



Grace and peace be to you from God our Father, and from our King and Savior, Jesus Christ, who is coming soon.

Malachi 4:1-6 (EHV)

4 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. ²But for you who fear my name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise, and there will be healing in its wings. You will go out and jump around like calves from the stall. ³You will trample the wicked. They will surely be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I take action, says the LORD of Armies.

⁴Remember the law of my servant Moses, which I commanded to him at Horeb to serve as statutes and judgments over all Israel.

⁵Look! I am going to send Elijah the prophet to you before the great and fearful day of the LORD comes! ⁶He will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers. Otherwise, I will come and strike the land with complete destruction.

►
If you read through the Old Testament, you will find a theme emerges.

Man is sinful and untrustworthy, but God is gracious, and he keeps his promises.

Ever since Adam and Eve sinned and brought death and suffering into the world, this theme has been woven into the fabric of history.

Over and over the people of Israel rebelled against God. Even though he had chosen them as the nation the Savior would be born from. Over and over, they abandoned the true God, to worship false gods.

And then Old Testament history brings us to the words of **2 Chronicles 36...**

“¹⁵The LORD, the God of their fathers, persistently sent warnings to them through his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. ¹⁶But the people kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets, until the anger of the LORD rose up against his people, until there was no remedy. ¹⁷He brought against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary. He had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or aged. The LORD gave them all into his hand.”

►
And so, the people of Israel who didn't die when the Chaldeans conquered them, were forcibly removed from the Promised Land, and resettled in Babylon.

Why? Because they had despised the LORD and his message, until there was no remedy, and God's anger swept them away.

But even when man is sinful, God is gracious, and keeps the promises that he makes.

And he had promised to send a Savior from the descendants of Abraham. He had promised that this Savior would be born in the town of Bethlehem.

So, a ruler arose in Babylon. And out of the blue, one day, this ruler decreed that the Jews were to go back to their homeland, and rebuild the Temple of Yahweh.

So they went back.

And the Temple was rebuilt.

And the walls of Jerusalem repaired.

But guess what happened almost immediately?

The returning remnant of Israel began to abandon Yahweh.

It wasn't to worship carved idols of wood and stone this time. No, now they abandoned God in different ways.

They openly disobeyed his OTHER commands.

They didn't set aside time for the LORD, but instead they invested their time and money in their OWN projects.

They abandoned their marriages, and discarded the people GOD had given them to care for.

You can read about these things in the book of Malachi. It's only four short chapters long.



And all of this was sooooo frustrating for the spiritual shepherds that God sent to tend this flock. At one point the prophet Nehemiah got so frustrated with men who were doing these things that he cursed them, hit them, and pulled out their hair.

But Nehemiah couldn't change their hearts with angry words, and violent actions.

And that was the problem. It was their sinful hearts that needed to be reformed.

Jesus knows this.

That's why Jesus comes to change the heart—first.

He knows that when the heart is changed, the stream of things that flow out of the heart will change also.



The words of our sermon reading are the last words of the book of Malachi.

In verse one, we hear a stark warning to the wicked—for Jesus is coming to judge the world. Let's hear verse 1 again...

“4 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” (**Malachi 4:1** EHV).

Malachi sees far into the future. It's clear that he sees judgment day, and not some other day, because of the details recorded here.

Look! He says. Pay attention. A DAY is coming.

And what is this day like? It's not just like a fire. No, it's like a furnace. Fire is hot enough, but when you enclose that heat and feed it with fuel and air, it burns much hotter than an open campfire.

And does this fiery furnace burn for?

ALL the arrogant. EVERY evildoer.

This is no minor judgment day. This is THE GREAT Judgment Day that the Bible says is coming at the end of time.

►
God uses a POWER term for himself here. He calls himself the "LORD of Armies". The true God is the LORD—Yahweh. The true God is the LORD "of Armies"—the ANGEL armies.

A single angel would be enough to decimate the armies of man. But God doesn't rule over just ONE angel. The Bible tells us that he reigns over thousands of thousands of angels. Each one ready to gladly do his will, with every ounce of his strength.

The arrogant, and the evildoer will have no chance.

And there will be no cease-fire. No opportunity to regroup when the Judgment comes. God says the fire of his judgment will not leave behind a root or a branch for them.

When I lived in Washington State, we had a problem with invasive blackberry brambles. It might sound nice to have blackberries everywhere, but these brambles were vicious, so tough, and almost impossible to kill. You could burn 'em down to the ground, but some bit of root that was missed would send up a shoot the next year.

Sometimes people actually rented goats to eat their brambles, because the goats would eat everything. They'd even pull up the roots and make sure everything was gone. And that's what you had to do.

That's the picture God paints here. There is no root or branch that will remain to grow up against the LORD, ever again.

►
But pastor, I thought you said Jesus comes to change the heart?

He does. But not on that day. He comes to change the heart TODAY, to give us a vision from Malachi—as a warning. So that we do not find ourselves allied with the godless on that day.

When I read those words about God's enemies being reduced to ashes, I can't help but think of two movies that came out a while back. Stories where there was a great evil character. Voldemort was one. Thanos, another. And in both of these stories, when the bad guy is finally defeated, in that scene their body becomes ashes (SNAP) just like that, and flake by flake, they fall apart and are carried away by the wind.

This warning went out in Malachi's day, and it goes out to us today. In THAT coming day, the opposition to Yahweh will be only as powerful as ASHES.

Jesus lets us see this ahead of time, so our hearts turn away from our sins, and seek the forgiveness that only Jesus can provide—before that terrible day arrives.

[PAUSE]

► **But there were others among the remnant of Israel that returned to the Promised Land.** Others that did not stand with those who arrogantly opposed the LORD.

In verses 2-3, we hear a word of comfort meant to lift up and energize these remaining faithful. Let's yearn verses 2-3 again...

“²But for you who fear my name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise, and there will be healing in its wings. You will go out and jump around like calves from the stall. ³You will trample the wicked. They will surely be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I take action, says the LORD of Armies” **(Malachi 4:2-3 EHV).**

Here Malachi is still looking into the future, and seeing the great Day of Judgment. But all is not fire and ashes. **For some this will be a day of healing, joy, and victory.**

When you look at what the rest of the Bible says about Jesus, it seems pretty certain that this “Sun of Righteousness” is talking about him.

After all, our Savior is called, “The LORD our Righteousness” **(Jeremiah 23:6 EHV).** John the Baptist's father Zechariah called our Savior the “Rising Sun” who would come from above **(Luke 1:78).** That's what “Dayspring from on high” means, if you've heard that in a hymn, or in another Bible verse.

And as for the healing that flows out from the “wings” or “rays” of this “Sun of Righteousness”—Isaiah tells us that it is by the wounds of Jesus that “we are healed” **(Isaiah 53:5 EHV).**

So, when you see that phrase, “Sun of Righteousness” think of Jesus, rising to heal our broken and sinful condition. See Jesus, like a bright star that doesn't just replenish our store of vitamin D, but a star whose rays make us fit to live, healed and healthy, in heaven with God, forever.

[PAUSE]

So, what's your greatest bodily pain? Maybe a hip pain? Knee pain? Exhaustion from an immune system gone haywire. Exhaustion from cancer's endless march.

Whatever it is, in the light of the “Sun of Righteousness” it won't stand a chance.

► **And along with healing, comes joy.**

Have you ever seen calves being released out into the pasture from their pens in the springtime? Since we live in cattle country, some of you have seen this in person. But for the rest of you, there's this thing called “YouTube”, and if you search for “young calves going out for spring” you'll find a great video posted by the “The Funky Farmer”.

Some of them shoot out like a rocket! And then they race around the pasture like it's the Indy 500! And all along the way they're not just running like cows usually do, they're prancing and kicking their back legs up, and just going crazy with joy. They're free at last!

Malachi was writing to Israelites who had endure the Babylonian Captivity. These people were now weighed down by the hard road of coming back to Israel, and rebuilding the mess. And for these weary pilgrims, God had a message of encouragement.

Joy is coming. You're gonna be like those spring-time calves. Yes, some of us may be very stoic, serious Christians, but not on that day. Joy is coming, God says.

And under our feet, will be the wicked. For all who are joined to God by faith in Jesus, will share in his victory over all the evil. The wicked will be trampled under our feet—but not in some gory way. No, that is not the image here. The wicked have already been UTTERLY defeated by God already.

And for those who are still afraid because of what the wicked have done to them in the past—there is comfort here.

The wicked will not be able to harm you on that day, any more than ashes can harm you.

[PAUSE]

Jesus comes to change the heart. For those who trust in him already, he wants our hearts to FULLY grasp what our future holds. That way our hearts will not be filled with this world's pain, and sadness, and disappointment.

No, here Jesus points us to the dawn of HIS eternal day—so that we might rejoice NOW, in him.

►
So, we've come to the last three verses, of our sermon reading, and of the Old Testament itself. Let's hear those one more time...

⁴Remember the law of my servant Moses, which I commanded to him at Horeb to serve as statutes and judgments over all Israel.

⁵Look! I am going to send Elijah the prophet to you before the great and fearful day of the LORD comes! ⁶He will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers. Otherwise, I will come and strike the land with complete destruction" (**Malachi 6:4-6** EHV).

Malachi warns the remnant of Israel to remember the laws that God commanded them at Mt. Sinai. For the returning remnant had already begun to disobey the LORD.

And then God gives them another glimpse into the future.

There would be another prophet. Like Moses, he would teach the people the difference between right and wrong.

This prophet would be like Elijah the prophet in many ways.

This "Elijah to come" was John the Baptist, of course.

But he didn't just thunder at the people with God's Law. **He also directed the people to Jesus.** He literally pointed to Jesus as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

And John also answered the questions of those who had been moved to trust in Jesus. When they asked how they should live their lives now that they knew their Savior, John said...

- Share your clothing and food with those in need
- Don't cheat people out of their money
- Don't use your authority to take advantage of others

- Don't manipulating people with threats or violence
- Stop telling lies
- Trust God and be content with your wages

Those were just some of the things John the Baptist guided the people to do.

► **Malachi summarizes godly behavior with a single example.** This "future Elijah" would turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers.

Adult Christians don't abandon their families.

Children who are Christians don't rebel against their parents.

These are things that the ungodly do.

Maybe you don't have children, so you wonder how this could apply to you. Well, let's think about that. What example would Malachi have used to summarize godly behavior in your life? Maybe he would have written...

He will turn the hearts of the workers, to serve their bosses, and the hearts of bosses to care for their workers.

He will turn the hearts of people, to wonder if their neighbors are doing okay. And the hearts of those struggling, to think if others might be struggling like they are.

He will turn the hearts of siblings to each other.

He will turn the hearts of the rich, to think of how to help the poor, and the hearts of the poor to see what the rich are lacking, and to help them in those areas.

► **Many in our day want to solve the problems of the world with policies, and laws.** And to be sure, whenever you live with other sinners, you're going to need policies and laws.

But these cannot solve the problems of the world. Because these cannot change the heart.

Jesus comes to change the heart.

First he came to claim the heart. To buy it back from hell with his holy life, and his innocent and willing death.

Then he stays to change the heart. For with forgiveness, salvation, and life, comes an on-going change in who we are. A change for the better.

[PAUSE]

As we move closer to the celebration of our Savior's birth, you might ask yourself, am I changing? Where would my Savior have me grow, and change next?

When God brought Israel back from exile, many of them stayed the same. Their hearts were not moved away from their sins. Rather than struggling against their sins, they were walking in them.

Through Malachi, God warned them where that path would end.

Through Malachi, God described a path that ends in life. The path of trust in the Messiah. The path of faith, and change.

Let Christ ever be our path, so that for us the burning day becomes the healing day instead. **Amen.**

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.