

Pastor Ben Libby
 Sermon
 12/8/2018

In Christ Jesus, who has come into the world to secure our Salvation, Fellow Redeemed:

The Word of the Lord which forms a portion for our sermon text this Advent Sunday comes to us from the book of Malachi, the fourth and final chapter:

Malachi 4:1-6 "For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. ² But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. ³ And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts. ⁴ "Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. ⁵ "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. ⁶ And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction."

This is the Word of God. Congregation may be seated.

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and from your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear fellow Redeemed...

One of my favorite movies is Star Wars. In this movie franchise, there is a great reversal. It is known as one of the biggest shocks and reveals of all movie history. The hero, Luke Skywalker, is told by his mentor (Obi-wan Kenobi) that the villain, Darth Vader, betrayed and murdered his father. When Luke finally confronts Vader, the villain tells him that this is incorrect. What he reveals flips the whole narrative on its head. Vader says "No, I am your father!" This is devastating news. When Luke sees Obi-wan after this, he demands to know why he was lied to and why he was not told the truth about his father. Obi-wan explains that what he told him was true, from "a certain point of view". "A certain point of view?" Luke retorts. Obi-wan explains, "Luke, you're going to find that many of the truths we cling to depend greatly on our own point of view."

I find this statement to be true, again, from a certain point of view. We are often told that Christmas is the most wonderful time of the year. This is true from a certain point of view. Many people view this statement to be true. Christmas is a wonderful time, it is full of joy and gift giving. But to others, Christmas is the loneliest time of the year. To those who are removed from their family, it's not wonderful, just very lonely. Maybe a military member must be over-sees at Christmas. Maybe a person is unable to join their family because they are bedridden. Maybe there is an argument that separate loved ones from each other. To these people, Christmas is just another reminder that while other people are celebrating and overjoyed to be reunited with loved ones, they for whatever reason are not.

Christmas is the most wonderful AND loneliest time of the year, from a certain point of view.

A lot is determined by how you look at it. This is sometimes known as the “glass half empty, half full” conundrum. Take a look at this glass. It has half the total amount of water possible in it. Someone who is perhaps pessimistic will say “That glass is half empty”. Someone else who is perhaps more optimistic will declare the same sentiment with an opposite conclusion. “No, that glass is half full!” They are both right from their point of view, but they look at it differently.

It seems strange how two opposites can be true at the same time. But it is hard to make sweeping statements that prove to be true no matter who you are. It is hard to find an absolute truth that everyone can agree on. Even something as universally held as “Christmas is the most wonderful time of the year” can prove to be incorrect from a certain point of view.

In our text before us this morning, we have a similar situation. There is another event that will mean very different things, depending on your point of view. It is described here in the book of Malachi as “the day of the LORD”. Depending on your point of view, the day of the LORD will mean very different things. But the real difference is Jesus. To those who depend on their own works for their salvation, that Day will mean burning and being set ablaze. But to those who depend on Jesus for their salvation, it will mean healing and jumping for joy. We pray that the Holy Spirit bless our study here this morning and reveal to us His point of view!

This juxtaposition of different outcomes of the same event is made clear in the opening verses of Malachi chapter 4:

Malachi 4:1-2 "For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble.² But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. What do you know about Malachi? It is a very interesting book with very

striking features. But one of the most remarkable things about this book is it is the last one. That is, it is the last book of the Old Testament. Malachi has its position in the Bible because it is the latest written Prophet book. It is possible that a historical book like Chronicles or Nehemiah might have been written after this one. But whatever the case is, it is the last book in the Old Testament, and it was written just some 400 years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem.

This fourth and final chapter of Malachi brings up good points when it comes to looking ahead. It makes sense that it would point ahead, it is the chapter that transitions into the New Testament. The season of Advent is all about looking ahead, namely to the Messiah being born. As we talked about last Sunday, we also look ahead to the time when the Savior will return. But that return will mean very different things to different people.

Malachi describes that day as “a burning oven”, one that will consume and burn up “all the arrogant” and “all the evildoers”. He says it will “set them ablaze” and “it will leave them neither root nor branch”. This burning means complete and utter destruction. There is no trace left of these evildoers. They are completely burned up. John the Baptist, who this section of scripture is also talking about, said something similar in our Gospel reading this morning. He was talking about the One who was greater than he, whose sandal he was not worthy to untie, namely Jesus Christ. **Luke 3:16-17** **He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.** ¹⁷ **"His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire."**

While this complete and utter burning will be completely inescapable to some, to others it will be a completely different. To those who believe on Jesus for Salvation, who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.

Have you ever seen cows running and jumping? It is quite the picture. Usually, we observe cows just standing around, being cows. Cows are big animals and they don't often make sudden moves. But, at times, they do run and jump. Imagine what joy those animals must experience when they have been trapped in barn stalls for a long period of time, and then they are let loose into an open yard. You might not be able to picture it, but you could imagine how that freedom could be exhilarating.

This is the same freedom that we will feel on the "Day of the LORD". On this earth, we are trapped and confined to its sinful stalls. Before Jesus enter our equation, we too were looking at that day like everyone else. It was an impending day of judgment, and our sinfulness would just be more fuel for the fire. There was no hope for us lost sinners, and there would be no trace of our existence, just complete and utter destruction. We were captives to sin, death, and the devil.

But then the Sun came. Jesus came into this world, and His coming would mean a great reversal. Jesus would come to set us free. As Malachi points out, Jesus' coming would be like **the sun of righteousness rising with healing in its wings**. We would be healed by what He would do for us! He would preach and complete the Good News, that all is not hopeless, that we just need to have faith in Him for our Salvation. This message was such great news, it makes us jump for joy! Jesus read and fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah **Luke 4:18-19 "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; 19 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."**

Jesus is the reason why one event can mean drastically different things to different groups of people. That Sun of Righteousness, that Son of God is our difference maker. Jesus is the difference between us being burned alive in our sins, and us

being healed completely by His Gospel. In verse 5, Malachi describes Judgement day as **the great and awesome day of the LORD** but that phrase is often translated "the great and terrible day of the LORD". How can such an event be both great and terrible at the same time? Well, it depends on your point of view. If you don't have Jesus, that day will be nothing but absolutely terrible. But if you know the Sun of Righteousness by faith, then that day is nothing but being completely awesome. Jesus truly is the difference maker.

Recently, one of our former presidents died. George H. W. Bush, the 41st President of the United States, passed away a few weeks ago. This past Monday, they had the funeral service. You might have seen it on TV. I didn't watch all of it, but something I did see was his granddaughter reading Revelation. She read selected verses of Revelation 21. That chapter is a great picture of the eternal reign we will one day share with God. That reading is a real picture of the fulfillment of what Jesus did.

Of course, a funeral is something else that means different things to people depending on your point of view. To some people, a funeral is nothing more than a sad reminder that death is inescapable, a terrible fact that they too will also die. But to believers, a funeral is something else entirely. It is a victory service. Yes, it may be sad that we don't get to see that person anymore. But if that person believed in Jesus you will! A funeral is not just a reminder that everyone dies, rather it proves that those who trust in Jesus will be delivered from this vale of tears and will inherit the kingdom that their Lord has prepared for them.

Something else I noticed from the funeral was the coffin. It is traditional and customary to have a coffin of a former elected official or military member (President Bush was both) to have the American flag draped over their coffin.

But that flag has not always been the same. Our American Flag has gone through many

iterations, 27 in fact. Part of the reason that it has changed so much is due, in part, to the symbolism it represents. There are 50 stars on the flag today, which represent the 50 united states. But we did not always have 50 states, and the flag would change with the addition of more and more states.

American became an official country in 1776. But it would take a full year before we officially adopted the first iteration of the stars and stripes. But that is not to say we didn't have other unofficial flags that we used before 1777. One of the most famous of these unofficial flags is called the Gadsden flag. It is a yellow flag with a coiled-up rattlesnake, ready to strike. Underneath the words read "DON'T TREAD ON ME".

This is a motto that still gets referenced and used today. People don't like to be tread on. But yet, few have the venous bite to back up the warning. This is another reversal that is referenced in Malachi. **Malachi 4:3 And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts.**

Being trampled on is a familiar feeling, isn't it? Life isn't fair, and often we feel like we are being taken advantage of. It is a feeling that most people can relate to. Perhaps it even seems like being a Christian means that people can trample over our beliefs. It seems like nowadays, everybody is so accepting of anyone's beliefs unless it is the Christian beliefs. The world has zero time for us standing up for our Savior. They will scream and shout for equal rights and equal beliefs unless it is the rights and the beliefs that don't agree with their point of view of tolerance.

But, on the day of the LORD, there will be only one point of view that matters. Earlier, I said that it is hard to make sweeping statements that prove to be true no matter who you are, to find an absolute truth. But there is one absolute truth, it is the Word of God! The difference when it comes to being trampled on and being the one who treads

down is Jesus and what He says! His Word is Truth, and it is the only truth! Everyone wants to let you know how their views will not be stepped on. But, the fact of the matter is that there is only one point of view that truly matters, God's! Either you trust in God and what He says, or you don't. Malachi here reassures us that the ones who trust in Jesus as their Savior, they will be the ones who tread down the wicked. But on the other hand, those who trust in anything other than Jesus, they will be the ones who will be ashes under the soles of believer's feet! Jesus crushed the serpent's head when He died on the cross and rose again. Those who put their faith in Him will share in that same victory!

Malachi 4:5-6 "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. ⁶ And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction."

As was mentioned before, this is a good transition into the New Testament. This Elijah that Malachi is referring to, we know by faith that it was John the Baptist. He had the important job of turning the hearts of the children and the fathers.

But, what did that job entail? Isaiah added that this Forerunner would make straight the Highway of the Lord. How did John do this? He preached the whole Word of God. His message was primarily one of "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand!" We read Luke 3 earlier, and it describes John's message to different groups of people who came out to see him. He told the people to give to the poor, the tax collectors to stop skimming off the top, the soldiers to be content with their wages. The leaders of the people were addressed as "A brood of vipers" who would not be able to escape destruction. John was talking about the same thing that Malachi was describing, the day of the burning oven.

But, yet those hard words of the forerunner are summed up as "So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people." How was what John said, "Good News"? The religious leaders thought that because they were of the chosen people of Israel, that would make them righteous. They believed that they could keep the law and be righteous like Father Abraham. But John came to correct this line of thinking. Abraham was not righteous because he kept the law, he didn't. Rather, Abraham was righteous because he trusted in the promise of a Savior who would come from his descendants. Paul clarifies in **Galatians 3:6-7** ⁶ **just as Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."** ⁷ **Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham.**

The correction of this thought process was how John would turn the hearts of the fathers and children. This correction was the Good News, that you shouldn't rely on yourself to keep the law, rather a Savior was the answer and His time was here. Malachi says that unless the people believed that they were need of a Savior, the whole land would be destroyed. **"lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction"** Why would the land be utterly destroyed? If all the people believed that they could somehow become righteous by their works of the law, this would result in utter annihilation. But the Good News that John spoke of was the alternative. Jesus was the answer to that decree of destruction.

Sadly, many people didn't listen to John and many people today still don't listen. People today largely don't view self-righteousness in the same way that Pharisees of John's day did, but the result is the same. Many people think that there are many ways to heaven. Many people even refuse to believe there is anything after this life. Many people think that what happens to you after you die largely depend on your own truth and point of view. "This is my truth, and who are you to tell me otherwise?"

The problem with their relative truth is that God does not agree. On that great and terrible day of the LORD, there are not many different outcomes, there are only two. You are either going to be burned and utterly consumed, or you are going to be healed and completely restored. You are either going to get trampled into ashes, or you are going to be jumping for joy. You are either going to be extremely disappointed or you are going to be tremendously triumphant!

The difference is the Son of God, the Sun of Righteousness, our Savior Jesus Christ. He is the One and the only reason we can look forward to that great and terrible day of the LORD. To the unbeliever, that day is only judgment and doom. That was our outlook as well before that blessed fulfillment of Christmas Day. Jesus did come. He did die. He did rise again. He did ascend, and He will come again. He is our Sun of Righteous who rises with our healing in His wings. He did all those things for us poor, wretched sinners. Because He did those things, God's point of view of us is not one of destruction. God sees you as blood-bought souls who wear the perfectness of Jesus. He is the reason that we jump for joy at Christmas. Because Jesus crushed the serpent's head, we will never really be trampled! We were once part of that brood of vipers, but Christ's atonement transformed us into calves leaping for joy after being released from the clutches of sin and Satan. We are healed, we conquer, we will go out triumphant and rejoicing because Jesus is our difference maker!

So, how do you view things? Are you a glass half empty person or a glass half full person? Is Christmas wonderful or lonely? Do you jump for joy or slump in sadness?

Well, no matter how you feel about the things in this world, it largely does not matter. There is only one thing that matters, there is only one point of view that means anything. It is God's point of view. It does not matter how we see a glass filled half

with water, it matters what your God sees filled in your soul.

And what does God see when He looks at us here today? He sees triumphant, bought back souls who are filled with the Holy Spirit. He sees this because when He does look at you, He sees His Son. Because God loved you so very much, you can claim Christ as your S.U.N., your Sun of Righteousness. He has truly healed you, and when He comes again, it will mean only one thing for you. For you, that will not be a terrible day of complete destruction. For you, dear Christian it will mean the opposite. The Day of our LORD, it will be an awesome day, and on it, we will see God with our own eyes, and we rule with Him forever into eternity! Jump for joy, the Sun of Righteousness has risen! Amen!!!