

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 7/19/2024

JESUS' Return

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

Jerry B. Jenkins is the bestselling author of the fictional Left Behind series of books that describe what things might be like after the rapture, the return and judgment of CHRIST. Recently, Jenkins urged Christians to be ready because, he says, the pre-rapture End Times prophecies have been fulfilled. I have a non-Lutheran colleague who regularly warns that the end is coming, so you must be prepared.

Throughout history, individuals have claimed that the end times are coming. It is sometimes used as a point of humor in cartoons with someone carrying a sign saying “The End is Near!” I remember one in which the “doom and gloom” prophet carrying such a sign was followed by a youngster prophet with a sign that read “Are We There Yet?” In 1970, Hal Lindsey published the book The Late Great Planet Earth, which was a huge bestseller and was later made into a movie, narrated by Orson Wells. In the book, Lindsey takes the images found in the Book of Revelation in the Bible and identifies contemporary proof that each of these images has been fulfilled. He followed that book with another called 1980's: Countdown to Armageddon in which he continued to point to the signs from Revelation. Fifty years later, the end hasn't come yet. And I find it interesting that Hal Lindsey took the prophets from his books and movie and used them to purchase long-term oceanfront property in Santa Monica. Maybe he was hedging his bets?

Again, every generation has had those who, like Lindsey, Jenkins, and my colleague, warn and even list the signs that the end is coming and CHRIST is returning, so you should be prepared. Their goal is to push people into or deeper into faith and Christianity so that their faith in JESUS will save them from eternal damnation and punishment. While this is commendable, I also see some problems with their effort.

First, while JESUS warned about falling out of faith with GOD, HE also said that no one would know when HE would return. Not even HIMSELF. JESUS said that only the FATHER would know the time. So, all of these individuals who claim to have insight into CHRIST's return are ignoring the very words of JESUS.

Second, and this will make a lot of End Times watchers sad to hear, the term “rapture” does not appear in the Bible. Both I Thessalonians 4 and I Corinthians 15 speak about the time when the bodies of believers who have died will be resurrected. Then, along with believers who are still living, they will meet the LORD. The word “rapture” comes from the Latin word *repare*, which means “seize,” “snatch,” or “take away,” as in taken up to meet CHRIST. But the term “rapture” does not appear in the Bible and those who talk about it are inferring from what the Bible actually says, which takes us back to what JESUS said about no one knowing the time of HIS return.

Finally, though JESUS did caution about the consequences of losing faith, HE was more concerned with helping people in life now. Rather than worrying about HIS return, JESUS encouraged HIS followers to seek a stronger relationship with GOD (which, by the way, helps if you are one of those worried about HIS return) and look for ways to serve each other. JESUS made this very clear when asked about the greatest commandment. HIS answer is familiar: love GOD with all your being, and the second greatest is to love your neighbor as yourself. To clarify this, JESUS taught that your neighbor is anyone who has a need, which is pretty much everyone. So, don't worry about HIS coming again. Instead, concentrate first on GOD's love for you and growing in your love for GOD, and then, look for ways to help others. If you do that, you'll be good when JESUS returns.

In CHRIST's love,
Pastor Jeffrey