

Son-burn, or Son-shine?

Text: Malachi 4:1-6 for 12/17/2017 by Pastor Bolwerk

"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. ⁴ "Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel. ⁵ "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. ⁶ He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."

Are you afraid of fire? Whether or not you are afraid of fire usually depends on two things: the size of the fire, and where you are in relation to that fire. For example: Most of us would not be afraid of a little flame on top of a birthday candle. That "fire" is so small you could easily blow it out with a quick breath. But what if an entire house was on fire? Would you be afraid of that? That would depend on where you were standing, wouldn't it? If you were standing inside of that house as it went up in flames you would probably be terrified. But if you were standing half a block away from a burning, empty house you may be feeling many emotions, but fear is probably not one of them.

As we prepare for Christmas our heavenly Father wants us to look ahead to our Savior's return. As we do God wants us to carefully consider where we are standing when it comes to our relationship with Jesus, and the coming of Judgment Day. God uses these words of his prophet Malachi to get us to ask ourselves, "What are we looking ahead to when it comes to Judgment Day?"

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When the Son of God returns on Judgment Day there will certainly be Son-burn. God tells us, **"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** (v. 1).

Judgment Day is a certain thing. Our Lord says in these words that it "is coming" and there is no way to avoid it. When that Day arrives Jesus will sit on his throne and judge the living and the dead. There will be only be two groups of people standing before Jesus: Those who face Son-burn, and those who face Son-shine.

For all who do not meet God's standard of perfection, that day will "burn like a furnace." This is not talking about a furnace like the one that keeps your house warm. The picture here is of a blast furnace: A furnace that is burning hot enough to melt rock and metal. On Judgment Day, those who rejected Jesus as Savior will feel the wrath of God the Son burn again them. Malachi describes those who reject Christ as, **"All the arrogant and every evildoer"** (v. 1).

That's good, isn't it? It's good to know that all those who have done evil and brought sin and suffering into this world will finally get what they deserve! Those who looked down at us, and treated us badly because we are Christians, will face the intense fires of hell! On that Day all those who rejected Jesus and his Church will certainly get what they deserve.

Yet before we start celebrating the demise of those "evildoers", we need to ask ourselves,

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“What side of this fire are we on: Son-burn, or Son-shine?” Are we sure we are standing in the right place?

It’s easy to look at the world and point out all the “evildoers.” We point to people who do things we feel are more “evil” than the little sins we commit. We compare ourselves to the “horrible” sinners of the world while pointing to the better-than-average life we live. We sometimes even act as if God should be happy we’re a part of his kingdom for all we do for the church. That arrogance can even lead us to become careless with God’s law, treating it as if that law doesn’t apply to us in the same way as it does to others.

So we break the Eighth Commandment which says, **“You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor”** (Exodus 20:16). Oh, but we wouldn’t do that. We only give our “opinion” of others, even if our opinion ends up tarnishing their reputation a little in the process. Or we lust after some person or thing, and act like that’s okay because at least we didn’t act on that lust – even if we do keep thinking about it. Soon, honoring our fathers, our mothers, and others in authority (like our political leaders) isn’t so important. And we would never steal or murder. But wasting a little time on the job or at school is no big deal. And hateful thoughts never hurt anybody, did they? It’s just a thought. None of these things are really a big deal for us because we’re “Christians.” We claim we have forgiveness because we “have” Jesus. We treat Christ as if he is some “lucky rabbit’s foot,” or a “get out of hell free” card. We do evil in God’s eyes and then try to justify that evil by waving the name of Jesus around. When that is our attitude, do we honestly think we are on the side of Son-shine simply because we claim the title “Christian?” How many arrogantly self-righteous “Christians” are going to be in hell? Jesus himself said of Judgment Day, **“Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”** (Matthew 7:22-23). Remember, it is the arrogant and evildoers who will face Son-burn!

God is serious about his requirement for getting into heaven. Dead serious. God demands perfection. Anything less will be burned away. And it won’t be just a little burn. Malachi tells us that day will **“burn like a furnace”** (v. 1). Like a fire from a blast furnace, Judgment Day will burn up the evildoers, the arrogant, and the unrepentant. It will burn them so completely that Malachi says, **“Not a root or a branch will be left to them”** (v. 1b). Anyone who has ever cut down a tree knows that getting rid of the roots is the hardest part. Yet God says the fire of his judgment will burn so hot it will destroy the evildoers right down to their roots.

This reality should terrify us! Who of us can say we have never misused God’s law in promoting our own worth by comparing ourselves to others? Who of us can say we have never been arrogant and condescending toward others, even in our thoughts? Who of us has not willfully sinned against God, and then tried to excuse that sin by pointing to our “Christianity?” Are we really any better than the rest of this world full of evildoers?

So where do you stand? Which side of this fire are you on: Son-burn or Son-shine?

The reality of our sin and the fire of Judgment Day may cause us to wonder who can ever be saved. Through Malachi God tells us, **“But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings”** (v. 2). To “revere” God’s name means to show him great honor and respect. To show true respect to God means to humble oneself

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before him. Humility before God means recognizing our lost and condemned condition. It means recognizing that no matter how good we think we are, on our own we are never “good” before God. Humility means throwing ourselves on the mercy and promises of God, trusting he will be merciful to us, even though we have offended him and have nothing to offer him.

If salvation is what we desire then we need to set aside our arrogance and self-importance. King David says of God, **“You save the humble but bring low those whose eyes are haughty”** (Psalm 18:27). God’s promised salvation is for all people, yet it is the humble believers who enjoy the benefits. The arrogant, on the other hand, feel they have no need for God and his salvation.

God humbles us with his law by clearly showing us our sins. With that sinful reality set before our eyes we cry out to God for mercy, and he answers. Through his saving gospel God the Father points us back to his Son.

In Jesus we find true Son-shine! Jesus said, **“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life”** (John 8:12). On that first Christmas night the angels reflected the Savior’s light to those shepherds who heard their joyous message. At Jesus’ baptism his saving light was made know as he began his public, gospel ministry. The light and warmth of the Son was seen and felt by those who were touched by Jesus’ miracles. And Jesus’ glorious Son-shine was seen by three of his disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. Yet, the brightest light of Christ shone on the darkest day of his life. Suffering under the oppressive load of all our sins, from his cross Jesus proclaimed, **“It is finished”** (John 19:30). With that simple phrase our sinful arrogance was paid for; our lack of humility was washed away in the blood of Christ. The dark power of sin was shattered, and the gates of heaven were opened for all believers. After his rising from the dead, the light of God’s Son continues to shine on and in our lives as he rules over everything for the good of his followers.

It’s this good news that makes us Jesus followers. Only by the power of Christ’s gospel can we come to trust in him. That saving message of Christ crucified fills us with the joy of sins forgiven, and gives us the power to fight our Old, evil selves. Only by trusting in Jesus and his righteousness are we holy and blameless before our perfect heavenly Father.

Through the gospel God the Holy Spirit creates the faith we need to humbly trust in God’s Son for the light of life. By faith we look forward with joy to that Last Day. God says of believers on Judgment Day, **“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. 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** (vs. 2-3).

On that Last and glorious Day, the “sun of righteousness” will rise and heal us from all the pain and suffering that sin has brought us. Fully and completely freed from our sins we will be leaping and jumping for joy. Those who stood opposed to Jesus, who faced the Son-burn of his judgment, will be nothing more than ashes under our feet. We will be in heaven celebrating in the Son-shine of our Savior’s glory, and praising him for all that he has done for us.

But that celebration of thanks doesn’t have to wait until Judgment Day. We can thank and praise the “sun of righteousness” even now. God said through Malachi, **“Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel”** (v. 4). That

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word of God is for all his believers. God's law moves us to repent of our sins, and his gospel promises turn our hearts away from sin and toward that saving Son-shine. Like a lamp for our feet all of God's word helps to guide and direct our daily lives. We need the light of Christ to help us see where we are going in this sin darkened world.

And if that powerful word of God can do all that for us, it can do that for others as well. God says to his believing children, **"turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers"** (v. 6). When we share God's decrees and laws with the people in our lives it gives the Holy Spirit a chance to turn people's hearts around. It gives parents the desire to want what is spiritually best for their children. And it moves children's hearts to listen when parents share that saving good news. What an awesome way to share Son-shine with the people around us.

Fire can be frightening, and fire can be comforting. As we prepare to celebrate Jesus birthday may the light of the glory of God's Son fill you with comfort. May the Son-shine of God's love fill you with all joy and peace as you humbly wait for the "sun of righteousness" to rise and bring you his final and complete healing. Amen.