

Please read Daniel 12:1-3

If you didn't know any better you might consider St. Paul a loser. He had all kinds of opportunities. He was well educated. He came from a good family. He was a Roman citizen, yet he gave everything up and suffered hunger and thirst, cold and poverty. He endured shipwreck and jail and finally was declared a criminal and executed. The same can be said for all the other apostles of the Lord. They suffered for their confession of Christ. They wound up with nothing. All but one were killed for being followers of Christ. The same can be said of martyrs for the faith both ancient and modern. But are Christians really a bunch of losers? No, that is not the case. Today we are talking about the Saints Triumphant. The theme of our sermon is a quote from St. Paul's Letter to the Romans, "*Thanks Be to God Who Gives Us the Victory through Our Lord Jesus Christ.*" This victory was foretold by the Old Testament Prophet Daniel. Our Lord through Daniel assures us that earthly distress will not harm us. Death will not defeat us and that glory lies in our future.

Daniel reminds us that Christians' lives on this earth will not always be pleasant. He speaks of distress. He is talking about stress, pressure. Beside the pressure exerted by doubts, fears and temptations, the Christian also will experience pressures from without. Often he will be misunderstood and suffer for doing the right thing. Jesus told His followers not to be surprised if the world hated them. If it hated Him, it would also hate them. Unbelievers accuse Christians of being unloving and narrow minded. They will call them ignorant and illogical. They will sneer, "How dare you say that faith in Christ is the only true religion" or "How can you believe in a six day creation. How stupid, I bet you also believe that the world is flat."

Opposition to the Christian faith can also lead to physical attacks. Christians might lose their jobs, their friends, their standing in the community because of their faith. Even today Christians are being jailed and murdered just because they are Christians.

The truth is, as the end of the world draws near life will not get any easier. At that time, as the end approaches, the Lord says there will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then.

However, the Lord promises that though His people suffer, they will not be destroyed. "But at that time your people- everyone whose name is found in the book, will be delivered. The expression "written in the book" is found elsewhere in the Bible. In Exodus 32 Moses speaks of God's people as being written in His book. In Revelation three we read of believers written in the book of Life. Jesus told His disciples, "Rejoice that your names are written in heaven." Those written in the book are believers of both the Old and New Testaments. What is it that they believe? They believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who was born of the virgin to take away the world's sins. Old Testament believers, like Daniel, believed in a Savior who would come. New Testament believers trust in the Savior Who has come.

God will surely protect those whom He has called to faith so that though they are distressed, they will not be destroyed. Our text mentions one of the ways He will protect them. "At that time Michael, the great prince, will arise." Michael is a mighty prince among the angels. What a comfort it is that, though Christians are sorely oppressed, the Lord still rules and has His mighty angels whom He will send to protect and deliver them. It is written, "For He will command His angels concerning you to guard you in all

your ways. God will do this because Jesus has taken away all our sins and has made us to be children of God.

Because God has given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ death cannot defeat us. The prophet wrote, "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. On the last day, when our Lord comes to judge all people, there will be a resurrection of the dead and the multitudes of bodies that sleep in the dust of the earth will arise. All the billions of people who have died will arise. There are some who deny the physical resurrection of the dead but the Bible is very clear on the subject. For that reason believers need not fear death. In God's eyes death is but a sleep. Yes, because of the blight of sin upon the world, they must die, yet, they are forgiven and they will awake to everlasting life. Jesus promised that those who believe in Him will not perish that even though they die; they will rise again to everlasting life.

How can this be? Death is the punishment of sin and death seems so permanent. When Jesus assumed the guilt of all sins and was punished for it on the cross, death lost its claim upon people. When Jesus arose He conquered death for all, As He arose again to eternal life, so will all who believe on Him.

But all those who refuse His forgiveness will also arise but not to life but to shame and everlasting contempt. Perhaps people have come knocking at your door telling you that there is no hell. That's what they hope. But those who refuse the love and mercy that God showed in sending Christ will die in their sins. If God is just, He must punish them. Outside of Christ there is no forgiveness. They will suffer the shame and everlasting contempt that an enemy of God deserves.

What will the eternal life of believers be like? Daniel gives us a peek. It will be glorious. "Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever." The wise are those who have been taught the way of salvation- those who believe on Jesus. Their eternal life will be one of pure joy and glory. In Psalm 16 it is written, "You will fill me with joy in Your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand." The shame and contempt believers feel for a little time now will be nothing compared to the glory that the Savior will share with them in eternity.

And something more; "Those who bring many to righteousness will shine like the stars. People become righteous before God with the righteousness of Christ. They receive this righteousness- this innocence before God by faith in Christ who is their righteousness. They come to that faith when Christians tell them about the Savior. Those who share Jesus will shine like the stars. Do you think your support of missions is useless? Do you think that out reach efforts are worthless? Obviously the Lord doesn't think so.

This Sunday we are speaking of the saints triumphant. Today we have received a look into the future. When we stand at the bedside of a dying Christian it might seem as they have lost out. When we stand beside the grave a loved one who has died in the Lord it might appear that all is lost. Today, our Lord has shown us the truth. Blessed are those who die in the Lord. They have joined the saints triumphant. God has given them the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

When we are tempted by depression because of the sorrows, the persecutions and the shame that come from following Jesus, may this message from

Daniel give us hope and comfort. The Lord is by our side. His angel is with us to defend us and when the time comes, to carry us into paradise. Because Jesus conquered sin, death and hell for us, we will be victorious. In Christ we are more than conquerors.

Let me close with a quote from St. Paul's letter to the Romans, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword. As it is written, "For your sake we face death all daylong; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who lived is." Amen.