

# WHEN GOD'S MERCY STOPS

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ November 6, 2016



**"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. <sup>2</sup> But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. <sup>3</sup> 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 4:1-3)**

*Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.*

TGIS – Thank goodness it's Sunday, right? OK, so maybe that's just something I made up. I think more people are familiar with TGIF – Thank goodness It's Friday. How many of you have heard of that phrase before? How many of you actively thankful that it is Friday? Kids get home from school and crash on the couch wondering what to do for the weekend. Mom and dad get home from work, glad to be off on the weekend. Maybe there's a school activity that takes up a part of the weekend, maybe it's just a simple weekend getaway. Even those of us who do not have the traditional Monday-Friday workweek understand the value of time off and the joy that accompanies it.

How that joy is contrasted by the time Sunday night rolls around. The mood is less jovial, homework needs to get done, lunches need to get prepped, as people prepare to embark upon another long five-day work week. Perhaps you've wished, or heard someone say, "I wish the weekend would never end" or "I wish I didn't have to go back to school." How great would that be if it actually happened that way, if we could live in a perpetual weekend? As wonderful as that sounds, as much as we wish it to be so, we also realize that's not going to happen. And anyone who said they could stop the weekend from ending would be scoffed at as a fool. Because no matter how hard we try to stop Monday from coming, no matter how much we don't want Monday to come, we know it's coming.

The inevitability of the weekend coming to a close contrasts vividly to many people's idea of the end of the world. Even as Christians, how often do we give thought to the end of the world, how often do we give thought to the last day and Last Judgment? Even though we know the Bible says the world is going to end someday, how seriously do we believe that it will happen soon or ever? Or how many people do you know deny that this world will one day come to an end by the power of an almighty God, and think that because they deny it, it won't happen?

Just as it is foolish to think that we can stop Monday from coming, so it is foolish for us to think that we can stop the end of the world from coming. That's the point that's being brought out this Sunday specifically with hymns and readings. What makes it something important and something we should straighten up in our seats about, is it's not just that the world is going to stop, but that this will be the time WHEN GOD'S MERCY STOPS. Simply put, it's going to be the time when:

1. No second chances given
2. No second chances needed

(1)

We like to think of our God as a God of second chances, don't we? And it's true, if he didn't give us second (and third, and fourth, and fifth) chances, there would be no hope for any of us. We are able to come to God's house every Sunday and confess our sins before his altar, and he forgives us of our sins. The Bible also calls God "**slow to anger**" and "**not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.**" But some people take it too far, saying that we will always have a second chance. But "**slow to anger**" doesn't mean "no anger." Something of which the Old Testament prophet Malachi was well aware.

So what do we know about Malachi? For many Christians, Malachi's only claim to fame is that it's the last book of the Old Testament. Some might be able to pull out the encouragement to generous giving found in chapter 3: "**Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse...Test me in this...and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven.**" But apart from that, Malachi remains a mystery. Let him be a mystery no longer.

Malachi was placed at the end of the Old Testament, because he was the last prophet and messenger to bring God's Word to the Jews. It was during this time that many Jews had returned to Jerusalem after being exiled in Babylon. The excitement of returning to the promised land had faded, the excitement of rebuilding the temple had faded, the everyday monotony of life had returned, some even going so far as to blame God for why their lives were not better.

This was the time that Malachi lived, with a people that were mostly apathetic to God's Word. One of Malachi's primary goals was to wake them up from their apathy, to get them to pay attention. That's what he does in the apocalyptic prediction in our verses for today. "Pay attention" Malachi shouts, "This is important!" "**The day is coming!**" What day? "**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.**" "The day is coming," Malachi says, "WHEN GOD'S MERCY STOPS." No second chances given.

The Jews of Malachi's day had gone into an arrogant stupor, thinking that everything was OK, that they were right with God because they were Jews, because they returned to Jerusalem. The only people God would punish would be the Gentiles, those who were not Jews. But Malachi says, "No! That's not what's going to happen!" Not just the evildoers will be thrown into a furnace, but the arrogant as well, those who rely only on their own lineage instead of God's grace. This is no idle threat.

Malachi could point to a century or so before, when God threatened to deport Israel from the Promised Land for disobeying him. Was God joking then? No. Was God joking now? No. For some this might seem out of character for the God we know. It seems out of character for God to threaten and actually punish his people for this. But understand this, when God declares his law and its consequences, the purpose is always the same. The purpose is not to send people to hell, but the purpose is to condemn sin, convict the sinner, and turn him back to God in repentance. And while it is true that God is loving, and God is gracious, eventually there will be a time when his patience will come to an end.

Are you ready for that time? Are you ready for God's patience to come to an end? Because I think there's an arrogance inside each one of us that isn't concerned about God's patience because we've always known it to be there. We know that if we screw up this week, God will forgive us. We know that if we miss church one week, there's always the next week to go. Sometimes we don't seriously consider how our pet sins are leading us straight to hell, because we know God's patience with us. The final judgment of God will come on the last day when he will judge the living and the dead. It is on that day WHEN GOD'S MERCY STOPS, when God's patience will end.

God's patience is not something we should treat lightly. Parents, you know this as well as anyone – how do you feel when your kids test your patience? The time will come when God will say enough is enough, and there will be no second chances given, no warning ticket to get your spiritual house in order. That day is coming whether you believe it or not. That day is coming whether the world believes it or not.

And so instead of testing God's patience, be thankful for it and respect it. Instead of being apathetic towards God's grace, rejoice in it and take advantage of it. Think of it this way. If you knew the world was going to end tonight and there's nothing you can do to stop it, what would you do differently this afternoon? I don't know about you, but I would want to spend as much time as I could with my family. I would want to call my parents on Skype and talk to them one last time. Maybe I'd even go out to eat at a fancy restaurant tonight. Maybe you would do the same things. But would you read your Bible? Would you go and talk to your neighbor about Jesus? Would you tell about the time WHEN GOD'S MERCY STOPS and no second chances are given?

Now is the time when there are second chances, now is the time for repentance – to turn away from the wickedness we have done. Now is the time to think about how we can share with our neighbor God's good news. Because when God's judgment comes on the Last Day, there will be no more time, there will be no second chances given, it will be the day WHEN GOD'S MERCY STOPS.

(2)

On the one hand, God's judgment on the Last Day should terrify us. Because we know we have done evil things in our life. We should be burned to stubble. But as a result of God's mercy we are no longer going to face it. As a result of God's mercy, and not our goodness, not our thoughtfulness, not our kindness, God brought us into his family. He had mercy on us not only by sending Jesus to live, die and rise for us, but he had mercy on us when he caused us to believe this message.

**"But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings."**

Instead of terror on the Last Day, we will be filled with joy. Because WHEN GOD'S MERCY STOPS no second chances will be needed. Those who believe in Christ will not need a second chance to make their lives better. Those who believe in Christ will not need a second chance in purgatory to pay for all of the sins that Christ didn't pay for, those who believe in Christ will not need a millennial reign of Christ on earth. Those who believe in Christ will be joyful.

There may be plenty of times that you wonder when the end will come. There may even be those times when you question if God is really there looking after the situation. But what God's Word reminds you is that God has not forgotten you. He has brought you to faith, and he keeps and encourages you in that faith through his Word. This is why I encourage you both from the pulpit and personally to be in God's Word as much as possible. If it's too hard to find time to read and understand God's Word on your own, come to church, come to Bible Class, better yet, bring a friend.

Everyone knows that the weekend will come to an end and that Monday will come tomorrow. We know there's no stopping Monday and so we plan accordingly. The same is true for the end of the world. The end of the world is coming, so plan accordingly. It is at that time WHEN GOD'S MERCY STOPS. But now is not that time, now is the time to rejoice in and enjoy God's mercy. Now is a time to tell others about God's mercy. I pray that God gives you the strength and opportunity this week to talk about his mercy. Amen.