

St. Paul: Weekly Devotions

*Devotions on week's readings
for 11.15.15 Pentecost 25b*

Day One: Daniel 12:1-3

“At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will come 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.

If you're not too familiar with the entire Bible, especially the Old Testament, you might think that these verses come from the Revelation of St. John. That's where we usually expect prophecies about the last days. The visions in Revelation were given to encourage the early Christian believers as they were being persecuted. But God's people suffered in many other times too, and God pointed them to the future, and to his righteous judgment. He would make things right in the end.

Do you remember where Daniel was when he received this revelation? Along with his entire nation, he was an exile in Babylon. He had

experienced being taken from his home and marched 900 miles. He had already faced a den of lions. How could God say that the angel Michael “protects your people”!?

God does allow us to go through some bad times – but is he protecting us from much worse things that we are unaware of? Yes – God cares more about our eternal destiny than our earthly comfort.

Why would he allow his special people to go through such terrible things? They were already on a much worse journey. They were traveling down a road away from him and toward slavery to false gods. This was a captivity from which they would never be able to return. So God used the captivity of Israel to bring many of his people back to faith in him.

How does God desire to use these challenging times in your life? From what is his angel protecting you? When you are in danger, his angel will arise for you as well.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, your angels surround me. Grant that I may see the victory which you have not only promised, but which you have already given to me. Amen.*

Day Two: Hebrews 10:11-25

Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God.

Can you think of any work you do that is almost immediately undone? Something that you have to do over and over and over again?

That's an easy one, isn't it? We keep cleaning the house, but it never stays clean. We keep doing laundry, but there is always more to do. We might even say that we're "fed up" with making meals, but no matter how much we eat or how good the food is we're never filled up for good.

The Old Testament priest kept going to the temple every day to offer sacrifices. He kept showing God that the people were sorry for their sins. He kept seeking God's forgiveness. But no single sacrifice was enough. And in fact all the sacrifices of all the priests over all the centuries could never add up to enough repay the debt owed to God.

But then there came one priest who was different. He was able to offer a very different sort of sacrifice.

We give God offerings, but we can never give God everything. Even the widow in last week's lesson who gave all the money she had to live on did not give her whole life.

But Jesus, our Great High Priest, offered himself entirely. Like John said, he was the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world, because he became the one total, once-for-all sacrifice.

When we have cause for doubt, when we are worn down by repeated troubles, when our efforts seem like they will never be enough and we wonder if we really can be forgiven, God calls us to look to Jesus, "the author and finisher of our faith." It's done! Jesus did it! You are safe in him!

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, Satan never ever gives up. But he is finished. You have conquered my enemies. Lord, help me to see that victory today in my life. Amen.*

Day Three: Mark 13:1-13

“Watch out that no one deceives you... You must be on your guard... do not worry beforehand about what to say... he who stands firm to the end will be saved.”

Look at all the verbs in these verses. “Watch out... be on your guard... do not worry... stand firm...” What does that sound like to you?

You’d think we were in a war or something! All these phrases sound alarming or combative. If they were movie lines, you’d expect them to be in the middle of a battle scene. “Watch out!” Is that really what your life is like?

We actually are in a battle and we are in danger, Jesus is not afraid for us. It’s not that he worries that we might be overcome. In this battle we already have the victory! But then, if he has already won this victory for us, why do we need to be warned?

I’ve been with many families before a major surgery. And the doctor often warns them about certain things. When the patient comes out of surgery they make look alarming (ventilator, tubes, IVs, monitors). These things are

normal and they don’t mean something bad is happening. Or they may warn about some possible setbacks on the road to recovery, and assure you that these things are not a surprise and the doctors have a plan for them.

Then, when these things happen, even though they are not “good” things, the patient’s family is encouraged that the doctor knew what he was talking about. He’s got it in control.

Jesus calls us to be awake and alert, to be aware that our enemy is hunting us, so that we will be able to rejoice as we see our Lord work out his victory in our life. Even when bad things happen, we see that Jesus was right all along. He has a plan. And he has the victory for us.

Where have you recently seen Jesus’ victory for you?

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, Satan fooled me. He drew me in again. He thought he had me! But you were there. You gave me forgiveness all over again. You drowned the “old Adam” in me once again and raised me to new life. Thank you, Lord. Let your grace fill me every day! Amen.*

Day Four

“Rise! To Arms!” (LSB #668)

Rise! To arms! With prayer employ you,
O Christians, lest the foe destroy you;
For Satan has designed your fall.
Wield God’s Word, the weapon glorious;
Against all foes be thus victorious,
For God protects you from them all.
Fear not the hordes of hell,
Here is Emmanuel.
Hail the Savior!
The strong foes yield to Christ, our
shield,
And we, the victors, hold the field.

Wow! That’s a powerful hymn!
It even calls us to take up
arms! One question: what does
that mean?

These days a lot of people
are getting a CCL, a license to
carry a concealed weapon.
Record numbers of people are
purchasing firearms for home
defense. Many people are
signed up to learn martial arts,
and a lot of women carry
pepper spray or a Taser in
their purse. Is that what it
means when we answer the
call “to arms”?

If it’s not being literally
armed, does it mean preparing
ourselves to win arguments?
Many believers are studying
apologetics, the use of history,
archeology, science, and
reason to defend God’s word.
Are these the “arms” the
hymn writer asks us to take
up?

While all these things may
be good in their place, this is
not really where our great
battle is fought. The real battle
takes place inside of you – in
your own mind and heart.
Here is where Satan wants to
win, and here is where God
promises to fight for you.

“Here is Emmanuel!” The
gospel says that Jesus would
be called “God with us”
(Emmanuel). And here is our
victory, that he will dwell in
you and never leave.

It may feel like you are
fighting a losing battle. Look
at all the things that are
broken in our world! But take
up God’s word, read it, live in
it, and you will find comfort in
life’s storms.

Prayer: *O Almighty God, Mighty
Warrior, strengthen my arm to do
battle by your side today. Let me
joyfully take up your Word and
fight, not my neighbor, but my true
Enemy. Let me, by your power,
defeat Satan once again. Amen.*

These devotions help us to think
ahead about the Bible verses we
will read in worship next week.
They are written weekly by
Pastor Don Neuendorf. You can
learn more about our worship or
our church at stpaulannarbor.org