

Surely the Day is Coming!

*(Malachi 4) "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. {4} "Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel. {5} "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. {6} He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."*

So, are you counting the days until Christmas? I expect that some of you are. I expect that for some of you, especially the younger ones among us, Christmas can't get here soon enough. You can't wait to open those presents. For you, there are like too many days between now and Christmas. For others of us, there maybe not enough days between now and Christmas. We still have presents to buy, cards to send, another sermon to write. And yet, you realize that no matter what group you are in, the fact is, Christmas is going to come on exactly the same day, whether you are ready for it or not.

You realize that the same thing is true about another even more important day, the day sometimes called Judgment Day. There are a lot of people who won't be ready for that day either. It's not like there are all these people who are busy making preparations for Judgment Day. I don't remember there being any pre Judgment Day Sales this year. In fact, for a lot of people, Judgment Day isn't even on their radar. They don't believe there will ever be a judging of the living and the dead—and so they live their lives accordingly.

On the other hand, there is a whole other group of people who firmly believe that Jesus is going to return to this world to bring the kind of justice that only he can hand out. They're looking forward to it. In fact, maybe they're wondering what's taking him so long. They're thinking, "How bad do things have to get before Jesus pulls the plug on this world?"

My friends, did you know that God, in his Word, has a message for both groups of people? To those who say, "Judgment Day will never come," and to those who lament, "Why hasn't Judgment Day come yet?" God has a very simple message. In fact, it's our theme for today, taken from the first verse of Malachi, chapter 4, where God says, "Surely, the Day will Come"

Now for us to really appreciate what these words mean, I want you to imagine this scene. Imagine that you are a 6th grade student. You're sitting in class when suddenly your teacher is called out of the classroom. At first everyone sits quietly. But it doesn't take too long before some of the kids start looking around, like, "Hey, where'd the teacher go?" They start whispering and laughing. The next thing you know, there's pieces of paper flying around. People are starting to get up out of their seats. Someone's up in front pretending to be the teacher. Others are rummaging through the teacher's desk, eating his secret stash of candy.

Finally, you can't hold back anymore. You say, "C'mon guys, don't you think we should sit quietly until our teacher returns?" Oh my goodness! You thought things were bad before. They start ripping into you. "Who do you think you are—Little Miss Goody Two Shoes? What are you, the teacher's pet? Don't be telling us what we can and can't do. In fact, you better just keep your mouth shut or something

much is going to happen to you.” So that's what you do. You kind of hunker down, close your eyes and you wonder when it will all end.

Now tell me, if you were that 6th grader in classroom that was out of control, what emotions might you be experiencing? What thoughts might be going through your head? How about, “Why are these people acting like this? This isn't right. This isn't fair. I'm trying to do the right thing and I'm getting abused for it. They're doing all the wrong things and they're getting away with it. In fact, if this is the way it's going to go, I might as well join in with them. I mean, if everyone else is goofing off, why shouldn't I?”

My friends, do you know why I took you to that imaginary 6th grade classroom? Two reasons. First, because that's the world that the prophet Malachi lived in. And secondly, because in many ways, it's the world we live in too. Back in 400 BC, when Malachi lived, people doing really wicked things. The rich were taking advantage of the poor. The powerful were preying on the weak. Religious leaders who were charged with caring for the spiritual lives of the people, were in fact leading them away from God. And what's worse, it looked like they were getting away with it—even as the God-fearing people were seemingly getting no reward for obeying God's commands. In the chapter immediately before our text, Malachi describes the sentiments of the people of his day. They said, “It is futile to serve God. What did we gain by carrying out his requirements? Certainly the evildoers prosper, and even those who challenge God escape.” (Malachi 3:14-15).

Tell me, can you relate? Is the world that Malachi lived in all that different from the world that we live in? In fact, isn't the world we live in a little like that 6th grade classroom without the teacher in it? I mean, you look at the world around you and you see people acting like there is no one who has authority over them. Right? They are going to do whatever they think they can get away with. They don't believe that they are under some higher moral authority. No rather, it's “whatever feels right to me. I'm going to do what I want to do. If I want to leave my wife to be with someone else, you can't stop me. If I want to lie and cheat and defraud others, I may end up with an even fatter bank account that I had before. And if I want to be a bully, if I can harass and denigrate others and can get away with it, that's what I'm going to do.”

In fact, if you try to stop them, if you tell them that what they are doing is wrong, in fact, if you refused to condone what they; are doing, if you don't support their right to do whatever they want to do, they will label you as a bigot. They will say that you are judgmental or unloving or intolerant. They'll say that you think you are better than everyone else. And because of that, they'll do everything in their power to bring you down a notch, you Bible-believing Christian. They'll try to make your life hard, whether that means ostracizing you or taking you to court, you into court, or taking your head off for being an infidel.”

My friends, these are the things that happen when it seems like the one who is in charge, the one who could enforce the law, the one who can bring punishment on the wrongdoer—when that one seems to have left the room, or in this case when that one has ascended into heaven.

But wait a minute. Should that surprise any of us? Do you remember what Jesus said that life would be like for his followers after he visibly left them to return to heaven? In Matthew 24, Jesus tells his disciples, “Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.” And again in John 15:18-19, “If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.”

Now, if that's true, that believers will be persecuted, if it's true that life won't always be fair, if it's true that there are times when it feels like the lunatics are running the insane asylum, what's to keep us from just throwing up our hands in the air and saying, “What's the use? You know, if we can't beat them, we might as well join them? If everybody else is doing it, why shouldn't I?”

Malachi's answer is simply this: "Surely the Day is Coming." In other words, there will be a time when the teacher steps back into the room. In reality, that will be the day when Jesus visibly returns to this world in all his glory, surrounded by all His Holy Angels, and he renders a final verdict. To those who put their trust in him and gave evidence of it in their lives, Jesus will say, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world" (Matthew 25:34).

But, to those who refused to acknowledge Christ's authority, those who lived in defiance of God's commands, Jesus will say, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matthew 25:41)

In fact, here in our text, Malachi describes the coming day of judgment with these words, "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." Certainly, for anyone who thinks that there will not be a final Day of Reckoning, anyone who thinks that they're going to get away with a life of godless behavior, these words ought to serve as a powerful wake-up call. A fire alarm, if you will. What does God say? Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction (Galatians 6:7-8).

So, the real question is, if Judgement Day is surely coming, or maybe I should say, since Judgment Day is surely coming, what is your attitude about that day? Are you counting the days, hoping it will come sooner? Or are you counting the days, hoping it will never come at all? How you answer that question will likely be determined by what you think will happen on the Last Day.

If you think that God is coming to reward you for being so faithful to him, you have every reason to be terrified by that day, because you and I have not always been faithful to God. Too often, we've joined in with those lawbreakers all around us. We deserve God's punishment in hell. On the other hand, if you believe that, in an act of pure undeserved love, Jesus took on the punishment you deserve, if you believe that Jesus, in effect, went to hell in your place, if you believe what God says, namely, that Jesus is your righteousness before the throne of God, then for you, Judgment Day will be a truly wonderful day. It will be the dawn of a new day after a long cold dark night.

Isn't that how Malachi describes it? But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in his wings. Do you see the picture Malachi is painting? For years we've been living in the darkness of this unbelieving world. Our bodies are stiff and aching as we feel the effects of sin in us and around us. But there on the horizon, we see the glow of the dawn. We know the sun is coming—whether you spell it S-U-N or S-O-N. When that sun of righteousness appears, we will step out into the sunlight. We will feel that warm embrace of God's love. Our bodies will be healed once again. They'll be set free from the effects of sin forever!

In fact, how will that make you feel on that day? Malachi tells you. You will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. Have you ever seen calves let out of the pen for the first time? Google it on YouTube. Those calves are just kicking up their heels in pure joy! Christians, that's going to be you and me on the last day! By God's grace, through faith in Jesus, we are going to be set free from the pain and persecution of this world. We are going to have bodies that are glorified. We are going to be with the Lord forever! You talk about a really great day, a day to look forward to, a day to get ready for!

Yes, this week, we're probably all getting ready for Christmas. But Christmas is just a precursor, a glimpse of an even greater, an even more glorious day. The day when Jesus returns to this earth to rescue his people, both soul and body, to take us to live with him forever in heaven. What a glorious day that will be! Can't wait! Amen.