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*The Day is Coming! (Malachi 4:1-6)*  
*12/17/2018 Sermon by Pastor Jason Liebenow*

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The day is coming! Christmas is almost here! Are you ready? There's so much to do! There are gifts to buy, plans to make, people to see! Some of us will finally get a break from work and school. What are you going to do with that time? Are you ready for it? Are you ready for the coming day?

Our lesson for today comes from Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament. These were the last words God gave to the world before Jesus was born. God's people had seen many different prophets up to this point, but then God was silent after Malachi for hundreds of years, and this was the last message God wanted his people to hear during that time of silence: the great and terrible day of the Lord is coming.

This concept of "the day of the Lord" shows up a lot in the Bible, especially in those smaller books at the end of the Old Testament called the "Minor Prophets." The day of the Lord points to a time when God will demonstrate his power by bringing judgment on his enemies and salvation for his people. For this reason, the prophecies about the day of the Lord can point to multiple events, multiple fulfillments. At the end of Malachi, the way he speaks points us to two different events; two different "great and terrible days."

The first day Malachi foretells is the first Christmas, the first coming of Jesus, what we are getting ready to celebrate! That day has come! But how could Christmas be a terrible day? Well, Jesus did not come to bring a cute stable scene. Jesus came to bring about the day of the Lord. It is the day of God's salvation for those who see their need for Jesus, and the day of judgment for those who reject and ignore their need for Jesus.

Again and again in the Gospels, Jesus was ready and willing to help everyone who came to him knowing that they needed Jesus. But most people didn't see their need for Jesus, and Jesus had only words of judgment for them.

Jesus spoke in parables, not so that people would better understand, but so that people *wouldn't* understand! Those who didn't see a need for Jesus walked away with their cute story and judgment was theirs. But Jesus' disciples, who saw their need for Jesus, came back to Jesus to ask him to learn more. When people spoke to Jesus

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thinking themselves good enough without Jesus, he spoke condemnation on them. He laid even more of God's laws on them. He called them whitewashed tombs, all sleek and clean on the outside but only death on the inside.

For people today who don't want Jesus as their Savior, their Christmas celebrations will be yearly proofs that they deserve judgment. In spite of all the fun they may have, Christmas is a terrible day for all who reject Christ. But for those who see their need for Jesus, Christmas is the day of our salvation.

Malachi's prophecy also speaks about a 2<sup>nd</sup> great and terrible Day of the Lord: Judgment Day, Jesus' 2<sup>nd</sup> coming. That day is coming. Are we ready for it? Malachi tells us that it will be a day of fire; that it will completely burn up all the arrogant.

But what is arrogance? Arrogance is when people think more of themselves than they really are. It's like when parents get a new crib for their kid and immediately throw away the instructions before building, only to put together something that hardly resembles a crib. They thought they could build that crib without the words that the crib's creators wanted them to know. Who do we think we are trying to build our lives without God's Word? The Bible is the exact words that the Creator of Life wants us to know! And do we think we can live without them? Just like the crib, if we are arrogant enough to live without God's Word ruling and guiding us, our lives will hardly resemble life.

It's like when patients listen to their doctor prescribe medicine, but, after a few days of feeling good, they stop taking the medicine and suddenly feel even sicker than before! They would have been fine if they just kept doing what the doctor prescribed. How arrogant are we when God tells us that his Word is our life, but after a good day on Sunday, we feel we don't need God's Word anymore; that we can get by without that Word now? It's arrogant for us to lightly think, "Yeah, I can skip my Bible reading today and I'll be fine." Just like with the medicine, suddenly we can end up sicker in our sins than before if we actually think we don't need Jesus anymore!

It's like when drivers hear all about the dangers of texting and driving, but they think, "Yeah, but I'm careful enough. I can pay attention to both things at the same time." How many people thought that before wrecking their car, or worse, losing their life. If they had just listened to the warning, it could have all been

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avoided. How arrogant are we when we when God tells us to avoid sin at all costs and then we think, “Yeah, but it’s just a little sin. I can handle it” or “I know God says this is wrong, but I’m gonna do it anyway”? Thoughts like those lead us to unrepentant sin and even to rejecting the Savior that God has given us.

Who of us can be ready for the coming day? Are we going to continue in our arrogance and say that we have really been good enough to escape punishment? If all the arrogant will be burned up when Judgment Day comes, we are in trouble. It is terrifying even to think about it.

But Malachi tells us that the coming day will be very different for those who fear the Lord. After what we just talked about, it’s not that hard to be afraid of God. But the fear that Malachi speaks of is more than that. It is respecting God above all things, considering him the most important. If you are afraid of something, how often do you think about it? Quite a lot! If you fear someone, are you going to listen to what they say? Absolutely! To fear God is to give God his proper place in our hearts. Really, it’s to worship God.

So, with the utmost respect for God speaking, let’s return to Malachi’s prophecy. Remember that the day of the Lord points to two events. One is Judgment Day, but the other is the first Christmas day, when Jesus came. On that great and terrible day of the Lord, God revealed to us the promised Savior, the One who would save us from our sinful arrogance.

Malachi said that the coming day would bring healing for those who fear, respect, worship the Lord! Jesus brings us healing; healing of our sins, healing of our arrogance. Malachi tells us that on that day, we experienced a sunrise unlike any other: a sunrise, not of light, but of righteousness. When you hear righteousness, think “perfection in God’s sight.” Think, “being good by God’s definition.” Jesus’ perfection shines on us.

You know how every time the sun rises darkness just disappears. When Jesus, our sun of righteousness, shines on us all the darkness of our sin simply disappears, not because our sinful nature goes away, but because God declares all our sins forgiven. God credits Jesus’ perfect life to our account. This is what the Lord’s 1<sup>st</sup> Day of Judgment has brought us: Jesus our Savior; our sun of righteousness!

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You see what this means? We don't have to be afraid of Judgment Day. Through your baptism, through the faith in your heart that believes that Jesus is your Savior, Jesus is always shining on you. When Judgment Day comes, God will find us covered in Jesus' perfection. On Judgment Day, God will not see even the slightest hint of sin in us because Jesus has healed us of all our sin.

Judgment Day will bring no condemnation for us. Instead, Malachi says that we will be free like we have never felt freedom before. He uses the picture of calves which have been cooped up in the barn all winter and are finally let out. You can imagine them jumping and prancing around the meadow. That will be us! Imagine, freed from being cooped up in this sinful world! Can you imagine life with no more sin, where we will no longer be blinded by our arrogance? Can you imagine life where things actually work the way they were meant to, where sin hasn't corrupted everything, where there is no more disappointment, suffering, or death! That is true freedom and it is waiting for us in heaven.

By God's grace, we are ready for the coming day. You are ready for the coming day because God's Son, our sun of righteousness, has dawned on you. Look forward to that as you prepare for Christmas, and be ready for Judgment Day, the day of your salvation, when you will be found, not arrogant, but perfect in God's sight through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.