

## **The Day of the Lord is coming Malachi 4:1-3**

*<sup>1</sup> Look! The day is coming, burning like a blast furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble. The day that is coming will set them on fire, says the LORD of Armies, a day that will not leave behind a root or branch for them. <sup>2</sup> But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise, and there will be healing in its wings. You will go out and jump around like calves from the stall. <sup>3</sup> You will trample the wicked. They will surely be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I take action, says the LORD of Armies.*

We are currently in the season of church year known as End Times. These final Sundays of the church year help us focus on the end of the world and our eternal existence. The Scripture that we consider today is taken from the last chapter of the last book of the Old Testament. Here the prophet takes us to that final day when our Lord returns to judge all of humanity. For some that day will bring eternal destruction. For others it will be a day of great joy. That joy awaits all who eagerly wait for the Day of the Lord to arrive.

So when that day finally arrive, God only knows. The Apostle Peter reminds us that many people mock the idea of a final judgment. Peter writes, *“In the last days scoffers will come with their mocking, following their own lusts. They will say, “Where is this promised coming of his? For from the time that our fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they have from the beginning of creation” (2 Peter 3:3,4).* God’s prophet tells us that day is certainly coming: *“Look! The day is coming, burning like a blast furnace...The day that is coming will set them on fire, says the LORD of Armies.”* Since that day is promised by the Lord who is served by celestial armies, it is certain to come. And it will come with the blast of eternal destruction. Who will endure the destruction? The prophet tells us, *“All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble.”* This destruction awaits those who stubbornly reject the Lord and his Word. They defy God and dare to challenge him. God’s prophet pictures them bring thrown into a smelting furnace where flames are confined and can be stoked to intense heart. The last book of the Bible describes it as a fiery lake of burning sulfur (Revelation 21:8). And those who defy God will be fuel for that fiery furnace. God’s prophet says they are like straw or stubble. After such worthless stubble is burned, all that remains are the ashes that the wind blows away.

One can see what terrible future awaits any who dare to face that day without God’s favor. They didn’t want him in their life when they struggled through life day by day. They paid little mind in learning what God wanted and expected of them. When the opportunities arose for them to hear God’s Word, they could only turn a deaf ear to him and cared little about what God says. It will be a horrible day when God has to say, *“You didn’t want to listen. Fine. I’ve got nothing more to say to you. Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41).*

Who can blame our Lord for making such a judgment? They arrogantly despised God’s word. They wasted the time of grace God had given them. They went after evil all the time. But beware. We are made of the same sinful flesh. Those same arrogant tendencies can trip us up. When the opportunity to worship is taken away, like when your pastor is on vacation and we don’t schedule a New Year’s service, will you find other options? Or will sinful flesh convince

you that missing a service is not going to do any harm? Even when we're in God's house for worship, do we let our thoughts wander off while singing a hymn or listening to the sermon? So the word of God can even be despised by those who are listening. For our neglect or for our giving in, we know the Day of the Lord should bring us eternal destruction. Who of us can claim to be as holy as God wants us to be? Who of us can ever expect to hear God say, "*Well done, good and faithful servant*" (Matthew 25:21).

The answer is actual found in our text. The prophet mentions that on the last day, *the sun of righteousness will arise*. Look who's coming to judge us but the very one who entered our world about 400 years following Malachi's prophecy. Last weekend, we dialed our clocks back an hour to save a little daylight in the morning. When God's clock of grace struck midnight, our Savior was born into this world, born of a woman, and born under God's law (Galatian 4:5). Like the rising sun, he brings light to this sin darkened world. For sin-sick souls he brings healing in his wings. No longer do we need to wander aimlessly through life. Our Savior strove the straight and narrow path of righteousness for everyone. His path took him to a cross, where the fire of God's wrath burned him to death. Every last sin was burned to ashes. But the aroma of his one sacrifice, smelled pleasing to his Father. So pleased that he raised him back to life on the third day and welcomed him home 40 days later. Now he rules everything for the good of his church. Even the enemies of his church will not prevail. When he returns in judgment he will set everything straight.

And what about those who long for his return? That same day that brings the fire of judgment on the arrogant and every evildoer, will bring lasting joy to those he has chosen. They don't fear the fire. They enjoy the warmth of hearing their Savior's voice. They are his sheep. They know his voice. They kept listening. It doesn't matter what lies the world around them tells them. They listen to their Savior. He speaks truth, the whole truth, and nothing but truth. When the arrogant and the evildoer make life difficult for them, they simply turn to their Lord's precious Word. They cling to every promise he makes. Even when they must endure evil, they know their God would work it all for good. He wouldn't give them more than they can handle. He always provides a way out. They find relief in the green pastures and the still waters of his holy Word. And now when he does return they can lift their heads high. Their salvation has finally come. And all fear and trouble that they had in this life is replace by everlasting joy.

One picture in this text really hits home for anyone who grew up on a farm. I remember late in spring when we first let the cows out to pasture. What a sight to see these 1400-pound animals running through the field and jumping in sheer joy. They were finally out of the barnyard after a long winter. That picture of great joy describes all who wait for our Lord to return. Yes, that day will bring destruction, but not for those longing for his return. The Apostle Paul describes that day in his first letter to the Thessalonians: *The Lord himself will come down from heaven with a loud command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them, to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord* (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17). And we'll want to meet our Lord in the air. That's because of the

destruction that is going on below. The Apostle Peter describes it in his 2<sup>nd</sup> epistle: *The day of the Lord will come like a thief. On that day the heavens will pass away with a roar, the elements will be dissolved as they burn with great heat, and the earth and what was done on it will be burned up. That day will cause the heavens to be set on fire and destroyed, and the elements to melt as they burn with great heat. But according to his promise we look forward to new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells* (2 Peter 3:10,12,13). Despite the worldwide destruction by fire, you and I and all God's chosen will begin our eternal existence experiencing lasting joy.

We do experience joy in life. The joy of hitting milestones in our education. The joy of victories on the playing field. The joy of marriage when a man and a woman become husband and wife. The joy of the newborn in a couple's life. What's common about all the joy we experience in life? It doesn't last. The joy of graduation ends when we start again at the bottom of the next level of education or when we hit the grind of a workday. The joy of victory is often replaced by the agony of defeat. Joy in a marriage is hurt by conflicts brought on by selfishness from both spouses. And the joy of a newborn can be easily forgotten because of a lack of sleep brought on by a crying baby.

But the joy that the day of the Lord brings lasts for eternity. It's so hard for us to imagine. Being filled with joy all the time. We've never had it in this world of sorrow. But it's coming. When we leave this world with all its disappointments and heartaches, we'll have none of it in our heavenly home. It is interesting that when Scripture describes what heaven is like, it usually tells us what is not there. In the last book of the Bible we read: *"Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them...He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away"* (Revelation 21:3,4). The psalmist describes our life there this way: *you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand* (Psalm 16:11). One can only speculate what life in heaven will be like. There's nothing that will trouble us. Nothing that will cause us any pain. Only Adam and Eve knew what that life was like before they brought sin into our world.

And thankfully the woman's Seed has entered our world to undo what sin has done. He crushed the head of our worst enemy. He's turned death into mere sleep from which he will personally wake us one day. And when he returns, it doesn't matter if we are sleeping in our graves or are still alive. We will all be with our Lord forever. We will receive an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade. All the riches in the world cannot compare to it. Our best days on earth do not come close to every glorious day we will have there. And eternal joy is ours, for every enemy we ever had will be destroyed.

When the day of the Lord comes, *then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain* (1 Cor. 15:54-58). The day of the Lord is coming. To those who defy God, it will bring destruction. To the rest of us—eternal joy. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.