

“Forty days more and Nineveh shall be destroyed.” [words of the prophet Jonah, son of Amittai] “This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand.” [words of Jesus, the Son of God, according to Mark] “I tell you, brothers and sisters, the time is running out! . . . The world in its present form is passing away.” [words of Paul to the people in Corinth] “Indeed on May 21, Christ did come *spiritually* to put all of the unsaved throughout the world into judgment. But that universal judgment will not be *physically* seen until the last day of the five-month period, on October 21, 2011.” [words of Harold Camping of *Family Radio*] . . . And we could cite the words of hundreds more through the centuries, who have made the same or similar predictions of the end of the world and the end of time. . . . Yet, the world goes on.

So, what’s the point? What’s the point of predicting the end – when it never happens?

The point is that, at the beginning of this new Season of Ordinary Time, we are admonished to repent, to do an about face, to change our ways, to be prepared for the end – *whenever* it should come. The people of Nineveh heard Jonah; the king proclaimed a fast, and all them, great and small, man and beast, put on sackcloth and sat in ashes. Simon, Andrew, James and John abandoned their nets and their boats, and followed Jesus. The people of Corinth reassessed their relationship with everything: with spouses, with weeping and rejoicing, with buying and owning, with use of the world’s goods. Some of Camping’s audience gave away all their property to friends and neighbors; after all who needs a BMW after the rapture.

What we *do* need is a right relationship with God. And we need that now – before the end. And that’s the reason for Jonah’s, and Paul’s, and Jesus’ call to repentance.

If you read on in the story of Jonah, you see that God repented of his plan to destroy Nineveh; he did not carry it out. The great city of Nineveh continued to live. Jonah wasn’t happy about it; he thought Nineveh should have been destroyed because of their great wickedness. So God had to call Jonah to repentance too.

If you read on in Mark’s gospel, you find out that the fishermen did not leave their families. Later in the same chapter, Jesus goes to Simon’s house, and heals his mother-in-law. Jesus becomes part of their family, and he makes Capernaum his home; and the disciples become Jesus’ new family; when this happens, everything changes; all the relationships are different.

If you read on in the story of Paul, you see that Paul was not telling his readers to refrain from the ordinary activities and experiences of life; he was telling them *to recognize their temporary nature*: the present order is not the only order; the present order of things is a prelude of things to come. So, married couples should live with and love one another, while keeping each other alert to the fact that there’s more to come beyond this life.

Those who weep and those who rejoice are called to recognize that the time is approaching when God will wipe away every tear and perpetuate every joy. Those who buy, sell and utilize this world’s resources are to realize that possessions and prosperity are not ends in themselves, but opportunities. Those who have, ought to share with those who have not, and in this way prepare together for what comes next.

The point is that if our earthly interests, our attachments to the things of this world, our investments and our bank accounts have become the most important values in our lives, then parting will be painful. But if we have lived in the world as caring and careful stewards, and if we have sought first the kingdom of God, if we have strived daily for a conversion of heart and mind, then the end will simply be a prelude to everlasting peace and joy – whenever it comes, whether it's tomorrow, or next year, or 100 years from now.

Repent, and believe in the gospel!