

In Nomine Jesu

Prayer Upon Entering Church: Almighty and ever-living God, since You have given exceedingly great and precious promises to those who believe, grant us so perfectly and without all doubt to believe in Your Son Jesus Christ that our faith in Your sight may never be reproved; through our Savior, Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Text

Daniel 12:1-3

"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. ²And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. ³And 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. (a reference to the work of pastors)

The Sermon

The end times are not something we think of often as Lutherans. We are much better at the parables – much better at the prophecies – much better at the prayers – than we are at the predictions of the end of the world. So when some “new” theology comes alluring – like the Left Behind series or some other aberration of millennialism – some Lutherans are suckered in because they don’t know any better. The readings today, however, focus our attention squarely on the teachings from both the Old Testament and the New Testament on the end times.

And the book of Daniel provides the most memorable of the visions of the end times in the Old Testament. The story of Daniel is set at the time of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar and the Persian kings Cyrus and Darius in the mid sixth century B.C.

Daniel – the hero of the book – was brought to the court of King Nebuchadnezzar as a captive from Jerusalem in the first deportation in 605 B.C. The first of the stories of Daniel really involved his three friends: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, whom you probably remember from catechism class as the three young men thrown into the fiery furnace and who was saved by God because of their faithfulness.

The book continues with Daniel interpreting dreams for the kings of Babylon and Persia, much like Joseph in Egypt before him. Daniel interpreted the “handwriting on the wall” – the *mene, mene, tekel, upharsin* – indicating the demise of the Chaldean Empire and the genesis of the Medo-Persian Empire. Eventually Daniel survived being thrown into the lions’ den. All of these stories in the first six chapters are told to exemplify Daniel’s faithfulness to the Savior-God even in the worst of times.

Our text today is Daniel’s vision of the end times. Daniel – standing by the Tigris River – saw the archangel Gabriel. Gabriel spoke to Daniel about the succession of kings on earth from the time of the story - about 538 B.C. – to the second century B.C. Gabriel spoke about the battles by the angels in heaven led by another archangel named St. Michael, fighting on behalf of God’s People. All of this would culminate in a great tribulation that would precede the end of time.

On that final day, the People of Israel who still lived would be delivered from their oppressors and many of the dead would be raised – some to everlasting life – and some to everlasting contempt. Interestingly, it was this passage from Daniel that Jesus referred to as He walked out of the Temple one day with His disciples.

The disciples were admiring the building of the Temple constructed by King Herod the Great and they were impressed by the large stones – 37 feet long – 18 feet wide – and 12 feet thick – massive and permanent. And Jesus responded by prophesying to them that *not one of these large stones will be left on top of another. Each one will be thrown down.* (Mt 13:3) And so it is today. If you were to visit Jerusalem today – this is the scene of destruction you would face on the Temple Mount.

Jesus spoke about “*the Abomination of Desolation*” – “*the Disgusting Thing*” (Mk 13:14) – language from Daniel referring to the pagan statues that would be set up in that very Temple by the Romans as the sign of the

end of the Jewish nation. Sometime after these signs, Jesus said, a time of suffering would be followed by a time when all creation would be dark. And then – finally – Jesus promised He would return.

It is one of those times in the Gospels when we see Jesus speaking with certainty about Judgment Day and the end of the world. But – Jesus say-
“*Be alert - because you don’t know when the Owner of the House will return.*” (Mk 13:36) This return of Christ at the end of time – like the resurrection of the body from the grave – is a chief tenet of the Christian Faith.

In the Nicene Creed only a few moments ago we confessed: “*He will come again in glory to judge both the living and the dead – whose Kingdom will have no end.*” And in the Lord’s Prayer only moments from now we will pray: ***Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done – on earth as it is in heaven.*** All of these are statements reflecting our belief as a Church that Christ will come again in glory at the end of the world. But what does that promise mean for us today?

It is the basis of all our hope for the future. Although we may not face in our lifetimes the end of the world as we know it – but don’t be too sure of that – because all the signs of the end have been fulfilled – this much is sure: we will certainly face our own death – and that of those we love. And all of us must appear before the Judgment Throne of Christ. And none of our excuses – not one – will hold water – about why we fell away – didn’t go to church – denied our Confirmation vows – and forsook the purity of doctrine to soothe our itching ears.

And some of us will face great suffering because of our faith in Christ as well. The book of Daniel speaks of the faithful being purified – cleansed – and refined. The author of Hebrews speaks of abuse and persecution. And Jesus speaks of martyrdom. I gotta tell you this morning: **It is not easy to be a Christian. If it is easy – it’s because you’re not practicing the Faith.**

But the promise of the Bible is the promise of the Resurrection and the promise of the return of Christ in glory. It is the promise of love triumphing over evil – it is the promise of faithfulness conquering indifference – it is the promise of joy overcoming despair.

The Savior-God speaks in these visions of the end times to Daniel about hope and healing and redemption. **Our call is to be faithful.** **Not** to entertain people in our worship. **Not** to pack the membership rolls of the congregation with numbers and paperweight. **Not** to have more in attendance this year than last. **But to be faithful** – until He comes – even if it's on New Year's Eve or during the second week of deer camp. **To be found faithful** when the end comes.

To live each day as if it were our last. Not in laziness and defeat – but rather with joy and hope – looking forward to that time when we shall see God face to face. Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds + in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!