

“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. ²Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. ³Those 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. (NIV 84)

Theme: A Guaranteed Victory Celebration

1. We will be rescued from peril
2. We will enjoy the spoils of victory

It was January 12, 1969 when the New York Jets of the American Football League faced off against the Baltimore Colts of the National Football League in Super Bowl III. Most experts considered the NFL to be far superior to the AFL (the two leagues wouldn't join together until 1970). The NFL's colts were 13-1 going into the game and were heavily favored against the 11-3 Jets from the AFL. But despite being an 18-point underdog, on the Thursday before the game at the Miami Touchdown Club, charismatic Quarter Back, Joe Namath guaranteed that the Jets would win. He was widely mocked and ridiculed for making this guarantee, but as it turns out, the Jets did win 16-7—considered by many to one of the largest upsets in sporting history. And so with that victory they were able to celebrate a huge upset victory.

Joe Namath's guarantee is now stuff of legend. But if the Jets wouldn't have won, he would have looked foolish. Today we see another guarantee—that despite what it may seem as we look at the world around us, God has guaranteed a victory for us. He will rescue us from peril and we will join together in heaven enjoying the spoils of victory!

We are told that the world is going to get worse and worse as time goes on; and finally, at the end of the word, there will be a period of time that will be unprecedented in its wickedness. This coincides with the loosening of Satan for a short time as mentioned in Revelation 20,

In the first verse of our text Daniel is told in a vision about these Last Days, **There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then.** Jesus explains in more detail in Matthew 24, **you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold.** He then concludes, **there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now—and never to be equaled again.**

Are we in these last few days of the world—“Satan's Little Season,” as we call it? We very well could be. Wickedness and debauchery, such as sex outside of marriage, getting drunk, or taking illegal drugs—things a generation or two ago people would be embarrassed about if they got caught doing, are now often done in the open and even celebrated and encouraged. Just take a look around you—read a newspaper, watch the nightly news, check your news feed. Some of the cities with the highest rates of violent crime per capita in America are just down the road from us. Almost, every night you can turn on the T.V. and it seems as if there is a murder somewhere close-by. Across the nation Christians are being attacked and vilified for standing up for godly morals and for defending the truth of God's Word against all attacks. There are large religious groups whose sole purpose, it seems, is to kill others, especially Christians—just look at what the terrorists did in Paris a few days ago. And it is true that throughout the world hundreds of thousands of Christians are killed each year because of their faith.

And worse of all, it seems as if the gospel is under attack now more than ever. There are more followers of non-Christian religions than ever before. Anti-Christian cults are gaining members each and every day. And even many so-called Christian religions fail to uphold the core teaching of salvation by grace through faith, preaching a message of tolerance, and that people may be saved outside of faith in Jesus Christ.

This isn't really news to you—you know this. You know that the world is becoming an increasingly horrible place. And we often have one of two reactions. The first is to fall into despair. You fight and

you struggle but it doesn't seem to do much. You voted for those who seem to have Christian morals and a godly character, but the majority of voters often do not. You try to show love to other people but your love is often overtaken by the hate of others. You try to tell other people about Jesus but no one listens or wants to go to worship with you. You brought up your children in the Lord, but some they might have fallen away from the one true faith. We describe those who are still in this world as being part of the Church militant, those that are still fighting for and defending the one true faith in a world full of wickedness.

And so you fall into despair. There is no hope. There is no reason to keep on trying. Why push so hard, why work so hard when there are little to no results? You've tried and tried to make the world a better place, but to no avail, so what's the point of trying any longer? The world is going to do what the world is going to do despite your best efforts so you don't see much of a reason to fight the good fight any longer.

The other reaction we may have us to give up fighting and join the other side—a “if I can't beat them, join them” type of attitude. Not that you join them in the hatred of and the desire to kill Christians. You've been hearing about it so much from your teachers, your friends, and the rest of society that you begin to think that they might be right about evolution, homosexuality, sex outside of marriage, and so on.

And there are times—there may be many times, when we do join the sinful world. We join them in violence; we join them in hateful speech, and drunkenness, and just a general wickedness. It's hard to be in the world but not of the world, especially with a sinful nature that is inclined toward only evil. So there are times that we do end up joining the world in its wickedness and contribute to the love of most growing cold. And your sins too weigh on you during these last times. It seems as if the world is down and out. But there is no reason to fear or fall into despair. Remember what the Lord told Daniel in our first verse, **At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise... at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered.** The Lord will send his angel Michael, in Revelation called the archangel—that is the chief angel, one of, if not the if not the leader of the angels. He

is sent by God to guard and protect us—just as all angels do. And so we don't have to be afraid of anything the world may try to do to us.

Jesus says in Matthew 24, **If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened. As bad as these days are, they will come to an end.**

And at the end of days the Lord will rescue us from such wickedness. All the elect—everyone whom God has chosen from before the beginning of the world to be saved through faith in his son, will be saved! Their names are written in the book which Daniel talks about. The book of life contains the names of all of God's children—and everyone written in that book will be rescued from this present world. And so you don't have to fall into despair. There is no reason to give up and join the other side. The Lord will come and save you. No one will be able to snatch you from his hand. For he chose you to be saved, and as the all-powerful Lord, you will be saved!

But how do you know that your name is written that book? There is only one copy of this figurative book and it belongs to Jesus, our judge. The judge holding this book, is the one who gave up his life, the one who lived a perfect life that we could not, the one who suffered and died as he took all our sins upon himself and suffered through the eternal punishment that we deserved. Our judge is the one who rose from the dead and once said to his disciples, **because I live you also will live.**

That is why we read in verse two, **Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.** On the Last Day the Lord will return and raise all people from the dead. Everyone, no matter how long it has been since they last took a breath, will be given life and they will stand before the Lord for Judgment. And we as believers have nothing to worry about. For we will awake to everlasting life. Our bodies will join our souls in heaven. And there together body and soul, we will live forever.

Jesus himself wrote your name in this book with his own blood. The blood that he shed for you on the cross paid for all the times you fell into despair. The times that failed to fight the good fight and joined in the wickedness of the world were paid for by Jesus on the cross. He is our judge and one that pleads our case before God. As John points out in his first epistle, **if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to**

the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

And you know what else? You were baptized! The Holy Spirit worked through the waters of baptism and brought you to the one to faith and kept in the one true faith through his Word and the Lord's Supper. At your baptism your sin was not only washed away, but you were clothed a robe of Christ's righteousness—his perfection. At your baptism, you were welcomed into God's family through faith. In Romans 6 Paul connects our baptism to a new life with the Lord now and in heaven forever, **We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.**

And so, as part of God's elect, we know that we will join him in heaven forever. Because we live in a sin-filled world and one that is full of wickedness we can't comprehend how great and amazing heaven is. It is a place free from sin and the effects of sin. It is free from wickedness and wicked people. There will be no more weeping and crying, or pain because there will be nothing to cause weeping, or crying, or pain.

In verse three the Lord revealed to Daniel what our bodies will be like in heaven, **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.** We are the wise who will be in heaven. As Solomon wrote in Proverbs, **the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.** Fear, not in the sense of being afraid, but fear in the sense of having awe and respect for the Lord as our maker and savior. We who fear the Lord through faith will join him in heaven and will share in the glory of Christ. On the Mount of Transfiguration the Lord gave three of his disciples a glimpse of his glory—his face and clothes shined so bright and were so radiant because of Christ's holiness that the disciples couldn't even look at him. Paul explains it this way to the Philippians, **He will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.** That is what we have to look forward to. Because Christ has removed our sins and clothed us with his perfect life of righteousness, we will shine in glorified bodies, brighter than the sun and moon and stars. We will live in heaven with Jesus, whose glory fills it so that it needs no light nor lamp nor sun. At our death

and at Judgment we will have passed from the Church militant to the Church triumphant—triumphant in victory because the Lord has given to us the crown of life!

We are going to live with our Lord forever in heaven as we share in his glory. We have nothing to be afraid of; nothing to fear. No matter how horrible the world may get, in the end we'll be in heaven. And so we can stand firm to the end without fear and defend the truth of God's Word and spread the gospel without fear. For in the end we will join all the saints singing the praises of the Lord, our Savior.

Joe Namath made that famous guarantee before Super Bowl III; and surprisingly he was able to back it up. Our guarantee is great, but less surprising. No matter how bad things get, we have nothing to fear because we will be victorious in Christ and we will share in his glory. And this celebration won't just last a week or two, but it will go on and on forever. All because of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who through his death and resurrection guarantees our eternal life. Amen.