

SAINTS TRIUMPHANT SUNDAY

Cross of Glory Evangelical Lutheran Church

They Will Shine like Stars

Daniel 12:1-3

"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.² Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.³ 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.

As a pastor, I have had the opportunity to speak with many people who have recently lost a loved one. It is a very special part of my ministry. It's special because I have the opportunity to bring comfort to hurting hearts that can only come from the pages of God's Holy Word. If I did not know what the Bible said about life and death and those who die in the Lord, I would not look forward to speaking with grieving families. I would have nothing to say. Simply telling someone to remember the good times they had with that loved one is shallow comfort, at best. We need more than that. And thankfully, God has given us more comfort. He's given us his Word, such as the passage we have today from the book of Daniel. Based on these verses, we can say with all confidence regarding those who have died in the Lord: *"They Will Shine like the Stars."*

Daniel's book is a unique and special book in the Old Testament. His book includes some beloved stories of heroic acts of faith—the three men in the fiery furnace and Daniel in the lions' den. That is only half the book, however. The second half of Daniel's book contains prophecy regarding the future. Daniel, by the Holy Spirit, was given the ability to see into the future and write down in detail what was coming for this world. Our reading today comes from the end of that prophecy. It gives us a glimpse of life in the end times. And it isn't all pretty. Daniel writes, *"There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then."* The distress that Daniel writes of is a result of sin in this world. Jesus spoke of this distress when he told his disciples about the signs of the end times—wars, natural disasters, false teaching and persecution.

We certainly see this kind of distress around us every day. Life in a sin filled world is not always pleasant. More than one person has decided to stop listening to the evening news because they find it too depressing. There are stories of war, violence, natural disasters—and that is only the first five minutes. The distress caused by sin isn't confined to the evening news, however. It creeps into our day to day life as well. We face persecution because of our Christian faith. We experience hurt and pain because of other's sinful words and actions. We sense deeply the pain of life in this sin-filled world when those we love suffer from illness and disease and perhaps even die.

But you didn't come hear this morning to hear about the pain and sorrow this world brings us, right? Today is not Saints in Distress Sunday. Today is Saints Triumphant Sunday. And so how

can we speak about triumph when things we see around us are filled with distress. We can speak of triumph because God's Word speaks of triumph. Yes, Daniel looked into the future and saw great distress. But he also saw this: *"But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered."* For those whose name are found in the book of life, the distress of living in this world will only be temporary. They will be delivered.

And who are they that are written in the book? They are those who have been washed of their sins through the blood of Jesus Christ. There is no way we can talk about the saints triumphant without first discussing the triumph of Christ on the cross. Jesus saw the distress of his people living in this world and he acted in love. He entered this sin-filled world and brought life and light. He did this through his innocent suffering and death and through his triumphant resurrection on Easter morning. Trusting in Christ as your Savior from sin, you can be certain that your name is found in the book of life. You are declared forgiven—not guilty of your sins. That is what it means to be a saint in the first place. Being a saint does not mean that you have performed some extraordinary acts of righteous living. Being a saint means that you trust in Christ to cover you with his righteousness and give you the status of a holy child of God, in spite of your sinfulness. Knowing that you have that special status before God is a triumph in and of itself.

It is a triumph that you can enjoy every day of your life. Think of it: Your name is written in the book of life. In the end, you have the eternal victory. Doesn't this truth make the problems that you face a little more manageable? Doesn't this truth make the stress in your life a little less overwhelming? You can be certain that no matter what this sinful world throws at you, God and his angels are there for you to deliver you from every trial. The last and most gracious deliverance God brings for his saints is when he sends his angels to bring their souls safely home to heaven, awaiting the day of the great resurrection—the day that Daniel prophecies about when he writes: *"Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt."* Thank God that though his Son Jesus, we are certain that we will be among those who awake to everlasting life.

The final verse of our text emphasizes the glorious future that awaits God's children. Daniel prophecies: *"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."* It's a beautiful picture that Daniel uses. Think of the wonder of a starry sky on a clear night. Then think of each of those stars as God's people who shine with the brightness of Christ's love and forgiveness. And just as there are especially bright stars in the night sky, there are especially bright stars among the saints as well. Daniel writes of the special brightness of those who "lead many to righteousness." Isn't that ultimately our goal on this earth? Having come to know the blessings that we have through faith in Christ, we seek to share those blessings with others and pray that the Spirit might use us to lead others to one day shine like stars by our sides in glory.

That's what really matters in this world. That is the kind of legacy that any of us would be overjoyed to leave behind. In a few minutes, we will have the opportunity to see a memorial tribute that was assembled using names and pictures submitted by the members of our congregation. These are just a few of those who are included among the stars of Daniel chapter 12. For those of you who submitted the name of a loved one, what is it about that person that still makes them shine for you today? Isn't it more than simply the memories of special moments you shared with them? Isn't it the way they actually made you a better person? The really is no greater way for someone to do this than by leaving a legacy of faith. That you might believe as

they believed. That you might trust in Christ as they trusted in Christ. That you might receive the crown of life as they have received the crown of life.

On this Saints Triumphant Sunday, we let's give glory to God for the triumph that he has given to us through his Son Jesus. Without Christ, we would have no reason to celebrate today. Let's also give thanks to God for the faithful who have gone before us, who fought the good fight of faith and are now at peace at their Savior's side. And let's leave inspired to go out and share the good news—to do all we can to lead many to righteousness so that they, too, can know and experience the glory of the Saints Triumphant. **Amen.**

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