

Sermon for November 18, 2012 – Saints Triumphant

Daniel 12:1-4

Theme: **The war is almost over.**

1. *Find protection in God's promises*
2. *Look forward to the glory that is coming.*

"At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people--everyone whose name is found written in the book--will be delivered. ² Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. ³ Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever. ⁴ But you, Daniel, close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge."

Back in 1999 there was a popular sci-fi movie called "The Matrix." The basic premise of the movie was that computers overtook the human race and enslaved them. They kept humans doped up so that they would imagine they were living in an alternate reality – not realizing that a deadly war was being waged around them.

Did you know that the premise of "The Matrix" is not too terribly farfetched? You see, the human race is enslaved to sin, death and the devil. Most people don't realize this. They are so doped on the pursuit of pleasure and the things of this world that they are oblivious to the dangers that threaten them. But make no mistake there is a spiritual war being waged all around us.

Daniel was given a glimpse of this war and its end in a grand vision. He wrote down what he saw, but was told to seal up the words of the scroll – to put them aside - because they were meant to give people living in the last days hope.

How Daniel's vision ends is how St. John's vision in Revelation begins. St. John saw a scroll in heaven that only the Lamb of God could open.^A And when the Lamb starts reading from the scroll, St. John starts seeing some of the very same things Daniel saw concerning the end.

The point is this: we are living in the last days. The last days began when Jesus accomplished his work of saving us and ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God the Father.^B Daniel's vision, then, is meant for us who live in the New Testament era. It is meant to warn us. It is meant to give us comfort.

So let us consider carefully God's message for us this morning, under the theme: **The war is almost over.** 1) *Find protection in God's promises.* 2) *Look forward to the glory that is coming.*

Part One: Find protection in God's promises

Right before our sermon text takes place, Daniel sees a vision of a terrible King who would exalt himself above all other gods and blaspheme the LORD. His forces would set up "*the abomination that causes desolation*"^C in God's temple and cause God's people great grief.

This vision has a two-fold fulfillment. About 170 years before Jesus was born a king named Antiochus Epiphanes set up a statue of himself in the temple in Jerusalem and demanded that all the Jews worship him. He severely persecuted and killed many believing Jews. This was a terrible time for the Jews, until the LORD granted them rest.

But this is not the only thing Daniel is talking about. Jesus himself uses the same imagery as Daniel to talk about another terrible danger that would torment believers – false teachers - the foremost of which would be the anti-Christ. We read in Matthew: ¹⁵ "So when you see standing in the holy place '*the abomination that causes desolation,*' spoken of through the prophet Daniel--*let the reader understand--* ¹⁶ *then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. . . .* ²¹ *For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now--and never to be equaled again.* ²² *If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.* ²³ *At that time if*

anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. ²⁴ For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect--if that were possible. ²⁵ See, I have told you ahead of time.^D

There you have it. In the last days there will be a terrible time of distress – but not the kind you might think. Don't imagine a horror film where everyone is suffering and enslaved, and it is totally obvious that it is the end. This is not the kind of distress the LORD is talking about. Paul says that the day of the LORD will come when everyone is saying, "Peace and safety."^E Jesus describes the time as any other time – with people eating, drinking and getting married – not knowing what will soon happen.^F

No, the distress is not seen with the eye, but felt only in the heart of the believer. The distress is seeing the hearts of people grow cold and selfish, watching materialism run rampant, and seeing all sorts of false teachers preaching a confusing message. The distress is whole church bodies falling away from Christ, godlessness growing, and persecution on the increase. ^G Even though the distress is a spiritual distress, make no mistake – it is more deadly and dangerous than anything Antiochus did to the Jews. We are at war, and our very souls are at stake! The devil and this world are trying to kill you eternally – but do it in a way that you can't see. The drugs of materialism and entertainment mask the deadly poisons of sin and indifference to God's Word that have been injected in your nature.

Make no mistake, you are at war. You are in mortal danger. If you do not seek cover in the fortress of God's Word, you will die. . .eternally.

But thanks be to God, He does not leave us alone. He sends his holy angels – lead by their chief Michael – to watch over us and protect us. We don't see them, but they are here – battling the demonic forces in this world in order to protect us. Michael's name directs us to where our true help is found. His name means, "WHO IS LIKE GOD?" And who is like God, so great and glorious? Who is like God – full of mercy and salvation? Who is like God – who sent his Son to be sacrificed in our place in order to forgive our sins? Who is like God, who sends mighty angels to protect us?

Our God has written our names in his precious book of life. He chose us from eternity to save us in time through the sacrifice of His Son on the cross. He sent his Holy Spirit to call us to faith and seal us as his own through baptism. Believers belong to God. Their names are registered as citizens of heaven. ^H

Therefore, dear brothers and sisters in the faith – run to the fortress of God's Word for protection. Confess your sins and trust in His forgiveness. Ask the LORD to keep you from sin, to help you battle against the spiritual indifference and the desire to sin that lurks in your heart.^I Ask him to create a new heart within you, and grant you a spirit that rejoices in his salvation.^J Ask, and you shall receive.^K The LORD will hide you under the protection of his wing, and keep you safe. ¹¹ *For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; ¹² they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.*^L

Part Two: Look forward to the glory that is coming.

God promises that these last days of distress will not last long. The day is fast approaching when he will bring it all to an end, judge our enemies and deliver us safely into his kingdom. On that day: *Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.*

Who are those who have eternal life? Jesus himself tells us: " *whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.*"^M Who are those who will be raised to experience everlasting shame and contempt? Again, Jesus himself tells us: *whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.*^N In other words: faith saves, and unbelief damns.

Our text continues: ³ *Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens. . .*

Who are the wise? They those who know and believe *the holy Scriptures*, which St. Paul says *are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*^O Yes, the wise are those who truly fear the LORD, who hold on to Jesus in faith, loving Him because He first loved us. The wise those who are clothed in Christ's righteousness and salvation now

through faith.^P And because they find their refuge in him now, they will be clothed in His glory on the last day. God promised as much when He caused St. Paul to write these words: *Just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven. . . Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed -- in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."*^Q

Our sermon text continues: *and those who lead many to righteousness, (will shine) like the stars for ever and ever.* Just think – God not only gave Abraham descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky,^R He also lets them shine like the stars as well!

Who are those who are promised this special glory? *Those who lead many to righteousness.* Now, at first glance you might think that this means pastors and teachers, but it does not only mean them. Every mother that teaches her little children about Christ is a star in God's eye – someone who led precious lambs to righteousness. The same can be said about every father who brings his family to Church, Every Sunday school teacher, Vacation Bible School helper – yes, every Christian that tells his family, friends or even strangers about Christ is someone who leads others to righteousness. They are all stars in the eyes of God and will be revealed as such on the last day.

And no doubt you are wondering what eternal life will be like, just what those pleasures will be that we shall enjoy. First of all, let me say that it will be far more glorious than anything we can imagine, as the Scriptures says: *"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him."*^S

But the LORD did give St. John a glimpse of the glory that awaits us in order to give us hope. He writes: *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.*² *I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.*³ *And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."*⁴ *He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."*⁵ *He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."*⁶ *He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life."*⁷ *He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.*^T

Dear Christian, you are at war. Your soul is in danger. Now is the time of great distress. But take heart because the war is almost over. Find protection in God's promises and look forward to the glory that is awaiting you through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.

^A Cf. Rev. 5:1ff

^B See how Peter applies Joel's prophecy of the last days to the crowd at Pentecost in Acts 2:17 and. See also Heb 1:2

^C Dan 11:31

^D Mat 24:15-25

^E 1Th 5:3

^F Mat 24:38

^G Mat 24:4-25

^H Heb 12:22-24

^I Mat 15:19-20

^J Psa 51:10-12

^K Mat 7:7

^L Psa 91:11-12

^M Joh 5:24

^N Joh 3:18

^O 2Ti 3:15

^P Gal 3:26-27

^Q 1 Cor 15:49,51-54

^R Gen 22:17

^S 1 Cor. 2:9

^T Rev 21:1-7