

This weekend we are celebrating “Saints Triumphant.” As we consider our three lessons appointed for this weekend, they each offer some perspective on Judgment Day. Instead of the traditional sermon, we are going to explore each lesson, see how they all tie together and especially see how they apply to us.

Our 1st lesson is from Daniel 12:1-3

12 “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. **This is God’s Word.**

Daniel wrote the words from our 1st lesson while he was in exile in Babylon. The first half of his book records significant events while Judah was in exile. The second half of Daniel records revelations that God gave to Daniel relating God’s plan of salvation to the end of time. These verses are about God’s people just before the great judgment comes.

“¹ 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.

Michael, the great prince, is mentioned a number of times in Daniel and also in the Book of Jude. We know he is a great prince among angels because of this portion of scripture and because Jude describes him as an archangel. Whenever Michael is mentioned he is doing battle against the forces of evil whether it be evil demons or Satan himself. Michael is a guardian angel for God’s people and thus, as he is mentioned here, he is protecting God’s people during a time of great persecution.

As Judgment Day approaches, the attacks and persecution of Christians will be severe, causing much distress. Jesus, in his prophecy in Matthew 24, said that for the sake of the elect, the days will be shortened. In other words, when the persecution reaches its height, Judgment Day will come. Everyone whose name is found written in the book of life will be delivered.

It would be easy to get caught up with the question, **“Just how bad is it going to get?”** Especially in light of what is going on in our world today. But a better question might be, **“How do you make sure your name is written in the Book of Life?”** After all you can’t call heaven and make a reservation. Jesus said, **“He that believes and is baptized will be saved. He that doesn’t believe will be condemned.”** (Mark 16:16) Is it really that simple? Yes it is, faith in Christ saves. It is simple, but not always easy.

There are so many temptations that try and pull you away from God’s Word. Satan and the world around you work hard to try and destroy your faith. Sometimes it’s in subtle ways – trying to get

other things to crowd God out of your lives. At other times, especially as we get close to the end of the world, it will be all out attacks on Christians.

The way to keep your name in the Book of Life is to stay close to Jesus – the keeper of the book. The way to stay close to Jesus is by coming to hear his word on a regular basis, to study it and to do what it says. And when you fall short, to look to Christ for forgiveness – and he brings forgiveness to you through your faith in him.

Christians look forward to Judgment Day when the Book of Life will be opened, our names will be read and we will be delivered. But what happens to everyone else?

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.

Most people don't like to think about death, but when a person dies their body and soul separate. The body goes into the ground and decays or it might be cremated. But the end result is that it returns to the dust from whence it came. At the time of death, the soul is judged. The souls of believers go to heaven and the souls of unbelievers to hell.

On Judgment Day body and soul will be reunited. The bodies of believers will be glorified and they will shine like the brightness of heaven while the bodies of unbelievers will feel the effects of sin and everlasting contempt. There is no second judgment just a confirmation of the judgment that already happened when the person died.

This portion of scripture is included today to remind us to keep focused on our goal of heaven. Even when we might be persecuted or when we struggle with coming to church this is a reminder of the everlasting glory waiting for all those who believe and trust in Jesus for their salvation – for all God's saints. So I encourage you, with these words, to remain faithful to God and his Word and look forward to becoming a Saint Triumphant in heaven. Amen.

Our second lesson is from Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, chapter 4, verses 13-18.

¹³ Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. ¹⁴ We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵ According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage each other with these words. **This is God's Word.**

What is the greatest fear people have about dying? It's the fear of the unknown. Whenever we are headed into a situation we have not experienced before, we have some fears we have to deal

with. Sometimes we can call on someone who has gone through what we are going to experience and gain from their knowledge but in this case we can't call on someone who has died to tell us how it went. But God doesn't want us to be afraid. He wants us to know what is going to happen to the faithful when they face death.

Notice the Paul doesn't tell us to not grieve when a loved one dies. We will miss those who die but Christians grieve in a different way because of Jesus death and resurrection. They assure us that we can stand before God, declared "not guilty" of our sins because of what Christ has done. His resurrection assures us of this and thus we have the sure hope of heaven. That is God's promise for all those who believe and trust in him for salvation. Thus the Christian approaches death with the confidence that it is just a doorway to heaven.

This portion of scripture expands on the words of Daniel. Daniel described the last days before Judgment Day and Paul describes what will happen on Judgment Day. Once again we have the archangel, Michael announcing this great day and sounding the trumpet for all to hear. No one will be left out – all will see and hear the Lord coming again. He will have all his angels with him and the souls of those believers who have died. The bodies of all these believers will be raised and reunited with their souls in the sky and then all the believers who are still living will be caught up with the Lord in the sky to go and live with him forever in heaven.

Paul tells us to, **"Therefore encourage each other with these words."** We all will face death and have friends and relatives facing death. These words are here to encourage us and remind us that death is not the end, but rather the beginning of a perfect and joyful life in heaven forever. Life in heaven will be free from sin and temptation and you will be in the presence of God and all the other triumphant saints. What a wonderful thing to look forward to. May these words drive away any despair or sorrow – any fear of dying – with the blessed happiness that awaits us. Amen.

Words from the Gospel of Mark giving us another perspective of Judgment Day:

²⁴ "But in those days, following that distress, "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; ²⁵ the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' ²⁶ "At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷ And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens. (Mark 13:24-27) **This is the Gospel of our Lord.**

"But in those days, following that distress," the distress referred to in our first lesson, just before the final day of judgment. Following that distress, the world will literally fall apart. There will be no need for sun, moon, or stars because the earth and universe in which we live will be destroyed. Peter says that there will be a new heaven and a new earth after the destruction of this sinful world.

As I think of the description and judgment recorded in this lesson I am reminded of the days of the Great Flood. Wickedness had taken over the world until there were only eight believers left.

Then the heavens opened up and it was terrifying. All the wicked perished and God's people were saved.

The Last day will come in the same way. It will be a terrifying surprise for many and a joyful relief for the faithful. And Jesus will make his appearance. This time he will not come in humility – born in a manger in the small town of Bethlehem. No, he will come in glory – returning in the same way he left. Once again, the angels are mentioned. They will gather the elect from the four corners of the world.

The elect are all those who believe and trust in Jesus as their Savior. All those who will see him with an everlasting joy in their hearts. The troubles and trials of this world will be over and they will be gathered to their heavenly home.

All three lessons you have heard today are meant to comfort and encourage you. Just as the people of the Old Testament waited for the first coming of the Savior, so we wait for his second coming. Just as they didn't know when that would happen neither do we. But God knows and his Son will return at just the right time. It could be today – tomorrow or hundreds of years from now. All that God asks is that we be faithful to him until that time and trust in his promises.

The promise of forgiveness because Christ has paid for our sins. The promise of heaven for all who believe and trust in him. The promise that we don't have to fear death because Christ has removed the sting of death through his resurrection. The promise that our bodies will be raised on the last Day – imperishable and glorified. The promise that the faithful will be gathered to Jesus to live with him forever in heaven.

Stay faithful to your Savior – hear his word, find comfort and peace in his word, live your lives guided by his word. Today you are saints – what we might call Saints Militant because you are still fighting the temptations of the world, your own sinful flesh and the devil. May God's Word help you in this fight and encourage each one of us until the day when you will be a Saint Triumphant in heaven. Amen.