

Week of January 29-February 4

SHHH, IT'S A SECRET!

Scripture Reading: Read Matthew chapter 24

Harold Camping may not be a household name to many, but his predictions were publicized all over the world last year. He claimed that Jesus Christ would return to planet earth on May 21, 2011. This wasn't his first stab at it. He had previously predicted that Jesus would return Sept. 6, 1994. Just like with his 1994 prediction, his May 21 prediction failed as well. When confronted, he indicated that Christ's return would actually be on October 21, 2011. When that date failed, Camping was finally willing to admit the obvious. His calculations were incorrect. He apologized and retired from ministry.

Camping is not alone in making such predictions. Through the centuries, many well-meaning believers have sought to predict the return of Christ as well. In my lifetime alone, I remember several. One in particular stands out. Edgar C. Whisenant, a former NASA engineer and Bible student, predicted the return of Christ would occur in 1988, sometime between Sept. 11 and Sept. 13. He published two books about this: *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988* and *On Borrowed Time*. When the rapture failed to occur, Whisenant claimed that he had made a miscalculation of one year because of a mistake in the calendar. Jesus was actually going to return during the Jewish feast of Rosh Hashanah in 1989! Whisenant published his discovery in *The Final Shout--Rapture Report 1989*.

One can only wonder why folks are so obsessed with predicting the return of Christ, particularly in light of Jesus' teaching in today's chapter reading. Jesus repeatedly warns his disciples that no one knows the date. *"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."* *"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come."* *So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."* This message is reinforced by the Parable of the Ten Virgins and Jesus' concluding statement, *"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour."*

When believers make predictions about Christ's return and they don't come to pass, it causes the world to look unfavorably on the church and its message. It also can discourage believers from looking for Christ's return with joy and anticipation. We can become dulled and complacent.

Jesus is coming again! It was this blessed hope that encouraged the 1st century saints to persevere under difficult times, to pursue holy lives and to remain watchful and faithful. They lived in light of Christ's return. May the return of Christ stir our hearts as it did theirs even if the timing is a secret.

Action Step: Take some time today to reflect on the return of Christ. How would your life change if you were living in light of his return?

Prayer Focus: For a watchful and faithful heart to live like Christ is coming today.

Take-a-way: *The timing may be a secret, but Christ's return is a certainty!*