

**TRINITY EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
MINOCQUA, WI
SERMON FOR OCTOBER 11 &12, 2020**

Then at that time, Michael, the great prince who stands over your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress that has not happened from the first time that there was a nation until that time.

At that time your people will be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. Many who are sleeping in the dusty ground will awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame, to everlasting contempt. Those who have insight will shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who bring many to righteousness will shine like the stars forever and ever. Now you, Daniel, close up the words and seal the scroll until the time of the end. Many will continue running back and forth, and knowledge will increase.

I, Daniel, looked, and there were two others standing there, one on the near bank of the river and the other on the far bank of the river. Someone said to the man dressed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, "How long until the end of these amazing things?" Then I heard the man dressed in linen, who was above the waters of the river. He raised his right hand and his left hand to heaven and swore by him who lives forever that it would be for a time, times, and half a time, and then, when the rejection of the holy people is finished, all these things will be finished.

I myself heard, but I did not understand. So I said, "Lord, what will be the end result of these things?"

He said: Go, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end. Many will be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked will act wickedly. None of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand.

From the time when the regular daily offering is removed and an abominable thing that causes desolation is set up, there will be one thousand two hundred ninety days. Blessed is the one who waits and reaches one thousand three hundred thirty-five days.

But you, go on your way to the end. You will rest and rise to your assigned inheritance at the end of the days. (Daniel 12, EHV)

Near the finish line of his life, at the very end of the last vision he received, at the very end of the book of Daniel, come these words. ***"There will be a time of distress that has not happened from the first time that there was a nation until that time."*** (v. 1b) Jesus authenticates Daniel's words with his own in Matt 24:21,22: ***"Then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now-and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened."***

Sounds like it will be tough. Good luck to the people who live through all that. What time does the game start?... Seriously, though, when will this time of distress be and who will be affected? It's a reference to the end times, in which we are living. Yes, we are living in the end times. All of the signs of the end spoken of by Jesus are present: false Christs, wars and rumors of wars. Famines, earthquakes, natural disasters, hatred for the Gospel and for Christians, and even among Christians, there is widespread apathy.

Just look at the news/on the internet/on TV. Chaos, upset, and a sense of spinning out of control are everywhere. International conflicts in every corner of the globe, wildfires out west, hurricanes, killer storms, COVID-19, our divided nation approaches a hotly contested election. Persecution of Christians is widespread and well-known. Christians the world over been infected with a virus, the virus of apathy. So many claim the name of Christ, but refuse to actually live the faith; they talk the talk, but don't walk the walk. Love has grown cold: love for God, love for neighbor. We are in the end times, and the world is rushing, stumbling, staggering to the finish line. It's an ugly scene, horrific, terrifying even.

We are pilgrims in an unholy land. How will we make it through? Can we hold on to faith, to Jesus, as we head for the finish line? What comfort do we have as we head for the finish line of life/of this world?

“But at that time –specifically on Judgment Day/the Last Day – ***your people will be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book.***” (v. 1c) What book? Literal, figurative, ebook, audiobook? It’s the Book of Life. John describes this Book further when he speaks about heaven in Revelation 21:27: ***“Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.”*** This book contains the list of all those who will share in the glory of heaven. This is one book we've never read nor ever seen, and there is only one copy, but it will be the only book that matters on Judgment Day.

The question is natural: "Is my name there?" Let's answer this question with other questions. "Did Jesus die for you?" Listen to the words of John in his first epistle: ***“If anybody does sin*** (What an understatement! Who of us is exempt from sinning? Who of us couldn't already recount sins of thought, word and deed that we've committed against God just today, in the last hour, the last few moments?. We are deeply in debt to him for our sins), ***we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense--Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.***” (2:1) Did you catch the words "our sin," the whole world"? Yes, Jesus died for you and your sins!

Here's another question: "Were you baptized?" That is, has the Holy Spirit had a chance to work in your heart through Word and Sacraments? St. Paul declares: ***“We were therefore buried with (Christ) through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life”*** (Romans 6:4). We share in the blessings of Christ's death through baptism - forgiveness and eternal life are ours by faith. Yes, dear Christians, your names are written in the book of life, not because of anything you've done, but because of God's incomparable love for you in Christ. They are written there not in ink, but in blood, the blood of our Savior. No question, no doubt about it.

On the Last Day, Daniel says, ***“Many who are sleeping in the dusty ground will awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame, to everlasting contempt.”*** Jesus again validates Daniel's words in John 5:28,29: ***“A time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear (my) voice and come out--those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned.”*** This is the resurrection from the dead. All who have died will rise from the dead, believers and unbelievers. Souls will rejoin bodies and everyone will stand before the Lord for judgment and then sent either to heaven or hell for all eternity. But those whose names are written in the book need not fear. God’s people – and that is who we are – will be delivered. Delivered to our final destination of heaven through Christ our Savior.

In 1 Thessalonians 4 he describes in great detail some of the events of the day when Jesus. It will be amazing, incredible, frightening for those not ready. But not for the people of the Book whose names are written in the Book of Life. Paul says that in the end, at the end of it all, ***“We will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.”*** (vv. 17b,18)

More encouragement is offered here in Daniel’s vision: ***“Then at that time, Michael, the great prince who stands over your people, will arise.”*** A brief glimpse into the spirit world – not vampires and zombies (which are not real) and devils and demons (which are real), but angels. Who is this Michael? He's mentioned only five times in the Bible - three times in Daniel, once in Jude where he is identified as an archangel, and once in Revelation. He is one of the highest ranking, if not the highest ranking angel to whom the Lord has given much power and an all-important task - the protection of God's people.

This matches other descriptions of angels found in Scripture. Their purpose is defined in Hebrews 1:14 ***“Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?”*** Angels serve God's people primarily by protecting them. Psalm 91:11: ***“He will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.”*** Also, Psalm 34:7: ***“The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.”*** Does the Lord need the angels' help to watch over his people? Certainly not. But he is pleased to give us the added assurance that the presence and protection of faithful angels brings.

By the way...there’s an angel speaking to Daniel in chapter 12. This is the end of a vision that started back in chapter 10. Listen to the description of the angel who speaks to Daniel. He is not named, but he is described as ***“a man dressed in linen. Around his waist he was wearing a belt made from gold of Uphaz. His body was like***

topaz, and his face looked like lightning. His eyes were like burning torches, and his arms and feet were like polished bronze. The sound of his words was like the sound of an army." (vv. 5,6) There is only one angel described like this elsewhere in the Bible, in Revelation 1. It's the Lord Jesus himself offering comfort and protection.

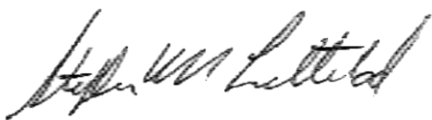
As we come to the end of our study of Daniel, and of our study of chapter 12, a couple more things. What will people be like as we head toward the finish line, toward the end of all things? In a word: lost. Jesus tells Daniel to **"close up the words and seal the scroll until the time of the end."** (v. 4) Not to hide the message, but to preserve it. Everything we need to know about faith and life, heaven and hell, is all here. What makes life worth living and death worth dying is here, and nowhere else. But many will go elsewhere. **"Many will continue running back and forth, and knowledge will increase."** (v. 4) In other words, everywhere, anywhere but here/the Word of God. We touched on this last week when we talked about so many people today saying, "I am spiritual, but not religious" that is, "I decide what's best/what works for me spiritually." It's a continuing fulfillment of the tragic prediction by the prophet Amos: **"Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it."** (Amos 8:12)

Final thought/question: What should we do? It's a confusing, frightening world. So uncertain. This uncertainty is highlighted by the fact that it isn't possible to know exactly what is meant by some of what's here in chapter 12 (and elsewhere in Daniel and Revelation, for that matter). Daniel seeks to understand, and clarity is not provided by references to **"a time, times, and half a time"** and **"the abominable thing that causes desolation"** as well as references to **"1290 days"** and **"1335 days."** It's best to consider the time periods in a symbolic manner. **"Time, times, and half a time"** equals 3 ½, which is half of 7, the Biblical number of perfection. 1290 days and 1335 days is slightly longer than 3 ½ years. Simply put, this time of great distress will be limited, and is under God's control.

But still, we want to understand. Daniel wants to understand. But Jesus says to Daniel (and to us), **"Go... because the words are closed up and sealed until the time of the end. Many will be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked will act wickedly. None of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand."** (vv. 9,10) And again in v. 12, **"But you, go on your way the end."** People will come to faith through Word and Sacrament, through the Word-filled witness of believers, and many will still reject God's truth. As C.S. Lewis wrote: **"Really, there are only two kinds of people in the world: those who learn to say, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God will say, 'Thy will be done.'"**

What should we do then? **"Go your way."** **"Go your way to the end. You will rest and rise to your assigned inheritance at the end of the days."** (v. 13) Keep living joyful lives of faithful service to the Savior. Keep believing, keep growing in the faith, keep sharing the good news of Jesus. Every day, people reach the finish line of their individual lives. We need to reach as many as possible while there still is time. Whom will you reach today, tomorrow? Got someone in mind? Got a plan? Just go and do, go and tell, go on your way. God will place people in your lives who need the Gospel of Jesus. He already has.

Go your way. Go with confidence and courage. By the grace of God, you are headed for heaven, and whether you are still here on this earth when Jesus returns or already in his presence, you **"who have insight will shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who bring many to righteousness will shine like the stars forever and ever."** (v. 3) Even now you are a saint. You are triumphant in Christ. Your name is in the book of life.



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