

Prayer of the Day:

Lord God Almighty, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by your Holy Spirit that we may always look forward to the end of this present evil age and to the day of your righteous judgment. Keep us steadfast in true and living faith and present us at last holy and blameless before you; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. Alleluia. (Matthew 24:42 RSV)

Text: 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 that day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the LORD Almighty. “Not a root or a branch will be left to them. ² But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. ³ Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things,” says the LORD Almighty. – NIV84

Sermon Text:

Brothers and sisters, it will be the second most significant day in the history of the world. It will divide nations, states, towns, and families and as the sides are drawn, one will be forever defeated and the other named forever victorious for all to see. I am not talking about an election to end all elections, nor am I discussing some cataclysmic athletic contest, ultimate entrance exam, or terrifying test. I'm not even talking about the ongoing debate regarding vaccination. No, this day will make all of those moments in our lives look minuscule, unimportant, and small. Instead, this day is the final day of all days, It's Judgment Day, a day that divides believer and unbeliever, sinner and saint in the eternal judgment of a Holy and Righteous God.

As we consider the picture that is painted in our lesson today, the squeamish may be left a touch queasy. God compares judgment day to a furnace, an oven, which burns with intense heat. So hot are the flames that they will consume those who are arrogant – literally all those who take pride in opposing God and all evildoers or all those who actively work at sin and godlessness. So completely will it consume them that “*Not a root or a branch will be left to them* (Malachi 4:1)”. They will be completely consumed from top to bottom, from hair follicle to toenail.

That's bad enough but here's where it gets a bit more gruesome. For the victorious group, those who revere the name of God, this day will be different, it will be a day of great joy, so they *will go out and leap like calves released from the stall* (Malachi 4:2) with all the pent up energy of our grade school students released for recess or told the day was done. As they prance and play however, they trample upon the wicked under the soles of their feet, dancing on the ashes of those who dared to oppose the holy and righteous will of God (Malachi 4:3).

Last Judgment can certainly look frightening, well perhaps frightening doesn't cut it. The final day is absolutely terrifying for those who have offended a holy and righteous God. As Malachi speaks these words he speaks them to an Israel which has sinned against God in every way imaginable. They have trampled upon His worship bringing worldly junk instead of the sacrifices He demanded; failed to stand up for His Word instead of seeking the acceptance of the

world around them; mocked marriage tossing it aside at will for divorce and lust; they challenged God; robbed Him; pretended as if His power belonged to men and fooled themselves into thinking it was all acceptable, as if sinful human reason could outwit an omniscient, all-knowing, God (read Malachi 1-3). Their feeble attempts would not succeed. Ultimately all they will find for their trouble will be ashes and agony in the eternal fires of hell. *“Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the LORD Almighty* (Malachi 4:1).

How do those words leave you feeling? As people who are the New Testament equivalent to Old Testament Israel these words are a stern reminder for us as well. Do you find yourself squirming a little as you hear them? There is a reason for that but we will not find it any easier to listen to than the words of God’s judgment on the arrogant and evildoer. We squirm because we know of our many sins. We know of the times we have fooled ourselves into making our junk look like gems for Jesus; times we have allowed the world to wallop God’s will without speaking up; times when marriage was openly attacked, jabbed at by jokes and incinerated on internet screens; we’ve challenged God, robbed Him, pretended as if His power belonged to men and fooled ourselves into thinking it was all okay as if my brainpower could rewrite the Holy will of God.

It’s for all of those reasons that when God speaks of looking me in the face, when He proclaims that the Sun of Righteousness, Jesus Christ Himself, will appear in judgment on the last day, I get nervous. It happens because we know we will have to speak like David, *“³ For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. ⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge* (Psalm 51:3-4).” Standing before the God of all things, who knows even the sins we have forgotten and left unrecognized, we will lament with Paul, *¹⁸ I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. ¹⁹ For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. ... ²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death* (Romans 7:18-19, 24)? Malachi’s words send chills, *“Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace (4:1).”* Will we burn like stubble? Does this Day hold Dread the unsurpassed horror as evil is, as we are, reduced to ash?

It’s in the face of such a question, confronted with our sin and the real and earned results of them, that God speaks to us in our lesson today. We are not among the stubble set for the ash heap. We are not the desolate landscape, left after God’s scorched earth campaign against sin. And our very fear, or reverence for this Day of Judgment, bears that out.

The words of our God shatter the darkness of sin. *But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings* (Malachi 4:2). Imagine the worst dream you have ever had, the most terrible nightmare which left you sweat drenched and trembling. You couldn’t wake up, the terror was tormenting and then the alarms went off screaming in your ears and peeling you from the false reality you had endured and exposing the dawning morning light streaming through your window, terror gone, only the warmth of the sun greeting you. That’s this day! Up until this day we kept drifting back into the nightmare but on this day there will only be eternal sunshine and never ending happiness for those who revere the name of the Lord.

But what does that mean, to revere God’s name, literally the Hebrews says “fear”? It means that we stand in righteous reverence of God, knowing that all which we said in the face of the

flames of the furnace is true of us and that we do not deserve to stand before the righteous rays of the Son of God. But it also means that we stand in holy awe and reverence of the purpose for the coming of His Son as well.

Notice that the rising of the Sun would have been a fitting picture for the beginning of chapter four as well the Sun can scorch just as easily as it can heal. But this picture is not introduced until fear, reverence shows us the mind of God. Or saying it as we are so accustomed today “faith” reminds us who God is. He *wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth* (1 timothy 2:4) or as He says in through Malachi He has come *with healing in His wings* (Malachi 4:2).

Growing up in New Mexico, I recall sitting in the heat of the sun in the afternoon, closing one’s eyes and just basking in the dry warm heat as it radiated through muscles and bones, joints and sinew, it felt wonderful. As we wake from the darkness of sin, Jesus removes our shackles which had trapped us in the dank dungeons of despair and the light, the pure radiance of His Gospel, radiates through our souls warming us up, healing our bodies. It’s all there as the Word promises that in the blood of Christ all sin is paid for, in His righteous life perfection has been gained for all, in His resurrection judgment holds no terror, for as the Holy Spirit works through this gospel promise real fear, real reverence, true faith is given not earned but presented as a gracious gift because of His work. I believe Jesus said it best in our Gospel Lesson, *I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life* (John 5:24).

Brothers and Sisters, the Day is coming. As the Sun of Righteousness peeks over the horizon, knowing what it means for us the stalls of sin will contain us no longer, leaping, rejoicing, we will greet the coming king of all creation. We will rejoice in the fact that the hard service of life in a sinful world is over. We will rejoice that the enemies that plagued us are ash under our feet. We will rejoice that sin and its awful consequences are gone. We will rejoice because *Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him* (Hebrews 9:28). Yes, we can Rejoice as the Sun of Righteousness shines for us.

As Malachi promised, **JUDGMENT DAY**, a day unlike any other is coming. It brings with it **DREAD THE UNSURPASSED HORROR AS EVIL IS REDUCED TO ASH**. Unlike most of Israel, may we heed the warning! Like Christians throughout the ages through faith in Christ may we **REJOICE AS THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS SHINES FOR US!**