

Leader Telegram Matter of Faith
Rev. David J. Huber
For publication May 21, 2011

Not surprisingly, another Judgment Day has come and gone. Nothing happened. According to Harold Camping, an earthquake was to shake the earth and the dead were to rise, heralding five months of horror until God utterly destroys our planet on October 21. Unpestered by risen dead, the world has continued just as it was. Camping, founder of Family Radio, said his prediction rested on solid scriptural proof. I read his paper, and it's just numerological fantasy and scriptural gymnastics that would cause anyone to ignore him if not for his vast funding (about \$18M per year*) which allowed him to buy roving RVs and to plaster billboards all over the country. True to form for the rapture-ready cultists, Camping now says it was a "silent" Judgment Day and that October 21 will still be a day of destruction. I am fully confident in saying that day, too, will pass with nothing happening.

The sadness here isn't just the end-timer's waste of time and resources, but the serpent-like venom of their end-time mania that poisons vulnerable people, even though the self-appointed prophets are always wrong and always will be. From the Millerites in 1844 to Camping previously in 1994, and hundreds others, they have pronounced doomsdays for hundreds of years by interpreting natural disasters, social ills, and so on as signs of the end. Truth is, we have always lived in anxious times. And serpents have always shown up to prey on the fears of the vulnerable. They are always wrong. Not just wrong about the signs or dates, or wrong about a bit of math, or wrong about claiming doomsday didn't happen because they saved enough souls (so keep donating, please!). Their fundamental error is asserting that a God-delivered end-time of merciless destruction is scripturally defensible. It isn't. So their ends of the world never arrive, the false prophets rightfully fade away into historical footnotes, and the only ones left behind are the victims manipulated into selling their homes or emptying their pensions to fund yet another lie.

I can understand the attraction to their way of thinking. Anxious times can feel hopeless, and that the best solution is to destroy it all and start over. We live in anxious times now. Flooding, tsunamis, tornadoes, leaking nuclear reactors, economic anxiety, caustic politics, environmental degradation, human social degradation, gay teens committing suicide because of condoned and sometimes sanctioned bullying. We have wars, terrorism, dysfunctional families, addictions, mental illness, hunger, poverty, sick people denied medicine because they can't afford it. That's just off the top of my head. Who wouldn't love to see that world end? But creating a litany of evil or inventing an end-time scenario in which our troubles are wiped out by God wiping us out is easy. It is an easy path of guilt-free withdrawal from responding to suffering while waiting with giddy delight for God to smite the "out" group. But Jesus calls us beyond easy answers or withdrawal. He calls us to fully submit ourselves into the world's suffering. Remember, God loves this world so much that God birthed the divine self in human flesh to save it, not condemn it, and to draw us deeper into new life.

I wonder what the financial and human cost of the billboards, RVs, websites and publications of the hundreds of other end-time "prophets" represents in terms of lost opportunity to live the

redemptive Gospel of feeding the hungry, bringing relief to flood and tornado victims, building schools in Pakistan, providing clean water in Africa, working toward peace. The Gospel response to anxious times is to use God-given imagination, compassion and love to relieve the causes and effects of suffering, not increase it or let it fester. The Gospel message of the Prince of Peace is love, not destruction. God's crazy love for the world. God's reckless love for the integrity of creation. God's untamable love for each and every one of us that leads us only to life in that kingdom which has no end.

*<http://money.cnn.com/2011/05/19/news/economy/may-21-end-of-the-world-finances-harold-camping/>