

Sermon — 11/14/21

Text — Daniel 12:1-13

Theme — “Everlasting”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our text is from the Old Testament book of Daniel. Everybody knows Daniel. Daniel and the Lion’s Den. Daniel’s three friends in the fiery furnace. We’ll talk a little bit more, in greater detail, in a few moments about those stories. But remember, Daniel (and his friends) were in those stories because of what had happened to the people of Israel. Because Israel had dared to flaunt the power and might of Babylon, and so were defeated. Routed, would be a better word. Totally and completely destroyed. The capital city of Jerusalem sacked. The king killed, and the heir to the throne hauled off as a prisoner. The Temple robbed of its treasures, desecrated, and then demolished. All the people of any consequence, any wealth, any talent were carried off as slaves.

Young Daniel was among those hostage-slaves. He was a young man of great physical beauty and wonderful talents. It was no wonder that the Babylonians wished to make him one of their court scholars and bureaucrats. Wise Men, they were called. Daniel and his three young Jewish friends (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego — their “slave” names, given them by the Babylonians) were culled out and sent to be trained for service. But one of the requirements of that training was that they give up their God, that they adopt and worship the idols of the Babylonians. This they would not do. And it got them in all sorts of trouble.

Let's start with Daniel's friends. The Babylonian king was a vain man. He was impressed with himself — and his many victories — to no end. He was easily persuaded that he must, indeed, be a living god. And as such he should be worshipped. So, the king had a great statue erected, and all the people — but especially those in government service, like Daniel's friends — were to bow down and worship it. And the penalty for refusing? Death. But the most horrible death imaginable: they were to be thrown into a fiery furnace. A place so hot that even those who stoked its fires were burned up and killed. So, when these three heard the call to worship the idol but would not, they were arrested on the spot and sentenced to death.

The king was so angry at their disobedience that he ordered the furnace stoked even hotter — seven times hotter! And then he ordered the three men, bound hand and foot, and cast into that lake of fire. But the king then saw a most wonderful sight — the three were NOT killed, not even injured. And, instead of seeing three men, the king saw FOUR! And the fourth was *"like unto the Son of God"*. The king then ordered the men released and sent for them to give an explanation.

Out they came, without so much as a blister on the skin, a hair singed, or even a whiff of smoke on their clothing. How can this be, the king wondered. Our God — the only true God — protected and saved us, they answered. And the king believed. (Pause)

If that story is familiar, then the account of Daniel and the lions' den is even more so. Another king, different from the one who ruled in the first story, was persuaded to make a law that forbid any prayers but to him. **He** was the god who ruled on earth! And the punishment for those who disobeyed was again death. This time by being cast into a den of lions. Of course, Daniel would not — he could not — obey such a law. He said his daily prayers to the true God, come what may. And it did come! Other, jealous, members of the Wise Men turned him in to

the king for his “sin” of praying to God. But the king was seized with remorse, for he knew Daniel to be innocent of any wrong, he knew Daniel to be a devoted servant, he knew Daniel was only being accused out of wicked envy. But the king could not change the law! So Daniel was cast into the lions’ den. All night long the king worried and agonized over Daniel’s fate. In the morning, he rushed to the lions’ den and found a miracle: Daniel alive and the lions all quiet. God had saved His servant! And this king, too, believed. (pause)

So, what do these familiar old Bible stories have to do with our text today? Well, remember that Daniel was more than just a Wise Man and servant of the Babylonian king. He was, even more importantly, a prophet of the Most High. And he was sent with a message for God’s people. A people that were lost and in exile. A people suffering under the Babylonian boot. A people whose whole identity had been taken away from them when they lost their land (promised to Abraham and his descendants), their freedom (they were slaves again, as in Egypt, before Moses), their king, their Temple. Why? Had God stopped loving them? Had He turned against them? Was He not able to save them? How long would His anger last? Were they forever lost?

Those are the questions, the mind-set, that’s Daniel (and other prophets) were sent to address. And God’s Word to them was good and gracious. It was Gospel. It was life. Yes, there is — and there will be — suffering and pain, loss and death. But these things do NOT win. Satan does not win. Sin does not win. Death does not win. God loves His own. Always. And He will save them. They will live. Forever.

Think about these three young men in the fiery furnace. God did not forget them. He did not abandon them. No, He saved them. Their faith in God was rewarded. Likewise Daniel.

And so too the people of Israel. God IS your Father. He is your Savior. He will not let you die forever. He has called you — by name — and you are His. So, trust Him and live. Forever.

And again these two stories are instructive. The fiery furnace — isn't that hell? And those roaring lions, seeking to devour poor Daniel — isn't that exactly how the Bible pictures Satan and his attempts to swallow us up? But God delivers His own. Not death, not sin, not Satan, not hell itself can stand up to our God! He WILL redeem. He WILL save. He WILL give life, forever. (Pause)

Many of us here today — maybe most, maybe even all — are suffering. Oh, not like Daniel or his three friends. We are not under the threat of death from our government. We don't have an egomaniac king who thinks he is god in the flesh. But we all know how the sinful world around us hates and persecutes the Church, God's own children. We know that, little by little, God's Word is being stolen and denied. The Law watered down. The Gospel perverted. And we should not be surprised if things get only worse. For they might; there is no guarantee of freedom from persecution in this world and life. The very opposite, in fact.

And we are not suffering like those displaced and exiled Jews. Our land has not been stolen away from us. Our cities have not been destroyed (although it may seem they are under attack from criminals and drugs and violence). Our "temple" — our places of worship — have not been ruined and destroyed. But there ARE times when we feel like we are living out of place and out of time. That we are only pilgrims passing through a very hostile world. Because we are.

Others of us are suffering in more tangible, noticeable ways. Some are grieving the loss of loved ones. Others are under the sentence of death from cancer or other disease. Others have

lost friends and reputation. Others are struggling to make ends meet, to put food in their mouths, to have a roof over their heads.

Yes, we are indeed truly suffering. Dying, in fact. That is what sin has done to this wonderful and perfect world that God had made. Satan slithered in and it has all gone to hell. Literally. But we are God's children! His own beloved! How can that be? How can He let Satan do all that? Why doesn't He fix it? When will He restore us? How long, Lord, how long?

That has been the cry of God's people, ever since Adam. Including us, today. And it is to answer those questions, those pleas, those cries for mercy that God has written the words of our lesson today. He WILL save. He WILL restore. He WILL give life. Forever.

Of course, you all know how. It is the obvious and easy answer for us Christians: Jesus. He has come down from heaven to be one of us. To be the Man we cannot be. To fulfill and obey and keep all the Law. To take our sin and suffering and punishment at the cross. To die our death. To suffer our hell. To sleep in our grave. But also to descend into hell — not to suffer more, but to proclaim His victory (OUR victory!) in Satan's ugly face. To crack open the grave on Easter, showing that we too will rise. To ascend into heaven, where He rules — and where we too will rule one day, alongside Him.

Yes, it is all about Jesus, isn't it? And yet.... And yet we still suffer now. We still cry out to heaven. We still hear the lying accusations made against us, much like those made against Daniel and his friends. We still cringe to know death, though defeated, will claim us. We still weep at the violence, the crime, the lack of faith, the hatred of the world around us. And which, if we are honest, we also see all too much in ourselves.

God, this world hurts! God, this life drags on us! God, how we wish it would all just be over! When, God, when? Yes, we have Christ. We have forgiveness. We have heaven. We have eternal life. But what about NOW? (pause)

And you know the answer, don't you? I am not here to tell you anything you don't already know. God has a plan. A purpose. A time. And we must wait. Patiently. Because He knows what He is doing. He knew all this, even before He created the heavens and the earth. He knew Adam's sin, and yours. He knew what Satan would do. He knew the answer — that He would come in the flesh to be our Savior. He knows our weakness. He knows our lack of patience and understanding. He knows EVERYTHING. And He says: trust Me.

One day — maybe sooner, maybe later — He WILL come again. And, as our text says, *“...at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found in the Book of Life...And 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.”*

That is God's promise. And He never lies. He never goes back on His Word. He never fails. Yes, at times it seems hard. Yes, at times it seems like the devil wins. But that is only our limited eyes, our weak understanding, our faltering faith. The victory has already been won. So, be at peace — even in this troubled world and life. Your Father knows what He is doing. All things ARE yours, in Christ. Forever. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

OS — Offertory/Offering
FE — Nicene Creed