

An Advent Sermon Study:

“The Sun of Righteousness Will Rise”

Malachi 4:1-3

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[This study might well serve for a third sermon in a series with one on The Rock (Daniel 2:44,45) and a second on The Branch (Jeremiah 23:1–6).]

Here is encouraging news for believers who in moments of weakness have thought that the wicked always enjoy the good life, while believers seem to get a bad deal and Christianity doesn't pay. “The Lord you are seeking will come” (3:1) is also the comforting message of the final chapter of the Old Testament. Out of the rich treasury of the Old Testament, Malachi's words provide a fitting Advent text. These verses bring real peace of heart and joy to believers who are discouraged by the seemingly endless prosperity of the wicked. Malachi informs us about the work of the longsought Messiah. For believers he will be a healer bringing righteousness, while on the wicked he will pour out his fiery wrath which will reduce them to ashes.

To limit the number of thoughts to be covered and thus keep the sermon more simple, our text is limited to the first three verses of chapter four. Verses one through three form a complete unit of thought, as various translators and commentators indicate.

Verse one

The theme of the previous verse (3:18) is carried forward. In fact, Laetsch's *Minor Prophets* includes our text as part of chapter three. Those who “feared the Lord” (3:16) will see the difference between the righteous and the wicked. When? On “that day that is coming.” “That day” refers to the “day of God” so often promised by prophets such as Obadiah, Joel, Isaiah, Zephaniah and Zechariah. That fateful day “will burn like a furnace.” The Holy Spirit is referring specifically to the Day of Judgment. In a wider sense, this “day” is the final era of world history, which commenced with the advent of God's Son (3:1).

Believers, wearied by the increasing wickedness of the world around them, are assured that the hour of reckoning will definitely come. *Hinneh*, “surely,” Malachi promises those who began to feel that it was futile to serve the Lord (3:14).

“Like a furnace.” Severe judgment and punishment will scorch the wicked who dare to challenge God (3:15). They will be thrust, not into an open fire, but into a much hotter smelting furnace where the flames are confined and can be stoked into intense heat. Recall the furnace into which Daniel's three friends were thrown (Daniel, chapter three).

Those who insolently defy God, whether idolaters, atheists or hypocrites within the visible church, will be fuel for that fiery furnace. As far as the Lord Almighty is concerned, they are like straw or stubble, little more than stumps of grain. After such worthless stubble is burned, all that remains are the ashes which the wind blows away. In fact, “not a root or branch will be left to them,” God warns. Their punishment will not be a light slap on the wrist. For those who stubbornly reject the Lord and his Word there will be no leniency. They will have no hope for the future, certainly no hope of posterity.

This severe judgment pictured will surely occur because the one who promises it is the “Lord Almighty” or “Lord of Hosts,” of celestial armies.

This is how the Spirit pictures the terrible fate of those who haughtily and arrogantly defy God, at the climax of time, when he returns to settle accounts. Then who will dare to claim that everything always goes well for the wicked?

Verse two

Malachi's words are addressed especially to "those who feared the Lord and honored his name" (3:16), to those who "revere God's name," that is, who respect God's revelation of himself. You remember that, according to the Hebrew concept, God's name is more than a label. His name is all that he has revealed about himself in his inspired Word. For those who hold him and his Word in the highest regard Malachi's message is all good news. On the Day of Reckoning they will not feel his white hot wrath, but will bask in his healing sun rays.

Indeed the glorious "sun of righteousness will rise." Scripture contains hundreds of unique and beautiful word pictures. "The sun of righteousness" is one of these, a much loved and used name. How many times haven't we sung of him in hymns such as 94, 106 and 359? The hymn writers, among others, were correct when they understood this expression to refer to the promised Messiah. Reu, on the other hand, because *shemesh* is feminine, rejected the interpretation of the sun as a personification of the coming Christ. He understood "sun of righteousness" as righteousness personified. Doesn't Zechariah's reference to Christ, however, as "the rising sun from heaven" (Luke 1:78) lead one to the conclusion that Malachi was indeed referring to the Light of the World whose dawning was fast approaching? Isaiah had pictured Jesus as the "light" (chapter 60).

Discouraged and depressed believers will experience more than a beautiful sunrise, however. They will be healed, the Spirit promises, for this real SOL INVICTOR "will rise with healing in its wings." Spiritually sick with sin, they will be healed by their divine physician, as he promised (Jeremiah 30:17; 33:6). Troubled hearts, burdened with guilt, will be filled with great and enduring joy, peace and tranquility. You see, the rising sun not only removes spiritual disease and darkness, he replaces the evil with wholesomeness of soul. And Christ's righteousness will spread across the world as the "wings" of the sun spread across the landscape. "Wings," refers to the rays of the rising sun as they spread their gold from object to object.

The blessed result of basking in such incomparable healing rays of sunlight? The end of the obscurity which believers suffer in the world. They'll be in God's spotlight and have total joy! This joy is illustrated by a picture which only those with a rural upbringing can fully appreciate. On a sunny day in late winter when the cattle are temporarily released from long confinement in the barn, they joyfully frolic about the barnyard, tails up in the air, kicking up their heels. The jumping of the cripple whom the apostles healed (Acts 3:8) is also a good example of the happiness which Jesus brings. Indeed, a gladness and joy will "overtake" the ransomed of the Lord (Isaiah 35:10). Such is the eternal joy of those who revere the name of the Lord.

Verse three

Malachi returns to the thoughts of verse one. As a result of the second advent of our "sun king," believers will no longer be the scum of the earth. That day, circled in red on God's calendar, will bring total and permanent vindication for the children of God over against their enemies. "You will trample down the wicked." Again cattle are used as an apt illustration. You have seen an area over which cattle have repeatedly passed. Any object in that path, whether bullthistle or anthill, is completely ground down into the mud or manure. Likewise, when the Lord comes in judgment, the wicked will be humbled, yes prostrated, never to rise again in haughty arrogance against those made righteous by Christ. God considers the ungodly, especially those who oppress his saints, as ashes. The furnace of that coming day will reduce them to a substance fit only for the ash heap. "They will be ashes under the soles of your feet," he assures his people. Evildoers will suffer the ultimate indignity.

It is the "Lord Almighty" who promises to settle the score. He has the limitless power to carry out his threats against all the arrogant and every evildoer. Recall his devastating judgments upon Pharaoh and Sodom, and Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Surely he can and will cast into the lake of fire those who stubbornly reject his Word and those who discriminate against, harass or persecute his church today.

What truly marvelous blessings the sun of righteousness brings to all believers: victory over their enemies and especially healing of soul through the removal of guilt and the imputation of Christ's righteousness.

Outline

Introduction

The seeming good life of the wicked

The Lord points out that accounts will be settled (3:18)

That will happen on the "Day of the Lord"

As we are reminded at this time of the church year, that day is coming soon

Through our text the Lord reminds us:

On the Day of the Lord Believers Will Stand

- I. Not with the arrogant and evildoers
- II. Only in the light of the Sun of Righteousness

I.

- A. The seeming prosperity of the wicked in Malachi's day
- B. The day of the Lord will come for every evildoer (Verse 1)
 1. Judgment will be like a furnace
 2. The ungodly will be like stubble
- C. That day is certain
 1. There are always those who doubt
 2. It hasn't arrived only because of God's patience
 3. It will come
- D. For those who revere "his name" the day means vindication (Verse 3)

How, though, can we be sure to escape the fate of the wicked?
Only by standing in the light of the Sun of Righteousness.

II.

- A. The need for the "sun"
 1. In nature
 2. Our need for the Sun of Righteousness because of our sin-sickness
- B. God's promise of the dawning of the Sun of Righteousness
 1. The promise made (Verse 2)
 2. The promise kept
- C. The benefit for us in "soaking up" that Sun through faith.
 1. Healing of soul
 2. Resultant peace of heart

Through the Sun of Righteousness alone we will stand in that great day

The wicked will be as ashes

We can indeed live in thankful joy because he has released us from darkness and spiritual disease