

**St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church - November 28, 2010**

Sermon "Pre-Post and A-Millennialism in dispensational Apocalyptic Eschatology"  
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Lord God,  
May the words of my mouth,  
And the thoughts and meditations of all of our hearts,  
Be acceptable to you, our God and our guide. AMEN.

Today marks the beginning of the season of Advent,  
And yet the scripture readings seem to have nothing to do with Jesus birth,  
Or Christmas, or any of that stuff.  
Let me explain why that is.

I mentioned a few weeks ago,  
And I neglected to remind or forewarn you last week,  
This is the Sunday when I will be dealing with  
Pre, Post and A-Millennialism in dispensational Apocalyptic eschatology.  
Now, I know many of you have been up late at night wondering about this,  
And not sure where you fall on this issue,  
So I feel it is my responsibility to put your mind at ease.

You are not alone by the way  
This is a burning question on peoples minds throughout the city of Ottawa,  
And the topic most brought up at fancy dinner parties  
and likely going to take over all conversation  
during the gray cup this afternoon.

Where do you stand on  
Pre, Post and A-Millennialism in dispensational Apocalyptic eschatology?

Now before we get too far into things, I should clarify a few of the terms,  
and where they come from.

The dispensational system of theology, if we are honest with ourselves,  
is actually a Nineteenth Century phenomenon.

Now I don't want to get into an argument about these things.

I know some of you might like to trace elements  
of dispensational teaching and belief way back  
into the early history of the church.  
but as an historical theologian, I must protest  
and assert that the system of dispensational theology  
is predominantly a Nineteenth Century phenomenon.  
and is particularly associated with John Nelson Darby  
and the Plymouth Brethren movement in Britain,  
and in The United States, with Cyrus Ingersoll Scofield.

Dispensationalists, of course, see their theological system to be in opposition to Covenantal Theology.

Now, the differences between Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology are partly in the area of Eschatology.

And of course that brings us to another term in the sermon title, Eschatology.

When we say *Eschatology*, we are talking about the end times and especially the time of the coming of Christ.

Dispensationalists are pre-millennial,

because it is essential to their theological system,

and some would say is perhaps the fundamental point of Dispensationalism.

Classic dispensationalism, in addition to being *premillennial*, is also

*pretribulational*. Essentially, to say that one is pre-millennial means that one believes

that Christ returns prior to the biblical millennium

described in the book of Revelation chapter 20

and according to dispensationalists

also mentioned elsewhere in the Scripture.

To be *pre-tribulational*, means that you believe in a rapture of the church

that occurs prior to the great Tribulation mentioned in the book of Revelation,

and again hinted at in other places in the Old and the New Testaments.

So classic dispensationalism has been both pre-millennial

and it has been pre-tribulational.

For those of you who are familiar with eschatological theology,

And for those who believe in a rapture, there are three views of a rapture.

There is the *pre tribulational view*.

That is the belief that Christians are raptured,

or taken out of the world prior to the Great Tribulation.

There is the *mid tribulational view*.

Believers are raptured out of the world in the midst of the Great Tribulation.

And there is the *post tribulational view*.

Which says that believers are raptured out of the world,

after the Great Tribulation.

All classic dispensationalism, however, is premillennial and pretribulational.

On the other hand, most Covenant Theologians have been either post- or

amillennial. That is, they interpret the millennium described in Revelation 20

to be something that occurs prior to the return of Christ.

Simply defined, postmillennial means that the coming of Christ is post,

that is after the millennium, and amillennialism is just a sub category

of post millennialism.

You can only have two views at the time of the millennium.

Christ is either coming before or after the millennium.

Those are the only two possible views.

So, amillennialism is a sub category of postmillennialism.

A-millennialists tend to stress the heavenly character of that millennium.

They will, for instance, stress that the millennial reign is going on now, in heaven.

It is a spiritual millennium.

Whereas post-millennialists tend to stress a more earthly character to that millennium, and often times project it as a golden age which is yet to be experienced, but which will occur before the time of Christ's return.

...And so as we look further at our understanding of Apocalyptic Eschatology, The revelation of what the end times will be like.

it will help us to clarify whether or not we are dispensationalists at all, and if we are dispensationalist in our leanings, whether we are premillennialist, post millennialists, or amillennialist, and then whether we are pre tribulationist, or post tribulationists.

So now please raise your hand if you are a classic Pre Tribulationist, pre-millennialist Dispensationist.

See I thought so.

And how about if you are a non-dispensationalist, or one could say pre-dispensationalist pre-tribulationist, amillennialist?

See, now that surprises me.

How many of you have no idea?

See, now finally, that makes sense.

Jesus said, ***“But about that day or hour no one knows,***

***neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.***

***Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.***

***Jesus said, “Keep awake”***

Which I think was a warning as much to preachers

who put their congregations to sleep going on about

pre and post millennialism in dispensational apocalyptic eschatology as it is a warning for anyone else.

What does all of this have to do with Advent

and the preparations for Christmas anyway?

Well Advent is only partly about the preparations for Christmas.

Advent has also traditionally been seen as the season of preparation

And waiting for Jesus coming again, the Eschaton.

In fact Advent is an entire season in the church calendar, devoted to waiting.

The readings from this morning talk about Jesus coming again.  
We do not know when that day will be though,  
and as Presbyterians we do not talk about it a whole lot,  
or get too hung up on dispensationalism, tribulationism, or millennialism  
The Gospel writers, and Paul, and the other writers of the New Testament  
Appear to have fully expected Jesus to return to them any day. . .  
and yet at the same time, they were humble enough to say  
that only God really knows the day and time of Jesus return.

Of course there have always been predictions about the end of the world.  
Do you remember the predictions of dire circumstances,  
With the dawning of the year 2000?  
The issue of software glitches was a part of that,  
And tended to add an air of validity to an otherwise irrational fear,  
There was fear that planes would be falling out of the sky,  
That nuclear reactors would malfunction and melt down,  
Our cars and our computers and anything with a computer chip in it,  
Would suddenly stop working at midnight on December 31, 1999.  
But the root of the Y2K issue was fear.  
A fear of the change-over to a new millennium,  
A fear of what might be ahead,  
A fear of the unknown.

I remember during a pastoral visit with Russell Moreland,  
A 95 year old farmer from my congregation in Gananoque,  
Him expressing to me his concern about the year 2000.  
It was getting late into 1999 and people were worried  
about what was going to happen.  
I was doing my best to be pastoral with Russell and listen carefully  
when he told me that he had a Y2K problem.  
When he said it had to do with his death, I listened even more carefully.  
He explained that when his wife had died many years before,  
He had decided to save some money  
and have his name engraved on the headstone at the same time.  
Of course he did not know when he would die, so they could not put the date on,  
But he did have them go ahead and put the "19" of "1990 whatever".  
His Y2K problem was that he was going to live past the year 2000,  
And now he was going to have to pay them again to redo the date.  
Somehow that conversation helped me to put other Y2K problems into perspective.

We are in a similar time now.  
We are beginning to hear about predictions of the end of the world  
on December 21, 2012.

I first heard about his from the Sr. Youth group.

According to those presenting this idea

the date primarily has to do with the Mayan calendar which is incredibly accurate,  
but it ends on December 21, 2012.

Others then pull in ancient texts and oracles,

And of course the book of revelation gets pulled in too

and they try to tie it all together into a specific date and time.

What will be the signs?

What will happen to believers in the end times?

Like the bumper sticker that reads "In case of rapture this car will be empty."

What would happen to cars being driven by true believers if they are taken up,

Like the woman threshing grain in the Gospel of Matthew?

Or pilots of airplanes?

There have always been predictions about the end of the world.

And in the same way that we like to speculate and think about and ponder

where it is that we came from, our beginnings

we also wonder about our endings,

what will happen when the end of the world comes.

We know this was going on in Jesus day,

And was still going on in the first century

when the books of the new testament were being written.

We know this, because Jesus mentioned it.

He would not have bothered to mention it

if it were not being talked about and wasn't a concern,

and the Gospel writers would not have written it down

if it were not being talked about and wasn't a concern.

Jesus response to those fears was to tell his disciples,

That no one knows when it will happen,

So there is only one thing to do and that is to be prepared every day.

Jesus even went so far as to say that not even he knew when that day would be,

that only God knew, it was in God's hands,

and there was nothing anyone could do about it,

so the only thing to do was to be ready.

What does that mean though?

How are we to be ready?

And how do we keep ourselves from living in fear of the possible end of the world?

First of all the fear.

I remember one time driving in the car with my brother Stephen.

He was in seminary at the time and likely discussing this kind of stuff.

I remember him asking me, "How would you feel if God were to send you a note,

Telling you that your life was coming to an end at 3:00 that afternoon,

And you had to meet God and give an account of your life?"

I remember my first reaction was fear.

I would be terrified.

And then I started thinking about the things I had done and said,

The things I was not so proud of.

The things I would change about my life if I had more time.

The people I would want to talk to before that meeting,

To try to make things right where I had wronged people.

The people I would want to talk to to tell them how I felt about them,

Before I had to meet with God.

It was a bit of a scary thought, the idea of having to meet with God,

And give an accounting of my life.

Then my brother said, "Now how do those feelings change,

With an understanding of God as love?"

If God is love, as we hear over and over in the scriptures,

The why is there fear?

I remember that encounter for a couple of reasons.

First of all I did not want to drive with my brother again for a long time,

Because he freaked me out.

But even more so, It got me thinking about things I do and say.

People I wrong and never take the time to make it right.

People I don't take the time tell how I feel about them.

And it got me wondering about how I should make changes in my life,

Even if I didn't have to meet God at 3:00 this afternoon.

And secondly that life does not need to be lived in fear,

When we understand God as love.

This is kind of what Advent is all about.,

And how we put together

pre-post and a millennialism in dispensational Apocalyptic Eschatology.

We do not know when the end of the world will be, or when Jesus will come again,

So there is not need to try to sift through the Bible

and put little fragments together to try to find a date.

Jesus said no one knows the time, so we don't need to worry about that.

Advent is about looking at our lives though,

And thinking about the things we do and say,

The people we have wronged and not dealt with,

The people we do not take the time to tell how we feel about the.  
That is part of how we prepare not only our church and our homes for Christmas,  
But also ourselves.  
And ultimately we need to remember that God is Love,  
And love wins out over fear, so we don't need to live in fear.

The season of Advent,  
The season of waiting and preparation,  
Is as much about us and our lives,  
As it is about preparing for Christmas and Jesus coming.  
Remember what we celebrate at Christmas,  
It that God loves us so much that he came to us in person,  
In the person of Jesus to tell us that.  
And he was and is and ever more shall be Emmanuel, God with us.  
In Jesus name, Amen.