

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. 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.

Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel. See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers...

The day is coming!

The day is coming, and we see the signs. No, I'm not talking about Thanksgiving, although we see the signs of fall and the end of harvest and the decorations and preparations for this special holiday picking up. The day is coming, and we see the signs. But no, I am not talking about Christmas even though some stores and homes have the Christmas lights up and the music playing already. The day is coming and we see the signs, the Last Day, the Day of Judgment is coming. For some time already, we have seen the glow on the horizon. The warnings and promises of God have been fulfilled. There were more earthquakes just a few nights ago, (reported near Hawaii) a sign that catches our attention. Wars and rumors of wars continue constantly. Throughout the world, the hearts of many have grown cold towards God and his Word. The day is coming, we see the signs, and yet God is faithful and gracious, his patient love endures, and His Word goes out. The eternal gospel is proclaimed and even in this season of distress under the curse of sin, there is also hope and the promise of the coming day of salvation.

The day of Judgment draws near and one day it will be here. The bible often reveals that it will be a day of extremes. For those who have remained outside of God's family, who have rejected his word, they will be destroyed along with this sinful world. But for those who belong to the Lord, who have been called to be his children, God will bring rescue and relief. And so even as we speak of the end of all things, even as we shudder to hear of the destruction of the wicked and this wicked world, we lift up our heads and look for that day.

The day is coming, that much is clear! Long there has been that glow in the sky. The signs were always there, and they continue to make themselves clear, hour after hour. The sun could peek over the horizon at any time. The Son of Man could bring forth a new day, a new heaven, a new earth any day now. And so we wait, not only with holy reverence and fear but also with wonder and with a certain level of excitement. Those in darkness have seen a great light and a day of eternal light is coming. We know

the joy that awaits God's people, and so we long for the day when every inch of darkness, sin, and distress, will be wiped out and erased, by the full blast of heaven's rays.

But what about our sins, what about the darkness within us and the dark stains that mar our record? What about our status before God? The day is called a great and dreadful day for a reason. The day is called the Day of Judgment for a reason. We will all have to stand before the holy God on the Last Judgment. And if we must come before a holy God as sin-darkened and corrupt and wicked sinners, *O Lord, who could stand?* The Last Day, the Last Judgment is coming.

That two-word phrase or title is an intimidating one: Last Judgment. It elicits all sorts of feelings. Because of the dire consequences that this title is associated with, a certain chill crawls down our back as we consider a day that is viewed by many as a dreadful day. A rush of anxiety pushes up inside of us as we consider the day when will have to give an account before our God and maker. But here in these words before us we have an eye-catching assurance, a picture that grabs our imagination and reels us in so that we may be surrounded by this wonderful reassurance, ***"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.*** God promises that those who believe, those who revere the name of the Lord, will be met with a warm expression of healing and relief. And as Scripture tells us this is simply a gift of his grace, received by faith.

Today we consider the immense gravity of that promise. For if you and I stood trial based solely on our own merit, there would be no shouts of relief and thanksgiving, only the awful sound of judgment crashing down and bringing forth the horrid unstoppable tones of weeping and gnashing of teeth. God's Word reminds us of what our sins truly deserve. The ten commandments each serve as a mirror to display the chilling reality that we have fallen far short of God's standard of purity and glory. His justice ought to come for us like a consuming fire. In our arrogance and pride, we have done much evil in the eyes of the Lord. We have gone our own wicked ways. We have even caused others to bend to temptation as they follow our lead. It is the height of arrogance to say that we can get by on our own merit or that we have earned God's favor in any way. And the Lord reminds us here that all the arrogant and every evildoer, including you and me, should be snuffed out and put to shame. Like a hungry flame rushing through dried-up chaff, that day of Judgment is coming, and we should be burned up and swept far away from a holy and almighty God.

The Lord gives us fair warning: all the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble. That day is coming, declares the Lord. In humility and fear, we bow before the Lord. However, this is the promise that your Lord includes for you and for your salvation. Yes, the Lord will come, and he will burn up the unbeliever and the wicked like chaff, but for his children, he promises that he will set us free. And you are his child through faith in Christ Jesus. This is his gift to you. He wraps you in his arms and promises that but because of his love and his action, you are rescued and redeemed. He has washed

you clean and claimed you as his own. For Christ has paid for your sins and wrapped you in his righteousness. He will hold you close and lead you through this burning house of this world. And one day he will set you down safely into his new creation and give you the full freedom and joy that he has won for you. This is the good news that has been declared to you. Your verdict and status have been declared from the cross and sealed unto you at the font, placed into your hand at the altar, and graciously proclaimed to you week after week from the pulpit and in the absolution. Your sins are paid for in full. You are a child of God. What wondrous joy and relief God gives to his people!

Picture a courtroom of a high-profile case that suddenly erupts with sudden and spontaneous euphoria! The heavy tension has been replaced with light-hearted elation! The verdict has come in and it has been read. "Not guilty!" Gladness of heart and relief explode in a sudden burst and pent-up emotion erupts in sweet jubilation. The defendant now is free to go, set free from the accusations, set free from any condemnations, justified and vindicated before the judge and any and all witnesses. A new life of freedom stands before him.

Think of that picture of the announcement of freedom and then compare it with the joyful picture that Malachi uses of a calf released from the stall. Instead of a spry animal springing forth after being couped up in a pen for too long, think of a person, a group of people, rejoicing in the freedom that they have in Christ! The righteousness that he gives! The forgiveness he grants to his people! To those pinned in and frustrated by this world of sin, by the enemy's accusations, and our own guilt and pain, consequence and regret are given that eternal freedom that Christ gives. Picture being set free from this daily sinful frustration of this life and being released into an eternal season of joy and painless perfection. This is certainly reason to get excited and to rejoice, right now! God gives you this promise of joy! We know what the verdict will be for we are covered by Jesus' blood and righteousness. Look ahead with confidence and gratitude, with eyes of wonder, and a heart of gladness, for this is the kind of joyful relief and release that God promises - even as we consider the Last Judgment.

Therefore, as we stand in holy awe of God's righteous wrath, we also give heed to his promise of grace. The day is coming, and thankfully our Rescuer is also our Good Shepherd who tends to our needs, and he promises to send messengers, even to his wandering and stubborn children. Consider how he sent prophet after prophet to issue the call to repentance to his Old Testament people. Consider how Malachi gives the people a specific promise of note in these additional verses. **See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers.** Long after Elijah had been already taken up to heaven God promises that he would send another Elijah. And so we page ahead and see that this promise would be fulfilled in God's sending of John the Baptist. With this promise God would reveal his patient love as God in his grace would indeed continue to send out his word of warning and promise. And so Malachi urges his people to remember the law of Moses, both the

commands and promises God gave to his chosen people, and he points them ahead to the coming work of that second Elijah, John the Baptist, as well. By issuing a call to repentance, the LORD would use John and messengers like him to do as he says here, “turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers”.

Even in these cold and dark and wicked times, God is faithful and gracious and patient, and he would send his saving word to warm the hearts of his people. He promises that fathers would turn to their children with the Word of God and parents would teach their children and bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. The children would, in turn, turn their hearts to their parents and would receive this instruction and they by God’s work would believe. And in this way, God in his grace would preserve for himself a family of believers even in these cold and dark and wicked days. He would preserve for himself a family of believers until he comes with the dawn of a new and glorious day.

With humble gratitude in our eyes, we look around and give thanks for that evidence of God’s grace among us. Fathers turning to their children with the saving Word of God. Generations upon generations sharing the message of salvation through Christ and encouraging each other to remain in Him. For without Christ and his saving message we would be lost and the day of Judgment dreadful. However, wrapped in the arms of our Father, we hand our children the full counsel of God. The Law that convicts us of our sins also shows us our need for a Savior, and God in his gracious gospel tells us how He provides his only Son, that we might be spared the judgment and destruction that our sins warranted. As thankful children plucked from the flames, we call on the name of the Lord who has rescued us and wrapped us in his righteousness and we trust and believe that he safely guide us through this life. And when that Last Day comes, he will set us forever free to live and leap and to praise the Lord forever in the blissful perfection that is to come.

The day is coming. We can see signs all around. And yet because of God’s faithfulness and grace, our hearts are warmed, the shadows of doubt are chased away, and we look forward with eagerness to the day when the Son of God our righteousness will rise with bright rays of healing and joy that extend to all the earth. Until that day, fathers turn your hearts to your children and children turn your hearts to the fathers so that you may hear our Father’s Word of promise and warning given to us.

So dear friends, the day is coming. Hear the Word of God, know that you are made ready in Christ, and guard your ways according to the will of God who saves you. Live in thankful obedience to your God as you wait for the coming of the great and wondrous day of the LORD. For one day, just as our God has promised, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves, released from the stall and nothing will stand in your way. To God be the glory in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.