

Malachi 4:1-2a. "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."

Lord have mercy!

Continue to sound the alarm!

Bring hope and healing to the hurting!

When reading through the verses above, it was hard not to think of the tragic fires that have been raging and burning in California this week. The images, the videos, the reports are downright terrifying. Many people have been displaced, some have even died as the fires ripped through entire communities. In one case an entire community was wiped out. The city of Paradise, California was lost entirely to the flames. Another report concerning the fire that was quickly spreading toward the affluent community of Malibu remarked that no level of income or celebrity status could protect these homes from the fires. The report also indicated that the firefighters had (for the time) given up on fighting the wildly burning flames and had turned their attention toward rescue efforts. Even from so many miles away our hearts hurt for those who are affected by this tragic event. As Christians we rightly and instinctively include in our prayers those who have experienced such pain and loss, and our concern remains for those who are still in harm's way. Lord, have mercy! Spare them from further pain! Lord, have mercy and bring healing to those who are hurting.

Well, dear friends, if this is the case when homes and lives are a stake, let this be the case all the more when we realize that eternal souls are also in harm's way. And so today we pray, **"Lord have mercy!" Continue to sound the alarm! Bring help and healing to the hurting!**

In such emergency situations, when the call to evacuate is given, it is something that you must take seriously. In the case of emergencies like a hurricane or a tornado, it might happen that people try to wait it out, but that is not a strategy that one can take when the emergency is a fire. Fire is all-consuming in its very nature and therefore the call to evacuate is one that should not be ignored. The call to evacuate could mean the difference between life and death.

When we consider what our God says about the day of Judgment we ought to listen to the sounding of the alarm. This is a matter of eternal life and eternal death. The destruction that is coming is terrifying. The LORD tells us that, ***surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace.*** In many different ways, the LORD tells us

that a day is coming when he will put an end to this wicked world. The heavens and the earth will melt away in the heat and God will judge the living and the dead. Those who believe in Jesus, who belong to him, they will be spared from the eternal suffering that all sinners deserve. Those who do not believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ will be lost forever in the eternal flames of hell. The LORD, therefore, sends out the call to repent, to turn from our sin, to believe in the forgiveness that Jesus brings, and to live for him in thankful obedience. Even though everything in this world will perish in the flames of judgment, we who hear God's call and by the gift of faith look to our God for salvation will be spared the wrath of God.

Our God, who is both perfectly just and holy, gives us fair warning. He who is merciful is also just. He who has been withholding his day of Judgment for centuries because of his great love for the human race, will one day come and put an end to all things and create a new heaven and the new earth. In patience and love he even promised and sent his Son into this wicked world to live a life of perfect righteousness and lay down his life for the sins of the world. In patience and love our God sees to it that this message of forgiveness through Christ's death and resurrection is proclaimed to the world. The LORD, who sounds the alarm to repent and return to God, also draws near with the gospel of forgiveness and salvation in Christ. God is incredibly patient and good. But more than a few people have taken the incredible patience of God to mean that he simply will not come, or he doesn't even exist; and therefore, it is unnecessary to pay any attention to his word and especially his call to repent. Here in the book of Malachi, God gives a pointed and urgent call to those who would prefer to stay put in their sin. ***Surely, the day is coming***, declares the LORD.

Not only do these words of Malachi point us to the day of eternal judgment, but for Jerusalem and Judah the day of reckoning was coming, and Malachi was sent to sound the alarm. He was sent by God as a last-ditch call to repentance. Malachi would bring yet another reminder that devastation and destruction was coming. Now was the time to evacuate and leave behind godless behavior and lives lived in self-indulgence and idolatry. God was calling out to them one last time. God had waited, he had been patient with them. God was consistent and abundant in his patience, and the land of Jacob, the people of Abraham, still existed. However, that patience had been tested and spent long enough and so he sent Malachi to sound the alarm of repentance. *"Return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD Almighty (Malachi 3:17).* Many, however, remained stubborn in their lack of faith, some even questioned whether it had ever been worth following the ways of God. *"It is futile to serve God. What did we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the LORD Almighty? ¹⁵ But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly the evildoers prosper, and even those who challenge God escape"* (Malachi 3:14-15).

Some of the people tried to cling to earthly prosperity and temporal things ignoring that judgment was coming, but it would be in vain. Earthly prosperity would not save the people from destruction; and trying to cling to such temporal prosperity only tied these people down in the path of God's wrath. Some would try to desperately hold on to the delusion that this day would never come. They looked around and assumed that because evildoers had enjoyed their share of earthly blessing, their good fortune would carry on and continue to endure. *"But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly, the evildoers prosper, and even those who challenge God escape."* (Malachi 3:15). As God had made it so abundantly clear in his words of warning, those who rejected his call would not be spared. Instead they would endure the terrible destruction that was promised. **All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire (Malachi 4:1).** The promised day of destruction upon God's people would be fulfilled and not one stone would be left on top of one another in the city of Jerusalem. The destruction and the devastation would be severe, as God's people went into exile. Devastation would come upon the whole land, and those who ignored the Word of the LORD would be lost and destroyed because of their unbelief.

In light of God's Word, we therefore pray, "Lord, have mercy! Lord, have mercy on us! Continue to sound the alarm against sin. For you are real, and your judgment is real. History shows us the terrible price that the people of Israel paid for their arrogance, their unbelief. Your word speaks of eternal destruction and a fire that does not go out that awaits those who reject your Word, your call to repentance. Lead us to repentance. Cut away that which is evil and wicked in our lives. Shake us from being rooted in our sins. Help us to evacuate and leave behind sinful habits, tendencies, lifestyles, or choices that would put us in opposition to your holy will. Spare us from the destruction that we deserve. Have mercy Lord, by calling out to us with your words of warning; and give us hearts and ears and lives that listen and respond to your words of warning. The day of the LORD will surely come. Prepare our hearts to meet you. Reshape our lives in the light of your Word. Lord, have mercy! For in you, O Lord there is hope!"

Our God, who was a help in ages past, is our hope for years to come, and therefore, we are never hopeless. The description of the day of the LORD is described in terms that are rightly terrifying, but the LORD of Armies who is rich in power and justice and might, is the same God who in his eternal goodness holds out a hope that far surpasses the fear of destruction. Through the prophet Malachi, God paints this brilliant picture of hope and joy, ² **But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.** God would come near and protect and care for his people in their distress and grant them healing. Even in the midst of the darkest night of suffering, a new day would dawn. For

those who revere his name there would be hope. The LORD would preserve a remnant of his people as his prized possession, replant them in the promised land, and through them the promised Savior would come. History would display the incredible patience and steadfast goodness and love that God would show to his people. He would bring them through suffering and trial and return them to their home, their promised land.

What goodness and eternal love God displays to those who revere his name! For in his mercy, not only does the LORD, promise to spare us from eternal suffering, but he gives those who believe in him the incredible promise that a new day will dawn. **“But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.”** When the day of the LORD comes, the heavens and the earth as we know them will be gone, and long gone will also be the pain and the misfortune, the loss and the sorrow of this world, as the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.

One of the communities in California that is currently suffering under the heavy cloud of these fires, is also a community that is mourning the loss of lives due to a mass shooting. In this midst of darkness and loss, sorrow, and fear, and pain, God in his mercy holds out a message of surpassing and eternal peace. A day will come when the dark and heavy curse of sin will be completely lifted, and Jesus will bring forth of new day - a day of eternal health and peace for those who believe in him. That message of salvation, that message of promise is given freely to us through God’s gift of faith. In this gift of faith the LORD brings his healing touch to our lives. He gives us hope even in the darkest hours of life because we know that our God in his great love has shown mercy on all sinners by sending his Son to take on the punishment that we deserved. Jesus came as promised, a Savior sent by a merciful God to set us free from sin and death and to give us the sure and certain hope of a new home in heaven. Though tragedy and heartache, pain and loss, are all terrible reminders that sin has broken God’s paradise, God promises that his paradise will be restored. The one who came in mercy and humility to suffer death and hell for us, will come again in glory to lift the curse of sin forever. To those long suffering under the curse of sin and death and pain and trouble a new day will dawn and the Son of Righteousness, Jesus the Christ, will come with healing and peace and joy for all those who believe in him.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer. Continue to send out your word to sound the alarm of judgment and to save those condemned by sin. Lord in your mercy bring help and healing to those who are hurting under the weight of sin’s curse. Shine your gospel of peace and the sure hope of eternal life in Jesus into our dark world until you come again to bring us to your kingdom of eternal light. Amen.