

“The Day Is Coming”

“I never thought this day would come.” Have you ever found yourself saying something like that? You’ve waited and waited, sometimes patiently, for whatever occasion it was, and then finally, it arrived. I’m fairly certain that there are many people in the United States that have been making similar claims lately. For the first time in 108 years, their team, the Chicago Cubs, won the World Series. So many of those long-suffering fans must have wondered if the day would ever arrive that their team was the world champion.

Or perhaps you are waiting just a little longer to say that. Perhaps you have, like many, been disappointed and upset by one side or both, with the political process leading up to the presidential election just a few days away. You’re going to breathe a sigh of relief when the commercials, news coverage, phone calls, and mailings stop. And even though you sometimes have wondered if that day would ever come, this Tuesday, you get to put it behind you.

Now, I hope that it is obvious to you that the two examples I just gave are not even worth comparing to the subject matter before us in our worship service and in our sermon. The outcome of a baseball game, or a series, or a season is just a distraction and a means of entertainment. And while the presidential election is much more significant and important, it, too, has a limited effect. In four years, we’ll be going through another cycle again.

But I bring them up because today we are talking about a day that seems very long in coming. You and I might begin to wonder if it will ever arrive. Others, for many years have not just wondered about it, but have flat out denied that such a day will ever come. But it will. The Bible makes it clear. Just one of many places where God tells us about that day is our sermon text from the last chapter of the last book of the Old Testament. God himself says the day is coming. You and I ought to listen to him.

We often call that day Judgment Day, and rightly so. On that day, God pronounces his final verdict, his last judgment. It is a day of punishment. Our text describes: **“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. The day of God’s judgment will unleash his fiery anger against sin.

That was a strong warning for those to whom these words were first addressed. Malachi prophesied, that is, he shared God’s Word, with the people of Judah who had returned from captivity in Babylon. They had rebuilt the Temple, though it couldn’t live up to its former glory. They had rebuilt the walls of the city of Jerusalem as well. But even as they had rebuilt so much of their homeland, the lives of the people were crumbling. They stopped listening in so many ways to the laws and regulations that God had laid down for them. They abandoned the Sabbath Day. They married their foreign neighbors, even though God had commanded their separation. They withheld their best from God in the offerings that they brought to him. And still they expected God’s blessing and complained when they didn’t find it in the ways that they anticipated.

God through Malachi addressed each of these issues with the people. And at the point of our sermon text, as the words of the prophecy begin to draw to a close, God makes a firm pronouncement about his relationship with the people. He is indeed watching over them and is with them, and he will ultimately punish the evil that he sees. Surely the day is coming.

So many had forgotten God’s patience, how he repeatedly warned his people about the consequences of their sin. He had borne with them lovingly and patiently right up until the point when he allowed those Babylonians to capture and hold them captive. Too many of the people didn’t see in their return from captivity the gracious working of their loving God. Too many didn’t look at their own sinful hearts and sinful attitudes to see what was offending their holy God in order that they might repent and turn away

from their sins. They were arrogant. They were evildoers. And so, the day would come when God's patience would reach its conclusion. The warnings would come to an end, and the calls to repentance would stop. All that would be left was God's fiery judgment. And it would burn severely: **"Not a root or a branch will be left to them."**

But these words were not meant only for those people of Judah. They have been preserved for our benefit, and for our warning. The day is coming. It will burn against the arrogant and all evildoers. And it is a frightening thought to consider just how similar we are to the people of Malachi's day. How often do we overlook what God commands because our sinful natures would rather serve themselves? Sure, the specifics have changed. No longer is God demanding that we keep the Sabbath Day, but he does desire our worship, our praise, our love, and our attention. But that attention is often divided. That love is set on so many things, and it is all too easy for our praise and worship to be crowded out and drowned out by other cares and concerns. And we stop giving to God our best and our firstfruits, and we stop recognizing God's blessings in many cases the instant they don't line up with our own expectations and desires.

God would have every right to lump us in with all the other arrogant and evildoers. He would have every right to burn with anger against us. The day is surely coming. But God's answer to us about that day is not to try harder or to be more careful about following his instructions. The answer isn't to compare ourselves to others and to stay in the top ten percent of good people. No, God's answer doesn't begin with us. It begins with him.

It begins with the sun of righteousness rising with healing in its wings. See, that day is a very different day if you have a different perspective on it. The arrogant and the evildoers from these verses are those who have rejected God and rejected his forgiveness in their lives. They stand before him with their own deeds and worthiness and the result is a consuming fire. But **"for you who revere my name,"** God says, **"for you...the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings."** Instead of the consuming fire, for some that day is the dawning of a bright sun chasing away the darkness and shadows. Because the same judge who will enact punishment on the sinners is the one who already took the punishment upon himself for you and for me.

The rising sun of righteousness is the Son of God. It is Jesus our Savior returning again not to bear sin, but to bring salvation. The returning one is the one who sacrificed himself once for all, not on a manmade altar, but in the very presence of God. And like the sun brightening the day, the returning Savior wraps his loving arms around all of those whom he has called to faith.

And at that day our joy will have no equal. Like a calf pent up in its pen for the winter and then released to a beautiful spring day, we, too will be set free. We will leap with joy and wonder and amazement. We will hear our Savior's voice and live. What has been hidden for so long as we await that day will be made clear to everyone: we have crossed over from death to life.

We will join in with a righteous anger in opposing all sin and shame. We will be victorious with the one who won the victory over sin, death, and hell.

There is much more that the Bible has to say about Judgment Day. We'll consider a few more aspects of that day as we continue through the next few weeks of the End Times season of our church year. But for today, let's take one more moment to reflect on this: we don't know when that day will come. You can't find it on a schedule. It doesn't get its own date on the calendar. So that means we'll want to always be ready. We will want to keep in mind that, no matter how long God is patient with this world, that day is coming. We will want to put into action right now our joy that comes from the forgiveness of sins. We'll want to demonstrate from our lives the love that God has placed in our hearts. And we'll want to share that love by alerting others that the day is coming and that through Jesus, they, too will be ready for it.

The text: Malachi 4:1–3 (NIV84)

“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. ² 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. 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.