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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
December 7, 2014
2nd Sunday in Advent

Scripture Lessons: 1 Timothy 6:11-16; Luke 17:20-30
Hymns: 64; 604; 60; 399:3 (Liturgy-377:10)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Malachi 4:1-6

“For behold, the day is coming,
Burning like an oven,
And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble.
And the day which is coming shall burn them up,”
Says the Lord of hosts,
“That will leave them neither root nor branch.
2 But to you who fear My name
The Sun of Righteousness shall arise
With healing in His wings;
And you shall go out
And grow fat like stall-fed calves.
3 You shall trample the wicked,
For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet
On the day that I do this,”
Says the Lord of hosts.
4 “Remember the Law of Moses, My servant,
Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel,
With the statutes and judgments.
5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet
Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.
6 And he will turn
The hearts of the fathers to the children,
And the hearts of the children to their fathers,
Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.”

(NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, The Judge of all, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: A Closing Message.

Our text comprises the entire final chapter of the book of Malachi. Perhaps more significantly, this is the closing chapter of the entire Old Testament. While the closing verses of our text speak of another prophet that was to come on the scene, there was a period of 400 hundred years following Malachi in which the Lord was silent, and there was no other revelation before the first coming of Christ. In many ways we may see a similarity to the period in which we live. It is a period of waiting, a time of expectation for the words of the prophets to be fulfilled, for the Christ to come to this world. However, we are not looking for the first coming which was fulfilled in the incarnation of Christ. We are now watching and waiting for that day when the Lord shall come again in glory to judge the world. We are watching for --

THEME: The Coming of a Day of Extremes.

When calamities strike in this world it can often be --

I. A Day of Horror.

When we read of earthquakes wiping out entire towns and many people losing their lives we grieve with them. When we hear of tornadoes or hurricanes striking part of our country our heart goes out to the victims. We know it is time for all of us to reach out and help in any way we can. But on that Day the destruction will be so much greater it will surpass our imagining, such will be that Day of horror for the world, for the entire world.

Malachi 4:1 “For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven, And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,” Says the Lord of hosts, “That will leave them neither root nor branch.

The destruction will be so complete that everything in the world will be totally destroyed. In the worst pictures we see of destruction, even from wildfires, there is always something left, smoldering stumps or branches or the metal skeleton of a car or truck, or a chimney standing where a house used to be. On that day all will be consumed, just like a fire passing over an already harvested field of dry stubble. Nothing will be left.

Now there are two points for us to consider here. The first is that we don't want to be caught up in that firestorm of judgment that shall destroy all the earth. That Day is coming. We should not fall into the sense of complacency that thinks this world will just go on forever as it has, and that all talk of final judgment is just scary talk to get people to behave themselves. That Day will come and it will be a day of horror for all who do wickedly.

And that leads us to the second point. With most disasters we react after the fact. When we see how badly people were hurt we open our hearts. We send money to the Red Cross, or maybe even go to their aid personally to help clean up and restore what was lost. With the final judgment there won't be an opportunity to respond after the fact to help those caught up in the judgment of the Lord. Now is the time for us to react. Now is the time to warn others of the judgment to come.

There are far too many in the world, and even in organized Christianity that are lulling sinners into a false sense of security, assuring them that their sin and wickedness is not a danger to them. "All is good, for God is love," they say, "and He will not punish the evildoer. A loving God wouldn't actually send people to hell."

God is love! God loved this world full of sinners so much that He sent His Son into the world, **"to born of a woman, to be born under the law to redeem those who were under the law"** (Galatians 4:4). He sent His Son to save us from sin, to deliver us from death. Jesus calls us to repentance. That is the message that is so urgently needed by those who are caught up in sin. Turn away from sin while we still have this time of grace, while God deals patiently with the world in His ***"desire that all men should be***

saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4).

For those who have heard this message, and by the powerful working of the Spirit have turned to the Lord in repentance and faith, that Day shall be extremely different. It shall be –

II. A Day of Blissful Joy.

Malachi 4:2-3 “But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings; And you shall go out And grow fat like stall-fed calves. 3 You shall trample the wicked, For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet On the day that I do this,” Says the Lord of hosts.”

The Sun of Righteousness shall arise. It will be a glorious sunrise, unsurpassed by any you have ever seen. That Day shall come with unparalleled splendor and glory, and bliss, joyous bliss. We shall bask in the warm glow of the Son of God! We shall feel the healing power that He brings to all His own as He calls His own to come to Him, and yes, even from the graves Christ will recall us. And all the detrimental effects of sin, the sickness and sorrow and trials and tribulations shall all just fall away as He brings us healing on that day, perfect healing.

What a feeling that will be, what an exhilarating feeling! Our text compares it to the joy of young cattle being freed from the confines of stable so that they can frolic in the pastures. Free at last! We will feel that sense of freedom as the shackles of this corrupt world are thrown off forever, and all the weight of sin falls away. We will want to kick up our heels in exuberant joy! That is where our consciousness will be focused, for our eyes will be fixed on the Lord Jesus, our glorious Savior and King!

Why shouldn't we want that Day to come quickly? It will be our introduction to heavenly bliss and glory in the new heavens and the new earth in which only righteousness shall dwell (2 Peter 2:13). That is what the Lord desires for us. It is what He came to secure for us. And so He presents us with --

III. A Prophet's Call for Preparation

The first part of the call for preparation is to pay attention to the Word of the Lord.

Malachi 4:4 “Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, With the statutes and judgments.”

God made an impressive show of His glory and His holiness and His power at Sinai when He presented Moses with the law. But the message the Lord is speaking here concerns more than the Ten Commandments or other laws and regulations that were put in place that day. It includes **all** the instruction of the Lord present in His Word. The Hebrew word here is **Torah**, the word still used by Jews today for all of Scripture. The Lord calls us to regard all of God’s Word as not only holy, but important.

That statement is almost a “Dah!” After all if we know God’s Word is holy don’t we also know that it is important? Well, we don’t always act like we know it’s important. For many it’s more like when we throw aside the instructions packed in a box with a new toy. We neglect them, and ignore them until we are desperate. In fact many would say the Word of the Lord is out of date, that it is no longer relevant to life today. Observing many Christian’s lives one would think that is the prevailing thought regarding the Law of the Lord, and all His instruction for us.

In spite of the fact that we snub God in this way, He reaches out to us with an encouragement to remember His Word and to pay attention to what He has to say to us. To this end He sent yet another prophet before the advent of our Lord.

Malachi 4:5-6 “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. 6 And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.”

The Lord Jesus identified this prophet, this second Elijah, to be John the Baptist. He left no doubt about that fact. The second Elijah has already come. We think of John as being the Lord’s

forerunner before Jesus' first coming, the incarnation of the Son of God. This passage makes it clear John's message is for us also who look for the Lord's second coming. John came with a message of repentance. Turn away from sin. Look to Jesus for forgiveness and salvation. Jesus is the one who alone can lead us in the paths of righteousness, for it is His righteousness that avails before God and not our own. So then let us forsake our human reasoning about doing the most good, and earning our own way into eternal life. Let us forsake our sinful lusts and greed, and all the ways of the world that encroach on our thinking and our manner of living. Let us turn to Jesus for life and salvation.

And then our text reminds us that the Lord has blessed us with family. The importance of having a truly spiritual family relationship is emphasized in our text. This is such a wondrous blessing for focusing our lives on the Lord, and the salvation He has brought us.

What the Lord desires for believing families is that the Lord be an integral part of family life. Pastors often encourage family devotions. Pastors also realize just how challenging that can be with our busy schedules and the distractions of the world that are around us all the time. However, family devotions remain a valuable starting point for a spiritual family. Regular family worship with the family coming to the Lord's house together, and then having time in the Word as a family, sharing Bible stories with young children at bed time, saying prayers together, and then talking about their faith and how it fits into everyday life, that is what the Lord is talking about in our text.

This is when the hearts of parents turn to their children. There is no greater gift, no greater act of love then to remind our children that we all are "Jesus' little lambs," and that "Jesus loves *us*, this I know for the Bible tells me so!" This is when the hearts of children turn to their parents. Everyone wants memories that will define your relationship with your children. So we go camping and fishing and go on great vacations. The Lord doesn't say that's wrong, but what He suggests for you, what He desires for the close knit family is that memories are built around the Lord and His Word.

My earliest and most precious memories of my mother is her singing to us children at bedtime, “*Now the light has gone away,*” or “*Now rest beneath night’s shadows.*” And yes, I do recall how my father led us in family worship, and how each evening we said the Lord’s Prayer together as a family, and received the Lord’s blessing as a family. I know in my heart that my parents are now with the Lord. My heart yearns for the day of blissful joy when I shall be with them before the Lord basking in His glory.

Those who neglect this vital part of life are risking their children’s souls. They are failing to prepare them for that Day. They are forgetting that the Lord has laid out a vision of a day of extremes, and that the other extreme, that of a curse, is as sure and certain and the one of blessings. It is **blessing** that the Lord desires for us, and curse, the very last word of the Old Testament of our English Bibles, is the last thing the Lord desires for anyone! So even as the Old Testament ends with the reminder of the extreme curse of sin and unbelief, the New Testament begins with the coming of the Savior who has come to destroy sin’s awful curse, and free us from its power. He has come to redeem us, and He shall come again to receive us to the extreme bliss and glory of the joys of heaven, so that we too pray; “**Even so come Lord Jesus**” (Revelation 22:20).

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.