

TEXT: Daniel 12:1-3

THEME: THE END OF TIME

1. Resurrection
2. Retribution
3. Reward

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

Dear Saints Triumphant:

What an amazing Scripture! 600 years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem, Daniel was urging the people of Israel to prepare for THE END OF TIME, the end of the universe. Daniel's prophecy presents THE END OF TIME with great clarity. He tells us to expect a RESURRECTION, RETRIBUTION, and REWARD.

We begin with RESURRECTION. **Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake.** The Day of Judgment will be the most profound day in the history of the universe. Michael, the only archangel mentioned in the Bible, will be there, as Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, **For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. (1 Thessalonians 4:16).** So, the voice of Michael will signal THE END OF TIME and at the sound of **the trumpet call of God** the dead will rise.

Some people have said the people in the Old Testament knew nothing of a resurrection of the dead, but that's obviously not true. Daniel knew about the resurrection, Job knew about the resurrection. Before Jesus rose from the dead and even before he raised Lazarus from the dead, Martha knew about the resurrection on the last day.

Yet even today, there are some misconceptions about that resurrection. Some people won't donate organs because they don't want their resurrection body to be missing parts. Some Christians won't be cremated because they think they won't have a body in the resurrection. We must understand that the resurrection is not "reconstruction." The resurrection body is a new and glorious body, as Job declared, **And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me! (Job 19:26-27).**

The resurrection is an essential part of the Gospel message and a key doctrine of the Christian faith. We must realize that death is not an end, but a beginning. Yet many Americans are so caught up in the details of this life that they forget this life is very temporary and that there is a life to come. Daniel goes on to describe what else we can expect on Judgment Day.

He tells us that for some there will be: **RETRIBUTION. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.** Those who reject the Gospel of Jesus Christ will be raised to **shame and everlasting contempt.** Hell is described with many different terms in the Bible, but the most common term is fire.

Here I cannot help but think of 9/11 and the inferno that was once the World Trade Towers. Some of you may remember seeing the live TV coverage of that day and the men and women who jumped 100 stories to their deaths—because that was more bearable than to die by fire. And that fire was nothing compared to the unquenchable fires of hell.

Yet, preaching about punishment for unbelief in hell is not popular today. According to a recent Gallop Poll, 78% of Americans believe they have a good chance of going to heaven, but only 4% of Americans believe they have a chance of going to hell. A famous mega-church preacher said not too long ago, *“Hell is just too negative. Churches are under enormous pressure to be consumer-oriented. Churches today need to be appealing rather than demanding.”*

Yet, hell is a real place that many people will experience firsthand. They will find out about the **weeping and gnashing of teeth** Jesus spoke about (Matthew 25:30). They will understand why people jumped from a hundred stories to avoid dying in the flames, because for those in hell, there will be no escape. This is the **RETRIBUTION** our just God has prepared for those who reject his grace and mercy, who reject the gift of his Son as their Savior from sin, death, and hell. God offers forgiveness and salvation to the whole world. But all people who reject that gift, who try to earn salvation their own way, or who try to deny the very existence of God will feel the full weight and heat of God’s wrath for all eternity. But Daniel says there is something else we can expect at **THE END OF TIME**:

REWARD—Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life,... 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 Lutherans, who know that we are not saved by the good things we do, but only through Spirit-worked faith in our Savior Jesus who has done everything for our salvation, we may be a little uncomfortable with that word **REWARD**. Yet we must understand it properly because Jesus used it frequently to refer to our life in heaven. He said, **“Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven” (Luke 6:23)**. Heaven is ours only because of what Jesus Christ has done for us. As Luther wrote: “We are saved by faith alone, but faith is never alone.” What Luther meant was that once the Holy Spirit has worked saving faith in our hearts and we have eternal life in heaven, our life on this earth will reflect that glorious truth by the things we do, by the way we live our earthly lives—spending and being spent for the Lord and his work.

Because God sent his Son and because Jesus sacrificed himself to pay for our sins and because the Holy Spirit has brought us to saving faith and causes us to live that faith, our **REWARD** is heaven. And heaven is a place of health and wholeness, of pleasure and peace, a place where we will be with our Savior-God for all eternity.

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus prove that at THE END OF TIME there is RESURRECTION, RETRIBUTION, and REWARD. Let that fact motivate us to thanksgiving for the blessing of heaven for ourselves, and to ever greater urgency in sharing with others the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus so that they, with us, can hear at THE END OF TIME: **“Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world” (Matthew 25:34).** Amen.

Prayer of the Church

Lord of eternity and King of saints, all the heavens adore you. Saints and angels sing before you and we join them to praise your majesty.

You clothe us with garments of splendor. You bless us with grace and mercy in this life and eternal glory forever. What undeserved love you show us! We thank you that you have made us your triumphant saints.

Encourage us by your gracious promises. Forgive our failures to live as you desire. Strengthen the faith of all who are weak and wandering. Give them and us the power to live as your faithful people.

Your saints will triumph forever in new heavens and a new earth. The sound of weeping and crying will be heard no more. We anticipate with joy an eternity of perfect fellowship with you. But for now, be with us as we work and witness for Christ, so that many more people can join us before your throne.

Special prayers and intercessions may follow.

Lord of life, the day is coming when you will come down from heaven with the voice of Michael the archangel and the trumpet call of God. On that glorious day, the saints triumphant will rise in bright array, clothed in your perfect righteousness. Give us strength until that day when we will share fully in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray:

THE LORD'S PRAYER