

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
Saints Triumphant Sunday  
November 18, 2018  
Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz  
***You have a brilliant future***

—Daniel 12:1-3

This past Tuesday night my wife and I were on a sightseeing boat on the Huangpu River, enjoying a nighttime view of the skyline of the city of Shanghai in China. (We got back on Friday from a ten-day China tour that we took along with the Henriksens of our congregation.) The buildings of Shanghai were all lit up for the International Import Exposition that China was hosting in that city, and it was an incredible view. Many of the skyscrapers have LED displays up and down them, displaying messages and moving images. With all the lights on both sides of the river reflecting on the water, it was a spectacular view. But perhaps the thing that is most remarkable is that only thirty years ago most of the land was open fields. Since development took off in the 1990s, literally hundreds of skyscrapers have been built, including the Shanghai Tower completed just a year ago, that is the second-tallest building in the world. And China is forging forward with even more growth and development, with plans to continue developing Shanghai as a world-class leader in finance and trade. With bright lights, tall buildings, lots of development, economic growth—China is planning a brilliant future.

“Young man, you have a brilliant future!” That’s the message to the basketball star who signs a seven-figure contract with the NBA. “Young lady, you have a brilliant future!” That’s the word to the college graduate who accepts a position and starts a promising career with a growing company. “You have a brilliant future!” The young couple revels in the congratulations on their wedding day, looking forward to a lifetime of happiness together. There are milestone moments, happy occasions, when the future looks so promising and so bright.

But what about when days are dark and prospects look grim? Can we still look forward to a bright future? What about when the interview goes bad and the much-hoped-for promotion doesn’t come through. Is the future still bright? What about when you wake up one morning and realize that your career has peaked, and now you’re heading down the back side? When you’re standing at the cusp of retirement, is there a brighter future than just a gradual fade into a golden sunset at the twilight of life? How bright does your future look when the doctor is explaining what your treatment options are for your terminal disease? How bright does the future appear when you’re sitting by the bedside of a loved one in the hospital, and their hand goes limp, their pulse fails, the line on the monitor goes flat, and you watch as they pass into eternity? When the joys of this life are past, when sadness overwhelms, can you still cling to the hope of a bright future?

Today we celebrate Saints Triumphant Sunday. Very simply that means: God’s people win! To see what a bright future we have as God’s children, all we need to do is look at things from an eternal perspective. If all we could do is think optimistically and have hopes and dreams for this life, we would inevitably reach the point where the future isn’t so bright. What’s young and promising gets old and gray. What’s new gets old and decays. That much is certain. Getting wrapped up in the here and now is so short-sighted. How much money you make, how many experiences you enjoy, how much stuff you accumulate—to focus on those things is to lose sight of the big picture, the eternal picture. But when we look at life through the lens of eternity, everything comes into focus, and we can see so clearly: In Jesus you have a brilliant future!

Daniel was a high-ranking Jew in the courts of the Babylonians and the Medes. He was carried off from Jerusalem in the Babylonian captivity and taken to Babylon as a young man. But the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar realized very quickly that Daniel was an exceptional individual. Not only was he intellectually a brilliant young man, extremely gifted, but the Spirit of the LORD, the God of Israel was with him and filled him with extraordinary wisdom. You know how Daniel rose through the ranks of the king’s court, so much that the nobles were jealous of his meteoric rise to the top and conspired to get Daniel thrown into the lion’s den. You know the how the LORD protected Daniel from the lions.

Toward the end of his life the Lord permitted Daniel to see a series of visions of things that were to come. Daniel saw that the Jewish nation would be restored and returned to Jerusalem out of captivity. Daniel saw that nations would rise and nations would fall before the coming of the Messiah. All of the things that Daniel saw were fulfilled. The visions came true, just as Daniel recorded them hundreds of years before they happened: The Medes, the Persians, the Greeks, the Romans all came onto the scene, just as Daniel had seen in the visions. Finally the

Savior came, just as he was promised. But then there was one final vision that brings the book of Daniel to a conclusion. The final vision is what we have in front of us today. It's a vision of the end, of things that are still to come. Before the end things will get very hard for God's people, but in the end the saints will be triumphant. *Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.* There will be a resurrection of all the dead. There will be a final judgment. Those whose names are written in the Book of Life will live forever. All others will also rise from the sleep of death, but their resurrection will only be the beginning of eternal anguish, torment, pain, shame, and contempt. The judgment will be final. The verdict will never change. Now is our time of grace for us to repent of our sins and turn to the Lord for forgiveness. On Judgment Day there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, as people learn their fate for all eternity.

But for the people of God, the day of resurrection is a day of victory and celebration. *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.* The wise are the saints triumphant. They are the people of God, for whom the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. Such wisdom is not found in the wisdom of this world; this wisdom is the eternal wisdom of God's everlasting love and grace in sending his Son to be the Savior of the world. This is the wisdom that is hidden from the wise and learned of this age, as Jesus said, and is given to little children. This is the wisdom that the Holy Spirit gives us when he opens our eyes to see that Jesus has saved us from our sins. Daniel looked forward to see what the Savior *would* accomplish; we look back to see what Jesus, our Savior, *did* accomplish. The Apostle Paul calls this the wisdom of "Christ crucified," wisdom from God and power from God. Jesus died on a Roman cross, just as it was prophesied he would do, and then he rose from dead, just as the prophets said he would, so that all who believe in him should not perish in the final judgment but have eternal life in him.

This is the wisdom you have been given as a saint, and this is what you look forward to as a saint, a holy one of God. You have an incredibly brilliant future, an eternally brilliant future! You don't even know, you can't even begin to imagine the brilliant future that is waiting for you in the glorious presence of God and all his saints! You cannot even begin to imagine, to conceive of the things that are waiting for you when you see God face to face in the judgment and are welcomed into heaven, when you lay aside this mortal flesh and are finally glorified in the resurrection together with all God's people for ever and ever. We experience the death of Christian brothers and sisters here on earth, we are thankful for the end of their suffering, and we console each other with the reminder that they're "in a better place." Well, yeah! You know they're in a better place, a place of glory and victory and joy and light and celebration with the Lord that our poor, earthbound imaginations cannot even begin to wrap our minds around! Think of a loved one who has gone before. Think of someone special who fought the good fight on earth, who kept the faith in Jesus Christ, who finished the race, and who rested from their labors and fell asleep in Jesus. Think of what it will be like when you are reunited with them in glory! It won't be long; it will be soon. The Lord has promised it for the sake of his Son, and he has confirmed it with his oath and sealed it with the blood of the Lamb, and just as the words of the ancient prophets came true, so God's promises to you will come true. The Lord Jesus is victorious. Your sins have been forgiven. You have been washed in the blood of Jesus, and you have been declared to be a saint, righteous, holy and pure before God. Now there is waiting for you a crown of victory with Christ in heaven. You have a brilliant future with Christ!

Now, here's the opportunity that the Lord sets before you and me: Around this world there are countless people who have not heard of the glory waiting for the saints in heaven. They do not know that there is a greater glory that outstrips all human achievement, that is not measured by brighter lights or taller buildings, an eternal glory that outshines any brilliance this fading world can offer. And so they may marvel and be amazed at the glorious achievements of man and stand in awe at the lights and the glitter of human accomplishment, while they're staring at nothing more than an empty, hopeless eternity. That's where you and I can take to heart the words Daniel heard in his vision: *those who lead many to righteousness [will shine] like the stars for ever and ever.* Maybe there's someone in your sphere whom you can lead to righteousness. Maybe there's someone close to you who needs to hear the good news that Jesus our Savior took upon himself our sins, so that we can be clothed in his righteousness. Then they too can share in your hope, your hope in Christ, and together with all the saints look forward to a brilliant future in heaven. Amen.