

**“And when you hear of wars and tumults, do not be terrified, for these things must first take place, but the end will not be at once.”**

Do not be terrified. As I read verse 9, I can't help but think of the phrase “Don't panic.” The 1979 novel, *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, tells the story of Englishman Arthur Dent who goes on various adventures in space. In this novel, there is a fictional guidebook of the same name. This guidebook, “The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy,” outsold the competition because it was slightly cheaper, and it has the words “Don't panic” in large friendly letters on the cover.

One thing that the novel and today's Gospel text have in common is that they both deal with the end of the world. In the face of such events, “don't panic” is good advice for all of us. But unlike a fictional novel, the Bible has real comfort to give us. JESUS GIVES US ALL WE NEED SO WE DON'T PANIC BEFORE HIS RETURN.

First, I. We don't panic because Jesus gives us the pattern. In *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, we meet Arthur Dent as he faces up against a construction crew that want to destroy his house to make way for a bypass. The bulldozers finally roll and destroy his house, but later that day, aliens from outer space surround planet Earth and destroy the Earth to make way for an interstellar bypass. The author of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, Douglas Adams, forms a pattern. The destruction of Arthur's house foreshadows what will happen next: Arthur's home, planet Earth, will be destroyed. The lesser models the greater.

As we look at our Gospel text today, our first word of advice is “Don't panic!” Jesus shows us the pattern so we know what to expect when He comes again.

What is this pattern? Verse 8 People will come claiming to be Jesus, verses 9 through 10 wars and riots, verse 11 earthquakes and other natural disasters, verses 12 through 19 Christians being persecuted and arrested. All of these are things that happened in the twelve disciples' lifetimes. By the year 70, most of the disciples have been martyred for the faith.

Then in verses 20 through 24, Jesus gets oddly specific. Jesus foretells the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70. Jesus says, **“Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”** As I wrote this sermon, I couldn't help but look at the panorama of the temple mount in my office. To this day, the temple mount is trampled underfoot by Gentiles, indeed, Muslims have erected a shrine where the temple once was.

The destruction in Jerusalem at that time can hardly be overstated. Historian Josephus writes that 1.1 million people were killed in Jerusalem because many Jews came in from around the Mediterranean for the Passover so it was more crowded than normal.

This is hardly a comforting pattern, if the events in this text are simply a model of what is to come, what is the real thing going to be like! But we don't panic because we know what to expect. As Christ prepares for His return, there will be these kinds of things: false Messiahs, wars, natural disasters, and persecution.

Peter writes in his second letter, **“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.”** If the lesser is the destruction of the temple of Jerusalem, the greater in the pattern is the destruction of the heavens and the earth.

Despite this, we don't panic because Jesus gives us safety drill after safety drill. Every forest fire, every natural disaster, every war, every persecution, all of these are the lesser events training us to be ready for the greater events that day when Christ will come again.

Second, II. We don't panic because Jesus gives us the words. In *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, Arthur Dent manages to escape the destruction of the Earth and goes on all sorts of adventures with aliens from outer space. Near the end of the book, he meets an alien who tells him they built a supercomputer to answer the “Ultimate question to Life, the Universe, and Everything.” The answer is 42. Hardly a satisfying answer! It turns out the aliens had to build another supercomputer to find out what the “Ultimate question” was!

In the face of Jesus' imminent return, we as Christians don't panic because we have a better word than “42.” As Jesus comforts his twelve disciples almost all of whom would face violent deaths because of their faith, He says, **“Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict.”**

Jesus lays out a pattern of how things will be in these last days, and we can tell that we are in the last days because of these signs. The end could come soon, any minute now. A key part of this is persecution for the faith. If the enemies of the Church did it to Jesus, they will do it to the twelve disciples. If they did it to the twelve, they will do it to us also.

Yet we have a word of hope. Jesus will give us the words to say when we are delivered before kings and governors for the name of Jesus. What word? Certainly not 42!

**“Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life,”** *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* had “Don't panic” in comforting words in the front. Our Guide to the Galaxy has the comforting words “Holy Bible” in golden letters.

Jesus gives us the words not only in Luke 21, but from Genesis to Revelation, all throughout the sixty-six books of the Bible. It tells us of the God who continually shows mercy on His people, relenting of disaster even when their actions warrant fire and brimstone. This book tells us of the God who sent His Son Jesus to rescue sinners like me and you. This book tells us of the eternal hope we have when Jesus died and rose again proclaiming victory over sin, death, and the devil.

Finally, III. We don't panic because Jesus gives us hope. The novel *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* ends as Arthur Dent finds out that the supercomputer was the planet Earth. Earth was five minutes away from discovering the “Ultimate question to Life, the Universe, and Everything” that would make sense of the answer “42” before aliens destroyed it to make way for an interstellar bypass.

Despite the novel being in the genre of comedy, it ends without hope: if there is meaning in life, we can't discover it. This shouldn't surprise us, after all, the author, Douglas Adams, was a staunch and outspoken atheist. For the atheist, there is no ultimate answer nor ultimate question to Life, the Universe, and Everything. For an atheist like Adams, what is “Don't panic” but an empty phrase?

Jesus puts all of this text into perspective saying, “**Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.**” Don't panic! Not only does Jesus give us the pattern to watch out for, not only does Jesus give us the words both to speak and to read in the Bible. He gives us hope for a better life at the end of the world.

We live in the short time between Christ's first coming and His second coming. At the cross and empty tomb, Jesus won salvation. At the second coming, that's when the work of salvation will be finalized. Just as you hold on to a coupon to redeem it for an actual good, Jesus is holding onto you so that you can be redeemed on that day when He comes again.

False messiahs, wars, natural disasters, persecution, and the destruction of the heavens and the earth—all of these will come to pass, but these are signs to wake up and to start paying attention. Something's coming that's greater than all of those things.

Dear Christian friend, “don't panic!” Your redemption is drawing near. On that day there will be no more suffering, no more pain. Jesus will wipe away every tear from your eyes. Death will be no more, and you will be reunited with those loved ones who have departed in the faith. At the final trumpet blast the dead will be raised and you will see Jesus face to face.

Not only “don't panic.” Rejoice! Look forward with hope to the great things that Jesus promises when He returns. Amen!