

## Malachi 4:1-2a

Look! The day is coming, burning like a blast furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble. The day that is coming will set them on fire, says the LORD of Armies, a day that will not leave behind a root or branch for them. <sup>2</sup>But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise, and there will be healing in its wings.  
(Evangelical Heritage Version)

## The Day Is Coming

### I.

The Babylonian captivity had ended. The Jews had returned to their homeland. The temple had been rebuilt in Jerusalem and the city itself had been restored. To many of the people, all appeared to be well.

All was *not* well. Despite a return to a place where all their Sabbath laws of worship could be properly observed, worship life in the land was shallow, at best. The priesthood had become corrupt. When the sacrifices were made, the attitude was “good enough,” rather than serious efforts to offer their best. The animals offered for sacrifice were crippled and blind, not the best as the Lord demanded.

The people followed right along with the bad example of the priesthood. God had commanded that a tenth of their income was to be given to support the work of the Levites. Corners were being cut and people were withholding what God commanded. Intermarriage with people from the pagan nations around them had become predominant. God’s law prohibited the Jews from marrying an unbeliever. Not only did they ignore this command, those marrying outside the faith weren’t bringing their spouses to the worship of the true God, but adopting *their* pagan worship practices instead.

Beyond even their corrupt worship and intermarriage, many were oppressing those they considered beneath them. Orphans and widows and the poor were being trampled on by those who thought nothing about anyone standing in the way of their grab for power and wealth.

All was definitely *not* well.

“Look! The day is coming, burning like a blast furnace” (Malachi 4:1, EHV). A day of judgment was coming. Complacency was *not* the way to be prepared. The people needed to be warned.

A blast furnace is not like the oven in your house, all ready to bake your pumpkin pies or your Thanksgiving turkey. It’s not even like the larger ovens you might find in a restaurant. Huge, industrial ovens are more like it, like this one made by Wisconsin Oven for an aluminum parts manufacturer. It is designed to keep the metal at 750-1,100°F for 20 minutes while it completes its processes. Even those of long ago, like this drawing from China, used intense heat to refine their product.

“Look! The day is coming, burning like a blast furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble. The day that is coming will set them on fire, says the LORD of Armies, a day that will not leave behind a root or branch for them. <sup>2</sup>But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise, and there will be healing in its wings” (Malachi 4:1-2, EHV).

The day of judgment left only two possibilities. Either you would be one of the righteous or one of the wicked. If you were one of the arrogant or someone identified as an evildoer your judgment would be like being thrown into a smelting furnace with its flames roaring as air was forced into the mixture to make the fires even hotter. In no time you would be burned up to ashes.

If you were judged righteous, it would be a day of victory. A sun of righteousness would rise with healing in its wings. No more pain. No more sorrow. No more tears.

The contrast was stark.

## II.

Could Malachi's prophecy just as easily be given to us?

The greed of the people was called out by God earlier in Malachi's prophecy. Certainly money is a driving force today. The lottery has exploded in popularity as people desire not just to get ahead, but to be fabulously wealthy in an instant.

Since almost no one wins the lottery, we make up for our lack of fabulous wealth by getting everything we can by use of credit cards, or decreasing the amount we give to church and other charities.

And just as the Jews looked to pagan nations around them, so also people of today look to all kinds of other things other than the true God. Fabulous opportunities for dining. Sports leagues that take all your time, energy and income. Entertainment options that are so numerous they can't even be quantified.

God called out the shallow worship of the people through Malachi. Certainly the halfhearted worship of today falls into the same category. Do you come to worship only a handful of times a year? Less? We don't have a command from God to give a tithe—10% of our income—but are our offerings chintzy? Perhaps your offerings are given from the leftovers rather than first setting aside a portion of your income for God.

Maybe you're here for worship all the time and your offerings are carefully planned and regularly given. How about your attitude at worship? Do you make it barely on time—as the bells are ringing to start the service? Do you stay up too late on Saturday night and come so tired you can hardly stay awake and pay attention? Then, maybe you are one who complains about what isn't going your way in the worship service. Perhaps you don't like the order of service, or the hymns. Maybe you just go through the motions of the liturgy by rote without paying much attention or giving much thought to what you are saying or doing in the service.

Malachi's message is just as valid for us as it was for the complacent Jews who had returned from captivity. Are you ready for the Lord's return?

## III.

Following the words of our text today Malachi records: "Remember the law of my servant Moses, which I commanded to him at Horeb to serve as statutes and judgments over all Israel. <sup>5</sup>Look! I am going to send Elijah the prophet to you before the great and fearful day of the LORD comes! <sup>6</sup>He will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers" (Malachi 4:4-6, EHV).

It makes you think of a song, doesn't it? It makes you think of "Days of Elijah," as our choir sang a few minutes ago. These verses, as well as the song, make you think of the day of Transfiguration. There was Jesus, up on the mountain, transformed before the eyes of Peter, James and John. Flanking him were two figures—Moses and Elijah. Jesus was shining like the sun on that day—brighter than a fiery hot furnace. Peter said: "Master, it

is good for us to be here” (Luke 9:33, EHV).

It is always good to be with Jesus.

“Look! I am going to send Elijah the prophet to you before the great and fearful day of the LORD comes!” (Malachi 4:5, EHV). Elijah had already come centuries before. He was known to the people. Jesus is the Elijah that was promised. Jesus has come. He has come before the great and fearful day of the Lord. He has come ahead of Judgment Day to get us prepared for his second coming.

How did he do that? When the Transfiguration of our Lord was finished, Jesus went back down the mountain. He went down expressly to complete the work he had come to do. He went down for a day of judgment like no other. He went down for the events of Good Friday. He went down to stand trial before Caiaphas and Pilate and Herod. False accusation after false accusation were hurled at him. He stood quietly, taking it all. He was executed for crimes he didn’t commit. At his crucifixion he took the judgment day verdict *we* deserve on himself—the penalties for every bit of love of money and things and entertainment; the penalties for our thoughtless worship and arrogance and rebellion. Every penalty—every death sentence every one of us deserved—he paid on the cross. Not only was it physical torture, but he suffered the agonies of hell, as the Heavenly Father abandoned him there to suffer in our place.

The Judgment Day of Good Friday was followed by the triumphant day of Easter Sunday, when Jesus rose again from the dead. His resurrection signifies to us that God the Father accepted his payment on our behalf when he died on the cross. As the choir song said, righteousness has been restored to us. To be near Jesus is good because he makes the Judgment Day when he returns again safe for us, just as he kept Peter, James, and John safe at the day of Transfiguration.

#### IV.

“Master, it is good for us to be here” (Luke 9:33, EHV). The words of Peter ring true for us today, as we gather for worship. It is good, Lord, to be here at worship today. It is good to be at worship *every* Lord’s day.

Every time we gather it is a reminder that the Lord is coming back soon. Though we can’t circle a date on a calendar, we know that he will keep his promise and return for us to take us home to heaven for all eternity. For those who *don’t* believe, that day will be a great and terrible day. “But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise, and there will be healing in its wings” (Malachi 4:2, EHV).

Knowing this makes such a difference in our worship. Worship is not about you and me. It’s not about how beautifully the choir sings. It’s not about how well—or how poorly—the pastor speaks. It’s all about Jesus. It’s about singing praises to him. It’s about coming to hear his Word. It’s all about getting closer and closer to him as we prepare the way for the Lord—preparing our hearts for his Second coming. He is with us. We are safe—safe in the arms of our Savior. Amen.