

UNEDITED DRAFT

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Friends in Christ,

The end of November will mark the end of the church year. The last four Sundays of the church years, we observe a season called “End Times.” Today we especially focus on the Last Judgment - that is, Judgment Day. Hearing this topic doesn’t bring joy to most. Most are happy to come for Christmas and celebrate Christ’s birth. Another popular Sunday is Easter and celebrating Christ’s resurrection. Those days are important because of what they mean for our salvation. But if we were to pick a single day yet to come... a day in the future that is just as important for our salvation, it would have to be Judgement Day.

But not too many people get fired up to celebrate that day which is most definitely coming. In fact, when I say those words, “Judgement Day” what thoughts and feelings do you experience? Or if I remind you a day is coming and cannot be avoided when you absolutely will stand before the Most Holy God, Creator of Heaven and Earth who sees and knows all things. Your life will be laid bare before him and you will be held accountable for all that you have thought or said or did. How does that make you feel? Perhaps fear and trepidation?

My prayer is that today is that once we have finished talking about Judgment Day, you will leave with total peace and exuberant joy in your heart. But I’ll tell you up front, before we get there, we’re going to have to make some less pleasant realities perfectly clear. So let’s just jump in.

We are looking at the last chapter of the last book of the Old Testament. Malachi. What do you suppose the last chapter of the last book of the old Testament is about? It’s about the “last day.” Judgment Day. Malachi spoke this prophecy about 4 centuries before Jesus was born. And here’s what he said:

Malachi 4:1-4 “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.

Right now we are living in an era of God’s patience. During the this era of God’s patience, God has not yet judged all people. He is patient with the wicked and the sinners because he does not want anyone to perish but that all would come to a knowledge of the truth and repent of their sins. But because God is patient, Christians see things that upset us: we see the wicked win. We see sinners seeminly succeed. The thief can thrive. The transgressor can triumph. Meanwhile saints seem to suffer. The loving languish and lose. The forthright fail. The righteous are wronged. Where is the justice?

“**Surely the day is coming**” “The Day” is Judgment Day and Malachi tells us it is SURELY coming. There is no escaping it. And not only is that day coming for “them,” it’s coming for you too. Sometimes it may seem like this world and our lives will just go on and on. We have a routine, there are seasons, there is a seeming sameness to it all. Couple this with the fact that we don’t like to think about death or judgment. If we do think about them, it’s almost always in terms of something always distant, always a long time off... never near, never immediate. So it’s easy to be lulled into a sleep thinking that there is no foreseeable end to me and no end to the world. But the prophet wakes us up from that illusion and dream. The day is surely coming... when this world will be burned with fire ...when every human being that ever lived will stand and give an account before the creator ...when you will stand before him and give an account for your life. Your court date IS set. It’s not a matter of “if.” It’s only a matter of when.

So we must be prepared. And now is the time to prepare since you don’t know the day or the hour. You can’t prepare later because there may be no later. And the matter is urgent because the consequences are eternal. The Bible is clear that everyone will live for all eternity. The only question is where you will live.

Some people convince themselves that there's nothing to be concerned about on that day because after all God is loving. Since he loves all of us, his children, ultimately everyone will go to heaven, right? Wrong.

“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.”**

God's judgment upon the arrogant and the evildoer is real. They will burn under the wrath of God. This teaching is found throughout Scripture. Psalm 21:9 **“At the time of your appearing you will make them like a fiery furnace. In his wrath the Lord will swallow them up, and his fire will consume them.”** Matthew 3:12 **His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”** 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10 **“God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.”**

Take this to heart. God's fiery wrath and judgment will be unleashed. Against whom? Malachi says: Against the **arrogant** and **every evildoer**. Paul said, **“Those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.”** Search your heart. Is their arrogance? Arrogance says, “I know better than God. I will control my own life. I will do what I want to do. God word is clear, but I will not yield.” This is a dangerous, dangerous place to be spiritually, friends. If in your heart you are not afraid to do what God hates, not afraid to act unlovingly toward another person, not afraid to disregard God and ignore God... you are on dangerous ground. The day is surely coming, says the Lord.

But listen: **“But to those who revere my name...”** What does that mean? To revere God's name is to humble yourself before him and listen. It means to put yourself in the proper place. You don't get to stand over God and call the shots in the universe... or even in your own life. He does. You don't get to stand along side of God, and give him advice as to what's right and wrong, what's good and bad -- even as it pertains to you and your situation and circumstances. “Look, God, I know what you say in your word, but let me explain something to you. You see my situation is different, therefore I can disregard what you say in this circumstance.” No, you can't! This is a failure to revere the name of God. You revere your own name, your own will, you own power, your own control.

Those who revere God's name know what God says about humans. We are sinners. We are under God. We have rebelled against God. To revere God's name is to know what God says about himself. He is absolutely just and holy and righteous. He cannot compromise those attributes. Therefore, Judgment Day is coming. But revering his name also means you know that God is love and that he desperately wants all to be saved. So how does God resolve this tension? He must punish sinners. He desires to save sinners.

The tension is resolved at the cross of Christ. God chose to punish sinners through a substitute. For that substitute to be suitable he himself had to be without sin. Any sin would mean the punishment would be for his own sin, not the sin of others. And so Jesus came, the perfect substitute. The Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John give a fair amount of detail about Jesus' life and ministry. More than enough for us be confident that he was indeed sinless, holy, perfect in thought, word and deed. Just the substitute we needed!

So to satisfy the justice of God - so sin would be punished - Jesus took the blame for all of our sins and took them with him to the cross. At the cross the full wrath of God was poured out. The lights went out on the world as Jesus hung there under the Father's wrath. The agony of isolation from his Father finally drove him to say: “My God My God, why have you forsaken me?” And when the final sin of the final person Jesus declared: “It is finished!” A victory cry! And he gave up his spirit and died. His victory was complete, for on the third day, he rose from the dead. The justice

of God was satisfied. The love of God was satisfied. All who trust in Jesus have God's free ticket to heaven. You have God's guarantee that your sins are forgiven! And if you truly trust in Jesus, you are revering God's name.

So the tension for God resolved. His justice is satisfied and so is his love. He remains holy, and his grace is poured out. But here's the thing: the tension for you is not yet resolved. You have been declared by God to be holy for the sake of Jesus. Yet you still struggle with sin in your daily life. In fact, it fences you in and feel restricted. You are still affected by sin in this broken world. And so you experience sadness. All around are people living in darkness and so you feel darkness all around you. You have been promised by God eternal life with him, but you live in a world surrounded by death and decay. God has claimed justice, but all around you see injustices. We long for relief, and justice, and for all to be made right! So let's look now at the 2nd verse in our reading, and receive much needed comfort for our souls.

God says: **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.**

Such amazing and comforting word pictures in this one verse.

1) Darkness: The sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. Even if you're not typically afraid of the dark, darkness can be a scary thing. You can't see where you're going and you could fall in hole or off a cliff. There could be bad guys waiting to harm you, and you wouldn't be able to see them. But when you have light, you see everything. All is clear. Living in this world of sin is like living in a long, dark night. Evil lurks all around. Sin is everywhere. But when that day comes, the sun of righteousness will rise. Light will shine and the darkness will be gone. This light is the light of righteousness. All evil will be exposed and burned away. Imagine the feeling of the sun finally rising after a dark, cold, dangerous, night. The warmth of those rays. The brightness it brings. The darkness soon becomes a distant memory as you bask in the warmth and brightness. So also when Jesus comes: he is the sun of righteousness shining brightly and dispelling the darkness of sin and all the horrible consequences we see in this world. The pall of death is lifted and life rules forever in his light.

2) with healing in its wings. A slight change in metaphors. Life in this sinful world is like always being sick. Our own sins, the effects of sin in general... all of it saps our life and strength. All I can compare it to is like a continuous migraine headache. I don't know if you've ever had one... I get on three or four times a year. It saps your strength. It makes you feel absolutely rotten. You have no energy. You just want to lie there in the dark. But then it lifts and its gone. The next day you feel pretty normal. And the difference is huge. Suddenly, you have energy and no pain. It's incredible. Jesus comes to bring healing on the last day. You're living under the migraine of sin, but the sun or righteousness will remove it forever. You'll feel refreshed and whole, with nothing burdening you... nothing weighing you down.

And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall.

3) The writer describes freedom for us. A calf in a stall is restricted. This is our life in sin. Have you felt trapped? Stuck? No way out? Can't hardly move? But then release. Freedom! And with that freedom comes...

4) Joy. You will leap for joy. The calf who can finally stretch its legs does not mope around, but enjoys his freedom through leaping and bounding around!

And that's what God ultimately wants you to have. He wants to remove the shackles of sin, and the pressure of living in a sinful world. He wants to fully and finally set you free from it all. You already have victory in the Lord Jesus Christ, but you don't fully feel it yet. In God's patience he hasn't finally cleansed the world of all sin and evil. But he will. And when he does, the joy you experience will be inexpressible. You will leap for joy.

Out of the darkness. Fully healed. Freedom given. Joy experienced: this is what you have to look forward to on Judgment Day because of what Jesus did for you on the cross. This is what awaits all who revere God's name.

C.S. Lewis said this: Men have pursued joy in every avenue imaginable. Some have successfully found it while others have not. Perhaps it would be easier to describe where joy cannot be found:

Not in Unbelief -- Voltaire was an infidel of the most pronounced type. He wrote: "I wish I had never been born."

Not in Pleasure -- Lord Byron lived a life of pleasure if anyone did. He wrote: "The worm, the canker, and grief are mine alone."

Not in Money -- Jay Gould, the American millionaire, had plenty of that. When dying, he said: "I suppose I am the most miserable man on earth."

Not in Position and Fame -- Lord Beaconsfield enjoyed more than his share of both. He wrote: "Youth is a mistake; manhood a struggle; old age a regret."

Not in Military Glory -- Alexander the Great conquered the known world in his day. Having done so, he wept in his tent, before he said, "There are no more worlds to conquer."

Where then is real joy found? -- the answer is simple, in Christ alone.