

### **Sermon Reading: Malachi 4:1-3**

“Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the LORD Almighty. “Not a root or a branch will be left to them. <sup>2</sup> But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays. And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves. <sup>3</sup> Then you will trample on the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act,” says the LORD Almighty.”

### **Sermon Theme: Here Comes the Son**

Some days when you go to bed, you really look forward to tomorrow. And if you are really excited for tomorrow, you might have trouble sleeping and getting settled down because you are excited for that new day. Then there are those other days where you really don't want to do tomorrow. Maybe you are like me and you have a hard time wanting to go to bed because that means that the next time you wake up you actually have to face whatever tomorrow brings. But no matter how you feel about the day, there's nothing you can do to change its course. Unless Jesus returns first, the day is coming whether you want it to or not.

Malachi, the prophet, speaks to us about a coming day. On that day the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays; or, healing on its wings. Malachi is not talking about that bright star in the sky. He is directing our eyes to a different sun; that is, God's Son, Jesus who will come again on the Last Day of time as we know it. And when the sun of righteousness, Jesus, comes with healing he also comes to bring judgment. As we are told in John 5 the Son comes to judge and those who have done good will rise to live and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned (John 5:29).

This topic of judgment isn't something people like talking about. Maybe it's because talk of the Last Day sounds a little crazy bringing up thoughts of an individual with a megaphone and poster board shouting “The End is near!” But it's also because we don't like the thought of being judged. Especially when that judging means all our lives and what we've done is on display as evidence of the type of people we are, that makes us uncomfortable. We know what have tried to bury in the past. But whether one wants to believe it or not, or how one feels about it makes little difference because the day is coming. Here comes the Son—the sun of righteousness.

Malachi was a prophet in Israel about 430 years before the birth of Christ. At that time the people of Israel were struggling with something that is all too familiar to us. Those who were wicked, evil, and not following God's will, were the ones who seemed to be prospering, to be doing well, who were succeeding at life; but, those who were supposedly doing good had nothing to show for it. Wearing by the increasing wickedness of the world around them, the people felt the temptations that came along with it. And so God assures

them, **“Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire,”** says **the Lord Almighty. Not a root or branch will be left to them.**” God’s justice is at hand; surely the day is coming—it’s in the process of getting here. The arrogant and evildoer, those who refuse to respect God and see themselves better than God and what he says, they will be set ablaze in this burning furnace. Not a root or branch left to them shows how thorough and devastating this justice will be.

But before getting too excited about how all of *they* were going to get it, we need to understand who Malachi is talking about. These words aren’t being spoken only for all those people *out there* who were living the life the way they wanted to and showing contempt for God’s name. No, this book starts in the first verse, **“The word of the Lord to Israel.”** Then Malachi goes on to reprimand the priests of Israel who aren’t doing their job to the best of their ability but just going through the motions, giving the scraps for sacrifices instead of the best, who saw their job and position as a burden (1:13). Malachi continues then with addressing those who have broken faith with their spouses and been unfaithful to their callings as husband or wife (2:13). He calls out those who are robbing God in their tithes and offerings. Instead of giving first and best, they were giving to God second and whatever was leftover. Malachi then warns those who were tempted to join in and support the sinful lifestyles and those who go against God’s will.

The truth is that when Malachi is speaking about “the arrogant” in chapter 4 verse 1, he isn’t directing these words only to the overpaid athletes of our day or the overhyped and degenerate celebrities we hear too much about. He’s speaking to you; he speaking to me.

The Lord says in chapter 1, **“But you profane it [the Lord’s name] by saying, ‘The Lord’s table is defiled,’ and, ‘Its food is contemptible.’** <sup>13</sup> **And you say, ‘What a burden!’ and you sniff at it contemptuously,”** says the LORD Almighty. **“When you bring injured, lame or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands?”** says the LORD. <sup>14</sup> **“Cursed is the cheat.”** Have I just gone through the motions of putting together a sermon or bible study simply because it needs to get done? Have I given less than my best effort in serving him? Have I seen my position as pastor as a burden? I am ashamed to say, “Yes, at times, I have.” Ouch, the truth stings. And then I must think, if God’s spokesman shows contempt for his name and service to him, should it be surprising that the congregation would do the same?

Malachi writes in chapter 2:13, **“You flood the Lord’s altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, ‘Why?’ It is because the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.”** Again, he’s not

addressing all the people *out there*. He's not talking about the people who didn't make it to worship today. He's talking to us, people who come to worship, who may bring offerings, but seem to forget that worship doesn't stop at the final hymn or when you pass the church doors. Worship of God and fearing his name continues outside of the church in the way we treat each other and our neighbor—including our spouse. If we have broken faith with our spouse with physical or even emotional adultery be that with wandering eyes, sin-filled thoughts, actions or whatever it may be, we have broken faith with God and are counted among those who God considers to be arrogant.

Then we get to those who have robbed God in their tithes and offerings. He is speaking to all who see their time and their cash only as their own. One may not say the words, but our actions show what is in the heart. There's almost always a number of excuses as to why one can't give the way God wants us to. The arrogant are always waiting for something before they are willing to give more: "Once I have a certain amount in the account...once my finances get in better shape...once a real need is there..." But that's not what God tells us. He says give **now** to him **first** in proportion to your personal income. It doesn't matter what someone else is giving, what about you? God even challenges you to try and out-give him. "**Test me in this and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it**" (Malachi 3:10). Again, it's easy to sit back and point fingers at all of *them* who really need to hear these words or think it's someone else's responsibility. But God is addressing these words to you; both the command and the promise. It does sound foolish to give to him first; it doesn't make sense. But God also tells us to lean not on our own understanding but trust in him (Proverbs 3:5). God knows whether or not you are being faithful and what is in your heart.

When we leave the excuses outside and leave our pride along with it, we see how arrogant we are with the exaggerated sense of our own personal importance and abilities. We see that in our going through motions of our service to him, the selfishness in our relationships, the not giving our first and best to the Lord. And so for our arrogance and doing of evil, we deserve that blazing furnace. That is the judgment that should be ours. Don't try and downplay the seriousness of the situation. The Law hurts, it bites, it stings, but we need it to strip us of our false pride and sinful arrogance. Because only then will we see the darkness of our sin and the complete lack of hope in ourselves.

But God does not leave you to despair or be left in your misery. Here comes the sun—God's Son. He is your perfect High Priest who sacrificed himself on the altar of the cross where the perfect Lamb of God, Jesus, shed his blood to take away the sin of the world. As the writer to the Hebrews stated: **He has appeared once for all at the culmination of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the**

**sins of many**” (Hebrews 9:26-28). For sinners too caught up in ourselves, who are unfaithful to the callings and positions God has given to us, for sinners full of all-too-convenient excuses, Christ came for you to unselfishly serve in your place offering his best—himself—for you. Just as people are destined to die once, so Christ was sacrificed once. But unlike people **who cannot redeem the life of another** (Psalm 49:7) Jesus’ death means something. He wrestled with the same temptations you do, defeated them and is without sin. With his death he brings you life. With the coming of God’s Son he has brought healing on his wings. Spiritually sick and dead with sin, the Great Physician heals with the Good News through his called servant, “Your sins are forgiven,” and they really are. Troubled hearts, burdened with guilt and shame, he comes to fill you with his light of great and enduring joy that those sins are removed and remembered no more.

And he continues to give you that healing on the wings of the Gospel preached and his sacraments given to you for the forgiveness of your sins. He feeds you with the Good News of his Word and his body and blood in the Lord’s Supper to give you strength to endure and resist the temptations of this world that attack you. He renews you each day with the light of his grace as you put down that Old Man of sin within and rise with Jesus as his new creation.

For those who do not believe, who want nothing to do with God or his Son, who stubbornly reject the Lord and his Word, there will be no leniency. They rejected God’s gift of forgiveness and will be treated as their sins deserve. There will be harsh just judgment.

**“But for you who revere my name you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves.”** God’s name is everything that he has revealed about himself in his Word. Revering God’s name is respecting his name and his Word. It’s trusting in his promises, holding to the truth, and believing that Jesus’ sacrifice was done for me. By faith we put on Jesus’ robes of righteousness so that we are protected against the burning of his judgment and receive the healing won for us on the cross. The Last Day, Judgment Day is not something for God’s people to fear. When the sun of righteousness comes all people will be raised up. All those who have been washed and cleansed of sin by the blood of the Lamb, who by saving faith revere the Lord, they will go out and jump and frolic like calves that have been kept in the pen for too long. We will be excited because what we hope for in the perfection of heaven will finally be our reality. When will it happen? We don’t know. But the day is coming. We are in the End Times; the signs have been fulfilled and we are just waiting for when God decides, “Today is the Day.” And so as we wait, with God’s people we pray and say: “Amen. Come Lord Jesus.” Amen.