

The return of the King

"It's far too late, and things are far too bad, for pessimism." -- Dee Hock, Founder, Visa International

"...10 percent of the nation's top executives are stockpiling canned goods, buying generators and even purchasing handguns." - The New York Times,

--it's beyond any country's ability, and institution's ability to control." - Jeffrey Garten, Dean, Yale School of Management

It is one of the most serious and potentially devastating events this nation has ever encountered " - U.S. Senate,

"Italy is going to crash, and we are going to be crucified"" - headline in THE TIMES, London

"Army Fears Civil Chaos ... Armed Forces Gearing Up To Deal With Civil Chaos" GLOBE AND MAIL, Toronto,

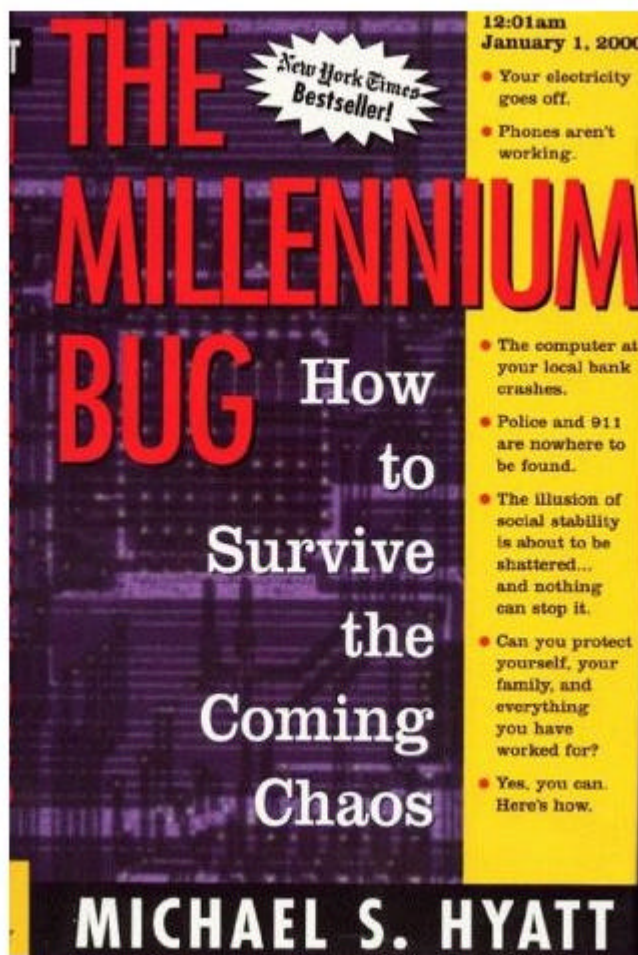
"We're no longer at the point of asking whether or not there will be any power disruptions, but we are now forced to ask how severe the disruptions are going to be..." - U.S. Senator Chris Dodd.

The end of the world? No just the end of the millennium. A few examples of millennium panic in 1998 and 1999.

We can laugh at these people now, but if we are honest, how many of us weren't even a teeny bit apprehensive as the clock approached midnight in Dec 1999?

People seem to love a good dose of panic, and history is full of examples of those prophets of doom, who have profited from doom, or at least the threat of impending doom.

People like the author of this book...



... which is still available from Amazon.com prices starting from 1 cent!

Some say it was all a hoax, or a scam so that computer consultants and other authors could go laughing all the way to the bank that never closed down after all. Others of course claim that nothing happened because we all so well prepared...

But I think it is just another example of how fear of the end of civilisation as we know it can be a great way to make money and manipulate people. It's usually religious groups that get blamed for this kind of thing, but this time it was the world's new god to blame – technology.

Yet the truth is it usually does happen to believers of one kind or another. Even this week, there is news from Russia about a sect calling themselves 'the true Orthodox Church' who have been obeying their leaders' orders to hide in a cave in the mountains with enough supplies to await the return of Christ next May. They have threatened to blow themselves up, including four young children, if the authorities try to force them out. The leader, by the way, didn't join them, and has been arrested.

If anyone knew human nature inside out it was Jesus Christ, and so when he prophesied that the Temple of Jerusalem was going to be destroyed, as it was forty years later, his disciples asked him the two questions most of us ask when faced with prophesy. They asked "when will all this take place? And what will the signs be?" To the Jews the Temple was the centre of their very existence, it stood for the presence of God in their midst, the last time the Temple had been destroyed, they had lost the promised land, ending up in exile in Babylon, and so to them the thought of it being destroyed again was just inconceivable. Naturally they wanted to know when it would happen and what the signs would be.

Jesus took these questions seriously and with two clear pieces of advice which is as valid now as it ever was. "Do not be misled, and

“do not panic”. Today the future is as unknowable and as frightening as ever, perhaps more so, the more we listen to the news the more frightened we can become, Global warming, the clash of civilisations, the war on terror, the threat of economic collapse. “Do not be misled, says Jesus, and “do not panic”. And why should we not panic? Because Jesus Christ is coming back to planet earth.

Jesus said a whole lot more in these verses of course, because Christ took the matter of his return to earth very seriously, as did the early church. When we preach the Gospel, the good news, and we don’t include his return, we are guilty of not preaching all the good news. “Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again” is one of the earliest proclamations of the church, and the early creeds, like the one we sung earlier, all included his return to earth as an essential part of the Christian faith.

Of course we now live in an enlightened age one where we know that the sky cannot be rent in two, because it is not a solid ball with stars stuck on it as the ancients believed, and we know that clouds are just droplets of water, not a chariot for God to ride on, but we still believe that he will return on the clouds of heaven because Christ is bigger than his creation, and no matter how clever we think we are, God is cleverer still. Maybe it’s poetry, but it’s also going to happen.

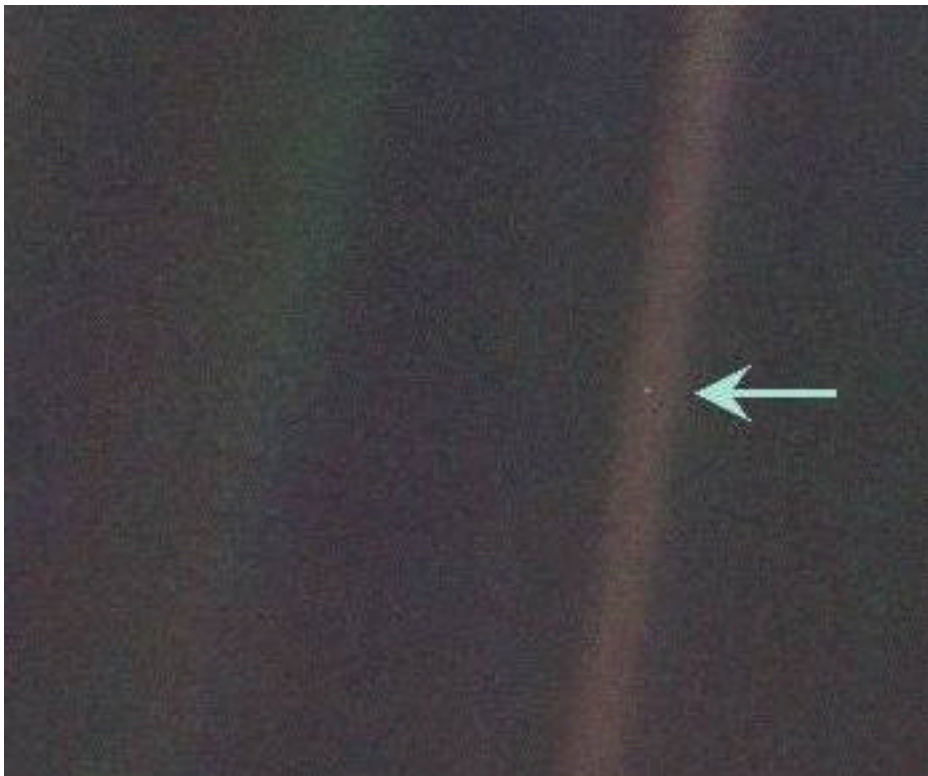
One of the things I find most frustrating when talking to sceptics and atheists, is the argument that we don’t need to believe in God anymore because we have science. “In the past, they say, people needed gods to explain how the sun came up in the morning, how the rain fell, they needed religion to explain the universe, now we have science we don’t need supernatural explanations, we know it all”, man, they say, has come of age.

I remember when I knew it all, I remember when I was wiser and cleverer than my parents, I was grown up, a man. But I was still a child, one of my Dad's favourite sayings to the teenage Dougie was "you'll learn." And I did learn, I learned that I did certainly not know it all, I needed to make many mistakes, and I learned to listen to my dad, I learned the value of his experience, I learned that I certainly did not know it all.

Man has not come of age at all, if anything we are still adolescents.

Those of us who came last Sunday night were treated to an amazing DVD shown by Yvonne on the wonders of the universe.

One of the pictures on the DVD was called 'the pale blue dot'



This is our home seen from more than 4 billion miles or away, Earth is a dot obscured in a beam of scattered sunlight reflected off Voyager 2 which took the picture. Kind of puts us into perspective, don't you think?

We might not need a God to explain how the sun comes up in the morning, or what makes the rain fall, but by golly we need him to tell us why.

Why is there a sun in the first place? Why is that pale blue dot there? Why am I asking this question? Why am I here at all? Science might tell us how it can never tell us why.

God is not about explaining the mechanics of the universe, but he is the reason for the universe in the first place.

When we tell people about Jesus Christ, we tell them that he gives our life a meaning. Without Christ in our lives have no meaning have no reason. 'Eat drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die'. But when we come to know Christ, we know that every single human being that ever lived on that pale blue dot had a reason for being born, for existing. We know he died for them, we know he rose from the dead for them, and we know he will be coming back to that pale blue dot for them.

But the Gospel does more than give meaning to our little lives, the fact that Christ will return gives meaning to history itself.

"When will all this take place? And what will the signs be?" we all would like to know the future, and if you were expecting a Bible study on the 'end times' then I am sorry to disappoint you, there are some here who can do that much better than I ever could, I am sure.

I think it was Sir Winston Churchill who once said "there is a purpose being worked out here below". I can go further than Sir Winston and say that each and every one of us, each and every one of you, are part of that purpose. Christ has died...for our sins, Christ is risen...for our life, Christ will come again...for the world. And when he comes again he will be bringing us with him. If you don't believe me ask the Apostle Paul...

“When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.” (Col 3:4 NIV)

So, to get back moment to the beginning, why does Jesus give us all this information? If human beings are so susceptible to deception and panic do we really need to know about wars and rumours of wars, earthquakes, famines, signs in the heavens and so on?

Of course we do, because he wants us to be ready, to learn from the fig tree that just as summer is inevitable when the leaves come out, out so his return to planet earth is inevitable when all these things begin to happen.

And Jesus isn't concerned with satisfying our curiosity, our desire to know the future, he simply wants us to be ready, to live our daily life in the knowledge that he could return at any time.

“Heaven and earth will disappear”, Jesus said, that pale blue dot will disappear, everything around us is temporary. All our pleasures, and all our pains are temporary. Jesus Christ though is coming back to stay.

So let's let him have the last say.

Heaven and earth will disappear but my words will remain forever. Watch out! Don't let me find you living in careless ease and drunkenness, and filled with the worries of this life. Don't let that day catch you unaware, as in a trap. For that day will come upon everyone living on the earth. Keep a constant watch.