

En Garde!
Mark 13: 1-8

An old time minister named Vance Havner once said this about Christians and events signaling the end times: “we are not just looking for something to happen, we are looking for someone to come. And when these things begin to come to pass, we are not to drop our heads in discouragement or shake our heads in despair, but rather lift up our heads in delight.”

Other than politics, few things will generate such excitement, fear, and discussion among people than the world as we know it coming to an end. Some might even be bold enough to say that the two are related. The Scriptures clearly reveal that to be true, but exactly how politics fits into God’s puzzling plan for new heavens and a new earth remains to be seen. Even so, there is no shortage of thoughts and ideas of how or if humanity and/or the world will one day end.

For more than 2000 years, curious and inquisitive minds have yearned to know more about the earth-shattering event that the Scriptures often refer to as the Day of the Lord. Books that claim to explain biblical prophecy and unlock the mystery of the end times fill the shelves of secular and Christian bookstores alike. A number of movies have been made about it, some based upon Biblical teaching like the Left Behind series, and a secular one made a few years ago that was simply entitled “2012”. Depending upon perspective, faith and beliefs, those movies may be described as the greatest love story or the greatest horror story ever told.

Like so much of the apocalyptic (end times) genre, the “2012” movie was more of a horror flick than a love story. It was loosely based upon “predictions” from Nostradamus and the Mayan Aztec calendar that the end of the earth would come in 2012. The plot centered around an imminent solar flare that was destined to destroy humanity and a plan by world leaders from China and the other G8 nations to isolate 100,000 people from each nation from destruction to ensure humanity would survive. Promotions for the film asked a question that so many of us often wonder about. Will this be the year that the cosmic clock finally winds down to zero days and zero hope? The funny thing is that the theaters were still offering advance ticket sales in December.

And much like Y2K , once the new year was ushered in, people found that the only thing that hit the Earth in 2012 was a barrage of erroneous New Age philosophy and internet doomsday rumors. Not only did they hit the earth, but they also hit people's wallets. The fact is that there are those that have recognized a hunger for understanding of the events that mark the end times and have secularized them for profit. And as cataclysmic worldly events continue to play out, it is likely that deceit and manipulation will accelerate at an even greater pace.

We are living in an entertainment driven post-modern world, bombarded with a great number of imagined and fictional explanations of end times that are as far from the Truth and the Word as can be imagined. What many fail to see is that they are being offered a poisonous buffet that will bring sickness and eventually death. The words of the apostle Paul in Colossians 2:6-8 come to mind. As followers of Jesus, we must be vigilant that we are not cheated or deceived.

It is true that the prophetic biblical books of Daniel, Ezekiel and Revelation provide a less than concise description of how the world will end. **Even so, the glimpse we do see in the Scriptures is tiny, yet sufficient.** With great wisdom, God has chosen to reveal to all who seek everything we need to know about the beginning of the end. Though there is much we don't know, there are some things we can know for certain. God is intimately involved and completely sovereign in the process. That means that the internet, the worlds monetary systems, climate change and nuclear war will not change the final outcome in the least way. They may be part of God's divine plan, but they cannot and will not change it or affect His perfect timing.

We also know that a "Messiah" or Savior is the main character and has the leading role. The Scriptures in their entirety, Old and New Testaments both, reveal that messiah and savior will not be an earthly ruler or king, but a heavenly king, none other than Jesus Christ, the Son of God. That is a truth most secular movies conveniently choose to overlook. Just to be sure I went back and checked the cast of 2012, and sure enough, Jesus is not listed anywhere. All of the main characters were political figures other than a Buddhist monk.

I confess that I didn't see the 2012 film, but judging by the plot it must have been a gloomy time for those who were not part of the chosen 800,000. Can you imagine living in a world where powerful politicians and wealthy people of influence determine the value of your life and decide whether you will live or die? There is no need to imagine as people like you and I having been living in that world for thousands of years.

The year was not 2012, but sometime around 33 AD when Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Jesus a question similar to the one the film was asking. Will this be the year that the cosmic clock finally winds down to zero days? They gazed at their beautiful church building and began to wonder if one day it could really be destroyed again. The first temple was destroyed by the Babylonians about 600 years earlier. Jesus confirmed their worst fears. Mark 13:2. **Names of tyrants change, but the tyranny does not.**

Like many of us, they wanted to know when the end would come. 13:4 Like many of us, it wasn't because they wanted to be prepared but because they yearned for the light of peace to prevail over darkness and evil. In their mind it was inconceivable that God would allow the giant blocks of stone in the temple to come crashing down unless the millennial kingdom they so looked forward to was near. They believed that something old and broken would soon be replaced by something new and perfect. Perhaps they even recognized that Jesus tossing the money-changers out of the temple marked the beginning of divine labor pains and the birth of something new was at hand.

Privately, they asked Jesus the question that we often ask Him in private-Lord how much time is left? How long? His answer in 13:5 is one we must never forget. See that no one leads you astray. **As followers of Jesus, we must be vigilant that we are not cheated or deceived.** Then we get to 13:9 and see this: Be on your guard. As those in a fencing match might hear at the beginning of the sword fight, en garde. It is a warning that says be prepared, this is a dangerous fight, this is not a time to sit back in your comfortable seat and eat popcorn and jujubes. Much danger lies ahead. Things will get worse before they get better. Be prepared to go on offense and use that sword that is in your hand.

13:6 Many will come in my name saying I am He, and they will lead many astray. Is that a reference to televangelists and ego driven megachurch pastors? Perhaps, but we will soon see that Jesus also has some others in mind. 13:9 These false prophets, these false Jesus's, the false people of power, prestige and wealth will try to lead you astray. They will tell you lies, try to convince you that I am someone else, they will tell you what you want to hear, they will tell you that I can't fix the problems of the world, but they can. If you don't submit to them, they will ridicule you, they will destroy your reputations, they will have you beaten, and they will drag you into court to explain why you have chosen to believe me rather than them. You will literally be hated for my name's sake. The truth is that we need to be wary of deceit in all of its forms. 13:10 The gospel must first be proclaimed.

Yes, there are false prophets within the church. At one time they were called heretics, today they are lifted up as role models by false authorities. The wise will recognize them by their false teaching. What is false teaching? It is adding to and subtracting from the Scriptures, offering up a variety of soul damaging untruths that are clearly outside of the bounds of Scripture and thousands of years of established church doctrine. Good or bad, the damage is typically limited to their soul and the souls of those that choose to watch their deadly films of deceit. May God in His grace have mercy on both. The gospel must first be proclaimed.

It is the false prophets outside of the church that inflict the most harm because they have a much larger audience. You know who they are. They harbor hatred or contempt for Jesus and at the same time think they are God almighty. They are the King Herods of the world, power drunk political leaders, evil kings, and rulers. They believe they are entitled to choose the 800,000, not Jesus. Today there is a growing number of kings of a different sort, owners of billion-dollar companies that disseminate lies and deceit and claim it to be truth. They are using their money, power, and social media platforms to sway elections and influence society to exchange Biblical principles and values to those of their own. Not only do they usurp God's authority in matters of physical life and death, they create a fertile environment for spiritual death to thrive. The names of the tyrants of our day are different than the names of those that lived in the days of Jesus, but the tyranny is not. Deceit will continue for a divinely appointed season. As followers of Jesus, we must be vigilant that we are not caught up in it. Nothing is more important, **for only the vigilant will see heaven.**