

“Being in the Book”

Daniel 12:1-3

November 18, 2018

26th Sunday after Pentecost

Way, way, back when dinosaurs roamed the earth (and, by that, I mean before the Internet existed), securing a hotel room was an entirely different process than it is today. There existed a book called the “hotel register”. Reservations were rare at that time. You usually just went in and asked for a room. When you did this, you were then required to sign the hotel register. The hotel register consisted of a list of all people who had rooms in the hotel. If your name was there in the book, you had a room in the hotel. If your name was not in the register, you were out. So, being in the book – the hotel register – was very important.

Even though many of our tasks, including booking hotel rooms, are done over the Internet, there still exists a book that has a great influence in our lives. It determines whether you have a spot, not in a hotel, but in heaven and everlasting life. The Scriptures refer to this as “the book of life”; “His book;” or, as in our text for today from the book of Daniel, it is simply “the book.” It contains the names of all people who’ve ever lived in faith toward Jesus Christ and now can expect eternal life past the grave in heaven with God forever. According to the Word of God in Daniel, being included in this book guarantees you eternal life. Exclusion from the book means exclusion from eternal life. The question, which is very important, is: how do you get your name in the book?

Of course, whenever the end of the world and a day of judgment are brought up, there exists great skepticism or disbelief. These feelings may exist, not only in a secular audience, but among Christians as well. It’s easy to be so involved in the tasks of this life that one ignores the signs of the coming end or disbelieves that it will ever come. People who talk of the “end of the world” are dismissed as fanatics.

The existence of “the book of life” is also rejected because it is assumed that, whenever anyone dies, he/she is always going to a better place. Everyone’s in. Nobody’s out. The fear of the world coming to an end and all humanity being judged is practically nonexistent. We would prefer to talk about our kind and loving God who does what we need him to do, but never challenges us or judges our behavior. We close our eyes and pretend that Judgment Day will never happen because it is so unpleasant to dwell upon.

Yet, you don’t have to be a Bible-thumping Christian to be afraid of the world coming to an end. Although we would like our world to be getting better and better (and that is the philosophy of atheistic evolutionists), what we see going on around us seems to contradict that hopeful and optimistic spirit. There are wars across the face of this planet which never end. There is a decline in civility which gives birth to the Balkanization of America in which we are divided up into many small groups which are at war with each other. There is the breakdown of the American family and its negative effect on society. There are natural disasters which seem more frequent and more powerful: the fires in California, the bitter cold in the eastern part of our country, the recent floods across the country, and so on. There is a loss of religious freedom in our

country today. It is been replaced by” freedom of belief.” Christians are free to believe anything they want. We just can’t live according to those beliefs.

Secularists have no explanation for this. They’ve always believed that the world is getting better and better and, therefore, we can be optimistic about the future. However, simple observation shows us that this is not the case. Many people do not believe that the world is becoming a better place. Many sense the decline and wonder when the end will come.

As Christians, we have an answer to this situation. The word of God, through the prophets, have always promised an end to this evil age. The world will continue to get worse and worse until there is a day of final judgment and, after that, will come the end.

Our text for today locates this time of judgment as taking place “at that time”. In other words, we do not know the day or the time. The text promises “a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time.” In other words, it’s going to get much worse than it is now.

In our Gospel reading for today from Mark, the evangelist gives some details about this time of trouble which is so bad. There will be false Christ’s and false religions which will fool people. There will be wars and rumors of wars which will kill people. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom which will cause chaos. There will be natural disasters earthquakes, famines, and other such things which will cause destruction. Christians will be persecuted which will cause a great apostasy – people leaving of the faith. The family will be torn apart and destroyed which will destroy our society and culture.

Why is our world in the shape that it is? Secularists have no explanation of this since we were supposed to be getting better. Nor, do they have any solution for it. Their mantras of inclusion, tolerance, and diversity have not helped build a brave new world and, in fact, ring hollow as daily violent protests and counter protests, more mass shootings, and fires, bitter cold, floods, and other weather phenomena all kill more and more people.

As Christians, we can no more prevent the destruction of our world than the secularists. However, we have an explanation for it, as well as a way to escape it. According to the Word of God, God created this world perfect and intended for it to remain perfect. The world was intended to be a literal Garden of Eden for eternity.

However, when humanity sinned, their sin not only corrupted humanity, but all of creation as well. God cursed humanity with death and hell because of sin. God also cursed creation with disaster and destruction because of sin, too. Thorns and thistles would inhabit the land. St. Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, said that creation longed to be set free from its futility in bondage to corruption.

God promised to judge sin and evil and eventually destroy them. He would create new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.” (2 Peter 3:13) That seems to be a good thing, but how do you avoid being swept away in the judgment of God in the destruction of all evil because of your sin? Having your name written in the reservation book – the book of life – would do it. But how do you get your name there?

Thanks to the advertisers, merchandisers, overzealous radio stations and the producers of the Hallmark Christmas Movie channel, we find ourselves thrust into the preparation for Christmas. We remember that Jesus came to this world, not simply to create a warm and fuzzy winter holiday. He did not come primarily to be born, but to live, die, and rise again from death. He did that to restore creation to the state of perfection it had before the Fall and to redeem – purchase – a people for Himself to inherit the new heavens and the new earth.

Jesus brought obedience through His perfect life where humanity had practiced disobedience. He came to pay off the debt which we, as humanity, had accumulated because of our sin through the sacrificing of His innocent life on the cross for the sake of sinful humanity. Jesus came to restore life where there had been only death since the Fall by into sin rising from death to life which destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light once again.

Jesus accomplished all of these things – perfect obedience, payment for sin, and restoration of life – and was able to proclaim, while yet dying on the cross, “It is finished!”. Although sin could not be undone and corruption could not be uncorrupted, God the Father offered mercy, forgiveness and life to all trusting in His Son, Jesus Christ. Thus, there would be a day of judgment, a time of separation, and the rewarding of eternal and perfect life to the faithful and the condemning to eternal death and hell to those who would not believe.

Those who will receive life for eternity in the glory of God the Father already have their names written in the book of life with the blood of the Lamb. The Word of God declares, “[God] chose us in [Jesus Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,” (Ephesians 1:4-5) St. Paul writes to the Romans, “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” (Romans 8:29-30)

The God who chose you before the creation of the world to become His sons and daughters and justified you in His sight will glorify you, something so sure that St. Paul confidently writes in the past tense of events which have not yet come to pass. This is why God can and has written your name in the book of life when you were baptized. You were joined to His name and His holiness. You individually received the forgiveness of sin won for you many years before on the cross. You were given new life in your baptism which has already begun, goes past death and the grave, and continues forever.

Having your name written in that book is vitally important. Those whose names are written in the book, and only those, shall have eternal life. Speaking of the Holy City, Jerusalem, the Word of God says in Revelation, “Nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.” (Revelation 21:27)

Those whose names are not in the book are in great danger. For the word of God says in Revelation, "And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire." (Revelation 20:15)

Some may worry whether the Lord uses "White Out" or has a delete key in the book of life. While it is true that you could erase your name from the book of life through your own sinful free will, the Lord never will. As our Good Shepherd, Jesus has this to say about us, His sheep, "I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand." (John 10:28)

So, how can you be assured of your place in the book of life? In order to be in that book, you need to stay in this book (Bible). The Bible is the Word of God and the dispenser of forgiveness and strengthener of faith. As you read this Word, hear this Word, and study this Word, you will receive the forgiveness for all of your sins so that you experience no guilt over sin's effect on your future; strength for your faith in all of God's promises so that you have no doubt about your future; and hope so that you may have confidence in your future when the book of life is finally open and your name is found there.

As we travel along the way of this earthly life and see all of the suffering and destruction and know that they are but signs of the judgment which is to come, it would be very easy to be discouraged and lose hope. However, God has a book which shows in detail already at this present time our inclusion in the festivities and celebrations of the eternal wedding feast of the Lamb Jesus which will never end. The most important thing is for you and me to have our names on the guest list in this book. The most comforting thing is to know they are already there. Amen.