

“Our Hope in Times of Trouble”

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October 31, 2021

Introduction: I’d like to read part of an article from the History Channel editors about a peculiar incident that happened on Sunday, October 30, 1938, at 8 p.m. “Orson Wells causes a nationwide panic with his broadcast of “War of the Worlds”—a realistic radio dramatization of a Martian invasion of Earth. Panic broke out across the country. In New Jersey, terrified civilians jammed highways seeking to escape the alien marauders. People begged police for gas masks to save them from the toxic gas and asked electric companies to turn off the power so that the Martians wouldn’t see their lights. One woman ran into an Indianapolis church where evening services were being held and yelled, “New York has been destroyed! It’s the end of the world! Go home and prepare to die!”

The debate about whether Orson Wells intentionally launched this production with the intention of causing panic or if it just happened because of the ignorance and fear that already existed in people. Today we have a golden opportunity to come and worship God with an open heart and mind and with an eager attitude to learn what Jesus meant in the Bible passage in Luke. Did Jesus want to provoke fear like the fear that was provoked by the dramatic broadcast of an alien invasion? Did he want to communicate that things will get worse?

Exegesis: In my exploration of the historical and biblical context, I found Bart Herman saying that “the Gospel of Luke is particularly concerned with explaining how salvation moved from the Jewish people to non-Jews, the Gentiles. Through this Gospel...Jesus is portrayed as a prophet, comparable in many ways to the prophets of the Old Testament.” The style of this portion of our reading is apocalyptic. The SALT commentary says this about apocalyptic literature: “When death-dealing forces seemed to have the upper hand, one ancient literary response was to envision an imminent divine rescue and a new era of justice and redemption.” This literature is often called “Apocalyptic” (from the Greek word *apokalupsis*, “uncovering” or “revealing”).

“God pulls aside the veil, revealing to God’s people the hidden, dramatic deliverance to come.” Apocalyptic narratives and images can be found throughout the Bible.

The New Interpreters Study Bible says that in the second part of this passage “Jesus moves from prophetic warning to pastoral counsel. His followers are able to be interpreters of the events around them, and through prayer and watchfulness, maintain faithful readiness.”

Theological Analysis:

In my reflection on all these words and considering their context, I came to the conclusion that Jesus’ message for his generation and for us is simple but profound: In world history and in our own lives, when things get worse, God always appears to save us and give us meaning. God is the one who promises his presence, strength, and comfort in times when we expect little, are weak or hopeless. The main purpose of apocalyptic literature is to denounce the menaces of different natures that threaten our

lives and help us realize that in the end, God will come to us, to comfort, to be with us and save us; and for those who have fallen, even in their suffering, all that has happened in the end will make sense because of the hope that we can find in God's word and presence.

Often apocalyptic oracles sound horrible but let's remember that even in natural disasters, human suffering, accidents or tragic events, there is always space for life, for hope.

Many times, unexplained things happen in order to produce something good, something amazing. I wonder if there is any hope that could heal this broken world?

At the beginning of my message, I shared the story of the panic that resulted from the broadcasting of what turned out to be a hoax, an alien invasion. In different scenarios, the same panic happens today. We have messengers and voices, that in an effort to produce fear in people, are now claiming that apocalyptic tragedies and events will come soon, to cause devastation and suffering, producing despair in the world. Christians today must be aware of the reality of our world and the powerful presence of God acting and moving in our lives even during the hardest of circumstances.

As we can see in Luke, Jesus is sharing a different report. He is saying that many bad things could happen, but we must be open to the signs of God, we must stay alert to what is happening in order to act according to God's plans. As the SALT commentary mentioned, "God is turning everything upside down, lifting up the lowly and bringing the mighty down from their thrones."

Takeaways: More and more calamitic and negative narratives are surfacing today. We can even find some of these kinds of speeches in parts of our denomination as we face controversies regarding human sexuality. The idea of a schism is threatening to tear us apart. When we hear that even our local church is facing difficulty, it could be that some people are getting so discouraged, so hopeless that they fail to heed God's word and worry that something will come to destroy our beloved church!

As we enter this time of discernment in our local church and in our denomination, this may be the perfect time to name what this new time of challenge is all about: (According to SALT Blog commentary.) We probably are "*entering the shadows of despair, war, sorrow, violence, captivity, and hate, actively waiting for Jesus to come.*" We can learn from today's Bible passage what God is saying. Trials, hard moments and even catastrophes will come but it is Jesus who can help us move forward, God is our hope!

Good news! Church, listen to this, and hold these words in your hearts. Jesus' words and presence empower us to face the present and the future with hope! In God we can find our hope in times of trouble!

As we are facing challenges in our lives, as we move forward facing the shadow of despair where hope seems limited or even impossible, we need to pay attention. We must open our eyes. It is important to listen to God's word but sometimes God will use circumstances and people to speak directly to our hearts. That's why we must direct our hearts toward those who come from despair, those who come from suffering, a

traumatized person, a lonely elderly person, an orphan, a widow, the separated refugee family, the heartbroken addict, the one who is rejected because of their sexual orientation, the poor. All of them might help us hear the voice of Jesus that says "I am an expression of the suffering Jesus in the world. Here I am, come to me and experience God's presence through my suffering and my hope."

In Jesus, we have hope. We probably do not have all the answers, but something we do have for sure is hope! Let's proclaim the good news! We have the hope that resounds when other voices are silenced, and our hope is sufficient to lift the brokenhearted and heal the wounded! Our hope is already here. With God's presence, we can overcome every hard time! Every anxiety from the global pandemic, political turmoil, or personal stress will fade away if we live in the hope that comes from Jesus Christ! Amen!