

Text: Daniel 12:1-3. Saints Triumphant. **November 15, 2015.**

You are God's triumphant saints. Amen.

You think you've got it bad? Think about Daniel. As a young man his nation was conquered, he was carried into captivity 1000 miles from home. But Daniel didn't despair. Daniel held onto his faith in the true God. Daniel was delivered and even promoted to a respected position in the kingdom. Daniel was delivered. You think our nation is turning away from Christ? Daniel's king, urged on by his closest advisors, passed a law that you could not pray to any god at all. You could only pray to the king. The punishment for breaking this law? Be thrown in a den of hungry lions. Daniel kept praying to God. Daniel was thrown into the den of lions. But Daniel was delivered. God closed the mouths of the lions. Daniel was not hurt. Daniel's determination even gained respect for the true God. Daniel was delivered. When you think you've got it bad, remember Daniel. He held fast to God and he was delivered. When you think our nation is turning away from God, remember Daniel. Daniel was delivered. And you will be delivered. Actually, in a sense, you already were delivered, delivered from sin when Jesus died on the cross, delivered from death when Jesus rose, delivered into the arms of Jesus when he baptized you. You were delivered. You are delivered. You will be delivered. You will be delivered.

God sends angels to deliver you. Michael is mentioned here as one of those angels. He's a great prince. He's powerful. He protects. God doesn't mess around in protecting his people. God sends powerful angels. Michael will arise. The idea is that Michael stands at attention. Michael takes a stand for God's people and against God's enemies. Michael is not sitting down and resting. Michael is standing at attention to protect God's people. There was a Seinfeld episode where George noticed a security guard at a store standing all day. George asked, "Wouldn't you like a chair to sit down, get off your feet?" The guard replied, "I supposed if they gave me a chair, I'd take it." George brings a chair. The guard sits down. Next scene, the guard is asleep in the chair, the store gets robbed. Michael is not sitting down on the job. Michael is not falling asleep protecting God's people. Michael stands at attention. Michael is powerful. Michael protects.

And good thing, because we need it. There will be a time of distress, distress, notice how strong a word that is. It means trouble, difficulty, adversity, tribulation. There's no rose-colored glasses. There's only reality. This will be a time of distress, such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. Wow! If you think it's bad now, cheer up. It's going to get worse. The distress will double. The tribulation will triple. Daniel lived almost 3000 years ago and look how terrible it was for him: captivity, lions' dens. Daniel's friends were thrown into a fiery furnace for refusing to worship an idol of gold. And it's going to get worse!! There was a time when two cities named Sodom and Gomorrah were so wicked, God rained down fire and burning sulfur from heaven to destroy those cities. And it's going to get worse! Even once, the world was so wicked, God sent a world-wide flood to wipe out all the people on the earth, except just eight. And it's going to get even worse!

And how easily we give in to the distress. Everybody's doing it, how bad can it be? No list today. You know what that temptation is for you. They seem happy and healthy and wealthy. Why is God blessing them? We give up in the distress. God has surely forgotten about us, if there is even a god at all. Looks like God has forgotten us, forsaken us. You know what God ought to do for sinful thoughts like that? Really forsake us, forever, in hell.

But! But! But! You will be delivered. You will be delivered. Jesus' blood on the cross, washed you clean of every sinful thought. Jesus delivered you from your sins. God will not leave you or forsake you. Jesus' perfect life delivered you from your sins by giving you his own perfection. Need some personal assurance that this means you? Look at that baptismal font. There Jesus pulled you out of all the sinful people in the world and God washed you clean, God declared, "You are mine! You will be delivered!" You will be delivered from this sinful world. You will be delivered for everlasting life.

You know those Bible accounts I mentioned about Sodom and Gomorrah and the flood? They both have happy endings for God's people. God rescued a man of faith named Lot from the destruction God brought on Sodom and Gomorrah. God sent angels who literally took Lot by the hand and led him out before the cities were destroyed. Lot was delivered. Before God sent that world-wide flood, God had a man of faith named Noah build a huge boat to protect Noah's family and every kind of animal. Noah and his family were delivered. You know these terrible times now? You will be delivered. You know the even worse times coming? God's people will be delivered.

It's easy to read this word, "people," and think very generically, people, a person, anybody. But the word God uses for people here is more than that. It refers to the people of God. It means the special objects of God's love, the people who are God's people who will be delivered. The people whose names are written in the book. Written. Written by God himself, not by you. God put your name, in his book. Written for assurance, so you can know, "I will be delivered." Written permanently, written with the blood of Jesus, written in black and white by our loving, unchanging God to say, "You will be delivered! You will be delivered!"

Yes, it's going to get worse. But finally, it will get better. You will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life. Everlasting life. This is the only time in the Old Testament this phrase is used. Everlasting life. Life with Jesus forever. Life that never ends. Life that is perfect. Think about a life with no sadness. Think about a life with no guilt. Think about a life with no disagreements. Think about that life with Jesus. Try to ponder for a second everlasting life. It's so easy to lose focus in daily life on everlasting life. We don't think about heaven enough, in my opinion. We easily forget why it's worth it to endure the distress. We easily get lost in the mindless grind of work, sleep repeat and Jesus just doesn't seem to matter. And everlasting life seems so far away, like maybe it's not real at all. That's why you came here. To remember everlasting life. That's why Jesus matters: you will be delivered from this seemingly meaningless life to everlasting life. It's worth it to endure the distress. It matters to hang on. You will be delivered.

Look at the alternative and see if it's worth it. Some will rise to shame and everlasting contempt. Again, very strong words. Can we just say something? Not everyone goes to heaven. Yes, some people will go to hell. Some people will suffer everlasting contempt. God is not some tolerant grandfather who ignores sin. God will punish. God will condemn! If everyone goes to heaven, what a waste of a Sunday morning to be here. Why bother reading your Bible? Why bother following Jesus?

Why bother? Because you will be delivered from shame and everlasting contempt. Why bother? Because we get the privilege to lead many to righteousness. God has only revealed one way to be right with him, one way. That way is not our good works, but faith in Jesus. And God uses us to lead many to that way, to Jesus, to righteousness. Notice, God doesn't choose to use angels to lead many to righteousness. God chooses to use us. Wow! That made my heart stop for a second to think about that. God chooses to use us to do his work and lead many to righteousness. Maybe you heard that phrase and

thought, "That's talking about pastor and vicar. They lead people to righteousness. Maybe it's a Sunday School or prek teacher, but not me." Think again. We've had many people bring friends to meet Christ and Christians here at church. It's not just the vivacious and outgoing people who are doing this. It's often quiet Christians who can't help bringing friends to meet our best friend, Jesus. That's leading many to righteousness. But it's not just here. A few weeks ago I had the privilege to go to a coffee shop and meet with one of our members and a friend and coworker of hers. This friend was not baptized. He is now. Our member did the hard work: spoke about her faith in Jesus, continued to share the love of our Savior. I get to do the easy part: baptize him, teach him God's Word. Leading many to righteousness starts by leading one.

Leading many to righteousness makes you shine like the stars forever and ever. Shine like the stars forever and ever. There are so many temporary stars in our world and they seem to shine so brightly. Brittany Spears was bright for a while, but does anyone pay attention anymore? Justin Bieber made hearts go pitter pat, but do you think in 30 years anyone will remember Justin Bieber? What about a great star, Bart Starr? If you are under forty have you heard of him?

But when you lead people to righteousness you don't shine for a short time like Bart Starr or Justin Bieber or Brittany Spears, you shine forever and ever and ever and ever. You will shine in God's eyes like the brightness of the heavens, like the northern lights, like the sun itself! A star doesn't hold its light in. A star shines for all to see. A star shines a light that lasts forever and ever.

What's worth living for? Leading others to righteousness or being afraid of what they will say? Shining like the stars forever and ever or being a star for a few minutes on earth? Don't give up. Don't stop leading others to righteousness. Don't ever forget: you have been delivered. You are delivered. You will be delivered. Amen.