

Daniel 12:1-3 "At that time Michael shall stand up, The great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; And there shall be a time of trouble, Such as never was since there was a nation, Even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, Every one who is found written in the book. ² And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt. ³ Those who are wise shall shine Like the brightness of the firmament, And those who turn many to righteousness Like the stars forever and ever.

Sermon Theme: A Prophecy of the Last Times

- 1. A time of great trouble for Christians**
- 2. A time of protection and deliverance for Christians**
- 3. A time for the resurrection and judgment**
- 4. An eternal existence of glory for Christians**

In the name of our Savior Jesus Christ, who as the Church's Head rules over everything for the sake of His Church of believers, dear fellow redeemed;

In the movie industry, one popular type of movie deals with the theme of apocalypse. The term apocalypse has the meaning of "an event involving great and widespread destruction." When speaking of "the Apocalypse", it is referring to "the final destruction of the world as described in the biblical book of Revelation." These movies are rather dark and foreboding, portraying doom and gloom. The story lines have forces of good battling forces of evil. So great and so devastating are the battles that the very fate of the world's existence hangs in the balance.

When speaking of movies, we are talking about fictitious stories. However, we know divine prophecies of an apocalypse that is not a made up story, but is grounded in fact. There are apocalyptic prophecies both in the Old and New Testament Scriptures. Numbered among the apocalyptic prophets of the Old Testament is the prophet Daniel.

While living in Babylon during Israel's captivity, Daniel received revelations from God foretelling the rise and fall of powerful nations during Daniel's lifetime. He also wrote prophetically of other mighty nations that would rise and fall many years after his day, even to New Testament times. The chief reason for the demise of all these great nations was because its rulers and citizens rejected and rebelled against the one true God.

Daniel's prophecies also included the foretelling of the apocalypse, that is, that which will take place in the last days of this world leading up to Judgment Day. The prophet speaks of it in this way in our text, "And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time." Speaking of this very same thing, Jesus refers to it as the "great tribulation."

The "time of trouble" or the "great tribulation" is due to battles between the forces of good and the forces of evil. The forces of good are the Lord and His Church of believers. And the forces of evil are the devil and his allies of evil angels and the

unbelieving world. Each are vying for human souls. One side wants to rescue and eternally save the souls of mankind. And the other side wants to corrupt and eternally destroy the souls of mankind.

The great comfort we have as Christians in such troubled times is that our Savior Jesus Christ has already conquered the devil through His perfect life and sacrificial death on the cross for our forgiveness and eternal salvation. Through faith in Christ the devil is powerless to overcome and defeat us.

This of course doesn't stop our archenemy from attacking us in order to cause us to turn away from Jesus in unbelief. In fact, the book of Revelation reveals that in the latter days the devil will be unleashed and deceive the nations (Rev. 20:7,8). Since Judgment Day is fast approaching, Satan is feverishly at work pulling out all the stops to wreak as much spiritual harm and destruction that he can muster.

The finger prints of his diabolical work in these last days can be found in his lies and deceptions that would cause us to reject God and His saving word, in his temptations that appeal to our sinful nature, and in his persecutions that would cause us to deny the Christian faith. The avenues carrying out such attacks on our souls can be seen in many different areas of life, such as the entertainment industry, the news media, the scientific community, educational institutions, the religious community, and world governments. All of these entities are causing great trouble and distress for believers.

Martin Luther was writing about this fierce battle when he penned the battle hymn of the Reformation. In that well known hymn he wrote, "The old evil Foe now means deadly woe; deep guile and great might are his dread arms in fight...But for us fights the Valiant One...Jesus Christ...of Sabaoth Lord...He holds the field forever." The Lord Jesus, who sits on the right hand of God the Father, is ruling in the heavens over everything for the sake of His Church of believers. He is the One who finally enables us to prevail in this fierce battle.

The most powerful weapon Jesus has placed at our disposal is His Word of truth, life, and salvation. With His Word we are able to expose the soul-destroying lies of the devil. With His Word we are able to resist the tempting ways of Satan. And whenever we fall into any kind of sin, we have the precious gospel that tells us of God's infinite love and His unceasing forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Also, through God's Word we receive the necessary strength to withstand and bear up under any kind of tribulation.

In addition to this, the Lord sends us His ministering spirits the angels to watch over us to guard and defend us from all harm and danger. Daniel writes of a leading angel who will come to our aid and rescue in the last days of this world. He says of him, "At that time Michael shall stand up, The great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people." The angel Michael is identified as being an archangel - a ruling angel spoken of here as "the great prince".

Earlier in the book of Daniel the prophet tells of the angel Michael helping him when he was opposed by powerful forces in Persia. In chapter 10 he writes there, "But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of

Persia.” (V.13)

In the heat of the battle, we are not alone. Not only do we have the Lord on our side, but we also have His powerful angelic forces standing with us to defend us and protect us. Think of the angel that liberated the apostle Peter from prison by removing His shackles and opening the prison doors. A number of years ago a Christian pastor imprisoned in Iran with a death sentence hanging over his head was set free. This could not have happened without the mighty hand of God and His forces for good.

With the battle fierce and the warfare long we hear the prophet Daniel tell us of a deliverance, even a final deliverance from this sin-scarred world. He foretells this wonderful deliverance, as he writes of it “And at that time your people shall be delivered, Every one who is found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame and everlasting contempt.”

For some Christians God’s deliverance from this sin-cursed world comes before the great and final day of this world. It comes when God in His rich grace and mercy brings our earthly stay to an end and translates us immediately to the glorious realm of heaven.

But then, the deliverance Daniel foretells is the great deliverance on the last day of this world. In the gospel of Matthew, we read that after the great tribulation the Lord Jesus will descend from the clouds above to judge the world and usher in eternity. We read there, “Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” (Mt. 24:30-31)

According Daniel’s prophecy, at Jesus’ coming on the last day there will be the general resurrection of all the dead, both the bodies of believers and those of unbelievers. Whereupon there will be a great division of the two. The bodies of believers sleeping in the dust of the earth shall be awoken and received into the everlasting life of heaven.

Daniel also foretells the sad and tragic eternal fate of countless others raised on that day by saying of them that some will be raised “to shame and everlasting contempt.” Instead of these wretched souls being raised in glory, they will be raised to an unending existence of shame and disgrace. Instead of having perfected bodies and souls, they will have bodies and souls of contempt which are an abhorrence to the sight.

Why will these have such a dreadful eternal fate? It is because they reject the God of their salvation. How often do we not see unbelievers in this world evading God, rebelling against Him, and not wanting anything to do with Him. Well, because of this, they will be sentenced to an eternal existence of God- forsakenness. Where God is no where to be found there is no joy or happiness, only perpetual sadness and torment.

This however is not the case with believers in Christ Jesus. Daniel foretells concerning our eternal life of glory in heaven, “Those who are wise shall shine Like the brightness of the firmament, And those who turn many to righteousness Like the stars forever and ever.” The prophet reveals that believers will shine like the brightness of the

firmament and be like the stars forever and ever.

Why will believers shine in glory in heaven? First of all, the prophet says of them that they are wise. When I hear this, I think of what the apostle Paul said to Timothy, “from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Tim. 3:15) There is no greater wisdom in all the world than to possess the wisdom that we are eternally saved through faith in Jesus’ redemptive work. This wisdom transcends all other wisdom, because it enables us to be received into the eternal habitations of heaven.

The second thing which enables believers in heaven to shine as stars is that of having been involved in turning many to righteousness. The special work of turning others to righteousness is helping others come to the knowledge of their Savior Jesus Christ, for through faith in Him a believer receives Christ’s righteousness. Those who turn others to the righteousness of Christ are not only pastors and missionaries and Christian teachers, but also Christian parents who lead their children to their Savior. And for that matter, it is any Christian who helps another come to the knowledge of their salvation through Jesus Christ.

In the time that remains in these last days of sore distress, may God continue to guard and keep us in the faith as we encounter troubled times brought on by the enemies of our souls. When we are granted this gracious help from above, we are assured of being translated into an eternal life of glory in the life to come. Come Lord Jesus! Come quickly! Amen.