

Here Is What I Predict, But Here Is What I Know!

Here we are, the first Sunday in 2011. Amazing isn't it? For some of us 2011 sounded so far away, we thought we would be wearing jet packs to get from place to place. When I was a child I thought by 2011 life would look like what I saw portrayed on the Jetsons. But such as it is, here we are in a brand new year, full of possibility and hope, like a fresh sheet of paper, unmarked, not yet written upon. Let's take up this new year and make something worthwhile, something beautiful, something that honors our King and celebrates the life He has given to each one of us. Take a deep breath and let's jump in with both feet and see what the year holds for us.

I'm going to do something I've never done before. I'm not a prognosticator or a prophet. I can't tell the future, but I'm going to give you my predictions for 2011 and then I want to share something more than a prediction. In fact, I'm calling this message, **Here Is What I Predict, But Here Is What I Know!**

I thought about making a short list of sure thing predictions like, I predict Lindsay Lohan will have problems with the law in 2011, or Mel Gibson will be kicked out of his anger management classes but I decided to go with a different list. So here are my predictions for 2011.

1. I predict we will see an increase in terrorist attacks. I think we will see another major attack in a European country and further attempts here in America. The tenth anniversary of the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks will be this September. I can't imagine that Al Quida will let this go unnoticed. As the media begins focusing again on the attack and remembering the anniversary, I predict the terrorists will look for their own ways of celebrating the attack and celebrating the deaths of the ones they call martyrs, the murderers who commandeered the jets. I think we will see terrorist acts carried out in some new countries and locations this year as radical Islam continues to spread its message of domination and death.

2. I predict we will see an increase in weather extremes and natural disasters. From earthquakes to winter tornados, from blizzards to droughts to tsunamis and volcanoes, to mudslides and fires and extraordinary flooding, I think we will see extremes in all of these areas.

Here is my reason. In the sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter quoted from the prophet Joel and said that in the last days, the days before the final judgment and the day of the Lord, that

God would show “wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood...” Acts 2:19-20. The prophet was talking about calamities in the physical earth. I believe these things are examples of the planet itself groaning for redemption. Paul writes in Romans 8:19-21 that creation itself is groaning, desiring to be liberated from bondage to decay. The planet itself, the stars in the heavens, all are in a state of turmoil, groaning as it were, awaiting the day of the Lord and part of the result will be what we call natural disasters and extreme weather patterns. Jesus himself referred to increased violence, earthquakes, famines as signs of the end of time. He referred to these things as “the beginning of birth pains.” Matthew 24:8

3. I predict the culture of death we’ve created will continue to produce devastating results in our society. By legalizing abortion, by glorifying violence, by encouraging assisted suicide, we have created a climate that devalues life and trivializes death. Perhaps you read the story of a young girl in Muskogee who delivered a pre-term stillborn baby in the bathroom of Walmart, left it in the toilet and then went home to change clothes and came back to work. I don’t know any details other than what I read in the paper, but I grieved as I recognized a culture with little or no regard or respect for a human life. Can we be so calloused that we can dispose of our own flesh and blood in such a cavalier and careless manner? That is the culture we’ve created.

I know those in favor of abortion always say if you outlawed abortion then women will die in back alleys from botched abortions. But by legalizing it and making it so accessible to young ladies, even without informed consent or parental consent, we have cheapened human life to the extent that we can discard our babies in dryers and in walmart toilets. No wonder the earth groans for liberation from this decay.

We’ve got gangs spraying cars and houses with automatic weapons, killing innocent babies and children with no regard for anyone. Parents running meth labs with their toddlers running around in the house. All of this is part of a culture that we have legalized and encouraged and glorified with no regard for life and it will only grow worse. A culture without values, without a basis for morality, a generation without fathers, without a foundation and this violence prone culture will only grow worse.

4. I predict Israel will be betrayed by those calling for peace. I am afraid the United

States will be part of those who will make deals behind closed doors that will lead to a betrayal of Israel. We should encourage our government to stand with Israel, but beware of those who speak of peace but partner with terrorists. I read where Netanyahu said he thought the world was starting to recognize that Israel was not the obstacle to peace in the Middle East, but the world will refuse to honor Israel or to recognize their need for safe and secure borders. God help the USA to not be one of those who betrays Israel, but I'm afraid that's the path we will take.

5. I predict Iran, North Korea, and Venezuela will continue to stir political unrest in the world but we will see the rise of some unexpected players stepping onto the world stage. Watch to see what names rise in prominence this year. God is orchestrating end time events.

6. I predict the economic recovery will be slow and it will have far reaching effects upon the church around the world. According to one poll, 38% of churches reported decreased giving in 2009 and the trend was expected to continue in 2010. 47% of mega churches reported a decline in revenue in 2009, more than double what they had experienced the year before. Nearly one in three churches made budget cuts of anywhere from 1 to 20 percent.

We will be sharing our financial report at our annual business meeting in February. You need to know we too have seen a decline in giving. Our finances are down and actually our Sunday morning attendance is down as well. Folks have left and others have come. That's to be expected I suppose. With regard to our finances, God has blessed our church so that like Joseph in Egypt, we were able to have a surplus from the good years that has helped to carry us through the lean times, however, we are facing the possibility of some hard times as well. We cannot continue to spend as we have been with our current revenue. Budget cuts are ahead for all of us. We want to continue to give to missions and outreach and benevolence. We don't intend to cut those things. We want to be good stewards so we need your prayers and your help as we take a hard look at things in the coming weeks and months. If you aren't paying your tithes, you need to start doing that now. I say that, not only because we need your contribution, but because it's the only way you will be able to stay financially sound in difficult economic times. If you pay your tithes God promised to open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing upon you and rebuke the devourer for your sake. If you don't pay tithes he said you are robbing God. God can't bless those who refuse to give to the Lord and his work.

I predict there will be some hard economic times for some of the churches, but at the same time, I believe the Lord will use that to help us get back to what the church is supposed to really be about. Economic difficulties in the church world will prove to be an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to do some necessary pruning in the church and help us discover innovative and more efficient ways to do missions and carry out the great commission and the work of the church in our community and around the world.

7. I predict more attempts will be made to silence Christians and to prevent the spreading of the gospel than ever before. We are seeing the attempt in Iraq to totally eliminate the Christian population there and it appears to me that the present administration is doing little to stop it. Around the world we will see more martyrs than ever before. We will see more legalized silencing of Christian voices and more government led opposition to the church and the gospel.

You heard about the bombing at the church in Alexandria, Egypt on New Years Eve. 21 dead and almost 100 injured. The director of Operation Serve whom we have worked with in Mexico and in Egypt reported on facebook that his cousin was worshipping in that service. Her newborn infant was crying so they left the service about 15 minutes before the bomb exploded. Tragically we will see more and more of this anti-Christian bias and organized persecution of believers.

This is what I predict, but let me tell you what I know for sure about 2011.

1. I know for sure that God's mercy will be new every morning of 2011. You can count on it. The word of the Lord declares, **"Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions [his mercies] never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."** **Lamentation 3:22-23.** It is good that such a word of hope is recorded in the book of the Bible known as Lamentations. To lament means to mourn, to grieve, to wail. In the midst of all the trouble and the causes for grieving and wailing, in the midst of it all, there is hope because God's mercy, the loving demonstration of his compassion for us will be seen each and every day. His mercies are new every morning. They were new and more than adequate for every day of 2010 and they will be new and more than adequate every day of 2011 and you can count on that!

2. I know for sure that we will stumble in our weakness and when we do, we will

encounter his strength and his love. I know some of you don't think I should talk like that. Those who put their hope in the Lord will neither stumble nor fall. Yeah, but I know me so well and I know us so well, so I'm just going to go ahead and tell you, because of our weakness and our human nature that still pokes its ugly head up every so often, and because of the fallen world we live in, we will likely stumble along the way. And when we do we will once again encounter his mercy, his strength, his love, his power. He will help us get up and walk on in his strength and in his victory.

The Lord spoke to the apostle Paul and told him, **“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” 2 Corinthians 12:9** Paul understood that when he was weak, when he came under attack, when he didn't think he could measure up, the strength of the Lord would be there with him and working in him. Paul discovered that by putting his trust in the Lord, “when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Cor. 12:10)

The Psalmist wrote, **“One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that you O God, are strong, and that you, O Lord, are loving.” Psalm 62:11-12.** He is strong and he is loving. When you stumble, he is there to lift you up, to pick you up, to set you back on solid footing again. He is strong enough to pick you up and loving enough to forgive you and restore you.

“My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.” Psalm 62:1-2. Rest in the Lord for 2011 and if you stumble, if you fall, call upon him and he will answer you and restore you. You can count on it.

3. I know for sure that we will have a greater opportunity than ever to let our light shine for Christ in the growing darkness. Jesus said we were the light of the world and to be like a city on a hill that cannot be hidden. We were never to hide our light but instead to let our light shine before men so that they could see our good deeds and praise our Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-6) We have an opportunity to let that light shine into a very dark world.

Here is Paul's description of the world in the last days. I believe he describes our culture. **“But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the**

good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God – having a form of godliness but denying its power.” 2 Timothy 3:1-5. This is our culture. So what do we do? The Scripture gives us the answer in Ephesians 6. **“...Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground...” Ephesians 6:10-20**

He describes that armor for us: the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the gospel of peace on our feet. The shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God. And he tells us to pray and to keep on praying.

This is how we stand as light in a darkened culture. Not pointing a finger of judgment and condemnation at everyone, but refusing to compromise, standing strong in the truth, in holiness, in faith, in the word of God and in prayer.

The darkness is growing but the light will always penetrate and illuminate the darkness. Let your light shine before everyone in your world. Jesus said when you let your light shine it would fill the whole house. Let your light affect everyone around you. Take advantage of that opportunity to let your light shine in 2011.

4. I know for sure God will work all of 2011 for his glory and that means it will be for our ultimate benefit and our eternal good. He gave us his word on it. So the Scripture declares, **“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” Romans 8:28.**

I can’t assure you that you won’t have any trouble or sickness or problems in 2011. In fact, I can assure you you will have problems in 2011. But I can also assure you that God will be at work in each and every situation granting his strength and his love and grace. He will be at work turning every problem into an opportunity for growth, for maturity, for enrichment in your life.

There will be some stuff happen in 2011 that will try to knock you off your feet, to cut you loose from the anchor of your soul, but if you will hold to Jesus and trust in his grace, he will cause all of those things to work together for your ultimate good.

Because God is for us, then none of these things can defeat us. None of the troubles of life can separate us from the love of God and his care for us. He will cause it all to work for our

good. Trust him.

5. I know for sure that all of us will move closer to our eternal home in 2011. I know that for sure because all of us are going to age during this year and that puts us closer to the end of the journey.

I drove to Muskogee this past Thursday to speak at the memorial service for the mother of some of my dearest friends from childhood. You've heard me talk about the Freemans. There were seven children, (seven children born in 8 years!) They lived just around the corner from us and I was best friends with the two youngest boys, Mike and Steve. To go back and see these faces from 43 years ago is a little unsettling. We've all grown up and out and older. And it happened so quickly. And seeing those gracefully aging faces from the past makes me stop to realize we are all aging, and changing, and all heading somewhere. And this year will be no different than any other year. Some folks will be born and some will die and all of us will move closer to that eternal destiny and that eternal destination.

And with that reality before us, I need to ask you, as you enter this brand new year, if this is your final year on earth, are you living it as you know you should? I ask you this morning, are you prepared to die? But let me ask an equally important question: are you prepared to live? Are you prepared to live a life that matters? Are you prepared to live out your life in 2011 in a way that pleases God, that is an example to others, that makes a difference for God and for eternity? Are you prepared to live here as you know you should and are you prepared to live in heaven for eternity? If not, you need to get prepared. You need to repent and call upon the Lord and ask him to save you and change you and give you a new heart and a new life today. Start this new year out right with a new commitment to Christ. Make him the savior and Lord of your life.

Are you with me? Are you willing to make that commitment to Jesus today, to surrender your life to him and make him the Savior and Lord of your life?

I don't know that any of my predictions will come true. I think some of them will or I wouldn't have shared them this morning. But I know that God will be faithful. I know his mercy will be new every morning. I know that if you trust in the Lord with all of your heart and lean not upon your own understanding, if you acknowledge him in all your ways, he will make straight paths for you and 2011 will be a year of his blessings and his provision, his guidance and his grace.

Let's commit this year to him and if you are not prepared to live and to die this year, let's make that spiritual preparation right now.