

**+ Daniel 12:1-3 + Listen for the Distant Triumph-Song +
+ 2nd Sunday of End Time: Saints Triumphant + 4 October 2012 +**

I just love the hymns we sing today, don't you? They are some of the happiest, most hopeful, most heaven-minded hymns we sing during the whole year. They are also some of the most bittersweet hymns we sing during the whole year. At one and the same time, singing hymns like "Behold a Host, Arrayed in White", "Jerusalem the Golden", or "For All the Saints" can fill your heart with the excited joy of heaven while causing a tear of sadness to slide down your cheek. In the same hymn you can belt out one verse with heavenly confidence, while you choke back the next with the memory of a loved one in the Lord or with longing to be in heaven yourself.

Those hymns fill you with the confident hope of heaven, yet they also remind you of the challenges of living in this sinful vale of tears. Every day is a fierce fight against your sinful flesh and Satan's temptations and the attacks of a world utterly opposed to the Lord whom you follow. Every day the darkness of sin and death threaten to overtake you, a follower of Christ. At one and the same time, you rejoice for those who now enjoy eternal rest, yet you long to be free of this faithless world rushing towards judgment.

...But have you been listening this morning? Yes, we've given thanks for the eternal rest that those who've gone before us in Christ now enjoy. We've joined our voices with all the saints on earth and hosts of heaven, but there's an even sweeter song sounding off in the distance. Like the battles of old, when victory on the battlefield was announced with trumpets for the rest of line to hear, the sweet song of victory sounds clearly for weary saints like you and me. So this morning let's **LISTEN FOR THE DISTANT TRIUMPH-SONG**.

No one needed to hear that triumph-song more than the Old Testament prophet Daniel. The Babylonians had taken him into exile with other young Jews like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He spent much of his adult life as a believer in a pagan nation, yet also as a high government official with the king's approval. It's no surprise that the king's advisers hated Daniel. For his faithfulness to the Lord, they convinced the king to have him lowered into a den of hungry lions. The darkness of that night must've been overwhelming, yet even then, the Lord sounded the song of victory. That night the Lord rescued Daniel. God closed the mouths of the lions. The triumph-song proved to be a song of rescue—the Lord's rescue.

Besides giving Daniel a long and prosperous life, the Lord also enabled him to see the future. Our text comes at the end of Daniel's final vision—a terrifying vision that gives God's people no reason for overconfidence, because God's people would endure terrible things. In the immediate future, they would be caught in the middle of a world war. Foreign rulers would desecrate their temple and attack them. In the distant future, the Antichrist would rise up among God's people to seduce them away from Christ and to undermine their faith in him. As the world draws nearer to the end, Satan and his henchmen—the world, our sinful natures, and death—would only increase their attacks against God's people. We've seen such an increase in anti-Christian attacks in our own time, but there's more. **"There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then."** Jesus himself used similar words in describing the last days to his disciples, **"There will be days of distress unequalled from the beginning...until now—and never to be equaled again. If the Lord had not cut short those days, no one would survive."** The warfare against God's people would nearly wipe them out, but even in that darkest hour, the triumph-song of God's rescue sounds clearly for his faithful people.

You see, the Lord does not and will not fail his people. No, he rescues them from great distress. **"At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise... [A]t that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered."** The Lord sends his archangel Michael and the armies of heaven to protect his Church. God promises that they will successfully fend off the attacks of Satan's armies, but God has done much, much more. He deployed his Son to defeat Satan's forces in battle on the ground to rescue you and me from captivity.

Like a prisoner of war, you were held captive by the guilt of your sin and the threat of hell. There was nothing you could do to get out, but even then, the triumph-song of rescue sounded. Your Deliverer, Jesus Christ, fought through the darkness and fires of hell to set you free. He went into Satan's dungeons and pulled you out. He fought off your captors, destroyed their power, and delivered you by sacrificing his own life to save yours.

So then, listen for that song of rescue when your faith comes under great pressure, when you face rejection or ridicule or mistrust for what you believe about Jesus and your trust in what his Word actually says. Listen for that song when the attacks of your sinful nature or the struggles and burdens of getting through this life

threaten to overwhelm you. Listen for that song of rescue, because God has guaranteed to **“everyone whose name is found written in the book”** that they **“will be delivered”**. No matter your distress, you **“will be delivered”** whether in this life or in the life to come.

Besides being a song of rescue, that distant triumph-song is also a song of encouragement. All those attacks from your sinful nature, from Satan, from the world around you can quickly dishearten you. Trickling doubts about God’s ability to help you, to provide for you, to deliver you can suddenly turn into a flash flood of despair without a moment’s notice. In the midst of all that doubt and disheartened despair, the sweet song of God’s encouragement still sounds, because your name is written in his book of life. After all, God made you holy through the blood of the Lamb—his Son Jesus—and made you one of his holy ones, his “saints”. Because of Jesus’ death-defying rescue operation, you can trust that your name is written in God’s book. That, then, gives you confidence to keep fighting the good fight of faith.

There’s even more! Not only are you heartened because you know your name is written with Christ’s blood in God’s book of life, but also because God will rescue you when you face the final enemy—death. Death is the reason a celebration of the saints triumphant is so bittersweet. Songs and lessons and prayers and rites reminding us of the glories of heaven fill our hearts with joy, yet death makes all this bittersweet as we remember loved ones in the Lord whose struggle for the faith is now over. Death has been devastating God’s perfect creation since our first parents fell into sin. For that reason, death and decay are everywhere, yet even in the midst of all this death and destruction, the sweet triumph-song of encouragement rings true.

“Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life...” God has promised complete and total victory over death by promising the resurrection of his saints to eternal life. That is why a true Christian funeral is not some sad eulogy about how great a person was during his or her life, but whose life was cut short like the cut flowers on the casket. No, a true Christian funeral is a Christian victory service, the sole focus of which is on Jesus and the victory he won for his faithful people by bursting forth from his tomb on Easter Sunday very much alive.

That Easter certainty gives us hope and fills our hearts with exceeding joy when we remember the saints triumphant and look ahead to heaven. That Easter certainty also gives us a sense of urgency because of what’s in store for those who are unbelievers. **“Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake...others to shame and everlasting contempt.”** Knowing that those who do not know or who despise God’s gracious Word will be sent to everlasting death in hell compels us to labor with all our might to bring them the Gospel—the sweet good news of Jesus’ forgiveness and grace.

Time is short! Souls are dying eternally every day missing out on heaven. As you go home today, consider your family and friends. How many will join you in the glorious rest of heaven? How many might end up in the torments of hell? We have such a precious message of freedom and deliverance. Share it so others can know that that distant triumph-song is for them too! It doesn’t have to be complicated, but simply share the reason you have so much certainty in the Savior-God who rescued you and made you one of God’s saints, certainty you have even in death, certainty found only in God’s Word. God, however, doesn’t give you eternity to share that victorious news, but rather he gives you a sense of urgency, because a time is coming when you will no longer be able to share that message of God’s rescue with the lost.

Until that time, the distant triumph-song sounds sweet music of rescue and encouragement and also of grace. You and I deserve nothing from the hand of our gracious God, yet in his undeserved mercy, he has given us and will give us more than we can possibly imagine. In fact, God promises more than just heaven to those who faithfully serve and faithfully proclaim the wisdom of his Word. Purely by his grace, God promises, **“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.”** Yes, eternal rest, blessed relief, and heavenly glory await those who endure this war to the end not because they were so great, but because God is so gracious.

In the meantime, the struggle goes on. The fight for your soul is ferocious. The battle seems to never end, and we grow very weary of it all. At times, whether we admit it or not, our weary hearts want to cry out, “When, O Lord, will you deliver us? How, O Lord, will we ever make it to the eternal rest of heaven?” Then we sing, **“And when the fight is fierce, the warfare long, steals on the ear the distant triumph-song, and hearts are brave again and arms are strong... The golden evening brightens in the west; Soon, soon to faithful warriors comes their rest. Sweet is the calm of paradise the blest.”** (*Christian Worship* 551:5,6) Listen, dear saints, for the distant triumph-song is sounding because victory is ours through our Lord Jesus Christ! Amen.