

Commentary: Tom Hanks & Star Wars: Trusting the Force more than the Father?

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[Tom Hanks delivered a virtual commencement address last weekend](#) for the graduates of Ohio's Wright State University. He called them the "chosen ones" in part because of the pandemic that has changed our lives so dramatically.

The actor explained, "You are the chosen ones because of a fate unimagined when you began your Wright State adventures." As a result, he predicted: "You will be enlightened in ways your degree never held in promise. You will have made it through a time of great sacrifice and great need. No one will be more fresh to the task of restarting our normalcy than you—our chosen ones."

What Warren Buffett thinks about our future

Yesterday was Star Wars Day with its annual slogan, "May the Fourth be with you." But today is also special for Star Wars fans, since the *fifth* rhymes with *Sith*—the ancient enemies of the Jedi Order.

The Star Wars universe has been a cultural phenomenon for more than four decades in large part because of its assurance that "the Force will be with you, always." This "Force," however, is not a personal God but, as Obi-Wan Kenobi explained, an impersonal "energy field created by all living things." It is available to us as we seek to defeat the "dark side."

In this sense, the Star Wars worldview reinforces and amplifies our belief in ourselves. A single Jedi knight can destroy a Death Star. People passionately committed to good can defeat those committed to evil.

What Tom Hanks told the graduates of Wright State University is what Americans believe about ourselves: We can persevere through pain and triumph over tragedy.

[Warren Buffett made the same optimistic claim](#) during a recent company shareholders meeting: “Nothing can basically stop America. The American miracle, the American magic, has always prevailed, and it will do so again.”

This can-do spirit fueled the pioneers who risked their lives and families to come to this New World, the settlers who pushed its frontiers from the East Coast to the West, and the entrepreneurs who built the greatest economic force the world has ever seen.

Every time I travel overseas, I am deeply grateful to return to this country. My father and grandfather fought for our nation. I will always love America.

It is in that spirit that I share what follows.

Beware “the protection of Pharaoh”

When Isaiah 30 opens, the Assyrian Empire is the world’s great superpower to the north. Egypt is the superpower to the south. The tiny kingdoms of Israel and Judah are in-between.

The Assyrians soon would destroy Israel and threaten to do the same to Judah. You might think in such dire circumstances the people would turn fervently to God for help. But the opposite was the case.

Rather than asking their Lord for protection, they turned to Egypt for help. Rather than relying on their omnipotent King, they relied on a fallen king of

a finite kingdom.

God warned such dependence on people rather than their Lord was folly: “‘Ah, stubborn children,’ declares the LORD, ‘who carry out a plan, but not mine, and who make an alliance, but not of my Spirit, that they may add sin to sin; who set out to go down to Egypt, without asking for my direction, to take refuge in the protection of Pharaoh and to seek shelter in the shadow of Egypt!’” (Isaiah 30:1-2).

As a result, God warned: “Therefore shall the protection of Pharaoh turn to your shame, and the shelter in the shadow of Egypt to your humiliation” (v. 3).

“O LORD our God, save us from his hand”

I am glad to report their story had a miraculous ending. A few years later, Assyria invaded Judah. But rather than trusting in Egypt as had his wayward people, the Jewish king Hezekiah turned to God: “O LORD our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone are the LORD” (Isaiah 37:20).

God heard Hezekiah’s prayer (v. 21) and sent his angel, who “struck down 185,000 in the camp of the Assyrians” (v. 36). The Assyrian king retreated back to Nineveh (v. 37), where he later was assassinated by his own sons (v. 38).

Seven chapters earlier, the people of Judah were trusting people to defeat their enemy rather than God. When they finally turned to their Lord, he did what no humans could.

Our situation is different: We can trust God to use people to defeat our viral enemy. We can encourage our healthcare heroes as they care for patients

and scientists as they develop therapies and vaccines against the virus. We can work together to restart the economy while striving to keep down infections.

And we can pray for God to do what no mortals can. We can ask him to protect our families and those on the frontlines of this battle. We can ask him to work medically and miraculously. We can know that as we work, God works.

What we must not do

What we must not do is trust people more than we trust our Lord. We must not make our heavenly Father into an impersonal “Force.” We must not believe in America more than we believe in Jesus.

Through this crisis, I am praying for our nation to admit we are dying mortals who need a living Savior. I am praying for our churches to share the only vaccine for eternal death. I am praying for Christians to depend upon the Prince of Peace more than the pharaohs in our mirrors.

Will you join me?

Jim Denison is the co-founder and chief vision officer of Denison Forum. He pastored churches in Texas and Georgia and now speaks and writes to empower believers to navigate cultural issues from a biblical perspective.

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