

Christ Community Covenant Church
The Story: Chapter 28 – The end of the beginning or The beginning of the end?
Pastor Dave Scherrer - April 15, 2012

Well, Easter is over and yet the story isn't over. The Story of God on earth still has a little bit to tell. The Story and our story are still unfolding. The resurrection is nowhere near the end of the story! Our story as individuals and our story as a church are just beginning!

Acts 1:3-7

After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority.

Whether the disciples were aware of it, (and I don't think they were) a new period in the history of the world had been ushered in. It had actually started when Christ was born. God had entered the world in the flesh. Then Christ began to teach and live the Kingdom of God, telling us all that something new had started. "Repent, the kingdom of Heaven is at hand," Jesus said right from the beginning. Jesus was telling us that it was the end of the beginning and the beginning of the end had started.

Prayer

The end of the beginning or the beginning of the end?

[When I say 'end times' what kinds of things come to your minds?]

The picture that the Bible paints of history is of a relentless movement forward toward a grand climax: **Creation - Fall - Redemption - Restoration**

Creation and Fall we know. And we have just revisited the story of our Redemption, which was won through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We had a party last week to celebrate that. And Restoration is yet to happen but it will be won by Jesus too when He returns to set things straight. The end of the Story as we know it now. But really, that is not quite the way of looking at it. Our Story continues into Heaven, into eternity. But this 'end times' conversation has been a pretty common theme throughout the years.

There have been 242 known end of the world dates that have been predicted concerning the coming of Christ that have come and gone dating back to the first century. Most recently Harold Camping of the Family Radio Ministries predicted Christ's return May 21, 2011. When that failed he revised the date and predicted October 21, 2011. These were not Harold Camping's first efforts at predicting the end of the world. He had previously reported that the end would come in September of 1994. Maybe you remember Hal Lindsey and the Late Great Planet Earth or the Left Behind series; those are books dealing with the end times. Now lest you think that Christians are the only ones interested in predicting the end of the world, there is a fair amount of press given to the end of the Mayan calendar that supposedly is done December 21 of this year - good for at least one high tech special effects movie. The Book of Eli is a recent end time movie. An

entire new genre of story called 'dystopia' – where something has happened and people are coping with post end time circumstances.

So are these the last days? The end of time as we know it. Jesus gave us things to watch for - birth pangs - if you will for a new day.

So let me answer the question by quoting several biblical passages:

Hebrews 1:1–2; "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son."

1 Peter 1:20; "Christ was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the last of the times for your sake."

1 Corinthians 10:11; "These things happened to them as a warning, but they were written down for our instruction, upon whom the end of the ages has come."

In all these texts the "last days" or the last times or end of the ages came when Jesus came. The coming of the Messiah was the beginning of the end—the beginning of the "last days."

This is what our text says as well. In Acts 2:15–17 Peter says that the commotion caused by 120 people praising God in many different languages is not owing to drunkenness but to the fulfillment of prophecy in Joel 2: "These men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day; but this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.'" Peter's answer to our question – Is this the last days?" - would have been, "Yes, I am now living in the last days." This was Paul's answer and the answer of Hebrews and John's answer. And so it should be our answer too.

Yes, we are living in the last days, because the last days began with the first coming of Jesus, and will reach their climax at the second coming of Jesus. The "mystery of the kingdom" (Mark 4:11) is that the end of an age came and the kingdom of God arrived, but, to everyone's surprise, this age didn't completely end and the kingdom didn't completely come. ***And so we live between the beginning of the end of the age and the end of the end of the age. We live between the beginning of the kingdom of God and the consummation of the kingdom.***

What should we expect before Jesus returns?

2 Timothy 3:3 says, "Understand this: that in the last days there will come times of stress. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, inhuman," etc. **2 Peter 3:3** says, "Scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own passions and saying, 'Where is the promise of his coming?'"

Jesus said in **Luke 21:9–11**, "When you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified; for this must first take place, but the end will not be at once . . . Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom will rise against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes, and in various places famines and pestilences; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven."

Matthew 24:3-8, 36-42

As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places.⁸ All these are the beginning of birth pains.

"But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

Jesus knew it would be hard so he sent a special weapon, a special power and presence.

John 16:7-8, 12-14

But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment. "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you.

Let's keep reading then from our chapter 28, you will find this on page of the Story;

Acts 2:1-12

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: "Aren't all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?"

What it means is that God is busy setting things in order for the completion of this world. To prepare for the end of time as we know it. So He sends the Spirit to indwell us. Mystery!!

The coming of the Holy Spirit's presence and power is to equip us as witnesses to the world. He is here to give us courage in difficult times and to lead us through them. The Spirit has been sent specifically to empower us to be witnesses. All of us!

Acts 1:7-8

He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

It seems that the difficult circumstances of the fall would be accelerating and in some mysterious manner, that makes it ripe for sharing the Gospel. It seems that our hearts are more open when times are tougher. The world needs us to share with power and authority and the Spirit is upon you so that you can do just that.

And to the establishment of the church

The Holy Spirit comes also to nurture believers into maturity and to reach out to a lost and dying world through these who believe. God is in complete control of the church. The church isn't a building or a denomination, the church is the total of all who have believed in Christ and received the Spirit, past present and future. The cloud of witnesses that have gone before us, they are the church too. And those who believe through our witness, even generations that have not yet been born, they too in some mysterious way, are the church. Let's read about the beginning of the church. It is recorded in Acts 2 and you can find it on page 392 of The Story:

Acts 2:41-47

Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

The church is God's plan now for restoration. There is no Plan B. We sometimes like to take pot shots at the church, "organized religion" or "Industrial Christianity" sometimes she is called. But we are the plan. Religion is not the plan; rules and regulations are not the plan. Believers filled with the Spirit – the church - is the plan.

C.S. Lewis, Mere Christianity

It is easy to think that the Church has a lot of different objects — education, building, missions, holding services. Just as it is easy to think the State has a lot of different objects — military, political, economic, and what not. And unless these services are helping to increase and prolong and protect the people, all the laws, parliaments, armies, courts, police, economics, etc., are simply a waste of time. In the same way the Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became Man for no other purpose. (p. 171)

Don't underestimate the power of a person filled with the Spirit:

Acts 4:8-14

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Jesus is:

“the stone you builders rejected,
which has become the cornerstone.’

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say.

Getting ready and staying ready

Acts 2:38

Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Repent - Be baptized - Receive the Spirit

Acts 2:42

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

The Word – Fellowship – Communion - Prayer