

Sermon for November 11, 2012 – Final Judgment

Malachi 4:1-3

Theme: The Day Is Surely Coming!

- 1) *When the arrogant will burn like stubble.*
- 2) *When the righteous will shine like the sun.*

"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.

Are you tempted like I am? "Tempted to do what?", you might ask me. Tempted to just give up. I mean look at the world. It's a mess. Christians are being persecuted throughout the world. The fastest growing religion in America is having no religion. Evolution is being promoted as fact. Society – even those who claim to be Christians – are throwing marriage to the wind.

The world has gone complete bonkers. People don't know what it means to love. Respect for parents and those in authority is gone. Public servants are using their office to serve themselves instead of the public. God is being publicly mocked in the media. Children are being abused at an alarming rate. Whole church bodies are turning away from God's Word and promoting an "anything goes" lifestyle . . . and I am tired of it. It is all so oppressive. Where is justice? Where is Christ's promised return? There are times when questions and doubts hound me. Don't they hound you as well?

Well, I know other people who were hounded by the same doubts: read the New Testament epistles, and you will see the apostles encouraging Christians to stand fast in this world, to not give in to the temptation to give up. In the Old Testament, God saw it important to record the lament of a man named Asaph. He wrote the 73rd Psalm – a psalm that expresses the very same thoughts I expressed – the temptation to question God's justice and goodness because of how chaotic the world is. He talks about how oppressive the success of the wicked was to him until (and I quote) *"I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny."* (Psalm 73:17)

Brothers and sisters in Christ: We have entered the sanctuary of God - His Holy Word – so that we can find hope to endure and strength to resist the temptation of giving up. Even though our sermon text was written many years after Asaph lived, the LORD offers us through it the same understanding He gave Asaph. Let us find hope and strength to contend for our faith by considering the final destiny of all, under the theme: **The Day Is Surely Coming!** *1) When the arrogant will burn like stubble. 2) When the righteous will shine like the sun.*

Part One: When the arrogant will burn like stubble

Our sermon text is taken from the book of Malachi. Malachi (whose name means "my messenger") was a prophet in Judah 400 years before the birth of Christ. He was the last prophet to write a book of the Old Testament.

Here was the problem: the Jews were starting to forget the LORD yet again. In order to understand this problem, let me give you a little bit of their history. When the LORD established the Davidic kingdom, things went well at first. But then, over time, both the kings and the people forgot the LORD and started worshipping other gods. The LORD sent prophets to call the people to repentance, but they didn't listen. He threatened punishment, but they didn't listen. Finally, he sent the Babylonians to conquer Jerusalem, destroy the temple and take the Jews captive for 70 years. Guess what happened? The Jews finally listened and repented.

After 70 years of exile, the Lord allowed the Jews to return home. They rebuilt the temple and their beloved Jerusalem. They vowed allegiance to the LORD and things were off to a good start. But then it started happening all over again. Jew started exploiting fellow Jew. Husbands were divorcing their wives. The people decided to withhold their offerings from

the LORD. Materialism, greed, and lust - all these things started to overtake many of them. Those who did not turn from the LORD were oppressed by those who did. What happened? Didn't the LORD care? Why wasn't He punishing those who were turning away from Him and oppressing others? And so the faithful were starting to question God and fall from their faith. They started to complain when famine and other disasters struck – wondering why the LORD was punishing them

The LORD sent Malachi to explain the situation. Why were there problems? Because they were forsaking the LORD. If they repented, things would change. If they didn't – there would be a more terrible day they would have to face. The people, however, were starting to laugh at the idea of God's judgment. "Doesn't God always threaten judgment? Will that day ever come?"

The Lord reassures us that it will: *"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.*

When it comes to judgment day, it is not a matter of if, but when. Soon, the LORD says. Soon he is coming, and everyone who has turned away from him will be judged. And this judgment will not be like the judgment of the Babylonian captivity. At that time, the LORD held out hope for Judah. He promised that a branch would come up from the stump of Jesse (a prophecy of the coming Messiah – Isaiah 11:1). Many would be allowed to repent and turn to the LORD because this was the purpose of the Babylonian captivity.

This is not the case regarding the day Malachi foretells. The fires of judgment will be so swift and complete that there will be no hope, no second chance. *Not a root or a branch will be left to them.*

Who are the arrogant and evildoers Malachi is addressing? Are they the criminals and terrorists of this world? No, more than that. They are all who refuse to believe in Jesus – including those who claim to be Christian, and use their faith as a license to sin. The author of Hebrews warns: ²⁶ *If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, ²⁷ but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.* (Hebrews 10:26-27)

Brothers and sisters in Christ: take heed of God's warning. The Day of Judgment is coming, when all wickedness together with all the wicked will be destroyed. The day is coming when we will have to give an account to God for all that we have done.

"But he is so long in coming!" you might think. "Almost 2000 years have passed since He promised he would come. Maybe he's not coming. Maybe I have time to join in with the world and sow my wild oats." Listen to what the LORD says through his apostles Peter: ⁸ *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. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. ¹¹ Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.*" (2 Peter 3:8-13)

There you have it: the LORD is coming, just as he promised. He is coming to judge the devil and all his angels. He is coming to punish all who persecuted us, enticed us to sin, and all that have fallen away from him. He is coming to judge. So be alert. Repent of your sins and look to Christ for forgiveness. Why? Because He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked He would rather that they turn from evil and live. How much does he desire your salvation? So much that took on human flesh and blood and was born of a woman, born under law, to redeem us who are under the law. So much that He took our all your sins upon himself – suffered and died for them and rose again to show that all has been paid for. You are forgiven and free through faith in him.

Surely the Day is coming when the LORD will judge the wicked. But that is not the only reason He is coming. He is also coming to deliver believers to glory.

Part Two: *When the righteous will shine like the sun.*

The LORD tells us: *But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.*

Yes, we can see it now – the dawn of the eternal day is coming. The sun of righteousness, who is none other than Jesus himself, is coming. And when the light of his glory breaks through the sky on that day, what healing it will bring! It will be like a warm spring day breaking the cold of winter. Jesus and the righteousness he brings with him, will calm our troubled hearts, dispel all our sorrows, fulfill our deep longing and grant us a peace that transcends all understanding. When that day comes, our Savior will wipe every tear from our eyes. There will be no more death, mourning or pain.

What a glorious day this will be for those who look to Jesus in love and trust in him for salvation! Not only will there be feelings of peace and relief, but there will be a great deal of excitement too.

Our text says: *And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall.* I have never seen a calf released from a stall after a long winter, but my Dad told me about his experience. He remembers seeing it as a child, and he was amazed at how uncontrollably happy that calf seemed. It just leaped and leaped and leaped – unbelievably high as well!

You know the excitement you feel when something good happens to you, how you might hop around laughing, speaking words of disbelief because what happened to you is so wonderful? Imagine that feeling of joy a million fold and then you will just begin to imagine the joy we – who hold on to Jesus in faith – will feel at His reappearing. And why? Because our Savior - our precious Savior - has come! And He has brought our salvation and inheritance with Him. More than that, He brought His Father with Him together with the Holy Spirit. Our God offers Himself to us as our inheritance. We will be with Him forever – how can that thought not make us who look to the LORD in faith and love leap for joy?

Our text continues: *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.*

Just think – the devil and all his evil angels will be completely defeated on the day of the LORD's reappearing. Never will they be able to rise up again to tempt and taunt you. And neither will this world, that was so bent on getting you to follow it, or the enemies of the Gospel that persecuted and killed fellow Christians – that warred against you at every step. The wicked and all wickedness will be gone – only eternal joy, peace and every other good thing will remain. The wicked will be as dust under our feet – in other words: completely conquered.

With all the pressure from the devil, the world and our own sinful natures, are you tempted to give up your faith? Tempted yes, but praise be to God he gives us the reason not to give up. The day is coming when He will rend open the heavens and judge the earth. The wicked will be destroyed, but upon those who hold on to him in faith, the LORD will shine all his glory and saving love. And so we say: Amen, Come soon Lord Jesus. Amen.