

Mark 13:24-27. ²⁴ "But in those days, following that distress, "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; ²⁵ the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.' ²⁶ "At that time men will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. ²⁷ And he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.

Do Not Be Afraid... You Are Triumphant Saints

- 1. Jesus chooses you through election**
- 2. Jesus preserves you through the tribulation**
- 3. Jesus delivers you to your final salvation**

The new James Bond movie, "Skyfall" hit theaters just about a week ago. Maybe a few of you have seen it. Most of you probably have not. But can you tell me who comes out victorious? Is it the bad guy or is it James Bond? Of course it is James Bond. Without even seeing the movie, we know who comes out on top. We know who is going to be triumphant in the end because the name of the character is written on the marquee in big letters.

Admittedly most movies and books are like that, we know the main character - the hero - the one with his or her name written on the poster, on the cover, that character is going to come out on top. However, during the course of the story we often still fear for the hero, because things become very difficult for him. We wonder how he is ever going to get through safely. But in the end he always does. Despite all the trouble around him, even when it seems like the very sky is falling on him, he finds a way to come out victorious.

Now there are not a lot of people lining up to get the rights to my life story in order to write a book or make a movie, the same probably goes for you. But God's Word gives to you and me an even greater degree of confidence that everything will end well for us. The bible assures us that in the end we are going to come out on top. Despite the trials and the troubles in our life our Lord tells us that we will one day receive his gift of heaven for we will be his triumphant saints. Through faith in Christ Jesus we are already victorious for although our names may not be written in grand letters on the top of a movie marquee, our names are written in the Book of Life. And so even if we live until that final day and the sky is literally falling around us we know that we will be triumphant.

The encouragement, therefore, that our Lord gives to us today is this: **Don't be afraid... you are triumphant saints. Jesus chooses you through election. Jesus will preserve you through the tribulation. Jesus will deliver you to your final salvation.**

There is plenty in this life that makes us afraid and fearful. We live in a time of great distress. Daily we see crime and hatred far too close to home. We see suffering, bitter disputes, and hateful crimes all around our state, all around our nation, and all around the globe. Nations are constantly threatening each other and waging war. At this very moment bombs are being detonated and missiles are being launched near the same tracts of land on which Jesus walked and taught. Palestinians and Israeli forces are currently going toe to toe, pummeling each other with explosive displays of force, posturing for power and control with numerous human lives at stake. Our nation as well continues to find itself in midst of a long drawn out war against the forces of terror.

As war and crime and suffering marks the human condition, the earth itself shakes under the effects of sin. Earthquakes, and active volcanoes, tornadoes, hurricanes, and superstorms all hit too close to home; or far too close to loved ones. Add to that the fact that daily we are afflicted by personal struggles and challenges. We might fear for our health, our safety, or our well being. In times of physical weakness or pain we might fear death. In times of spiritual struggle we fall into repeatedly into temptation which can slowly overtake us pushing us to the edge of despair until we plummet into a fear of judgment on the final day.

There is plenty in this world that makes us afraid, that makes us fearful, that makes us anxious. As a parent I occasionally experience a sudden rush of anxiety as I see my children grown and I wonder what kind of world this will be for my children as they grow up. And so in order to calm all our fears the Lord gives a teaching that is a profound mystery. It is a teaching that goes beyond our logical minds and can only be explained by the gracious nature of our God. It is the doctrine of election.

Perhaps the word election has been on the list of things that have recently caused us anxiety and distress, especially after the last couple of weeks. But when we use this word in a spiritual sense it brings comfort and joy because the doctrine of election is pure gospel. God in his love has chosen you. As a believer you can be confident that are a member of his elect. Despite all our faults, our sinful errors and mistakes; despite all our character flaws and our natural sinful defects God has chosen you and me to be his own. He has chosen us before time. And the Lord in his goodness has sealed that promise for us through the cleansing waters of baptism, and in his word he encourages us with the precious reassurance that we are members of his chosen people.

The doctrine of election calms our fear of judgment and assures us that we have been selected. We have been chosen. We have been hand-picked to receive life eternal. God will bring us to the unparalleled peace of heaven. There we will join the hosts of saints and angels who serve and worship God before his throne drenched with magnificent color and light. There we will enjoy the eternal peace and security of being in the very presence of the almighty God. He will bring us out of this time of great distress, and even if the sky literally begins to fall around us, God promises that you and I will be victorious saints.

In these words from the gospel of Mark, that are at the same time both alarming and comforting, Jesus promises us that ***he will send his angels and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of the heavens.*** We do not have to be afraid because Jesus will one day send his almighty angels gather his elect from this world of sin. He will spare us from the coming destruction. He will give us the peace and victory of heaven.

The doctrine of election is intended to bring us great comfort. God tells us that he chose us before time was and we are members of the elect. He promises us that we will spend eternity with him. But often we don't feel so special in the meantime. In this life we don't feel so set apart. You and I don't live the glamorous life that we see in movies. We don't live the privileged life that some might expect as members of God's elect. Rather our lives are in large part ordinary. The Lord opens his hand and blesses us, but our lives are often marred by sin and sorrow, hardship and pain. That is when our enemy doubt starts to pummel us and leads us to wonder, *"How will we ever make it through?"* We might look at this world around us, we might look at the troubles that threaten us, and we might recess into the darkness of despair and question God. *"Why would he let his elect go through such trouble?"*

Jesus promises that he will preserve his elect in the tribulation. He has told us that our lives will be filled both with blessings and struggles, both with joy and pain. He has told us that we live in the last days. He told us that this world around us will not get better, but it will get worse and worse. There will be a general increase in wickedness, as the hearts of many will grow cold. There will be signs of the end times in nature, in society, even within our own families there will be strife. The Lord Jesus tells us that we must go through much tribulation to enter the kingdom of God. And so the Lord Jesus prepares us for the trouble and then promises to preserve us for the trials and tribulation of this life. He will preserve us through the twists and turns in our life story. He will preserve us in the difficult and trying times that we will face. And yet we do not have to fear for he tells us that he will be with us. He tells us that he will be with us until the very end of the

age. He tells us that he will rule over all things for our good. He promises us that we will come through this distress victorious.

In our lesson for today he begins by saying, ***“But in those days, following that distress”***. These words indicate that Jesus will be with his people and will bring them through a time of great distress. He will bring us safely through these times of great distress, and if this world keeps going on and on he will bring our loved ones, our believing children and grandchildren through troubling times as well. The exalted Christ rules over all things and he promises that he will serve as our powerful prince that protects his people during this troubling time. God promises us that whatever happens to you and me here in this life, whether we see prosperity or poverty, joy or trouble, he will one day gather his elect to himself and we will reign with him in heaven.

And that is the final promise on which we place our hope. Jesus promises that a day will come when he will put an end to this world. And even though the final scenes of the earth’s last day will include some unforgettable and unmistakable events, we do not have to be afraid. The stars will suddenly fall from the sky like hailstones. The sun will suddenly stop shining and the moon will no longer have light to give. Everything as we know it will end. This final scene will certainly be shocking. It will be unlike anything any movie production team could ever even dream up. But we do not have to be afraid, because we know that everything will end well for us. **Jesus will deliver you and me to our final salvation.**

Even if the sky seems to be figurative falling around us as we deal with trouble in this life, even if the sky literally falls down around us on the last day, our Savior gives us a message of comfort and complete confidence. Through faith in Christ Jesus we are victorious saints. We are members of God’s elect. Our names are written in the Book of Life. Our Savior will preserve us through the twists and turns and difficulties of life, and thanks to him, in the end we will come out on top. We will receive the gift of heaven that our Savior Jesus has secured for us. This is our confidence with which can encourage one another: We will be with the Lord forever. Dear friends, don’t be afraid... You are victorious saints. Amen.