

**November 16, 2003**  
**Saints Triumphant**

*"Saints of God, Keep Focus on Your Deliverance"*

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### **DANIEL 12:1-3**

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*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. <sup>2</sup> Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. <sup>3</sup> 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.*

A Christian man went into the doctor for exploratory surgery. He came home to his wife with the sad news he only had six weeks to live. Later he told a friend, how hard it was to adjust to the fact that he had only six weeks to live. He sat in his chair and all he could think about was "six more weeks." He read the Bible, and said his prayers, but before he finished he kept hearing the words, "six more weeks to live."

Then something happened that totally changed his focus and outlook on life. On the third day after hearing the sad news, the words of Jesus came to him from John 10, "My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me, and I give unto them eternal life." Instead of six more weeks, the words "eternal life" kept going through his head. He was able to lean back in his chair and laugh as if he did not have care in the world.

God's Word can do that for you. It can change your focus in life and put you on a whole new path and new direction. It can take precious saints of God who are struggling in this life to make it through each day, and fill them with joy and hope as they focus on the ultimate victory and deliverance that is waiting for them in Jesus. This morning we want these words from the prophet Daniel to help us stay focused on the guaranteed deliverance that we have in Jesus.

#### **1) Deliverance for the worst days**

It's good to know ahead of time, that the Lord has already planned how he is going to deliver us from days of great distress. Chapter 12 of Daniel begins with the words, "At that time, the great prince Michael who protects your people will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of the nations until now." What a shock these words must have been for Daniel. He has already been given visions of mighty kingdoms rising and falling, Greeks, Romans, Persians, Egyptians locking horns in combat, with the nation of Israel caught in the crossfire. Daniel knew distress. He saw his friends thrown into the fiery furnace and he was thrown into the lion's den for his faithful prayers. Could the times get any worse? The Lord tells Daniel that as the end gets near, things will even get worse than any other time in history, worse even than the times before the great world flood and the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Jesus spoke of such a terrible time of distress or tribulation in Matthew 24 when he said,

“There will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now- and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive.” (Matthew 24: 21) Perhaps you have heard someone describe this world in which we live as a madhouse. Actually it is not just a madhouse but a war zone or battlefield that pits Satan and his angels against the saints of God. Ephesians says, “We are not fighting against flesh and blood, but spiritual wickedness in high places.”

There are those who say that Christ will come secretly and snatch up the church and spare the saints of God from the great tribulation. We know the Lord will rapture his church into the clouds on judgment day, but until that time we needed to listen to the words of Daniel and the words of Jesus that speak about a time of distress coming to Christians unlike anything the world has ever seen. We don't want to put on rose-colored glasses and pretend everything is pink and pretty. Nor do we want to join the large masses of people who read books such as “Left Behind” and believe that we will not have to face the tribulation in the last days.

What comfort we find in the words that simply say, “At that time.” “At that time, Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise.” When the battle becomes especially fierce as the end draws near, our Lord promises to send out Michael the archangel to battle the forces of evil. Daniel 10 spoke of Michael the archangel being active behind the scenes of history working against Satan's angels who behind the Persian government. We may not be able to see these battles being waged, but we know from what God promises us that angels will help us in the last days. It is it any wonder then that Martin Luther prayed in his morning prayer, “Send your holy angel to be with me that the wicked foe may have no power of me.”

As the final battle lines are drawn, and the end draws near, God's people have the assurance from his word that they will be delivered. Verse 2 of Daniel 12 says, “But at that time, your people-everyone whose name is found written in the book- will be delivered.” Dear Christian, your name has been written in the book of life, and that is why the Lord will protect and keep you even it means you are the generation to experience the terrors of the great tribulation. You were not born with your name written in the book. You were born dead in trespasses and sin, without God and without hope. Then you were made alive in Christ. You were born again. Your name was placed into the book of life. Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice, and they follow me and I give them eternal life, and no one will pluck them from my hand.”

As one of God's precious saints washed by the blood of the Lamb, I don't want to face the final great battle, or be caught up in the end times, when Satan unleashes all his weapons for the final great battle. What if we are in these times right now? What if the great battle is not the persecution of Christians, but the prosperity of the times in which we live? I don't want to live through days that are so bad even the elect could fall away if that were possible. If we must pass through these days, then we have the Holy Spirit to keep us focused and remind us of the promises of our Lord that say, “Fear, not for I am with you, I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteousness right hand.” Faith listens to the Lord saying, “I will” and faith allows us to throw our shoulders back and laugh. Faith makes us like the warhorse in Job that snorts as it smells the air of battle and thrills to the sound of the trumpet.

Wait, what's that distant sound I hear? It's not the sound of a trumpet on the field of battle, but another trumpet, the trumpet call of God. There is another sound off in the distant, the shout of the archangel, and the shout of millions upon millions of people raised from their graves to meet King Jesus in the air.

## **2) Deliverance on the last day**

Our text takes us to that great day of deliverance when it says, "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt." Multitudes of people, in fact every single person who every died will be raised to life again on the last day. Jesus said, "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out." Some will rise to live, and some will rise to be condemned.

Will it really happen? Will our bodies actually be brought back to life again, and will we then be taken to the place that Jesus has prepared for us? Listen to these amazing words from 1 Corinthians 15, "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." This blessed hope of a bodily resurrection on the last day works itself into every fiber of our being. It fills us with a hope that keeps us from being discouraged. We can throw our shoulders back in joy and laugh at the problems of this life as Paul seemed to do in 2 Corinthians when he said, "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen. For what is seen is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." The more we focus on what will someday happen to us when Jesus returns, the more we will be able to cope with the problems and disappointments of this life.

What about those others who have no hope, who are destined for eternal death and punishment? Will they perish forever in the fires of hell? Will they suffer eternal shame and contempt? The words of Daniel are clear: "Others to shame and everlasting contempt." Jesus often spoke of the dangers of rejecting him. John 3:18 says, "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

The other day as I was working on this sermon, I heard a loud screeching sound of two hawks fighting and trying to land in the large cypress tree on our church property. One of the hawks held in its talons, a little chicken plucked from a nearby yard. Both fell to the ground, and dropped the chicken. It ran into a bush as I stood near to keep the hawks away. The neighbors came running, and claimed the badly injured bird. I grew up on farm and observed animals in the clutches of death. Seeing a creature suffer pain, and face death, can put a knot in the pit of our stomach. Only by faith, and the power of the Holy Spirit are we able to accept as real, the fact that some will rise to everlasting shame and contempt without Jesus.

Saints of God, we have deliverance for the battles of life, and the ultimate deliverance when we are raised to life again. We also have a mission to fulfill. "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. People need Jesus. They cannot find in themselves the righteousness they need to be accepted by a holy and righteous God. That essential

perfection or righteousness is given to us in Jesus as free gift, declared as a gift to the whole world. You know people and so do I who do not have this righteousness. We have the privilege of leading people to this righteousness so they can share the position we have as saints of God. Our shining moments will take place on judgment day, when we see the people who were lead to righteousness because we were involved in warning them and sharing with them what Jesus has done to declare us righteous.

Six more weeks. Six more months. Six more years. How much more time do you and I have in this life? With Paul we can joyfully proclaim our deliverance and laugh at whatever comes whether life or death: "Whether we live we live unto the Lord, and whether we die we die unto the Lord, whether we live therefore or die, we are the Lords." Amen.