

The Day Is Coming!

Malachi 4:1-4

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St. Paul's Lutheran, North Freedom

“Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the LORD Almighty. “Not a root or a branch will be left to them. But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays. And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves. Then you will trample on the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act,” says the LORD Almighty.

“Remember the law of Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel.” (Mal. 4:1-4 NIV)

In the name of our coming Lord Jesus Christ, dear fellow believers:

“The day is coming!” It’s mid-November, and that means the holidays are just around the corner. Thanksgiving is just 11 days away. Christmas is 39 days away. And soon we’ll welcome in the New Year. “The day is coming” is a call for us to be prepared.

Just over 400 years before Christ, the Lord spoke through his prophet Malachi to get his people ready for his coming. Christmas, of course, is the day of the Lord’s first coming. But the Lord also foretold the “great and dreadful day of the Lord” (Mal. 4:6), the Messiah’s second coming. We can’t mark it on our calendars; no one knows the day or hour when he will come. But we need to listen to God’s Word and prepare, for “surely **The Day Is Coming!**”

The day that is coming is called Judgment Day, a day of burning. It “will burn like a furnace.” Picture a blast furnace, where all the stubble and chaff left over from the harvest gets thrown into. That is a picture of the punishment to come: “All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire.” Not only the wicked, but all those who are “arrogant,” who are proud and self-righteous, will get sent to the fires of hell. The Lord pictures this day of burning as very thorough: “Not a root or a branch will be left to them.” Every evildoer will suffer the just punishment of hell. Though the burning is thorough, do not think of this like an annihilation. The book of Isaiah ends with this scene: “The fire that burns will not be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind” (Isa. 66:24b). The suffering of hell will be eternal.

When we think of hell and eternal condemnation, we might think, “That will never happen to me. Hell is for the really wicked, but I’m a pretty good person.” But note that the arrogant will also suffer the burning of hell. This is a warning for all of us. We may become proud about who we are (“We’re members of the true church, the Wisconsin Synod”) and proud about what we do (“I go to church every Sunday, I obey God’s commandments”). In doing so we break the first commandment, “You shall have no other gods,” because then we’re loving and trusting in ourselves instead of God. Be warned! The day is coming! May the news of our Lord’s coming lead us to humble ourselves, confess our sins daily to him, and look to the Lord alone for salvation.

But rest assured, the day that is coming is not only a day of burning. The Lord promises that it will be a day of healing as well.

“But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays.” That’s sun—S-U-N. Like the sun’s rays peaking over the horizon at dawn, so the Last Day will be the

appearance of God's Son, breaking through the darkness of sin, bringing life and overcoming death. Jesus is the "sun of righteousness." He is the one who overcomes sin with his righteousness and perfection.

When the sun's rays peak over the horizon, or break through the clouds after a chilly, cloudy morning, it cheers our spirits. So the Sun (Son) of righteousness brings "healing" in his rays. Jesus' first coming brought this righteousness to the world when he died and paid for all of our sins with his lifeblood. "By his wounds we are healed," it was foretold in Isaiah 53:6; God declares us forgiven and righteous for his Son's sake. Now our Lord Jesus is coming again. That day is coming where Jesus will give perfect healing to both body and soul. The pains and sorrows of this life will be removed from our bodies. The sinful nature that clings to our souls redeemed by Christ will be drowned forever. Christ's perfect righteousness will become ours, and we will enjoy eternal life.

Is it any wonder we look forward to that day, a day of healing! The Lord tells us that we will "go out and frolic like well-fed calves," literally calves that burst out of the stall, no longer cooped up. When we see the dawn of the Last Day breaking forth, the Son of righteousness appearing in the sky, we won't see him as a "ball of fire" to destroy us, but we believers see him as our healer, our righteousness, our Savior. What joy will fill our hearts when that day comes!

God promises that the day of healing will also be a day of victory. "'Then you will trample on the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act,' says the LORD Almighty." The Lord carries that picture of the wicked burning in the fire even further—they become like ash. Believers will trample on them. This brings to mind another picture, when cheerleaders at a game yell out to the opposing side, "We will stomp on you!" Jesus is the one who won the victory over the devil and his enemies, and we get to share in it by faith in him.

In our world today, we don't often feel like victors. The Lord's enemies so often seem to have the upper hand. I was reading about euthanasia laws in Canada and how tens of thousands of people, not just the terminally ill but others are given assisted suicide because "they can't take it anymore." This is not God's will! Death seems to be winning! Or in our country, where states are enshrining abortion laws, and other states are denying funds for helping the poor. Are unbelievers winning, when we read the news? No! The day is coming when the tables will be turned, and Jesus will be seen as the victor.

Let's be ready for that day! Our text tells us how: "Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel." Malachi was the last prophet in the Old Testament. For four hundred years the Lord didn't send any more prophets until John the Baptist. But they had all the Word they needed to prepare. The law of Moses taught them to observe the Sabbath, the day of rest, and look for the true rest the Messiah would bring. The law of Moses directed them to sacrifices, pointing ahead to the ultimate sacrifice of the Lamb of God, to take away the sins of the world. Now that the Messiah has come, we prepare for that day by remembering and reading all of God's Word. "These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). We hear and read it because the Holy Spirit keeps us in the faith through it, along with Holy Communion: "Do this in remembrance of me."

Be ready. The Day is coming! It is surely coming soon! Amen.