

**“Hope Comes Down From Heaven”**

**Mark 13:24-37**

**11/30/08 - Mike Magee**

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**Only the Son of Man Can Save Us**

Some tell us we are in the midst of a religious crisis. They cite as warrants that the secular world has changed its definition of a civil marriage, and favors a mother’s rights over her unborn child’s rights. But when it comes to providing for the poor and welcoming immigrants and beating swords into plowshares, they invoke the words “separation of church and state.” I propose we do indeed suffer a religious crisis, but a different one than proposed by some. I propose we suffer a religious crisis when we say there is anything our country does that God does not care about. Is the devil in the relaxation of our standards of marriage, or the supremacy of the right of the mother over the right of her unborn child? I propose no more so than in our relaxation of the Biblical mandate to favor the poor, and to beat our swords into plowshares.

We all agree we are in the midst of an economic crisis. Both the free-market groups and the more-government-control groups agree our current crisis in Wall Street is because of the economic derivatives in the housing market. The absence of regulation of economic derivatives. Banks granted loans to anyone who asked for them, and turned around and sold them to other banks who did not look the person taking the loan in the eye. No one took responsibility for the risk to whom they gave loans. And when the loans defaulted, the banking industry fell like a house of cards. And there is no regulation in the credit card industry. So most house holds spend more than their income. Do we have an economic crisis? Yes. Did the devil do this, or did we do it to ourselves? God tells us to be better stewards.

I read Al Gore’s book. He has pictures of receding glaciers; pictures with the years they were taken, without notation as to which season in which they were taken. So you do not know which pictures were taken in the summer, and which were taken in the winter. So you cannot tell from the undated pictures if the glacier recession is seasonal or if it represents global warming. I agree with his conclusion that we are in the midst of an ecological crisis, but based on rising temperatures in the ocean, and the rising number of tropical storms. Not based on receding glaciers. I doubt he invented the internet, and I also doubt he invented global warming. Do we have an ecological crisis? Yes, but not a crisis solved by accumulation of nuclear wastes, nuclear plant melt downs, or bio-renewable fuels which release as much CO2 into the atmosphere as fossil fuels. God tells us to be better stewards.

Barbara Walters said on national TV last Wednesday that we have the most unpopular president in modern history. She declares we are in the midst of a political crisis. Never mind that President Bush has done a lot of work in alleviating the AIDs crisis in Africa.

Never mind that we have had no terrorist attacks since 9/11. She declares on national TV that we have the most unpopular president in modern history. That we are in the midst of a political crisis. It is true that George Bush is no Messiah, but neither is Barack Obama. Neither man is possessed by the devil, and neither man is the Messiah.

To which voices do we listen? I propose none of them know when the crisis to top all crises will come, or what response is best. We demonize those who disagree with us, whether they are religious leaders, economists, energy experts, or politicians. When in fact there is truth and falsehood in each of them. None of us is purely motivated.

We want a savior, and we want him now. But our savior is neither Jerry Falwell nor Jim Wallis. He is neither Alan Greenspan nor Paul Volcker. He is neither Al Gore nor is she Sarah Palin. She is neither Connie Rice nor Hillary Clinton. Our savior is neither Mr. Bush nor Mr. Obama.

Hope has been derided, as if all hope is false. In Greek mythology, when Pandora opened her box, and released all sorts of terrors and disease upon the world, the last creature to escape the box was the creature named Hope. And some say Hope is the worst creature of all, because it makes us believe in a future salvation that will never come.

We do not recognize our savior when we look to humankind. Humanists who look to politicians, human religious leaders, economists, energy specialists, or presidential cabinets will not find salvation from our troubles. The return of the Son of Man, that is, our salvation, is not subject to human control or prediction. Only God can save us. But where is God when we need him? Where is God right now?

### **God's hope gives us patience**

A few years ago, I was myself in the hospital. I thought I was never going home. Most people in the hospital feel this way. It is irrational, but it is why we should visit people in the hospital, to give them hope. One of my friends visited and told me to have patience. I would have my turn. She was right. But I learned that patiently waiting for something, especially when we want it now, is a hard thing to do. Hope is the expectation of a better tomorrow. It is hope that gives us patience.

Debbie and I saw a movie recently. It starred a Nashville resident, Nicole Kidman. The name of the movie is Australia. I highly recommend it. In this movie, she tells a creamy-skinned racially mixed boy, a boy who is being sent to a remote island in the battlefield of WW II, that he is not alone. She will come for him. Our relationship with God is like that. God tells us he will come for us. And he will. God will come for us.

God's people are promised they will not be left alone. The lesson of the fig tree is that we know God will not leave us alone. Summer will come, and so will God. God will not leave us without hope. God will save us. God will come for us. So we wait patiently. But waiting patiently is not the same thing as sleeping. We do not sleep, for God's salvation will come upon us unexpectedly. We must be prepared for it or we might not recognize it.

### **God's hope keeps us awake**

Jesus asks us to be constantly alert for his return, or we will be caught unprepared. For the timing is God's. And I propose that just as Mary did not recognize Jesus at the tomb until he spoke, just as Thomas did not recognize Jesus until he put his hands in his wounds, and just as his disciples did not recognize Jesus on the road to Emmaus until he broke bread with them, so do we in our day do not recognize Jesus. We do not recognize Jesus in the faces of the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, or those in prison. We do not work to save other people from hunger, thirst, sickness, or prison. We do not recognize Jesus in the small acts of kindness we receive from the other, the little smiles we see on the face of the other, the words of encouragement we hear on the lips of the other. And we do not come back to thank the stranger for those small acts of kindness. Because we have fallen asleep. We have not stayed alert. And in ignoring those in need, in taking these things for granted, we take Jesus for granted. We ignore Jesus in need. And we take for granted the providence of God.

A woman whose only son died asks her minister how she can regain her lost hope. He tells her to knock on every door in her neighborhood, and when she finds a house that has known no grief, she will regain her hope. So she does this. And she finds no house is without grief. But in listening to, and giving peace, love, and joy to others, she regains her own hope.

Our country has various levels of terrorist alert. And at the hospital, they have what they call a pink alert for when a parent thinks their baby is missing.

I propose that this Advent, and in fact for the rest of our lives, we be on a Jesus alert. I propose we be on a high state of alertness, looking for Jesus in all the unexpected places. Looking for an opportunity to be Jesus to other people. And looking for an opportunity to thank Jesus for every small act of kindness shown to us by the other. "And what I say to you I say to all: keep awake."

### **Conclusion**

Like the fig tree which waits for summer, we hope for a better tomorrow. Our God given hope gives us the patience to wait. And hope keeps us awake. Jesus Christ is God's gift of love, joy, peace, and hope. We keep awake looking for the love, joy, and peace of Christ, because we have hope. Our God given hope both gives us patience, and keeps us awake. Hope keeps us on high Jesus alert.

Glory be to God, Hallelujah, and all God's people say ... .