

Malachi 4:1-2

Last Judgment; November 10, 2024

I have to tell you that I'm a little disappointed that the elections are over. I mean, it was so nice to get so many pieces of mail from people who really cared about me. It was flattering to realize that so many people valued my opinion. It was heart-warming to realize that so many people had such a deep and personal concern for my welfare. Right? It was disappointing to see on the Facebook pages on most of the news stations in Milwaukee that they told you when the last political ad was going to air on their stations. Channel 4's last ad aired at 4:30 pm on Tuesday. Channel 58 was at approximately 4:38 pm; Channel 12's last ad was at 4:53 pm. I never thought about how much I missed that hearing: "One call, that's all" and "buy one window, get one free." It is probably safe to say, that no matter what side you are on, it's time to move forward in life.

God's people needed to have hope as they looked forward to their future. That was also the message that God's prophet, Malachi, would bring to his believers. Yes, there is a large part of the book of Malachi that talks about the Judgment God would bring on those who had abandoned him. Malachi writes in our text: **"Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire," says the Lord Almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them."** God's judgment would be certain and it would be complete.

Yet, Malachi wasn't sent as a prophet to just announce doom and destruction. He was sent to the people of Israel to bring them back from their sinful ways. God wanted people to repent and turn back to him. Through the words of Malachi, God called them his people. He had not yet given them over to destruction. This was a time for them to turn back to God. The words of our text are the last couple of verses of the Old Testament. God was about to go silent for the next 400 years. The next time that God would speak directly to his people, it would be to announce the birth of Jesus. Yet, he wanted there would be a time coming that **"you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves."** This passage in Malachi isn't a passage for vengeance or judgment. This passage in Malachi is all about helping the calves to see that they can be set free. It's about helping the calves to see that they are no longer destined to be slaughtered. It's about opening the gate and setting the calves free. **"But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays."** There was still time. There was time to repent. There was time for them to return to him.

There was still someone coming who would rescue them. That person would be **"the Sun of Righteousness."** That Messiah would once again make people right with God. He would bring a light that would shine brightly through the darkness of sin. This light would shine out to all. As he shines as the **"Sun of Righteousness,"** he **"will rise with healing in its rays."** He will come and *bring the cure* for healing. He will be the cure for healing. He will come and bring deliverance to a world that has been stuck in sin. He will come to do what this world could not do.

Why does God have to point this out? He has been doing that for hundreds of years in the pages of the Old Testament. Again and again he has called his people to repentance and promised them hope and healing. Why? For the same reason that we need to hear that promise again and again.

Because from where the calves are, it looks like they're still trapped. To the people of Israel in the days of Malachi, it looked like God wasn't coming to their rescue. They were still under oppression from a foreign empire. Their economy was still in question. They lived in a country that was no longer their own. Their society wasn't theirs. The Messiah didn't seem to be coming any time soon. So, the people stared at the fence. They stood in their stalls. They looked at the fence surrounding them, and they kept forgetting to look behind them, kept forgetting to see the gate behind them had been opened. They stayed in their stalls like calves destined for slaughter. They kept not noticing their freedom. The circumstances of their lives clouded their vision. The circumstances made it seem like God wasn't going to show up.

Yet, God wanted his people to know that God doesn't change or take back his Word concerning his promises. When God assures us that He forgives our sins, that he has forgiven them all for the sake of his Son, Jesus Christ. He wanted them to see that all along God was there holding the gate open for them. God had made a way for His people to go free and be saved from the slaughter.

We need to be reminded of that as well, don't we. Many of you are now aware of that about a week and a half ago an area of cancer had been discovered in my colon. Suddenly, I realized what it is like to hear the "C" word spoken to me. It's hard to hear. I'm still processing all of this in my own head. I go from being fully confident in trusting in God and being afraid at the same time. I get what it feels like getting that kind of news. It turns your world upside down because that was not on my radar screen at all. Even though there are some optimistic signs in some of the tests, I still don't know what lies ahead. Tomorrow (Monday) we meet with my care team to get some more definitive answers and begin to chart the path going forward. After that, we place myself in their hands and the hands of God.

It's hard to see the open gate sometimes. Yet, as the days have passed since the doctor called me with the results of the pathology report, I'm slowly seeing the open gate. My words cannot express the encouragement and support that I have received from you, the members and friends to this congregation in the last week+. St. Paul's is a special place. It is a place **"the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays."**

Yet, what a comfort it is to see that the promises of God don't change in the circumstances of life. There are so many ways that we can forget that the gate is open. Therefore, I keep telling myself that I am a child of God who is loved by my Savior. No matter what direction this all goes, I do not face it alone. It is the same **"Sun of Righteousness"** that shines on you. Trust him. See the open gate. See the forgiveness that Jesus has brought to each one of you. Therefore, let us **"go out and frolic like well-fed calves."** Amen.