

To God Alone Be The Glory

Every once in a while I still hear someone say, “If there is a hell, people experience it here on earth during their worst days, like in war or abuse or assault or terminal illness.” If you have suffered greatly and you’re not a Christian, such a notion could make a lot of sense. There’s something dreadfully wrong with the world. We actually had to have the court or the legislature state that Good Samaritans can’t be sued if they try to help a stranger and it doesn’t turn out well. We actually have to explain to some workers that if they don’t do their work, they don’t get paid. Oh, wait, in the last few decades that’s been reversed: some people don’t do the work and still get paid. Somethin’ wrong with this world. Some court observers have noticed that perpetrators have more of their rights preserved than their victims. Somethin’ wrong with this world. Isn’t it amazing how people are oblivious to what’s going on around them?...as if no one else in the world exists, so they don’t have to be considerate of others. Somethin’ wrong with this world. In some churches people won’t speak up about right and wrong, or aren’t willing to lead, because they don’t want to have to put up with snarky comments or unnecessary criticism. Somethin’ wrong with this world.

Would it help to know that Judgment Day is coming? that the Lord is going to put up with the evils of mankind for only a while longer? that there will be a day of reckoning? The Old Testament prophet MALACHI is on hand with a prophecy about Judgment Day. He TELLS US ABOUT THE DAY OF THE LORD.

He starts by describing how **The Unbelieving Wicked Will be Punished on That Day**. Listen again to the description. ¹“*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.*” That day “*will burn like a furnace.*” Your furnace probably came on this morning, burning natural gas or wood logs at just enough temperature to heat your home. In Bible times a furnace was used to heat ore in order to free the desirable metals from rocks. The people back then knew how to make a furnace hot. If you’ve never been inside Federal Mogul where the steel is heated into a liquid, think of a bon fire. Remember how it roars? Can you feel the heat of it on your face, feel yourself backing away from the flames? A bon fire and a smelting furnace and a foundry are tiny little fires compared to what’s coming on Judgment Day.

Who's the fire for? ¹*All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire.* Stubble catches fire quickly. The arrogant and the evildoer will catch fire quickly. Normally a stubble fire will also die down quickly after the stubble is burned off. But Malachi reports: *Not a root or a branch will be left to them.* There's not much heating value in branches or roots. They aren't worth taking home to heat your house. But in the picture God has Malachi relating, the fire on Judgment Day will be so thorough that all the branches and roots will be burned up too. The point is that no arrogant or evildoer will get away.

Why single out the arrogant? Because it takes a certain kind of pride to do something wrong and then deny having done it, or deny that it's wrong, or deny that it's anyone's business to confront them about it. The Lord would rather everyone humble themselves and own what they did wrong. Not, "I may have gotten angry and raised my voice a little at someone." No, "I let my anger control me and I yelled at you; that was wrong; I'm sorry." See the difference between arrogance and humility? When the Lord leads us to admit our wrongs, we are no longer the arrogant or the evildoers. Yes, we believers have done evil in our lives, but none of it will be held against us. Malachi will explain later.

Not only will all the arrogant and the evildoers be caught by God's thorough-burning fire on Judgment Day, you and I are going to participate in bringing judgment. The Lord says to his people: 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. Malachi does not assert that we will take any pleasure from this, like the pleasure we see on the faces of villains in our movies. Nor does the Lord take pleasure in bringing judgment on those who refuse to humble themselves and repent (Ezekiel 33:11). But he will bring judgment because he is just.

Yet because God is also merciful, **A Fiery Elijah Will Come to Prepare People for That Day.** This is how the Lord says it through Malachi: ⁵*See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.* Here's where your daily Bible reading can help you. Elijah was the second most important prophet in the history of God's people Israel. He preached at a time when almost no one was willing to listen to the Lord or his messengers. Elijah asked the Lord to withhold rain from Israel for 3½ years in order to convince the Israelites that rain does not come from the false god Baal so they should stop worshiping Baal. Elijah then asked the Lord to send fire from the sky to demonstrate that the Lord is the only true God. The

point was to lead God's people to repent of all sin and turn to him for full forgiveness.

If you are familiar with the Gospels (the accounts of Jesus' life), you recognize Malachi's words about the coming prophet Elijah as a prophecy about John the Baptist. Jesus identified John the Baptist as the Elijah whom Malachi had prophesied (Matt 17:13).

But there are some really cool details to explore. For instance, think about what happened when it was almost time for John the Baptist to be born. The angel Gabriel surprised John's father Zechariah and told him, "*Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John*" (Luke 1:13—the name John means "the Lord is gracious.") The angel went on to say:

¹⁶*Many of the people of Israel will [John] bring back to the Lord their God.*

¹⁷*And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.* That bit about turning the hearts of fathers to children sounds a lot like what the Lord reveals through Malachi when he says that the fiery Elijah whom he is sending ⁶*will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.*"

That sounds like, "I want you all to repent. If you don't, very bad things will happen."

John the Baptist preached a fiery message like this, didn't he? "The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent now or you will be destroyed in the fire" (see Matthew 3:7-12). Just like what happened in the days of Elijah, the Lord worked repentance through the preaching of John the Baptist. Anyone who confessed their sins before John, he baptized them in the Jordan River for the forgiveness of sin (Mark 1:4). In this way John the Baptizer prepared the people of his day for Judgment Day. And everyone who listens to John's messages today and repents of their sins the Lord makes ready for the Day of the Lord.

Judgment Day will be a dreadful and frightening day because God's wrath will be revealed—sin is that bad in God's way of looking at things. But the Lord actually wants everyone to escape the fury of his wrath over sin. So in his mercy he reveals through Malachi that **A Healing Savior Will Bring Blessing for That Day.**

The Lord's people had been complaining about how the unbelievers were getting away with breaking God's laws, and yet the unbelievers' lives seemed way better than the lives of those who were living for the Lord. So

the Lord let his people in on his plan. He wants us to realize that he is just, and he will punish evildoers when the time is right.

But wait. We've done evil. Shouldn't we be punished? Yes, if it weren't for the fact that A Healing Savior was Going to Bring Blessing for That Day. By God's grace we have been taught to revere God's name, to hold it in high regard. And what does the Lord promise through Malachi? *²For you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.* We know who the sun of righteousness is from the Christmas carol: "Hail the heavenly Prince of Peace, hail the sun of righteousness. Life and light to all he brings, risen with healing in his wings." If our nearest star, the sun, stopped shining, there would be no photosynthesis in plants, which would result in all the plants dying off, which would mean nothing to eat, which would mean no life. The sun brings healing from hunger in the form of food. | Think how a sunny day brings a kind of healing to our attitudes. Jesus is like that, only better. If Jesus stopped shining his grace on us, there would be no light, just the darkness of sin. Without Jesus there would be no spiritual food to feed our souls. Without Jesus there would be no forgiveness. But we have the Savior, and he's not going away. Think what knowing Jesus and his love does to us

on our worst days: he gives us hope for heaven, promising every problem will pass. Jesus is the sun of righteousness, the one who obeyed God's commandments perfectly and then gives us credit for his righteousness. His life heals our record so we can stand before holy God.

From our perspective the sun seems to fly across the sky. You can even imagine the sun having wings. When Jesus, the Son of God, the Sun of Righteousness, comes back on Judgment Day, he will fly across the sky so that everyone can see him. He will end sin and all its consequences, including disease. We will be fully healed, physically and spiritually.

And what will our response be? *²You will go out and leap like calves released from the stall.* When calves are released from the pen, they frolic in a way that looks like pure joy, tails held up high in the air, kicking up their heels as they leap. That's how we will act when Judgment Day comes, as if we have nothing to fear. Pure joy will fill our hearts. For us the Day of the Lord will be wonderful, thanks to Jesus.