

Daniel 12:1-3

Then at that time, Michael, the great prince who stands over your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress that has not happened from the first time that there was a nation until that time.

At that time your people will be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. ²Many who are sleeping in the dusty ground will awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame, to everlasting contempt. ³Those who have insight will shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who bring many to righteousness will shine like the stars forever and ever.

Superheroes

I.

He was an unlikely figure to be admired by so many. In fact, many did not even know his name, though millions admired his work and went to see movies about the characters he created. Stan Lee died this week at the age of 95. He was the legendary creator of Marvel Comics.

People need heros. Sometimes we don't even realize how much we need heros. Those who, like Stan Lee, create these heros do so to give to us something to hold on to. Sometimes it seems that everywhere we look in the world around us there is discord and hatred; people are constantly looking out for their *own* interests without any concern to the interests and needs of those around them. The superheroes of these stories just did what was right.

One of the superheroes of the Bible is Daniel. The Book of Daniel is a book all about struggles and battles and war. Daniel comes on the scene at a time when God's people were exiled in Babylon. Daniel had become a close advisor to the king because he interpreted the king's dreams. King Nebuchadnezzar, following some bad advice from other advisors who hated Daniel, made a decree that every citizen should worship the king as god. Daniel steadfastly followed *his* God, the true God, though he knew it meant certain death. Daniel was thrown into the lion's den for the crime of worshiping the true God, but God shut the lions' mouths, and he lived.

Daniel's friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were superheroes, too. They refused to bow down to an idol, and for their crime they were thrown into a fiery furnace. Were Daniel and his friends superheroes because of the great things they did? No. They were superheroes because they trusted in the Lord.

II.

How is *your* trust in the Lord? Has your faith prepared you to face hungry carnivores with nothing but God to protect you? Does the thought of punishment of a blast furnace because you are a believer make your heart quiver with fear?

Did you ever notice that the majority of comic-book and movie superheroes wear masks as they go about their super-duties? Maybe they did so because they weren't really looking for a pat on the back or for too much recognition for just doing the right thing. Maybe, though, there was something more. Did you ever notice that most superheroes had some flaw written into their character? Spiderman, for example, carried the guilt of his uncle's death. Perhaps they wore masks because they were ashamed of something in their past. Perhaps they wore masks to hide the guilt they lived with all the time.

Maybe the stories of superheroes are just to give us stories about ourselves. We all have character flaws. We all are loaded down with guilt. We all put on the mask every day before

we go out the door. Only a select few are allowed to see our flaws. We don't want even our spouses and children to know the deepest flaws.

What are the deep, dark secrets you don't want anyone to know about yourself? Alcoholism? Drug abuse? Porn? Sexual sins? The Psalmist David said: "Who can recognize his own errors? Declare me innocent of hidden sins" (Psalm 19:12, EHV). Sometimes we suppress sin so much and so deeply we even try to hide it from ourselves. But God knows. You walk around with a load of guilt too heavy to bear—all the time.

Maybe that's why character flaws were written into so many superheroes. Their stories are stories that teach us something about ourselves—or they *can*.

Isn't the same true of many superheroes of the Bible? Sometimes we look at them as towering heroes of faith—David, who slew Goliath while wearing no armor and carrying only a sling as a weapon. Joseph, the younger brother of a bunch of jealous siblings, who was sold into slavery and eventually rose to become second in command only to the powerful Pharaoh. Moses, who was plucked out of the bulrushes to be raised in the palace, only to later fall into disfavor because he killed an Egyptian, but eventually elevated again by God—at age 80—to become the most powerful prophet figure in the Old Testament.

But they were all flawed human beings. David stole his neighbor's wife and had his neighbor killed to cover up his own sin. Joseph was hated by his brothers because he was cocky and obnoxious about the favor his father showed to him. Moses' flaws were shown *before* God called him to be a powerful figure when he killed the Egyptian, and again *after* God called him, when he tried to make excuses as to why he couldn't serve the way God wanted him to, and still other times when he simply didn't follow God's directions about the way he was to lead the people and did things his *own* way.

The stories of the Bible tell us something about ourselves. Biblical superheroes are flawed. Just like us. They couldn't earn God's favor on their own. Just like us. They needed a Savior. Just like us.

III.

Superheroes fight battles. The first half of the Book of Daniel was more historical. The last six chapters, 6-12, deal more with prophecy. Daniel's prophecies are in symbolic picture language. There are strange creatures and symbolic numbers and battles between spiritual forces in heaven and on earth.

"Then at that time, Michael, the great prince who stands over your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress that has not happened from the first time that there was a nation until that time" (Daniel 12:1, EHV). The prophecy is about the last battle. It is a struggle for people living in a world tainted by sin—a world that hates God and his message. The people of God struggle with the temptations of such an evil world, and with their own propensities to sin—the sinful flesh.

Jesus came to deal with all the sin the world faced and faces. He died on the cross for all the sins due to our character flaws and sins of weakness and sins that we try to hide from everyone else. He even died to pay for the sins we try to hide from ourselves. He died so that we could and would be free from lugging all that guilt around every day.

The time between Jesus' first and second comings is known as the End Times, or the Last Days. It's even the season of the church year that we are in right now—our readings and our thoughts focus on these last days.

Jesus talked about the things we could expect as the end grows closer. Wars and rumors of wars. Natural disasters. Disobedience both in the home and in society. Every generation of Christians looks around and sees the way society has become and the things going on in

the world and is convinced that it is the worst it has ever been. “There will be a time of distress that has not happened from the first time that there was a nation until that time” (Daniel 12:1, EHV). Perhaps we are living in the middle of the worst. Perhaps the worst is yet to come.

But the greatest Superhero of all time has already dealt with the issue. The Lord Jesus has already taken the brunt of the punishment of sin and has left us with the sure promise of everlasting life.

“Then at that time, Michael, the great prince who stands over your people, will arise” (Daniel 12:1, EHV). Michael is the only angel specified in the Bible as an archangel. He is the general of God’s army of angels. He is another superhero sent by God to protect his people from the spiritual forces of evil, both in the heavenly and earthly realms. Our Lord Jesus sends him and the good angels to defend us and protect us from the devil and his band of evil angels. He is here to save lives. We are not abandoned by God, but cared for and protected.

IV.

“At that time your people will be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. ²Many who are sleeping in the dusty ground will awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame, to everlasting contempt. ³Those who have insight will shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who bring many to righteousness will shine like the stars forever and ever” (Daniel 12:1-3, EHV).

As far as human beings go, do you know any you would consider superheroes? I know I do. They are the ones who have lived a life in Christ and still keep on coming to hear the message again and again. Some of them come with walkers or in wheel chairs. Some can’t come any longer and I visit them in their homes or in nursing homes. These are superheroes of the faith. They have flaws, to be sure, just like David and Joseph and Moses and almost all the other superheroes of the Bible. Their life of faith still includes sin, but they come again and again to the message of salvation given in that same Bible. They want to hear over and over the message of the greatest Superhero—the One who was like none other—the One Superhero who did *not* sin—ever—or have any character flaws that marred his personality. They come to hear Jesus and his message of salvation.

These are the superheroes you can look up to. Believers who have lived in faith and stand ready to meet their Savior. Perhaps you can think of a few who have died and are sleeping in the dusty ground right now, as Daniel put it in his prophecy. Make those stories of believers that have gone ahead of you the stories that give you hope. You know that they will rise. They already shine like the stars, but at the last day they will shine like the stars forever and ever. That’s what makes Christian funerals special. We *know*, even as we mourn the death of loved ones, that they loved the Lord and are with the Lord.

Saints Triumphant Sunday is only possible because of the greatest Superhero. Though he was not masked to hide his identity, Jesus came veiled in human flesh. He came that way so that he could bleed and die for us—rescuing us by giving up his own life in our place. He still comes through his Word and Sacraments—not covering up his identity, but revealing it in his Word with the water and in, with, and under the bread and wine we eat and drink in his Supper. He comes to us each week to keep us prepared for that Last Great Day, the day our Superhero returns to take us to heaven for eternity.

We are ready. Amen, come Lord Jesus. Amen.