

Sermon Manuscript: Malachi 4:1-2
The Sun of Righteousness Will Rise

2nd Sunday of End Time – Last Judgment – November 7, 2021

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. 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." [NIV]

When I was in college, I made a spring break trip to Florida with some friends. We wanted to get a break from the cold and snow of late winter in Wisconsin and enjoy the sun and surf of Daytona Beach. We drove to the Sunshine State to soak in the sun. The only trouble was that we were pretty pasty white from the long winter living on the frozen tundra. That sun felt really good – at least for a while. But we were foolish. We didn't use enough sunscreen. We stayed out during the middle of the day. And by the end of our first day in Florida, we were all sun burned. One from our group had sunburned the back of their knees and so had a hard time walking. Another had sunburned lips. They were swollen up like a bag of popcorn left in the microwave too long. I sunburned the tops of my feet and couldn't wear shoes. The lesson we learned is that the sun is a great thing after a cold winter but when you don't treat it with the proper respect, it can be dangerous and destructive. We were lucky that we weren't injured worse than we were.

Our text for today speaks of God's judgment with images of fire and the sun. When we don't revere God's name, we will face the destructive heat of God's just anger. The day of judgment is coming and, on that day, Jesus will judge the world. He wants us to be prepared. So today let us know that **THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS WILL RISE**. On the one hand, his heat will burn away evil. On the other hand his warmth will heal his people.

1. His Heat Will Burn Away Evil

This is the last chapter of the last book of the Old Testament. The prophet's name, Malachi, means "my messenger." And the message God gives is to warn as well as to comfort. The warning comes for those who ignore and are not faithful to the LORD. The comfort comes as he foretells the coming of the Forerunner, John the Baptist, who will prepare the way for the "Sun of righteousness." The first three chapters call the people to be faithful and repent for their unfaithfulness. When he comes to chapter four, Malachi gives the reason for them to be prepared. The day of the LORD is coming.

That day will bring about God's complete judgment on those who have rejected and been unfaithful to the LORD. Malachi uses some very vivid pictures to make God's message to his people clear. That day will be like a fire that burns with intense heat. The heat of God's

judgment on that day will be so intense that it will burn everything to stubble. There will be nothing left above or below the ground. There will be no branch or root left. That day will set all the unfaithful on fire.

God's judgment will come on all who are "arrogant and every evildoer." The arrogant are literally those who have an inflated image of themselves. They are so self-important that they have no regard for God and do not care for his will. God and his Word are unimportant to them. They have more important things to do.

The evildoers are literally those who are the "makers of guilt." The things that they do earn them God's judgment. Guilt is not just a feeling. Guilt is first and foremost the punishment that sinners earn for the sin that they do. They create guilt by the things that they do. Such arrogance and disregard for God's law make people who see no need for repentance. They think that God will not judge them.

Malachi's warning is that the day of the LORD will come. And when it does there will be nothing left for these arrogant and evildoers. The destruction of the evil will be complete. There will be no branch or root left. This destruction must happen because God hates evil and cannot tolerate it. He will completely separate himself from evil and those who do it. Hell is the place for the eternal destruction of those who sin against God. Isaiah describes those who will be consumed at the end of his prophecy: "*They will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind.*" [Isaiah 66:24] This is God's judgment on the arrogant and all evildoers.

Malachi's warning is not just about what will happen to such sinners. It also warns us all that this day of the LORD will surely come. It is popular among sinners both then and today to deny God's judgment and especially hell. Malachi reports what many people then and now think: *Now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly evildoers prosper, and even those who challenge God escape.*" [Malachi 3:15] Because judgment hasn't happened yet, people are tempted to think it will never come. But we dare not mistake God's patience for the idea that he will not judge the world. Peter tells us:

First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation." But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. ... By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. [1 Peter 3:3-5,7-9]

As Malachi says here, "Surely the day is coming!" And even though we don't know exactly when it will come, we can be absolutely sure that it will come. It can only be the arrogant and the evildoers who would deny God's judgment.

Are we in danger of being among the arrogant? Among the evildoers? We must confess that we don't always live as if we're certain of God's coming judgment. We get full of ourselves and push God aside. We are surely makers of guilt every day. We get careless and mistake life's day-to-day routine as the way things will always be. We can conveniently forget that the day of the LORD is coming. I see it in my own life. And I see it in the lives of the people around me. Evil doing is there every day. It's not just the murderers or drug dealers or prostitutes. It's the little idolaters we become when money and possessions cease to be merely tools and gifts from God and instead become what our life is all about. It's the world of evil that our tongues create when we speak gossip, true or not, under the guise of being "concerned." It's the poison of resentment toward others whom we think have wronged us in such a way that we can't forgive their trespasses as we have been forgiven ours. It's the cruel criticism of the efforts of others when it doesn't meet our standards without ever turning the mirror on our own shoddy treatment of others in return.

Our arrogance is also seen in our laxity of worship. It's not just when we don't come but maybe worse when we come only to be seen by others instead of baring our sinful hearts before God who judges. It's seen in our callousness to God's law that condemns sin as if we had none. It's made plain in our apathy to the greatest news of all that the most precious blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin. It's heard (or rather not heard) in our lack of thankfulness for God's countless blessings when the only sound is our constant worrying and whining.

Such carelessness will feel the heat of the judgment. It will be like the intense, immobilizing pain of sunburn. Hear and heed Malachi's warning. "Surely the day is coming!" Let's be ready.

The Lord in his grace makes us ready through warnings like Malachi's. When I lived in Oregon, it was the custom there for farmers, who grew mostly hay, to burn their fields in the spring. The idea was that the heat of the flames would burn away all the weeds and kill the seeds that those weeds had deposited so the new hay could grow fertile and lush in the warmth of the spring sunshine. This is like where Malachi turns us next. The Sun of Righteousness will rise. His warmth will heal his people.

2. His Warmth Will Heal His People

Messages like Malachi's are God's way of preparing the ground of our souls for the spring sunshine of Christ. When we are warned of the coming of the day of the LORD and by God's grace we heed the warning, God brings his spring sunshine.

The problem is that our sin and rebellion, our arrogance and evildoing, need to be healed. We need the healing that only God's love can provide. Sin is like a disease that breeds and festers in the darkness. Jesus talks about this with Nicodemus: *"This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."* [John 3:19-21] Christ is that light that shines into all the dark places of our lives and warms and cleans and heals all the wickedness away.

Christ is our Sun who rises and heals us. He takes away our sin and guilt. He endured the fire of damnation in our place. He cried out in our pain from the cross, "Why have you forsaken me?" And in his death and resurrection he provides the absolute healing that heals the breach between the holy God and sinners like us. When the temple curtain was torn in two, that was the sign that sin no longer infected us and now we could come before the holy God without fear of the fire of his judgment. Just as the spring sunshine brings new life to the green grass that sprouts from burned over fields, so the warmth of Jesus' love for us brings life where only judgment could have been before. This new life it what makes us able to revere the LORD's name and be the ones who are indeed healed.

This is why we can look forward with eager anticipation for the day of the LORD. It will mean that our healing will be complete for all eternity. All our sorrows and ills will be healed forever when Jesus comes. And we will be like young calves in the springtime. I don't know if you have seen calves like this. They have been cooped up like college students in dorms during a Wisconsin winter. When that warm sun comes out and the green grass comes up, there can be nothing but celebration. And so it will be for us when the day of the LORD comes. There will be no fire to fear. There will only be the warmth of our Savior's love in which we will bask for eternity. Because of what Jesus has done for us, the springtime of forgiveness and hope is the judgment we look forward to as believers.

Until the day of the LORD comes, let us live every day prepared for its coming. Let us do everything we can by God's grace to stay in the warmth of Christ's sun. Stay close to God's Word. Be cleansed by daily recall of our baptism. Be fed with the feast of forgiveness in our Savior's Supper of his body and blood. Flee temptation and sin. Live in love for others. And do all this by God's grace and in Christ's healing forgiveness.

Winter is coming and the days are getting shorter and colder. After a cold, dark night we look forward to the warmth of a rising sun. May we so look forward to the coming of our Sun of Righteousness, Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.