Daniel 12:1-3: 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. 2Many who are sleeping in the dusty ground will awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame, to everlasting contempt. 3Those 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.

There are just times when you give thanks to the Lord for what his Word teaches you. Today is one of those days. Another member of St. Paul’s has been called home to be with the Lord. Now, normally in the Pastoral ministry such a thing, holding a funeral, is just what a Pastor is called on to do. But I have noticed over the years, as I have served you, as I have gotten to know all of you, as I have become attached to all of you, I have noticed a slight change. There are more emotions involved. You have become more than just members, you are friends, fellow believers in the Lord, and treasured souls that I have now known for 39 years. Yep, a few more emotions involved when it comes to such moments.

That’s why you give thanks for Sundays like this and texts like we have before us. This Sunday is known as Saints Triumphant. It is a day when we contemplate all the more what it is that the Lord says, reveals and promises when it comes to things we don’t really have any experiential knowledge with. It is a day that reminds us to trust and have faith in the Lord and what he promises, because sometimes it is those promises, those wonders of God’s grace and love that simply get us through this “v**alley of the shadow of death”** we walk in. Our theme for today will be: **THE PROMISE OF HEAVEN.**

We have before us the Book of Daniel. Daniel was a young man taken as a captive to Babylon during the first wave of captives. The people of Judah are captives because they refused, that is the majority refused, to do something as simple as “You shall have no other gods.” They had been worshiping false gods and idols for the past 200 years or better and it is clear that they are not going to stop. All of this brought on by faithless religious leaders who assured everyone that God is love and they had nothing at all to worry about. God is love and they were Abraham’s descendants, nothing they did could be wrong.

They were wrong. And so it is that in about 606 B.C. the nation is conquered and the beginning of the, captivity that God promised was upon them. Now remember, the only reason that the people are going to get to return to their land and their worship life is because of the promise of the Savior. God had promised a Savior through the descendants of David of the tribe of Judah. So the Lord, for the sake of this promise, will continue his promises of grace and mercy to the faithful, the small minority of those who did not worship idols but stayed faithful to the Lord.

Daniel is one of the faithful. Despite being carried off as a young man, Daniel maintains his faith and is a wonderful example of faith even in the midst of hardship. Daniel will survive the defeat of the Babylonians, and the rise of the Medo-Persian Empire. Daniel will serve these governments all his life but not without some difficulty. It is Daniel who will get thrown into the lion’s den and walk out unharmed all because of God’s grace to this faithful believer in a foreign land.

The other role Daniel played was that of prophet. Daniel was a spokesman for the Lord. Not only did he foresee and foretell the fall of the kings he served but Daniel was also given prophecies of times yet to come. Daniel’s prophecies are so accurate that many liberal scholars of today simply proclaim that there is no way this book could have been written by him at the time he lived, it must have been written by men much later on. They are wrong. It was written by Daniel with the help and guidance of the Lord.

Of particular interest to us are the words of our text. This is the end of Daniel’s prophecies and yes, Daniel has indeed prophesied concerning the end of all things. So we see in Daniel’s words the Day of Judgment brought on by the Lord and the very results of that day.

Our text starts with these words: “**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.”**

Here is what we know. Michael is simply a prince of angels. I can’t tell you much more other than to say that if God wants to have a hierarchy among his angels, God can. Michael is evidently an angel who serves and oversees the believers of the Lord. Michael comes because of great distress found in the world. But make no mistake, Michael comes for the sake of the believers, to take care of believers. I have no doubt in my mind, even though it is not said here, that Michael actually comes with the Lord Jesus to bring an end to the world.

Here is why I say that. Jesus himself tells us in Matthew and in reveals in the Epistles what we can expect. As the time of the end draws near, there will be distress, persecution of such terrible nature that even those with their names written in the Book of Life are thinking of deserting the Lord. That’s why the Lord comes, for their sake, to keep his promise of salvation for their sake. So things will get pretty bad and then one day, all will hear a trumpet sound and with that trumpet sound the very world and its elements will melt away. And there, standing before us is the Lord, who comes with those already in heaven, comes to bring an end to this world and the beginning of his eternal and perfect kingdom of heaven. Again, these things said in Daniel are in complete accord with all that is said in all of Scripture concerning the great Day of Judgment.

Then comes the next line of Daniel, again still in complete accord with all else that Scripture says. **“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 and everlasting contempt“.** With these words we simply understand that Judgment Day has come. We are told there will be a general resurrection, everyone will be raised. But pay attention. There are those who will be raised to everlasting life. There is no doubt this is a reference to the eternal life and salvation provided by the Lord Jesus for all who believe. Please note even Jesus affirms the truth of these words. He told us in our Gospel reading: **“Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and will come out. Those who have done good will rise to live, but those who have practiced evil will rise to be condemned.”** There is no difference between what Daniel says and what Jesus says.

So what is the full picture of what we know? We are told believers, those who have trusted in the sacrificial atonement and salvation of Jesus will be resurrected. They will be made physically alive and from that point on, in a very physical way, will live with the Lord in his glorious and wonderful kingdom forever and ever, the new heaven and the new earth that God will create.

In the Book of Revelation we are given further glimpses into what God has prepared for us. We are told we are with God. We have been clothed with his righteousness. Actually the words that describe this are fascinating. They say, **“They have washed their robes and are made white in the blood of the Lamb.”** Those words make it clear that the victorious saints in heaven are not there because of what they did. It says they are there because the blood of Jesus made them pure and holy, yes, granted them the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Dear people, here is the very promise of the redemption of Jesus. That we are forgiven, cleansed, washed, renewed and made new in Jesus. All because Jesus won the victory and Jesus, by grace through faith alone, grants eternal life and salvation. Just before these words about washing, a couple of lines up it says, **“Salvation come from our God, who sits on the throne, and from the Lamb.”** That’s the song of those in white robes, those before the throne of God. They are there because of Jesus.

And then the section goes on and describes further what this heaven is like. It says, **“Because of this they are in front of the throne of God, and they serve him day and night in his temple. He who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. They will never be hungry or thirsty ever again. The sun will never beat down on them, nor will any scorching heat, for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd. He will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”**

That’s just a small picture of what heaven will be like. What I can tell you is this. This is the promise and revelation of God. This is the hope and comfort of all who believe, that we depart this world and we are with the Lord. At first, we are simply with the Lord in spirit but when the Judgment Day comes we are given back our physical bodies and we will live and rejoice with God forever. Every single believer, starting with Adam himself and going to the very last soul to be saved, is given this promise and hope of heaven. Our loved ones who have believed, there is no doubt, they are with the Lord, singing his praise, basking in his total and complete love, lacking nothing but found in a place of complete joy, wonder and marvel. Nothing bad, hurtful, harmful or distressing will ever touch them again. They are with the Lord and when the Lord returns, we are told they are coming with him, the first, in our sight, to be resurrected.

Now, we are not yet completely finished with what is said here. There are a few more points to be touched on. The unbelievers, yes, we need to speak of what is said here by both Daniel and Jesus. **“And some to shame, to everlasting contempt,”** and **“those who have practiced evil will rise to be condemned.”** If you would, let me just quickly share with you what Revelation says of this group. It is described in these words, **“Then the angel swung his sickle over the earth, and he harvested the earth’s vine and threw it into the great winepress of God’s wrath. The winepress was trampled outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress, as high as the horses’ bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia.”** I’ll just let you contemplate the horror of those words and say nothing more other than this is what God’s Word clearly says and proclaims of those who refuse to believe in the Lord, Jesus, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Now to our last verse of Daniel. He says, **“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.”** Again, this is a picture, a prophetic picture of the believers. The word insight implies wisdom and knowledge. God’s Word says, **“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”** Indeed, Jesus tells us he is the very light of the revelation of the truth of God. And we, with faith will shine with this light of Jesus. We are clothed with his glory and taken into his kingdom. All because we believed. We trusted what God’s Word says. We believed the message of sin and we hoped in the joy of forgiveness found in Jesus. This is not an easy task. The devil, the world and often our own sinful flesh oppose this gift of faith and salvation. But God continues to send his Holy Spirit to call, gather, enlighten and strengthen us in this precious truth of Jesus. In him and because of Jesus, the promise of eternal life is ours.

Note also the last line. It literally says that when you share that message of Jesus you will shine like the stars forever. I chuckle at those who think this is only speaking to those who are pastors and teachers of the Lord. In truth, it is speaking of every single believer. Every single believer can’t help but share the wonder of Jesus. We may only get to share with our children or family or nearest friends, but that doesn’t matter. You see, true faith can’t keep Jesus to itself. True faith, will share and point to the Savior. True faith is a light to this world of ours. This verse is really just speaking of those who have insight, who have grasped the wonder and joy of salvation and then just can’t help but share as God gives them opportunity. It is just another way of speaking of the glory of salvation. To Daniel we will be stars in the forever sky and to John in Revelation we are those in white robes before the throne of God singing his praises.

There you have it. The joy of what God has promised, given and poured out in Jesus. Ours when called from this life and ours should we be around when Jesus returns. Heaven is our home and eternal life is ours. Amen.