



Friday's Formation Note by Jamie Hall

“Jesus said, "There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.””

Oh dear. This does not sound good... Apocalyptic thinking has always been around; somehow it is vaguely appealing. (Less in the Eastern cultures perhaps, but strongly in the Judeo-Christian – and in the Norse – the descriptions of Ragnarök bear interesting, thought very Pagan, parallels to Armageddon) We see it here. Paul mentions similar concepts from time to time in the epistles. Both here, though, and in Paul, there is usually an additional component: “Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place.” And they haven’t.

In more current thinking, it is not at all difficult to find a headline or an article somewhere saying that unless mankind does this or that, the world will come to an end – or at least civilization will. And, of course, over the millennia as they do today, people have made more or less exact predictions as to the day (and even the time of day). Problem. We poor temporal creatures don’t know – we can’t know – what we are talking about.

There are two pieces of music, though, for you (if you have a decent sound system) which give two very different takes (both rather long. Sorry).

Berlioz: Grande Messe des morts, Op. 5, H. 75: II. Dies irae
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Ob4YhzKVyc&t=2s>

Mahler Symphony No 2 Mvt 4 and 5 – London Symphony Orchestra Semyon Bychkov:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=skaNXA00ctM>

It is completely natural for us to ascribe a specific day and time for the Apocalypse. That is the way we think; we are hard-wired to think of past, present, and future. We make calendars. We set alarms.

But God’s creation is beyond time. For Him, all creation is NOW. Perhaps the psalmist comes closest to understanding this: “For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.” (Psalm 90:4) – still thinking constrained in our earthly time, but at the same time acknowledging the disparity between Creation and our temporal world. This world of ours had a beginning in time. I have no doubt that there will indeed be a final apocalypse for the entire world. When, in our time frame, I wouldn’t even think of venturing a guess.

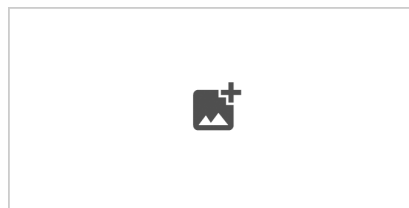
But for each of us there will come a personal apocalypse. A time when our personal world, and all we have known, comes to an end, and we see the Son of Man descending to us – to each of us – coming to us in a cloud with great glory. We cannot know the time or place – but I wonder: in God’s eternal NOW, is it not possible that on the other side that that is irrelevant? Could it be that viewed in God’s terms, not ours, that the Apocalypse as seen in these verses and our apocalypse are one and the same?

Now the last verses of our Gospel make perfect sense. We do not know – we cannot know – when in our temporal frame that will be for each of us, but surely we each will stand before the Son of Man on that day, and I have confidence and hope that with the help of the Holy Spirit, and the guidance of Jesus Christ, that I – and any of us – will have had the strength to withstand “all these things” and stand before Him on that day and that He will accept me, flawed as I am and have been, into His glorious company. And I pray that it may be so for all of us.

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