

Imagine for a moment that you are God's people packing up your stuff to leave the land of Egypt to go to the Promised Land. You have to pack light. You need to carry enough food and water. There is a sense of excitement as you join two million of your people and follow your leader Moses. You know the Lord your God is with you because he is guiding you through the desert with a pillar of fire at night and a cloud by day. You are saints triumphant on the way to the Promised Land the Lord has prepared for you.

Trouble comes. The Egyptians send an army out to bring you back, an army with chariots and horses that will kill many of your people, including women and children. You see behind you the dust rising from the chariots and horses. You see the Red Sea in front of you and there is no escape. Instead of trusting in the Lord and listening to your leader Moses, you cry out in fear, "Why have you brought us out into the desert to die? Why didn't you leave us die in the land of Egypt?" Then you hear your leader Moses say to you, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again." The waters of the Red Sea miraculously divide. You walk across on dry ground. The Egyptians try to follow after you. The waters of the Red Sea drown the entire Egyptians army.

On this Saints Triumphant Sunday we want you to think of yourself as God's holy and special people marching to the Promised Land where you will shine like the brightness of the heavens basking in the glory of the Lord. We also want you to realize that there will be troubles that come to you just as troubles came to God's people who were going to the land of milk and honey. The Lord already knows the troubles you will experience. He also has planned how he will deliver you when these troubles come. Forrest Gump said, "Life is like a box of chocolates" because you never know what you will get. That's not true for God's triumphant saints. You know that life will bring you trouble, but it will also bring you amazing deliverances from the Lord.

What does your future hold? According to these words of Daniel there will be a time of great distress for God's people who are living in the last days. "There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then." Daniel received visions of great nations rising in power and then falling. He heard the Lord predict a nation would rise up and desecrate the temple of the Lord and set up an abomination that causes desolation. In 70 AD the mighty Roman legions entered Jerusalem and destroyed the temple of the Lord. They mounted the Roman eagle in the temple of the Lord and poured pigs blood on the altar. Thousands of people lost their lives through famine and sword. Jesus told his disciples when they saw this abomination that causes desolation to take place in their life time they were to get out of Jerusalem and flee to the hills. Yet, those times of great distress were not as bad as the times that we will face as the end draws near.

Perhaps you have heard people describe the world in which we live as a madhouse. It may be a madhouse but it is also a war zone where Satan and his minions are geared up for a battle to deceive as many people as possible before the end comes. Ephesians says that we do not fight against flesh and blood but "spiritual wickedness in high places." We find comfort in these words of Daniel, "At that time Michael the great prince who protects your people will arise." In the days of Daniel there was a battle taking place. It pitted the angels of God against Satan and his evil angels. Satan's troops wanted the Babylonian government to inflict as much

pain as possible upon God's people. Satan wanted to make sure that God's people who were held captive in Babylon never returned to the land of Palestine. Satan wanted to make sure that the Savior Jesus Christ did not come into the world to redeem mankind. But Michael, the archangel, a 5 star general, was God's agent to overthrow those Satanic schemes and to guarantee that God's people would return to Palestine. Thus, good angels, invisible spirit beings, exist to protect God's people. As this world gets closer to the end, and things get worse for Christians, Michael will again intervene on behalf of God's people. God's angels are watching over you. Take heart, we have our back side covered.

In Matthew 24 Jesus also speaks of a time of great distress coming for the church. "For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now, never to be equaled again." There is stress that comes to us in daily battles of life, and there are times of great distress. Do you ever find yourself stressing out because of the news? We see the effects of Adam's sin in our world. We are living in a dying world where hurricanes take human life and cause much suffering, diseases and infections enter our bodies. If only there was a cure for cancer? We live in a world where the daily news includes car accidents, shootings, and stabbings in our own community. You cannot think because you are a Christian you will be spared from the problems the rest of the world faces. Because you follow Jesus you can expect the last days to be even more difficult for you because of the cross that you carry for Jesus and the concern you have for people and where they will spend eternity.

Both the prophet Daniel and our Lord Jesus spoke about an abomination of desolation that would occur in the history of the church. Daniel predicted in chapter 11 that the "armed forces will rise up to desecrate the temple fortress and abolish the daily sacrifices." The daily sacrifices in the temple stopped when the Roman legions destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD. All through history these temple sacrifices pointed to Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. In these last days, Satan will do everything in his power to lead large numbers of people away from trusting in Jesus' sacrifice for their salvation. He does this through false religions and false teaching that rises up within the church. Some of the largest and most successful churches in our country spend lots of time coaching and cajoling people on how to live their lives and very little time on showing people the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Consider the many entertainment churches of today.

How will we survive the last days when saints of God are attacked by forces without the church and forces within the church? How will we survive days of trouble when we feel like we are being afflicted the way Job was afflicted? Oh, what comfort we find in these words of Daniel, "But at that time your people- everyone whose name is written in the book- will be delivered." When the times of great distress come, you know that the Lord has already planned a way to deliver you from those difficult times.

God has a book—the Book of Life. It's his family album. Everyone who is in this book will be saved. So how do you get your name in this book? You can't write it in yourself because you don't have access to this book. It resides in the vault of God's holy heart. Our sin-stained hands can never grasp this book any more than bare hands are able to grab a bar of gold that's sitting in a fire. And even if we could get our hands on this book, we don't have the right kind of ink to inscribe our name on its sacred pages. God must do the inscribing and he does so with the ink of Jesus' blood, for if we were to sign our names in our own blood, it would only leave

offensive blotches on the page, which God would then tear out. Only Jesus' pure blood, shed for the sins of the world, has a quality which is pleasing to the holy God.

All of the deliverances the Lord brings into your life now culminate in the ultimate deliverance that comes for God's saints on the last day. "Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life, and others to shame and everlasting contempt." The earth is filled with the bodies of people who have died and been reduced to dust. Some day this multitude of bodies will be raised to life again. Jesus said, "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out." Some will be raised to everlasting life others to everlasting shame and contempt. There will be a big difference between the body of the Christian vs the non-Christian on Judgment Day. Speaking of non-Christians the Bible says, "Their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched, and they shall be an abhorring to all flesh." They shall be an abhorring means no one will want to be near them. Ugliness, shame, and pain will fill the bodies of the unbelievers. On Judgment day their bodies will be awakened, resurrected and reunited with their souls in hell. Shame and everlasting contempt. On earth they avoided a relationship with Christ. Now, they will hear God say: "Very well, you wanted to be without me; now be without me-forever!" Many people feel that the God of the universe would never do anything like that. They view God as loving but spineless. But the same God who, in the time of Noah threw oceans of water over the mountain tops, drowning a whole world of screaming people, the same God who scorched Sodom and Gomorrah in a hurricane of fire, the same God who fed queen Jezebel to the dogs, still reigns in heaven. And He has told us what he has done before He will do again. This should move us to reach out to our friends and family, to tell them of Jesus and how he has saved us from this horrific future.

But for us, a much brighter future. A New You is Coming. Our body will be changed. We will not receive a different body; we will receive a renewed body. A glorified body. Just as God can make an oak out of a kernal or a tulip out of a bulb, he makes a new body out of the old one. A body without corruption. A body without weakness

"Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever." Saints of God, you are wise. You know what Jesus has done to save. You know how sin has made you unacceptable to God and there is no way you can pay for what you have done wrong. You know that God has done everything for you in Jesus his Son. Because of Jesus you look forward to shining like the brightness of the heavens. Jesus prayed for you to see this shining glory when he said, "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world." No more stress, no more distress, no more sin, no more tears, no more aches and pain, no more disappointments with how we are living our lives. "When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun, We've no less days to sing God's praise then when we first begun." Some day we will shine like stars as we see how the Lord used us in many different ways to lead others to righteousness. Amen.