

THE GREAT AWAKENING

Daniel 12:1-3

Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost (Series B)

November 14, 2021

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

Ny Stavanger Free Lutheran Church, Buxton, ND

The sermon is based on the Old Testament lesson for this Twenty-fifth Sunday after Pentecost. It comes from the prophet Daniel, chapter 12, verses 1 through 3. In this Old Testament lesson, the prophet Daniel speaks of the very end. Please stand as you are able for God's holy Word. From Daniel 12, beginning at verse 1, we read in Jesus' name.

¹ “At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. ² And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. ³ And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus is coming back. He will raise the dead. He will judge all mankind. He will transform his believing saints and bring them into everlasting life. He will also condemn unbelievers and cast them into everlasting contempt.

Dear saints, this is our great hope. And I want you to notice how simple this is. End times teaching is often made to be quite complicated. It should not be. There is a basic level of doctrine on the end times that is simple enough for small children to understand. This basic level is clear, and it contains the most essential truths concerning the last things. There are, most certainly, difficult passages regarding the end times. The reason for this is that most of the difficult passages are visions of what's happening in heaven. That's what most of Revelation is, and we also get quite a bit of that in Daniel. But when the Scriptures speak of what will happen on earth, it's quite simple.

The creeds give us a faithful summary. In the Apostles' Creed we confess concerning Jesus, that he “is seated on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From where He shall come to judge the living and the dead.” A little later we also confess, “I believe in … The Resurrection of the body, And the Life everlasting.”

The Nicene Creed is similar. We confess concerning Jesus, that he “is seated on the right hand of the Father. And he shall come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead: Whose kingdom shall have no end.” Again, a little later we confess, “And I look for the Resurrection of the dead, And the Life of the world to come.”

None of that is very complicated. Jesus is coming back. He will raise the dead. He will judge all mankind. He will transform his believing saints and bring them into everlasting life. He will also condemn unbelievers and cast them into everlasting contempt.

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This is what God has revealed. But it doesn't cover everything we want to know. There's basically just one other thing we really want to know. When? That's what everyone wants to know. But the "when" is not revealed to us.

But our fascination with the "when" leads us to misuse the signs. The Scriptures do reveal signs of the end, so we try to use the signs to at least get a general idea of when these things will take place. But that's not the point of the signs. They are not markers of time. Rather, they simply reveal that this world is not the way it should be. Whenever Christians try to interpret the signs in order figure out when the end will come, we always come up with the same answer: soon. And that is the right answer. Ever since Pentecost, Christians have been living with the expectation that the end is soon. And this is the right attitude. But it's not because we see more signs than we saw yesterday. It's because Jesus tells us he is coming soon (Rev. 22:20). The signs have always been there, because there are two common characteristics of almost every sign: they are general, and they are negative. They include wars, disasters, famines, earthquakes, blasphemies, false teachings, and, especially, persecution. Everything that is evil is a sign to us that the end is coming, because God is good, and this world is not the way God designed it to be. Therefore, he cannot allow it to continue like this forever. If this world is not the way God designed it to be, then it must be coming to an end. Our good and gracious God must be preparing something better. In this way, every evil thing is a sign that the end is coming.

We have been seeing these signs throughout the entire history of the Church. And they do seem to be intensifying. Christians have always been persecuted. It was that way in the book of Acts and in the centuries that followed. It has continued, right up to the present day. And it has actually multiplied in the last century or two. This reminds us that the end is getting closer, but it does not tell us how much longer we have, or how much worse it will get. It simply reminds us that Jesus is coming back. He will deliver his saints.

The context of the prophet Daniel is quite similar to *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*. Daniel was in exile in Babylon. He was probably a young man when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon destroyed Jerusalem, including the temple, and took many of the Jews as prisoners to Babylon. Daniel was among them. And he spent most, probably all, of the rest of his life in Babylon. His status there was up and down. He was elevated for interpreting dreams, but he was also thrown in a pit with a bunch of hungry lions. Others were thrown into a fiery furnace. Daniel knew what it meant to be persecuted for the Christian faith, and he saw others persecuted as well. So he wrote his book as an encouragement to other Old Testament Christians, especially those in exile.

John's circumstances were very similar when he wrote *The Revelation*. He was in exile on the island Patmos (1:9). This, also, was a persecution for his Christian faith. And others were suffering too. Chapters 2 and 3 of *The Revelation* contain seven letters from Jesus to seven churches that were facing tribulation and persecution. So both books were written from a similar context. They were written to similar people. And they have similar content.

The last six chapters of Daniel are apocalyptic like *The Revelation*. The word "apocalypse" simply means "a revealing." Both books reveal visions of heaven. So they encourage suffering Christians by revealing that, while tribulation increases on this earth, God our Father, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, are not blind to our suffering. In fact, they are very much in control of the situation, and they direct their holy angels to guard the saints. The theme of both books is the same: Jesus reigns supreme over all of heaven and earth. Even when it seems that sin, death, and the devil rule in chaos, they are all under the feet of Jesus. Jesus rules over all things, and the time of this present darkness is short. Life and light are coming soon.

We see all of this in this short reading from Daniel 12. First it speaks of the angel Michael. Michael is mentioned earlier in chapter 10 (13, 21). He's also mentioned in the New Testament in Jude (9), where he is identified as the "archangel," and also in Revelation (12:7). Here he is called "the great prince who has charge of your people." Michael is the fighting type of angel. The word angel simply means "messenger." So all angels are messengers of some kind. But at least some angels are also warriors. And Michael is the greatest of these. I suppose he would be the fourth most powerful being in the universe, behind only the three persons of the Holy Trinity. He is the general of the Lord's army. Whenever someone goes head-to-head with the devil, it is either Jesus, in which case there is no contest, or it's Michael, which is closer to a fair fight, but Michael always wins. In short, Michael is really awesome. And I mean that in the classical, literal sense of the word, not the modern slang sense. Michael is awesome. And we can rejoice in Michael, because our gracious Lord has sent him to fight the devil.

It's interesting that our Lord often chooses to work through means. He could do everything himself. And he could do everything directly. But he often chooses to work through means. He speaks to us through the Scriptures. He unites with us through the Sacrament of Baptism. He feeds us through the Sacrament of the Altar. He feeds the world through farmers and bakers and grocery store clerks. He protects our bodies through police and soldiers. He teaches us through parents and pastors and teachers. He heals us through doctors and nurses and pharmacists. He could do everything himself without any help. But he does most things through means. And when the devil needs a good smack down, our Lord sends Michael. Michael is awesome.

This is a great comfort to know, because we do not see Michael. We see tribulation. We see persecution. Or maybe I should say that we *should* see persecution, because it's there. Our Lord's saints are suffering all over the world, but we hear very little of it, unless, of course, there are Americans involved. But if our eyes are open to our suffering brothers in other parts of the world, or if that persecution intensifies in America, which I think is quite likely, we will find great comfort in Michael.

Michael's presence does not mean we will avoid all trouble. What we see in Daniel is that his presence and his warfare actually coincides with great trouble. This is actually a comfort, because it shows that the tribulation of the saints is never out of control. We have a defender.

And we should probably think about what, exactly, Michael defends. When I think of persecution, I think about what might happen to my body or my bank account. And I suppose Michael does care about these things. Our Lord Jesus cares about these things. And we know that Michael contended for the body of Moses (Jude 9). But the thing that really needs to be defended is our faith. What's the worst thing that can happen? Is it that the devil will destroy your body? Is it that the government will freeze your assets? Not even close. The worst thing that can happen is that we would deny our Lord Jesus and walk away from the faith. This is the devil's aim, and this is what our Lord sends Michael to defend. They may take your wealth. They may take your life. Our Lord will restore them a hundredfold, and that's an understatement. The devil wants to draw your fear, love, and trust away from the one true God. This is where the devil attacks. So this is where Michael defends and prevails over the devil. This is what it means that our Lord protects and keeps his saints.

Jesus guards his saints, so that their names might be written in his book of life. And if your name is written in his book, then you will be raised in glory at his return. If they take your life, fear not, Jesus will raise your body from the grave. And it won't be like it is now; it will be like

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Jesus' body is now. And if they take your home, “**Fear not, little flock, for it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom**” (Luke 12:32).

We also see this in this short passage from Daniel.

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever. (12:2-3)

Now, when Daniel says, “Many,” he doesn’t mean that in contrast to all. All mankind will be raised from the dust of the earth. The emphasis of the word “many” is simply that it’s going to be a great multitude of people. Jesus also teaches that “**an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment**” (John 5:28-29). So Jesus teaches the same thing as Daniel. There will be a day when every dead person in the history of the world will come to life. This passage from Daniel is one of the key Old Testament texts for the resurrection of all the dead.

And on that day, Jesus will judge all mankind. And not everyone will be rewarded. Some will rise “to shame and everlasting contempt.” Our common word for this is hell. And this is one of those things, especially in modern times, that makes us a little uncomfortable. The new doctrine of the world is that all people are basically good. The problem is that we didn’t consult God on this doctrine. We just decided it was so. Maybe the doctrine of hell and everlasting contempt makes sense to you. Maybe it doesn’t. I don’t know. But whether or not we like it doesn’t make it true or false. If we had a vote in the matter, many people would choose to not believe there is a hell. But that doesn’t make it go away. When you stop and think about it, that’s obvious. But in practice, we often believe only those things we want to believe. We should examine ourselves on this. Do we like everything we believe? If we do, we are probably believing some things that are not true. And it’s likely that there are things that are true that we disbelieve. If we like everything we believe, we are really making ourselves to be the source of truth. That is, we are making ourselves out to be gods. If there is nothing in your belief system that makes you uncomfortable, you are almost certainly in error. This, of course, doesn’t mean that everything you don’t want to believe is then true. That doesn’t make sense either. But if there is nothing in your belief system that makes you uncomfortable, the source of your system is not God, but you. The doctrine of hell and everlasting contempt is true, whether or not we want it to be true. It is true because God revealed it to be true.

But the Judgment Day is not something for us to be afraid of. Rather, we should look forward to it and pray for it. It will be our final deliverance. Jesus sent Michael and his angels to guard us until that day. “Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above.” To be wise means to trust in Jesus. To be wise means that we see beyond the circumstances of our lives. We look to Christ, and we find security in his promises. He has promised us his incorruptible life and his eternal kingdom. Are you wealthy? It won’t last. Are you poor? It won’t last. Are you healthy? It won’t last. Are you sick? It won’t last. The only things that will last are the things Jesus will give us on the Last Day: his incorruptible life and his eternal kingdom. The world can mock you. The world can call you a fool. They can persecute you and take every earthly possession you have. They cannot take Jesus from you. And on the Last Day you will “shine like the brightness of the sky above.” Jesus Christ is our wisdom. At the Judgment Day, all of his believing saints will be revealed to be wise.

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Dear saints, this is our great hope.

Jesus is coming back. He will raise the dead. He will judge all mankind. He will transform his believing saints and bring them into everlasting life. He will also condemn unbelievers and cast them into everlasting contempt.

Jesus has redeemed you. He bled and died for you. He rose from the dead and lives eternally as your King. Everyone who is baptized into Jesus Christ and everyone who believes in Jesus has their name written in his book of life. And they will shine in glory with Jesus when he returns. Amen.

He who testifies to these things says, “**Surely I am coming soon.**” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with [you] all. Amen. (Rev. 22:20-21)