

## Malachi 4:1-3

One thing I think that we can all agree on is that there is a lot of **wickedness** in our world today. You don't have to go very far to find reports of countless evil **atrocities** being committed all around the globe - some even in our own backyard. What makes it all so **discouraging** is that it seems like things are only getting **worse**, and there is **no end** in sight. And in addition to that, not only is sin on the **increase** all around us, but at times it seems like people are actually being **rewarded** for their sinful actions. That can lead many people to think that **God** must not **exist**, or if He **does** exist He either isn't **fair**, or He just doesn't **care**. One thing we need to realize is that this isn't something **new**. Ever since Adam and Eve's fall into sin, people have **questioned** God's **justice** and **fairness**. But in our sermon text for today we actually have God's justice on **display**. The Prophet **Malachi** points God's people **ahead** to **Judgment Day**. On that day, there will be no question about whether or not **wickedness** goes **unpunished**. As we take a look at our text today, we see that Judgment Day will be a **Day Of Wrath** for the **wicked**, but at the same time, we **believers** can look **forward** to that Day as a **Day Of Joy**.

The words of our text today are some of the **last** words God **inspired** before He sent His Son **Jesus** into the world. The time was around **400 years** before the **birth** of Jesus. If you remember the history of God's people, they had already returned from their **exile** in Babylon. In fact, they had already rebuilt the LORD's **temple**. You would **think** that this would be a **wonderful** time for those who had hung on to God's promise of **restoration** through prophets like **Isaiah** and **Jeremiah**. However, the restoration of the **temple** was **not** followed by a restoration of true **worship**. It didn't take very long at all before God's people fell into **sin**, and away from **Him**. The true believers must have been very **discouraged** to see all the **wickedness** around them. It was bad enough to see the cruelty and viciousness of the godless nations **around** them, but to see that same kind of evil on display within the **church** was absolutely **devastating**. How could that **happen**? How could God **allow** it to happen? These are the thoughts which were reflected in the verses just **before** our text where the LORD told believers that He has heard them say, "*It is **futile** to serve God. What did we **gain** by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the LORD Almighty? But now we call the **arrogant** blessed. Certainly the **evildoers** prosper, and even those who challenge God **escape**.*"

With the last words of **Malachi's** prophecy, and ultimately the last words of the **Old Testament**, the LORD wanted His people to know that **evildoers** would

not prosper **forever**, and that His **justice** would ultimately be **carried out**. Our text begins, “*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,*” declares the Lord Almighty. “*Not a root or a branch will be left to them.*” This prophecy clearly points ahead to **Judgment Day**, and we can see a **similarity** between **Malachi’s** prophecy and the Apostle **Peter’s** description of that day: Peter wrote, “*The day of the Lord will come like a **thief**. The heavens will **disappear** with a roar; the elements will be **destroyed** by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be **laid bare**.*” The LORD definitely wanted His people to be **aware** that on the Last Day, His justice would **prevail**.

And yet, there are many people in our world today who don’t **believe** in a Judgment Day as it is described in the Bible. They think that it’s just a **myth** or a **story**. One reason for that is that so many **years** have gone by since those prophecies were made, and nothing has **happened** - at least not yet. So, they think it **never will** happen, and they live their lives as though they will **never** be held **accountable** for their godless actions. But, when the Last Day **does** come, as it most certainly **will**, that kind of thinking will be **exposed** for the **foolishness** it is. Notice how Malachi began these verses. He said, “*Surely, the day is coming.*” It’s a **sure** thing - **not** a myth.

God’s judgment is **real**, and it will be **revealed** to **everyone** on the Last Day. Malachi tells us that all the **arrogant** and every **evildoer** will be **stubble** - that is, destroyed **completely**. There’s a sense of **vindication** in those words for **believers** who look around and see **wicked** people **prospering**, and evil going **unchecked** and **unpunished** in this world. But we can be sure that God’s judgment **is coming**, and those who are **ungodly** will get their due. It’s always **satisfying** when justice **prevails**, and the bad guys get what is coming to them. But just imagine that sensation being **intensified** a hundred times over, when it will finally become clear to the **whole world** that the LORD is exactly who He **said** He was in His Word, and that His **judgment** comes to **all** those who **reject** Him. That sense of vindication is reflected in the final verse of our text where Malachi tells us, “*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.”

Vindication, **yes** - but is that thought **comforting**? It seems to be just the **opposite** - especially when we look at **ourselves** and realize that **we** are **no less** sinful than **any** wicked person we could point our fingers at. We may not have committed **heinous** crimes, or **flagrantly** disobeyed God, but we have certainly **not** lived up to His standard of **perfection**. God’s justice demands that **our** sins

would be punished just as harshly as the sins of those whom we consider to be **wicked** and **ungodly**. And with that in mind, how could we possibly look **forward** to the Last Day - the great **Day Of Wrath** - and not **tremble** in fear?

The answer to that question is found in the **second** verse of our text. Malachi tells us, “*But for you who **revere** my name, the sun of **righteousness** will rise with **healing** in its wings.*” What a **beautiful** picture is painted for us in those words from Malachi. Is there anything more **glorious** than watching the **sun rise** after a dark and stormy night? As I think about the **beauty** of a sunrise, I can picture the sun peeking above the horizon, and the sky **warming up** - painted with amazing shades of purple, orange, and red. That’s the **same** beautiful picture of what **Jesus** - the **Son (S-Q-N)** of Righteousness - brings into the lives of **believers**. He brings **warmth**, and **beauty**, and **healing** and **peace**, as He took upon **Himself** the punishment that our sins deserve. His cross is where we find **forgiveness**. His cross is where we find **healing**.

Because of Jesus Christ, we Christians can look forward to Judgment Day as a **Day Of Joy**. We will have to come before God’s **judgment** seat just like the **unbelievers**, but we have the **advantage** of **knowing** what God’s verdict will **be** for us. We will be declared “**not guilty**,” because each and every one of our sins has already been **forgiven** through the blood of **Jesus**. So for **us**, there will be no **greater** day than the **Judgment** Day. In the final verse of our text for today Malachi uses a very **interesting** image to describe the **joy** which we will experience on that day. He writes, “*And you will go out and **leap** like **calves** released from the stall.*” Those of you who are, or were **farmers** know **exactly** what that **looks** like. You’ve **seen** calves out in the open field kicking their legs up in the air and **leaping** around - **enjoying** their freedom after being released from their stalls in the barn. On the Last Day we will be just **like** them - thoroughly enjoying the **freedom** that Jesus brings as we stand on the verge of spending an eternity with Him in **heaven**.

And in reality, we don’t even have to **wait** until Judgment Day to **experience** that joy, because as believers in Jesus, we already **possess** the joy which the Gospel provides. We can take a little of that joy **with us** in everything we do and say. That joy also affects the way we look at the **world** and others **around** us. It doesn’t make us any less **concerned** when we see all the **wickedness** in this world, but it does give us a reason to be **comforted**, knowing that wickedness will not last **forever**, and that God’s justice will ultimately **triumph**. Just as the Israelites looked forward with **joy** to being released from their captivity in **Babylon**, and to going **home**; so also we, who have been released from our

captivity to **sin**, look forward to the **Judgment** Day, and going **home** to heaven. God's full and perfect **justice** will be revealed on the Last Day - a **Day Of Wrath** for **unbelievers**, but a **Day Of Joy** for God's **children**. Amen.