

## **Sermon: Stand Firm and Hold Fast**

(Preached by the Rev. Paul Wu, at St. Giles, Ottawa, Nov. 9, 2025)

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable to you. O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

The War of the Worlds was an episode of the radio series The Mercury Theatre on the Air, broadcast live at 8 pm, on October 30, 1938, the night before Halloween. It was directed and narrated by Orson Welles, containing a fictional yet convincing description of a supposedly Martian invasion taking place in the heartland of America.

The show began with an introductory monologue, explaining the nature of the program, after which it took on the format of a typical radio broadcast being periodically interrupted by news bulletins. Listeners who tuned in midway throughout the show would've missed the introduction, but caught the ever frightening news of an unusual explosion on Mars, followed by an object falling on a farm in New Jersey, followed by the emergence of aliens from a spacecraft, then their devastating attack against Manhattan with advanced weaponry, and the US military's futile efforts to stop it.

Actual police logs across the country that evening chronicled the chaos of those who had heard the broadcast and thought it was true, and happening in real-time. Much effort went into damage control afterward by CBS Radio Network, trying to calm people down, to assure them it was only fictional, and to deal with the inevitable backlash.

Looking back to that period of the early 20th century, we in the 21st century might chuckle a bit at the naivety of that population. I would note that within less than a year, an actual world war would've broken out, in September 1939, as Hitler drove his war machine across Poland, and soon to the rest of Europe. Of course, those of us from Asia would tell you the Second World War started much earlier than that, in 1931, when Japan first invaded Manchuria. The inattention of the world-wide community, and its unwillingness to stop that invasion was the first domino to fall, and the rest soon followed.

So what then should we do with war—the rumour and the actuality of it, from far corners of the globe to our door steps, into our living room? Do we panic and riot on the streets, or do we stand firm and hold fast, trusting in ourselves, and in the Lord God who is for us and with us?

In the Scripture, there is a tradition called 'the Day of the Lord', which refers to a period of God's direct and dramatic intervention in human history, be it judgement for the wicked or blessings for the righteous.

In the Old Testament, the Exodus event was seen as the Day of the Lord, where the enslaving Egyptians were punished and the enslaved Hebrews were set free. Whereas in the New Testament, the Day of the Lord is often connected to the return of Jesus Christ, with the corresponding final judgement of all and the destruction of the current world order. Jesus himself said, in Mark 13:19, *"For in those days there will be suffering, such as has not been from the beginning of the creation that God created until now and never will be."* Then in verse 26, *"Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory. Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds"*.

In Apostle Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, written early in his ministry, he encouraged faithful Christian community gathered in that city to look forward to the coming of Jesus. Evidently, believers were somewhat discouraged of the delay in this second coming, and they were losing heart due to persecution they endured. So Paul wrote to them, commending them of their faith and love, reassuring them of the resurrection of believers, and providing them with instructions for holy living.

However, in his second letter, as part of Scripture reading today, written supposedly much later in Paul's ministry, the situation he had to deal with was much different. Evidently, some in the community of faith had come to believe that the second coming of Jesus was already happening, as we read in chapter 2 verse 2, *"[Do not] be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as though from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here."*

One can appreciate the allure of the Day of the Lord for believers of Jesus. When life is hard and tragedy strikes; when injustice runs rampant beyond our ability to cope or change; when the world is descending in alarming fashion, into unfathomable abyss, oh how I wish, as well, that Jesus, the king of all kings, the lord of all lords, would come and wipe the slate clean, and start over again in new heaven and new earth. Oh, how I too wish, God would come and make all things new.

However, one can also appreciate how such wholesome and genuine hope could easily be perverted and twisted by what Paul calls the 'lawless one', whose agenda is to control and manipulate the faithfuls, through

deception or fear, into believing that he is the saviour, the second coming of Christ.

There have been much debate amongst biblical scholars as to the identity of this 'lawless one', be it a particular individual, the anti-Christ, an agent of Satan, or the great deceiver himself. I think those speculations might miss the point. In the 21st century, in a world where most of us no longer believe in creatures like Satan or the lawless one, we might be tempted to treat Paul's warning as unimportant.

Yet, as biblical scholar Walter Wink had persuasively argued, these creatures remind us that catastrophe and evil are real, even if we no longer personify them. Power and principalities of this world may not be biblical spiritual beings, but there are nevertheless real, having real-world impact on our institutions, nation-states, economic systems, and forms of government that exercise power over us. In such a reading, the lawless ones are then seen as anyone exhibiting a spirit of extreme arrogance, embodies in anyone or anything that claims to be godlike, but when in fact is anti-God.

Short of being labeled as alarmist, we must acknowledge that evil, unfortunately, is real and is a ever present reality of this world. However, as Paul assures us, only those who appreciate the true reach and depth of evil will, after all, be able to receive the love of God who through grace, grant us eternal comfort and good hope. Unless and until the Day of the Lord is actually here, we ought to be on constant guard, as Paul puts it, "stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught."

A story was once told of a particular day in early Puritan New England, of a total solar eclipse. The sun was blotted out, the day turned dark, and people were rightly terrified. "The world is ending. What shall we do?" One insightful man replied, calmly, "If the world is indeed ending, let us be found doing our duty."

On this Remembrance Sunday, let us remember and give thanks to those men and women, who defended not only this country but the entire British Common Wealth during the First and Second World Wars. They did not panic when going got tough, they stood their ground and rose to the challenge by simply doing their duties. Some paid the ultimate sacrifice.

Let us give thanks also to the current members of the Canadian Armed Forces, who continue to defend and protect the values this country has long stood for and cherished, namely peacekeeping and peacemaking.

I understand the past decade has been difficult for those serving in the armed forces, with limited fundings and budgetary constraints. I am glad the current government is finally planning to live up to its promises and recommitting to strengthen our military. Ministers like myself like to talk about the Day of the Lord, as it should be. That is part of our job to teach about the coming of Jesus. But until then, I am surely glad there are those who are professionally trained, and willing to put their lives on the line, to serve, to protect the very same values that I preach.

I shall leave with you a different radio broadcast, by the former primer minister of Great Britain, Sir Winston Churchill. He first spoke these words in the House of Common, in June 18, 1940, shortly after the disaster in Dunkirk. His words were later retransmitted over the airwaves. This is only an excerpt of the last paragraph:

“What General Weygand called the Battle of France is over. I expect that the Battle of Britain is about to begin. Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilization. Upon it depends our own British life, and the long continuity of our institutions and our Empire. The whole fury and might of the enemy must very soon be turned on us. Hitler knows that he will have to break us in this Island or lose the war. If we can stand up to him, all Europe may be free and the life of the world may move forward into broad, sunlit uplands. But if we fail, then the whole world, including the United States, including all that we have known and cared for, will sink into the abyss of a new Dark Age made more sinister, and perhaps more protracted, by the lights of perverted science. Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say, “This was their finest hour.”

This we remember.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**