

April 18, 2021

“Living with Not Knowing”

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ACTS 1:7



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

Special Music: “Because He Lives” Crowder, Johnny Swim, Tori Kelly

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=La9Zy917JcQ>

I PLACE NO FAITH

**I place no faith in days to come
Those days that can't be seen
I place no faith in wealth or pride
For those can cease to be**

**I place no faith in the plans of men
For man is dust to dust
I place no faith in the strength of steel
For even metal rusts**

**I place no faith in rules and laws
For they cannot guarantee
Justice for each and everyone
And not just for you and me**

**I place my trust in God alone
Because He is not bound
By time, space, or any place
Where creation can be found.**

**Each day I live I must confess
And affirm my pledge anew
To place my faith in Yahweh's grace
And reveal that grace to you.**

Rev Walt

By nature, we are creatures given to plans. When we are not busy planning our own lives, we are planning our children's and grandchildren's lives. We find comfort in planning because it gives us a false sense of control. We really like to feel like we are in control.

We plan for college. We plan for our careers. We plan for our families. We plan for our homes. We plan for our meals. We plan our vacations. We even plan our daily schedules. And when things don't quite work out the way we planned, we go to plan B. It is difficult for us to let go enough to just... let go. Many of us find it difficult to give into spontaneity. We tell ourselves: We don't have tickets. We don't have the right materials. We don't have the time in our schedule. We don't have the right transportation. If we give in to spontaneity, something else may not get done. We don't seem to acknowledge that we don't go somewhere or do something simply because we have not planned for it. We often miss out on the spontaneous joys in life because we are afraid to set aside our plans. I've quoted the old Yiddish saying before, "Man plans. God laughs."

I'm not saying that planning is a bad thing. What I am trying to point out is that sometimes opportunities present themselves and we are hesitant to embrace them. Those opportunities simply don't seem to fit into the rest of our plans and we don't want to rearrange our lives just to take advantage of those spur of the moment opportunities. Have you ever wound up with a hole in your schedule and

said, “gee whiz, here I have a couple of hours on my hands that I wasn’t expecting, whatever should I do?” Perhaps we are so fixed into our plans that we are afraid of the possibility that embracing something unplanned for might mess everything up. Maybe we should be flexible enough that we are able to shift things around in our schedule or reprioritize our plans so that we can take advantage of those spontaneous blessings that God places in our paths.

The problem is that we are project and destination oriented. It is part of our nature. We can’t see the future, so we try to control the present to help ensure that we don’t find ourselves in a pickle tomorrow. But tomorrow often throws us a curve or a slider that we weren’t anticipating. And that unanticipated event can either be a blessing or an opportunity.

No one predicted the arrival of COVID-19, even though the possibility of a world-wide pandemic had been discussed for decades. We knew the possibility existed, but the actual event caught us off guard. We simply were not prepared for dealing with the large number of infected people. Not enough masks. Not enough sanitizer. Not enough ventilators. Not enough hospital beds. Not enough testing supplies. Not enough medications. Not enough personnel. Not enough toilet paper. We were unprepared for this country being forced into a lockdown. We didn’t have plan “A” much less a plan “B.” And unlike the advent of WWII where the entire country joined hands and proved its flexibility and

adaptive nature to bring and revamp the industrial and military complexes into a new vision to meet our enemies on not one, but two fronts, Covid 19 left us squirming and trying to adapt to a situation that no one seemed to have a handle on and certainly without the united cooperation that we found in the US in 1941.

Throughout history, trusted theologians, scientists and scholars have predicted the end of the world using everything from various calendars, books (including the Bible), climate change, political upheavals and posturing, scientific data and cultural trends to build tools of prognostication. And many people trusted those sources and made plans with regards to those predictions. This included hiding in caves, storing up emergency rations, investing in survival equipment and isolating themselves. The scurry to build bomb shelters in the 1960's is a prime example of this process and its results.

Many of these end-of-the-world predictions came from well-meaning spiritual leaders and Biblical scholars. Many of them quoted Matthew 24:4-14:

3 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?"

4 Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you.

5 For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many.

6 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.

7 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.

9 "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.

10 At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other,

11 and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.

12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold,

13 but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

There has never been a time since the resurrection of Jesus Christ where these mentioned conditions have not been met all over the world. Wars and rumors of wars. False prophets. Famine and earthquakes. People turning away from their

faith and turning their backs to God. And there has always been someone that the people of the world trusted who predicted the second coming of Christ or the end of all that we know. Many of us have been around long enough to remember Jim Jones, Charles Manson, Herbert W. Armstrong, Chuck Smith, Pat Robertson, Edgar C Whisenant, Louis Farrakhan, David Berg, James Gordon Lindsay, Jerry Falwell, Tim LaHaye, Ruth Montgomery and Jean Dixon. Some of those names have become infamous for the pain, suffering and even deaths that they caused with their teaching. Some were just well meaning, respectable modern day self-proclaimed prophets who simply got it wrong.

Jesus was very clear about this. Although He explained the signs of the end times to His disciples, He also said quite clearly in Matthew 24:36:

"But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

And in our passage today, Luke in the first chapter of Acts reiterates with:

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

As much as we embrace the concept of the trinity, we need to pause and reflect when Jesus tells us that the Father knows the day and the hour, but Jesus, Himself does not know. And neither do the angels in heaven. It is a secret that has not been revealed and will not be revealed until it happens. When someone says they know when the last days are upon us, they are claiming to know more than Jesus. I can't imagine God giving any man or woman an authority that is greater than the authority that He has given to His son, Jesus Christ. **"Watch out that no one deceives you."** We do not know, and we will not know until it happens.

I think back to my years in the theatre. I was involved in multiple productions of *Fiddler on the Roof*, a script that holds many special memories for me. At one point in the script, Motel, the tailor that marries Tevye's daughter Tzeitel, is speaking with the local Rabbi. The villagers of Anatevka have received an edict telling them that they must leave their homes. Motel asks the Rabbi, "Rabbi, we've been waiting for the Messiah all our lives. Wouldn't now be a good time for him to come?" and the Rabbi, in his wisdom, replies, "I guess we'll have to wait someplace else."

We find ourselves wanting to believe that this is the right time, that there is now some new insight into God's plans. It is easier for us to fall victim to false teachers rather than to accept not knowing. How do we live with not knowing? How has anyone ever lived without knowing?

Even the brightest theologians of our time, and I certainly don't count myself among those, jump on questions that we have no way of knowing the answers to. They want answers for questions that have no answers and are willing to drive themselves and those around them crazy or provide misinformation to encourage a perceived truth in a void that was never meant to be filled. Why is it so hard for us to accept that there are mysteries for which we may never have answers? I don't fault people who seek those answers, but there is no peace in doing that because the answers cannot be found. There are plenty of mysteries that can be solved by both scientists and theologians alike. Sometimes a mystery is just that; a mystery. And it does us no good to beat our brains to pulp trying to explain things that cannot and will never be able to be explained.

It is also true that we sometimes we quit too soon. There are answers to some of these questions, but we stop searching. We can find scientific truth and I greatly value those who have the tenacity and expertise to keep their nose to the grindstone of discovery. We can find the value of a human soul by looking into their eyes and reaching out our hands. And we can find God, which isn't as difficult as we make it out to be because God is always looking for us and sent His Son to bring us to Him. We can know love and grace for the very same reason.

It is in our nature to worry, even if we don't worry about the end times. We worry about having enough retirement resources. We worry about our health. We worry about our families. We worry about our clothes and our homes. All of these are things that we feel might disappear tomorrow if we don't protect them. We also worry about our own death and what comes after.

In the 9th chapter of Luke, Jesus gives power to His disciples and sends them into the world to "proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick."

3 He told them: "Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt.

4 Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town.

This was not a lesson in poverty or self-deprecation. It was a lesson in faith. They needed to see the truth that when we walk the path that God has set before us, He will provide for us. Basically, we work His plan rather than our own. He will provide the resources and skills that we need to serve as His hands and feet.

It is so difficult to escape the “just in case” syndrome that clouds our minds with worry.

“I know He told me not to take a staff, but I think I will take one ‘just in case’ I run into a bear.”

“I know that He told me not to take a bag, but I think I will take one ‘just in case’ I have to carry something.”

“I know that He told me not to take any bread, but it’s a long road and I might get hungry, so I will take a little bread ‘just in case’”

“I know that He told me not to take any money, but what if I need to buy something? So, I will take a little, ‘just in case.’

“I know that He told me not to take an extra shirt, but I might get to be pretty stinky on the long walk in the sun, so I will take one, ‘just in case.’”

I once met a young man who was a little older than me. I was still in high school and he was in college. We were visiting and I learned he was a Catholic by faith. He regularly attended mass. Went to confession and did everything the church asked of him. Then he told me something that I found a little shocking. He let me know that he was really an agnostic. He wasn't sure that God existed. I made no bones about my belief in God the Father and how Jesus died for the sins of all. But I just had to ask him why he spent all that time doing all the things that the church asked of him if he really didn't believe. After all, couldn't he find a better use of his time? His answer was really quite simple. He looked me in the eye and answered matter-of-factly, "Just in case I'm wrong."

There's a little of that in all of us. Some of us attend church "just in case God is real." Some of us do good things for people we know to balance out the wrong things that we do, "just in case we need to balance the scales." Some of us give of our money, "just in case God's accountant is going to go over our books." We spend a lot of time and energy dealing with 'just in case' when we don't even know if there is going to be a tomorrow.

But we were never meant to live our lives for tomorrow. Our purpose is to serve our God in the here and now, today. To be in a relationship with Jesus in the present. By allowing the Holy Spirit to work through us in the here and now. If we do that. If we focus on what God has planned for us right now, then we don't have to fear tomorrow because God's got this. He has us in the palm of His hand. He loves us beyond measure. We are his children, and He cares for us. He loves us so very much that He sent His Son to die for us so that we can know Him. It is the reason that He created us.

That is how we live without knowing because what we don't know simply doesn't matter as long our faith is chained to the Rock of our Salvation. Because he lives, we can face tomorrow.

AMEN

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