**3rd Sunday in End Times - Saints Triumphant Sunday – Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY**

**Based on Daniel 12:1-3 written by Pastor Paul Horn**

**God’s People are Triumphant**

**I. Even though they expect distress**

**II. They will also expect deliverance**

*“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. 2Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. 3Those 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 past Thursday morning, around 7am, a mother was driving her 10yr old daughter to school here in Radcliff. While they were stopped on the road, waiting for traffic to clear, a cement truck rear ended their vehicle, sending them into oncoming traffic were they were hit again by another truck. The mother died and her daughter survived. Our hearts go out to that family and the students at Woodland Elementary. Even for us as Christians, who have God’s Word as our comfort and strength, it is difficult.

Life is difficult. And wouldn’t it be nice to have a guidebook to tell us what to expect so we can prepare ourselves for these difficulties in life? We do! It’s the Bible. The Bible tells us that as a Christian, we can expect hardship and disappointment. Will it eventually get better? Not on this earth. In fact, it will get worse. The Holy Spirit tells us to expect distress in life. We might think, “Yikes! I don’t know if I want to be a Christian anymore!” So that we do not despair, the Holy Spirit shares good news with us. We will also expect deliverance. God’s message for his people is this: God’s people are always triumphant. Even though they expect distress, they will also expect deliverance.

Our lesson is from the book of Daniel. Daniel makes us think of the stories we learned in Sunday school – Daniel in the lion’s den, and the story of his three friends who were thrown into the fiery furnace. We love these stories because they are examples of faithful believers who would not compromise their faith in God regardless of the consequences. The final half of this book is apocalyptic - filled with visions, which are hard to understand. The LORD shared with Daniel a sneak peak at the future - the rise and fall of different nations and their impact on God’s people. These are events that will precede the first coming of the Messiah, as the baby in Bethlehem. In the final chapter, God speaks about the second and final coming of Christ.

In vs1 an angel told Daniel to expect distress in the end times. The end will be preceded by a time of great tribulation. There are several other places in the Bible that speak of this. Jesus, the Apostles Paul and John also spoke of it – there will be times of tribulation.

Perhaps you’ve heard from other branches of Christianity who speak of a tribulation period. But they also teach that a rapture will take place - that Christians will somehow be taken out of this tribulation, somehow swept away and not experience it. Scripture does not speak this way. There will tribulation, but both believers and unbelievers will have to go through it.

Distress will be visible in one of two ways, 1) earthly distress – wars, natural disasters; and 2) spiritual distress – persecution, false doctrine. Jesus focused on spiritual distress in his ministry. John 15:18-20 **“If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also.”**

It’s stressful being a Christian, doesn’t it? You take your stand on the Bible, but the rest of the world doesn’t. Because the world takes their stand on whatever it is you want to believe. And they go a step further and attack the truths of Scripture. Oftentimes you may feel like a Soldier fighting against a platoon of enemy soldiers by yourself. It’s not fun being constantly shot at and you can easily succumb to battle-fatigue. There will be times of tribulation.

We look at our own country. After the presidential election a family member texted me and said, “This is an evil world.” She was referring to the fact that three states had voted to approve marriage rights for gays and lesbians, and that Wisconsin had elected the first openly gay senator: a slap in the face to God’s original plan for marriage: one man and one woman. This is an evil world. Two states legalized marijuana, Colorado and Washington, although the federal government and physicians have declared the drug unsafe. It will cause damage to a human beings psychologically, emotionally, and physically. Another slap in the face of God, “We know better than you how to care for our bodies.” This is an evil world.

When we stand up for the truths of Scripture in a firm, yet loving way, we are labeled “old fashioned, out of touch, unaccepting, not with the times.” It is difficult being a Christian.

And then there are the churches which have long ago abandoned even the most basic and fundamental Christian doctrines. There are some denominations that no longer believe or teach that the Bible is God’s Word or that Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation. The preaching of law and gospel and sin and grace and Christ crucified are replaced with a watered-down psychology and feel-good religion and social action. When we don’t preach and teach that way, people don’t come back to church, because they don’t want to hear it.

The Bible clearly says that distress will mark the end times. Someone said to me recently, “This world is a madhouse.” The Bible describes the world more like an arena, a battlefield, between the forces of God and forces of those who oppose God. Whenever God establishes believers in one place, he is always counteracted by Satan and his henchmen. This struggle will continue and intensify until the very last day of this world. It’s what we can expect. What are you going to do about it?

Well, you could despair and say “Woe is us!” and live in fear and paranoia the rest of your life. That’s what Satan wants you to do. Fear leads to distrust in God and his promise to deliver. Then we abandon the Scriptures and trust in something or someone else. Another way you could handle it is just to give in. Instead of walking apart from sinful society it is easier to walk with sinful society. That way you won’t be seen as old fashioned and out of touch. But there is the great danger that you will lose your soul to the everlasting contempt and shame Daniel spoke of. For those who do not believe, who cast God out of their lives, who persist in their sinful living, God will on the last day say, “Ok, you didn’t want me in your life. Then you can have that, for eternity.” Everlasting shame…

Perhaps you are guilty of despair and fear, guilty of giving in, of giving up the fight, abandoning God’s truths. Now is the time to repent. Repent and acknowledge our sins. Turn away from them and turn to Christ who promises that we can expect distress, but we can also expect deliverance.

Vs1 **“But at that time your people – everyone whose name is written in the book – will be delivered.”**

**“Everyone whose name is written in the book..**.” Have you ever seen a family Bible? A real family Bible is about 10 inches thick and has been passed down from generation to generation. The front pages are reserved for a family tree, birthdates, baptisms, confirmations, anniversaries and deaths of every member of that family are written in that Bible. Your Father in heaven has a family book with your name written in it. The Bible tells us that from eternity, from before the creation of the world, God wrote your name in his book, and your name, and your name. Why did he do this? Because he loves you and wanted to deliver you from distress and from your sin and everlasting shame.

God wrote your name in his book because his Son went into the arena of this wicked world, too, just as you and I have, but Jesus is our faithful Soldier, who fought against the lies of Satan. He stood firm on the truths of Scripture. He did not compromise the truths of his Father to be more likeable on this earth. He defended his Father’s plan for marriage. He was not afraid when threatened with death for believing the truth. He did not despair of life, he confidently entrusted his body and soul to his Father’s care even in death. By that perfect life, Jesus fought against sin, against Satan, against the false teachings of this world, and he won.

Through holy baptism your Father has given you Jesus’ perfect life of faithful fighting against Satan and falsehood. Through baptism you know that your name is written in God’s book of life. For at baptism God adopted you as his sons and daughters. Your Father in heaven wrote your name in heaven’s family Bible, the Book of Life. You are his child. And he has promised you deliverance. This is what you can expect as a child of God…

Vs1 **“At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise.”** Michael is the name of a mighty angel mentioned in another chapter in Daniel whom God used to help His people, the Jews. We have the assurance that when the final great distress overtakes the world, Michael, God’s angelic champion, will again intervene on behalf of God’s people. Though he rages against us, Satan will not overcome us. Though they attack us with all their might, his demons will not destroy us. We can expect deliverance through God’s mighty angels.

Secondly, God promises deliverance from another enemy – death. Death has been distressing the human race since Cain and Abel, bringing grief and pain and untold suffering. Death is a powerful enemy. He always wins. Yet God promises deliverance from death. Vs2 God says, “**Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake.”** The prophet Isaiah wrote, “The earth will give birth to her dead.” (26.19) The prophet is not describing a zombie invasion. He is seeing our victory over death. The dominance of death will be broken when God brings history to conclusion, the final chapter will be written, when the dead rise. You and I will rise from the dust of our graves because Jesus’ resurrection proved his power over death. Jesus will raise all the dead. For us who believe in him, and trust in him, he raise our bodies to everlasting joy where we will join the saints of all time.

Finally, the prophet is told, vs3 **“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.”** Those who are wise, literally translated, “Those who teach or instruct for the purpose of imparting wisdom and understanding.” God is talking about our mission statement, to seek the unchurched. Through Daniel God is telling us to expect deliverance, not just for us, but for others as well. The multitude of other people who are marching toward hell, that we might help them recognize their own sinfulness, but more importantly, their Savior from sin and death. We will help others find the way, the only way into God’s family, into God’s book of life, that way is through faith in Jesus Christ alone. We will shine the light of Christ for them.

Because this life is difficult, for Christians and unbelievers. It is filled with bad news, wars, natural disasters, disease and death. And God has told to expect distress in this life. But he also told us to expect deliverance – and so we will not fear, we will not be afraid. We will be strong. We will be confident and persevere. Because in disaster and deliverance God’s people always triumph. To that end we pray, “Come quickly, Lord Jesus! Amen.”