

November 14 & 15, 2021

Daniel 12:1-3; Saints Triumphant

It's getting to be about that time again. It's getting close to being the Hallmark Christmas movies time. I went back to see when I last talked about the Hallmark movies in a sermon, it was already about 2 years ago. (I would have said – last year.) Yet, people are still making comments to me about watching Hallmark movies. For as many people who are making comments, I'm going to say that I am not alone in watching them. You know the kind of movie that I'm talking about? It takes about 10 minutes of watching one of them, you know how it is going to turn out. No matter what the plot is, everyone will live happily ever after.

Wouldn't it be great if real life was like that? This morning, God allowed Daniel to see exactly that. He wanted Daniel, the children of Israel and the believers of all ages, that we know that with Jesus we will live happily ever after. In Christ, we will be triumphant. So, today, we celebrate what the Christian Church calls "Saints Triumphant Weekend." It is a day that we remember those who have gone ahead of us to heaven and celebrate the victory that we have in Jesus.

Daniel has a young man when he was brought to Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar had begun to wage war against the Kingdom of Judah. His tactics were different than other nations when they waged war. His purpose in his first campaign against Judah was not to destroy them as a nation and a people, but rather he wanted to frighten the people and then make them a state of Babylon. As part of that plan, King Nebuchadnezzar had taken some of the best and brightest young men of Jerusalem and deported them to Babylon. There he would train them for government service. They received some of the best education available. Later the Babylonians would destroy the city of Jerusalem. Even though Daniel had not been an eyewitness of that destruction, he certainly would have known people that would have been.

Yet, even in exile God would continue to protect Daniel and the Israelites. In the first half of the book of Daniel, we see stories like the three men in the fiery furnace or Daniel in the Lion's Den. In spectacular ways God would show his people that he was in charge. In chapter 7, the tone begins to change. God gives Daniel several different visions. Through these visions, God tried to paint for him the broad picture of his plans for not just the nation of Israel, but also for all of mankind. In these visions, God also gives us a glimpse of the future. For us to see just how much God is for us, he let's us see what's going on behind the scenes. That's where Daniel starts today.

"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." The Archangel Michael is the general of God's army. There is a spiritual war that is raging all around us – the forces of evil trying to rip God's people away from him. It's a war that we don't even see. Not only does God say that it is raging now, but it's going to even get worse. You might look at these words and think how do those words comfort me? You might look at events that are unfolding in your life and you might begin to think – *Where is God?* God wants us to know that this battle is and is going to happen. This is no surprise to God. In fact, God is saying to us that this is all part of God's plan. We don't need to fear the outcome of this battle.

He wants us to know who is protecting us – **"Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise."** God assures his people that he knows our names and he has written them down in the Book of Life. God will rescue his people. **"But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered."** The next logical question is how do our names get into that book? We live in a day and an age when so much of what we say or do is recorded, archived, and preserved. One little slip up, lie or bad action from the past is enough to destroy a person. When God looks at our slip-ups, lies or bad deeds, what does he see. He sees sin that should destroy and crush us. But we also know that when God looks at us, he sees those sins washed away in the blood of Christ. He doesn't see those sins that should erase our names from that book for an eternity. He sees the names of his believers written in bold letters in that book. God wants us to know: **"For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us."** (Ps. 103:11-12) Or as our Second Lesson said this morning: **"Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more."**

Through the water of baptism and the word of God working in our hearts our sins are gone. God wants us to know that his plan for us has conquered death. There is a day coming when the believers of Jesus will be raised back to life. They will light up the heavens. **“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.”** Have you ever been outside at night far away from the lights of the city? Look up. What do you see? If you ever seen that, you can’t help but marvel. That’s what God wants us to marvel at – he will guard and protect his people so that they will **“shine like the brightness of the heaven.”** No more pain. No more tears. Being with God in all of us his glory and angels for an eternity.

Have you ever driven out west toward the mountains? From a distance, you might see something that looks like a dark bank of clouds. As you drive closer, you begin to see what looks like hills. The closer you get the bigger the hills seem to be. Finally, as you drive in those mountains, you see just how massive and majestic they are. Soon you find yourself standing there in awe.

You see that’s God wants us to see! He wants us to look at all the troubles and battles in this life and see the victory that lies ahead. He wants to give us a glimpse of the future. He wants us to see the end of the Hallmark movie and know that we will live happily ever after. May God help all of us to see that his plan is for us. Amen.