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What Farmers Tell Us About the End of the World

by Herbert E. Douglass

A few years ago while on a speaking appointment, my wife Norma and I stayed with a Northern Alberta rancher who owned a huge acreage of wheat and soybeans. The cabs on his combines and spraying machines were about eleven feet off the ground! The fields stretched beyond eyesight; the wheat was gloriously growing.

I asked him one night how he knew when to start harvesting, knowing that a few days too early or too late would be a disaster. He said, “We know that merely looking at the rippling fields in the wind is not enough. We must open the heads of wheat in our hands. We must gauge the water content as well as the color. We don’t go in until the grain is ripe. We must wait some years longer than others, but we must wait until the grain is ripe. And we don’t wait one day longer.”

His advice sounded so much like our Lord’s counsel: “The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground. . . . The earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come” (Mark 4:26-29, NKJV).

Years later, Jesus reemphasized this harvest principle by giving John a picture of how the kingdom of God reaches its purpose on earth: “And I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat one like the Son of Man, having on his head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, ‘Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the hour has come to reap, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe’ ” (Revelation 14:13-15).

What is Jesus saying here? *The first lesson I hear is that the purposes of the kingdom of God and of our backyard gardens (or our huge ranches) are the same—the harvest is ready when the seed has matured.* Who plants tomatoes or wheat, just for the fun of it? Of course, there is pleasure in planting the seed! Sinking the knees into warming April soil, planting peas one by one—is there a man or woman alive that doesn’t know that joy? Yes, there is even fun in cultivating growing carrots and beans. But, really, we don’t plant seeds merely for the fun of weeding down the rows, week after week! We plant because we enjoy those first, ripe red tomatoes, and the juice dripping down our faces, as we eat them in the garden!

In other words, just as farmers must wait for their seed to mature, so Jesus has told us that He will wait until the gospel seed has produced a harvest that He can stamp with His approval. When that harvest is ripe, when the wheat and the tares are fully mature, all the events we associate with the end will happen very quickly, such as the Latter Rain, Loud

Cry, Sunday laws, etc. For example, the “Latter Rain” falls only on mature Christians, which makes possible the “Loud Cry.”

The second lesson of our Lord’s harvest principle is this: Farmers and prophets engage in conditional prophecies. Farmers know, for example, that early corn should be ready in 68 days, later corn in 74 days, some, 88 days. That is what my seed catalogue promises me!

Norma and I mark off the kitchen calendar those dates that our seed catalogue tells us when we should expect ripe carrots, beets, beans, tomatoes, etc. That is the date promised in the seed catalogue, if! If the corn gets enough rain, but not too much, if the nights stay warm in July, if the birds don’t eat the corn—all these if’s, the farmer has no control over.

Jesus is saying to everyone everywhere: “Listen to the parable of the farmer.” If you are farming along the Nile or in the Ukraine, in Northern Alberta, or in rocky New England, the delay in the harvest of the world has not been due to a change of mind on the part of the Divine Farmer. As far as God’s seed catalogue is concerned, the harvest could have and should have ripened decades ago.

We have been living in the time of the delayed harvest for far too long. The fruits of the Spirit that reflect the character of Jesus have not yet matured. Paul often reflected on the parable of the harvest: “This I pray . . . that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God” (Phil. 1:9-11). “Because of the hope . . . which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth” (Col. 1:5, 6).

In letting the Bible speak to us, we save ourselves a lot of theological abstraction and jargon, as well as a lot of philosophizing—which is not much more than justification for whatever the human spirit wants to think or do.

If Jesus were asked, “Why are you delaying your coming?” He would respond, “I am waiting for the seed I have planted in my willing followers to mature.” But we respond, “Why wait? We have had enough distress and horror in this crazy world. Must the world get even worse?”

Jesus presses His point, “My return is not dependent on world conditions but on the condition of my loyal followers who must give the world an honest, believable message that I can provide for them better than Satan’s principles can. In other words, I won’t come until the difference between the wheat and the tares is more fully developed, enough so that people in the final generation can make an intelligent choice between Satan’s way and mine.”

Why did Jesus, in Matthew 24 and 25, want us to keep our eyes on the maturing of His followers rather than on the world? Remember He said, “Take heed that no one deceives you. . . . You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, see that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. . . . There will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrow” (Matt. 24:4-8).

He continued: “Let me tell you where My focus has always been. The gospel of the kingdom that has brought so much joy and hope and power in your lives *will be preached* in all the world, . . . and then the end will come!” (verse 14). Rightly preaching the gospel is more than telling the world that Jesus died on Calvary! Most every Christian church, Protestant or Catholic, does that well! The gospel is the good news that Jesus has opened the door back to Eden by offering grace enough to pardon every sinner and grace enough to him or her to overcome those sins. We can’t accept one without the other! For this reason, the gospel is preached only by those who are good witnesses to the real gospel—we must walk the talk.

For this reason, to place undue emphasis on world conditions, which are always in distress, would be similar to a farmer saying: “I oiled my combine, it must be time to harvest the wheat.” Or, “It looks like there will be a bad thunderstorm. It must be time to pick my corn.” There is as much relationship between a thunderstorm and picking ripe corn as there is between distress in the world and the return of Jesus.

In Revelation 7, John hears Jesus tell him that the Seven Last Plagues will continue to be restrained by God Himself until His followers are ready to be sealed! Wait He will, until His loyalists catch on as to what their final assignment really is—to be His matured people. He will wait until He has a people who, indeed, He can endorse with His signature, His name, on their foreheads! Only then will His promise be fulfilled—that His gospel will finally be preached in all the world, and *then the end will come!*

These sealed people, endorsed by God as His best reflection of what the gospel will do for everyone with a willing heart, will be the ripened harvest, people ready for His coming, ready to be translated.