

2CH Sunday at 7.30

Talks from the NSW Council of Churches

Being prepared

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What will the world be like in a weeks time, a month or a year? It may not be very different from the way it is now.....but then again it may. We live in uncertain times. Someone asked me the other day, “Do you think we’re nearing the end of the world?” That’s a good question. What do you think?

There are some people who point to the problems in the world at this time and say, “Yes, this is the sign of the times.....the beginning of the end.”

Within everyone of us there is the curious voice that wants to know the answers to the big questions in life. Where have we come from? Where are we going? What is our destiny? These are questions that often play on our minds when there are times of national or international crisis.

Today I want to talk about what we can hang onto with certainty, in a world that seems to be out of control.

Part 1

We live in uncertain times. In Australia we have enjoyed a relatively smooth ride compared with the roller-coaster experience of Europe and many third world countries. However, there is now a heightened level of anxiety for those who carefully watch dark events unfolding on the international stage and the shadows that creep back to what we have always seen as a rather remote yet secure homeland. We don’t always articulate the questions that play on our minds. What does the future hold? What is our destiny? Is there another world beyond what we experience now?

To find an answer to these questions, some turn their eyes to the TV and print media, and seek messages from horoscopes, or from those who have “gone before”. – ‘crossed over’. Also, we are keen to tune our ear to the transcendent. It seems that many amongst us are keen to look and listen to the extra-terrestrial for answers to our past and future.

Mel Gibson’s movie, “Signs”, is about a former pastor and farmer who discovers crop circles, or what some believe are spaceship landing pads, in his cornfield. The copycat phenomenon began in England in the late seventies and the circles have been found in 70 countries around the world.

In the early nineties the original pranksters confessed that they created the circles with a plank, knotted rope, and moonlight. However, these spectacular images have become part of pop culture, and there are many who believe or hope that they are “messages” from aliens or superior beings.

“Signs” writer-director M. Night Shyamalan is skeptical about crop circles, but says, “I’m hopeful they’ll be proven true. I like believing in things and possibilities of things.....so tantalizing.”

Michael Shermer, author of *Why People Believe Weird Things*, believes that interest in crop circles “really is a religious belief. It’s the promise of something transcendent, bigger than us, beyond us.”

The Good News is that God sent his son Jesus so we could get the full picture, and so avoid going around in circles. We don’t have to go and look in haystacks. God’s communication comes to us in the Bible. Here is everything we need to know about our past and future.

The picture we get from the Bible regarding the past is, that God made the earth and the universe, and put man in charge of the earth to care for it. Now, that helps us with the future, because it means that God is ultimately in charge.

As the Psalmist says “Lord God Almighty, Heaven is yours, the earth also, You made the world and everything in it.” How can we prepare for the future?

Part 2

None of us knows what lies ahead, except God. One thing is certain, and that is, that Jesus will return, as He promised.

In the Gospel of John (John 14:1) the angels of God assured the astounded followers of Jesus on the day of his ascension into heaven following his death, burial and resurrection saying, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11, NIV).

While Jesus said that He’ll return, He also emphasised that we should be prepared. He said, “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him” (Matthew 24:42-44, NIV).

It is amazing how intensely some people get caught up in religiosity, including the prophetic literature of the Bible about Christ’s return and the end of this age. Jesus said when he was on earth, that not even he knew when the day of his return would be, and yet, whenever predictions are made with a specific date and time, there are people who believe it and give up all they have in preparation for that day.

Over the centuries there have been various theories as to when and how the world might end. For example, I have read how “in 1665 a man named Solomon Eccles was jailed in London’s Bridewell Prison for striding through Smithfield Market stark naked, carrying a pan of blazing sulfur on his head, and prophesying doom and destruction.

“In 1874 Charles Taze Russell, founder of the sect that became Jehovah’s Witnesses, concluded that the Second Coming had already taken place. He declared that people had 40 years, or until 1914, to enter his faith or be destroyed. Later he modified the date to ‘very soon after 1914.’

“Over the years many other date-setters have come along. Each one has been wrong. It makes me think of a minister in Germany named Michael Stiftell. Based on his study of Revelation, Stiftell proclaimed that the world would end on October 18, 1533. When it didn’t happen, Stiftell was given a thrashing by the townspeople.”

The fact is that Jesus is coming again. It may not be for a hundred, or a thousand years, or, it may be today. The important thing is to be sure that we are ready, for when we least expect it, he will come again.

How can we be ready?

Part 3

Today I'm talking about the uncertainty that surrounds us and the questions that often arise in times of stress. What does the future hold?

One thing that we can hold onto for certainty is that Jesus will return as he promised. We do not know the day or the hour when that will take place, however the important thing is that we are prepared. How can we be prepared.

Firstly, by celebrating life. Jesus said when He was on earth "I am come so you might have life, life in all it's fullness. I like the following reflection from the pen of an anonymous writer entitled "Today".

Today we have higher buildings and wider highways, but shorter temperaments and narrower points of view. We spend more but enjoy less. We have bigger houses, but smaller families. We have more compromises, but less time. We have more knowledge, but less judgement. We have more medicines, but less health. We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values. We talk much, we love only a little, and we hate too much. We reached the moon and came back but we find it troublesome to cross our own street and meet our neighbours. We have conquered outer space, but not our inner space. We have higher income but less morals. These are times with more liberty, but less joy. We have much more food, but less nutrition.

These are the days in which it takes two salaries for each home, but divorce increases. These are times of finer houses, but more broken homes. That's why I propose that, as of today, you do not keep anything for a special occasion, because every day that you live, is a special occasion.

You do not search for knowledge, read more, sit on your front porch and admire the view without paying attention to your needs. Spend more time with your family and friends, eat your favorite foods, visit the places you love. Life is a chain of moments of enjoyment; not only about survival.

Use your crystal goblets. Do not save your best perfume, and use it every time you feel you want it. Remove from your vocabulary phrases like "one of these days" and "someday". Let's tell our families and friends how much we love them. Let's write the letter we are "going to write one of these days." Do not delay anything that adds laughter and joy to your life. Every day, every hour, and every minute is special. And you don't know if it will be your last.

Preparing for Christ's return involves us fully living in the present. Celebrating the gifts God has given to us.

Secondly, it is putting the relationships right with those that surround you.

In the world we hear much about assertiveness and fighting for our rights, which is often appropriate, but there is a lack of focus on forgiveness. Jesus taught us in his prayer, that we are to forgive others that sin against us, because we are forgiven our sins, by God. The Bible says, that we cannot love God and hate our brother.

Physicians and counselors alike attest to the damage done by an unforgiving spirit. Some medical doctors estimate that the majority of illnesses they treat are related to emotional problems such as resentment, which is a lack of forgiveness. And counselors see the roots of bitterness reflected in depression, anxiety, and destroyed relationships. It's in our best interest, physically, emotionally, and spiritually, to forgive.

Finally, we need not only to put our relationship right with others and forgive others those who have wronged us, but also seek God's forgiveness for our rebellion.

There's no greater experience of liberation than when we come to God in faith, and transfer trust from ourself to God. We are forgiven by God, and become part of his family.

Conclusion.

In our uncertain world, we can hold secure to the fact that God created the heavens and the earth. God is in control and has the world in his hand. We can hold onto the promise that Jesus will return, just as he said he would. We can be prepared by transferring our trust to him, living our lives in the power of his spirit so we can keep our relationships clean through forgiveness, and our lives fresh, as we celebrate life and all God's gifts.