

“Living Fearlessly”—Eric Arndt—August 23, 2020

It was a cold snowy night, January of 1992. I had just turned 17 a few months previous, and was a senior in high school. I was walking down Peach Street towards McDonalds. I had been wandering around aimlessly for an hour or so, and needed to find a place to warm up, as I had left the house rather hastily and was only wearing my brown leather jacket.

A brown leather jacket that I still have by the way; it's packed away of course since I outgrew it many years ago. I referred to it as my “Jones Jacket” after adventurer explorer Indiana Jones, who was my childhood hero. It is probably one of the few things I own, that I will never get rid of.

The evening had started off well enough, but eventually turned into another argument with my mom. It ended with me being asked to turn in my house key, and being told not to come back. But as I walked down the street on that cold blustery night, I knew I needed to get warmed up soon. My ears and nose hurt, my fingers hurt, and I couldn't feel my toes. Every step was becoming painful, so I decided to head towards my place of employment, McDonald's.

I told my manager and friend Jeff Kehl, who was working the closing shift that night what had happened. He gave me some warm food, and told me to go warm up in the break room for a while. As I sat there warming up, I began asking myself questions: where was I going to go, what was I going to do? Where will I end up? I couldn't move in with my Dad, he was still living with his sister and her family. The future hadn't been looking very bright to me for some time, but was now looking downright scary. And my depression was beginning to give way to fear.

Now I'm going to come back to this story shortly, but right now I want to fast-forward to today. I know that those same fearful questions I asked myself 28 years ago have been asked by millions of people over the course of humanity's existence. But those questions seem to be on the rise in the past few years. And they've skyrocketed in just a few short months. With everything going on in the world, it has gotten so much easier to become fearful.

If it seems like earthquakes and erupting volcanoes are happening more frequently, that's because they are. I combed through all the records from the United States Geological Survey's website; and found that the 20th century had 8,420 earthquakes worldwide between the magnitudes of 6.0 and 8.0, for an average of 84 per year.

20 years into the 21st century and we've already had 3,066, for an average of 153 per year. That's an 82% increase. "Well" you might say "the measuring equipment is so much better today than it was 100 years ago." So I decided to compare 2 recent 20 year spans, where technology hasn't changed much. In the years 1980-2000, there were 2,825 earthquakes in the 6.0 to 8.0 class. Compared to the 3066 in the 2000-2020 time frame, that's still a 12% increase in a short period of time.

During the last century, there was an average of 7 earthquakes of an 8.0 magnitude or greater per decade,. The 2000's so far have seen an average of 12. That's an increase of 70%. So I did the same 20 year comparison of 1980-2000 and 2000-2020. The first group saw 11 earthquakes of this magnitude (none higher than 8.3), while the 2000's have already seen 25 (2 of which were over 9.0); that's 127% increase. So they are increasing not only in frequency, but also in intensity

The world's super-volcanoes are also becoming a little uneasy. Iceland (which is home to some of the most dangerous volcanoes on the planet), Greece, Bolivia, the Yellowstone and Long Valley calderas in the U.S., Chile, Italy – most of the world's active super-volcanic systems have been showing signs of inflation, an early indicator that pressure is building in the magma chamber.

And as pressures increases in the magma chambers, the number of tremors increase as well. If any one of these major volcanic systems has a large scale eruption, it will most definitely become a global event.

Then we have the protests and rioting that has been taking place for some time now. And while I'm not going to address the specifics of those events, I am going to touch on the fact that there are people that are bent on wreaking havoc and destruction for the singular goal of keeping hatred alive. And it doesn't matter who is the object of that hatred, as long as the end result is chaos.

And who could forget about the now infamous Covid-19; another in a large family of about thirty-some different coronaviruses. On one side you have people who are scared for their life like it's the plague. And on the other side, you have people that just don't bat an eye at it. People scared that there won't be a mandatory vaccine, and people scared that there will be.

And you have reasonable, educated people with logical opinions on both sides of this issue. Unfortunately, you also have unreasonable people as well. And these unreasonable people have made polite discussion absolutely impossible. They do their best to shut down any opinion different than their own; any opinion that makes

them uncomfortable. How do these people expect to move forward, if they can't listen or talk to their neighbors?

And with everything that's going on right now: millions unemployed, in danger of losing their businesses, or homes, volcanoes, earthquakes, protests, rioting, pestilence, famine, lawlessness, growing persecution of Christians around the globe, a rise in Anti-Semitism, apostasy in the church, there is just a plethora of things to be fearful of, on a scale that has never been seen before.

But we don't need to be scared.

Now while I may have some of my own personal reasons for not being scared about a lot that is happening, the biggest reason that surpasses everything else, is that we were forewarned. God told us this would all eventually at some point happen. And we know what happens after all of this takes place, we know the end of the story.

And despite what it may seem like, things aren't falling apart, they're falling into place.

Jesus sat on the Mount of Olives and held a confidential Q and A with 4 of His Disciples, and it's recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. It's called the Olivet Discourse, and answered questions about the future of Israel, and the 2nd coming of Christ.

Just listen to a small excerpt from **Luke 21**:

Then he said to them: "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven. (Luke 21:10–11)

First off, the word "nation" in this passage is translated from the Greek word "Ethnos", from where the English word "Ethnicity" is derived. It literally means people of differing ethnic backgrounds. Do we see people of different ethnicity's rising up against each other today?

Now you may be saying: "Well, wait a minute Eric. The stuff you're saying here has always happened. When hasn't there been hatred between ethnic groups?"

In the **Matthew** and **Mark** account, Jesus refers to these specific end times events as "***the beginning of birth pains***". And what happens with birth pains? They increase with frequency and intensity. We will see the stage being set, in the days leading up to the "***great tribulation***" (**Matt 24:21-22**). I think you'd have to have your head in

the sand, if you can't see these events having increased in frequency or intensity over the course of anyone here's lifetime.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke also give us a parable from Jesus about a fig tree, in relation to this point in time:

“Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. (Matt 24:32-33)

People might say to that: Well technically, we've been in the end-times since the First Advent. And another thing, every generation has been talking about Jesus' return for I don't know, almost 2000 years. This is just more of “same old, same old”.

To which I respond with the words of **2 Peter**:

Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” (2 Peter 3:3-4)

I have actually personally heard people question the return of Christ in this manner. And it just blew my mind, to think of this verse while they were doing it!

Seeing everything that's happening, and knowing we have been given a heads up (not only to the events relating to the church or Israel, but people's responses to them), should give us a feeling of security, or fearlessness in such uncertain times! Why should we feel secure? Well, first of all, we know that we can count on God's word. And one way we know that we can count on God to do what He says He's going to do is with fulfilled prophecy. He gave us prophecy because he knows we're a scittery bunch, and a lot of us tend to panic easily. So He wanted to give us a good solid foundation to build our faith on. It's a foundation we can fall back on when it looks like our world is falling apart, and we start asking those same fearful questions. What do I do, where do I go, what's going to happen now?

Remember the words from Isaiah in the scripture lesson today:

“Remember this, keep it in mind, take it to heart, you rebels. Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what

***is still to come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.'* (Isaiah 46:8-10)**

Do you think God forgot about us? Do you think that God forgot the promises He made to us? No!!! Just because He hasn't returned in the timely fashion that **WE** think He should have doesn't mean it's not going to happen. He, who has made known the end from the beginning, knows the best moment for His return.

2 Peter 3 says:

***"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."* (2 Peter 3:9)**

God's goal has always been allowing as many people into His Kingdom as possible. That's why He goes through such great lengths to show us that He is the absolutely patient, Righteous Judge, that created us and our world, and has proven time and again through fulfilled prophecy that His words hold true since the beginning of time. His promises and covenants are unbreakable.

God is eternal and omniscient; that means He knows everything there is to possibly know. And as the eternal, omniscient God, He knows the past, present, and future. He is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End (**Revelation 21:6**).

The book of Isaiah was prophetic to the nation of Israel. But an understanding of how things will progress for Israel during the end times (by reading what the prophets said about it, and Jesus in His Olivet discourse), gives us an understanding of current events, as we see the age of grace coming to a close, and the return of Jesus Christ on the horizon.

And the reason I'm relating Prophetic scripture for Israel to the church is because it's all interconnected. 2 Timothy tells us that: ***"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness."* (2 Timothy 3:16)**

Israel was on a constant roller coaster of rebellion, and Isaiah brought a message of repentance from sin and of God's deliverance in the future. According to Isaiah, God is ***"holy, holy, holy"* (Isaiah 6:3)**, and therefore He cannot allow sin to go unpunished. But God is also a God of mercy, grace, and compassion. So even though the nation of Israel was in and out of fellowship with God, and deserved judgement; because of

God's mercy and grace, He promised that Israel's punishment wouldn't be forever. He promised to bring restoration, forgiveness, and healing to the people and the land.

Ezekiel 12 says:

“They will know that I am the Lord, when I disperse them among the nations and scatter them through the countries.” (Ezekiel 12:15)

Did we see that happen? Yes, in 70 A.D. when the Romans destroyed the 2nd Temple, and Jerusalem. And the Jewish people were scattered over the entire world. The land of Israel was a bleak, barren, undeveloped land – for almost 2000 years. Which also happened to be prophesied about in **Ezekiel 12**:

I will make the land a desolate waste, and her proud strength will come to an end, and the mountains of Israel will become desolate so that no one will cross them. Then they will know that I am the Lord, when I have made the land a desolate waste because of all the detestable things they have done.’ (Ezekiel 12:15)

The land assigned to the Jewish people would remain desolate as long as it was occupied by strangers, and they remained in exile. And so it was, just as God foretold. But then hey guess what? God promised that this wouldn't last forever. And here's a 2 prophecies about this from Ezekiel and Isaiah:

Ezekiel 11 says:

‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I will gather you from the nations and bring you back from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you back the land of Israel again.’ (Ezekiel 11:17)

And **Isaiah 66** says:

“Who has ever heard of such things? Who has ever seen things like this? Can a country be born in a day or a nation be brought forth in a moment? Yet no sooner is Zion in labor than she gives birth to her children”. (Isaiah 66:8)

The first thing I need to say is that there were 2 dispersions — The first occurred back in Daniel's day, during the Babylonian captivity. The second occurred in 70 AD when

the Romans destroyed Jerusalem dispersing the Jewish people all over the known world. They did not have a nation for 1878 years until, miraculously, after WWII, the nation of Israel was re-born “in a day” (literally) on May 14, 1948.

Isaiah prophesied to Israel (and all of us) about the salvation that will come through the Messiah. The Messiah will one day rule in justice and righteousness (**Isaiah 9:7; 32:1**). The reign of the Messiah will bring peace and safety, and will be everlasting! The Messiah’s eventual kingdom and reign on earth is where and when God’s righteousness will be fully understood.

There are still prophecies in the Bible that await fulfillment. But through fulfilled prophecy we know we can count on the word of the one ***who makes known the end from the beginning***. Events that we see taking place in our day are happening just as God told us they would, but according to His calendar. And we need to remember that ***“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. (2 Peter 3:9)***

And Right now, during the age of grace, the church, or the “Bride of Christ” is in focus. It’s a time when anyone Jew, Muslim, atheist, Buddhist, Hindu is invited to the party with no admission fee; just the acceptance of a free ticket. But there is a coming time, the time of Jacobs’s trouble (**Jeremiah 30:7**), the Great Tribulation, when God’s focus will be on cleaning house. And Isaiah is just one of many places we can catch a glimpse of what that will be like:

“Therefore I will make the heavens tremble; and the earth will shake from its place at the wrath of the Lord Almighty, in the day of his burning anger.” (Isaiah 13:13)

Jesus is coming back, and this time it’s not as the suffering servant but as the conquering king! And I know from the words of Jesus that ***about that day or hour no one knows (Matt 24:36)***, so we are not to guess dates or try to predict when; but I also know that ***when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. (Matt 24:33)***.

The world has seen natural disasters, earthquakes, and wars since the beginning of recorded history. It’s seen upheaval and ethnic hatred too. What’s so significant about the things we are seeing today? Are they really any different than what has happened in earlier times? I’ve heard and read many sincere Christians who do not recognize the signs of the times because people have talked about Jesus’ soon return for so long and nothing has happened. They point to other historical events and say:

“look how bad things were then, but we recovered from that”. “Things may look bad now,” they say, “but it’ll get better again like it always does.”

But we need to understand the signs of the times, as Jesus chastised the religious leaders of His day for not doing.

Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and the sky. How is it that you don’t know how to interpret this present time? (Luke 12:56)

But as children of God, we need to know and remember the promises God made of what comes after this. A world restored to its original, intended grandeur; a world where we will get to live with God. We need to ponder these things during our current trials and tribulations, and breathe a deep sigh of relief because God revealed to us the end from the beginning.

And Jesus made specific promises that should bring us comfort for what the future holds.

One is from **John 10**:

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.” (John 10:27-30)

He has you, and all these problems in His hands.

And another is from **Revelation 21**:

‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’ (Revelation 21:4)

It sounds like a wonderful end, and a beautiful beginning at the same time doesn’t it?

Back to that winter night 28 years ago; I felt lead to go talk to my friend Ryan, and began the cold, dark, snowy trek to his house. When I got there, he wasn’t home. I’m sure his mom could tell something was wrong, as she invited me in to hang out till he got back. When he got back, I told him what had happened, and he invited me to stay the weekend. On Sunday, as it grew dark around dinner time, I began to feel nervous and queasy. Then his parent’s, Jerry and Susan Dunn, asked if they could talk with me alone. The short version of that conversation is that I could live with them as long as I needed. No conditions. Well, other than being in by dark. And I lived there for the remainder of my senior year.

And while it may seem to others as such as small thing, there kindness, love, and generosity is something that will stick with me for the rest of my life. They were a light in the darkest time of my life.

God is in control even if it feels like everything is spiraling out of control. In uncertain times God will guide you. Even when you don't even realize He's doing it.

So where does your faith and trust lie. Government? The world? Or is it with God.

Trust in the words and promises of God. You know where you are going, and you know how this will all end. Let go of today's fears; stop living a fearful life, and start living fearlessly.