHAM & DANIEL.

IT MAY NOT BE MUCH CONSOLATION NOW FOR SOMEONE IN THE MIDST OF AN APOCALYPSE OF LIFE & YET WHAT ELSE IS THERE?

WHAT DO WE HAVE IF WE HAVE NO HOPE?

WHAT DO WE HAVE IF CAN'T LOOK TO THE PROMISE OF CHRIST THAT A NEW DAY IS DAWNING?

THAT, ULTIMATELY, IS WHAT ALL APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE IS ABOUT.

IT'S ALWAYS ABOUT HOPE.

IT'S ALWAYS ABOUT GOD'S VICTORY OVER ALL THE FORCES OF EVIL THAT THREATEN US.

IT'S ABOUT YOU & ME JOINING WITH GOD TO DEFEAT THOSE FORCES OF EVIL IN THE WORLD.

IT'S ABOUT OUR CALL TO BE ASTUTE ENOUGH TO SEE SOMEONE IN THE THROES OF A PERSONAL APOCALYPSE & STANDING WITH THEM IN THE BATTLE.

YOU SEE, IT'S NOT ENOUGH TO PREACH PIOUS PLATITUDES ABOUT HOPE.

WE HAVE TO MAKE HOPE COME ALIVE BY DOING EVERYTHING IN OUR POWER TO HELP SOMEONE GET THROUGH THEIR OWN PERSONAL APOCALYPSE.

THERE'S A STORY OF A VOLUNTEER TUTOR WHO WAS ASKED TO VISIT A 9-YEAR-OLD BOY IN A LARGE HOSPITAL.

SHE TOOK THE BOY'S NAME & ROOM NUMBER & WAS TOLD BY HIS TEACHER THAT THEY WERE STUDYING NOUNS & ADVERBS IN CLASS.

IT WASN'T UNTIL THE TUTOR GOT TO THE BOY'S ROOM THAT SHE REALIZED THE BOY WAS A PATIENT IN THE HOSPITAL'S BURN UNIT.

NO ONE HAD PREPARED HER TO FIND A 9-YEAR-OLD SO HORRIBLY BURNED & IN SUCH GREAT PAIN.

SHE FELT SHE COULDN'T JUST TURN AROUND & LEAVE, SO SHE SUMMONED UP HER COURAGE & WENT IN.

TRYING TO SOUND CHEERFUL BUT KNOWING THE BOY COULD SEE RIGHT THROUGH HER, SHE SAID, "HI, I'M YOUR HOSPITAL TUTOR. YOUR TEACHER ASKED ME TO HELP YOU WITH NOUNS & ADVERBS.

CLUMISLY, SHE LAUNCHED INTO THE LESSON.

WHEN IT WAS OVER, SHE BARELY MADE IT OUT OF THE ROOM BEFORE DISSOLVING INTO TEARS.

THE NEXT MORNING A NURSE CALLED THE TUTOR & ASKED, "WHAT DID YOU DO TO THAT BOY?"

SHE BEGAN A TEARFUL APOLOGY BUT THE NURSE INTERRUPTED HER.

*“NO, YOU DON’T UNDERSTAND. WE’VE BEEN VERY WORRIED ABOUT HIM. BUT SINCE YOU WERE HERE, HE’S FIGHTING BACK. HE’S RESPONDING TO TREATMENT. IT’S AS THOUGH HE’S DECIDED TO LIVE.”*

WHEN THEY COULDN’T MAKE SENSE OUT OF THE CHANGE BY ASKING THE TUTOR, THEY WENT TO THE BOY HIMSELF.

HE ADMITTED THAT HE’D GIVEN UP HOPE – UNTIL THE TUTOR CAME.

HE SAID, *“I FIGURED THEY WOULDN’T SEND A TEACHER TO WORK ON NOUNS & ADVERBS WITH A KID WHO’S DYING, WOULD THEY?”*

HOPE IS THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT WE NEED TO SEE US THROUGH THE EARTH-SHATTERING EVENTS OF LIFE.

HOPE IS THE POWER THAT HOLDS OUR LIVES TOGETHER.

IN ALL OF YOUR OWN, PERSONAL LITTLE APOCALYPSES, HANG ON TO THE HOPE THAT SAYS A NEW DAY IS DAWNING.

MAINTAIN THE ASSURANCE THAT NO MATTER WHAT’S COLLAPSING AROUND YOU & INSIDE OF YOU – NO MATTER HOW BRUTAL THE BATTLE YOU’RE WAGING – NO MATTER WHAT CALAMITY THREATENS TO UNDO YOU – THERE IS SOMETHING BEYOND THAT APOCALYPSE OF YOUR LIFE & SOMEONE TO WALK THROUGH IT WITH YOU.  
AMEN.

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