



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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November 12, 2006
2nd Sunday of Endtime
Malachi 4:1,2b
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Malachi 4:1,2b
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 90
Second Lesson: Hebrews 9:24-28
Gospel: John 5:19-24

Judgment Truths to Grow On

You see them all the time if you watch television, but they almost become like white noise—it's just there and you don't pay attention to it. They happen during the commercial breaks, but quite often they are not as entertaining as the commercials so they are just there. Various public service announcements where they tell you things like, don't be a bully, be nice to each other, or other tidbits that are viewed as public service announcements. I don't remember much about public service announcements, but I do remember a campaign a number of years back where they ended each segment by saying, "And that's one to grow on." I don't remember what I was supposed to grow on, but I remember that phrase.

It comes to mind today because as we gather together in the second of our three Sundays for Growing and Building Together in Christ, our God has in front of us some judgment truths that are good for us to grow on and it's not just white noise. It is all important. It is a matter of eternal life and eternal death—these judgment truths that our God puts in front of us through the last prophet of the Old Testament Era, Malachi.

The two judgment truths he wants us to grow on is this certainty that the day is coming and also that he wants us to grow in our reverence, or our love and respect, for our Lord.

It's one of the things I find fascinating when you teach—when you teach a class, you see kids doing some of the same things you did and thought you were getting away with. As a teacher, a lot of times you just ignore it because you have more important things to do than deal with every little stupid thing that students do. But when you become a teacher and stand in front of a class and start teaching, you recognize, and all of a sudden it dawns on you like a bright light, "You know what? When I thought I was getting away with all that stuff, my teachers probably noticed what I was doing too and they just had better stuff to do." So all the times I thought I was being so clever and so smart; I was probably always noticed—just not dealt with.

When the Holy Spirit has Malachi write to the children of Judah, he is dealing with some people that are like the students in that classroom who think God doesn't notice what is going on and that God is not dealing with what is going on so they might as well keep doing what they are doing because God doesn't care anyhow. "Sure he says he doesn't want us to steal or to hurt or to take advantage of other people. Sure he says to bring him the good animals in the offering and to bring him a full tithe, but we haven't done it and he hasn't struck us dead yet, so what's the big deal? The Day of Judgment

isn't coming." Instead of the healthy animals that God demanded, they were bringing the ones that they didn't want to eat themselves and saying, "Here Lord, we love you. Take what we don't want to put in our own mouth." It's not exactly a ringing endorsement of their love for God.

He had told them to bring a tithe of certain things. They weren't bringing the full amount. They could just sweep a few shavings into it and stretch it out and make it look a little better, but it wasn't the full amount. They were thinking, "God hasn't struck us dead, so God doesn't really care."

All this was taking place after the children of Israel had come back from exile in Babylon. They had gone away in about 586 B.C. and they came back in about 516 B.C. and by the time Malachi came to talk to them, they had already rebuilt the temple and some of the city walls and those kinds of things. Things were starting to go a little better, but they were seeing and doing these things and God wasn't striking them down, so they weren't paying much attention to God's prophets anymore. So Malachi comes with some pretty stern warnings here, some pretty stern judgments, and one of them is to say, "Be certain the day of the Lord is coming when everyone will give an accounting for their relationship to God. The day is certainly coming. *Surely the day is coming*" (Malachi 4:1). The day he describes for those who are not in a right relationship with God, those who don't believe the promises God has made, those who found more important things to do in this world than to know Jesus and to grow in Jesus, or in their case to know the promises of the coming Messiah and grow in their knowledge of the promises of the coming Messiah—here's how he describes that day. *"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"* (Malachi 4:1).

You might like fire. You might like to sit by a campfire and watch the flames jump up, the sparks come and there are different colors in the fire. That is kind of nice and calming and soothing. If that's the picture you heard when I read those words, get it out of your head. That isn't the picture he is talking about. He is talking about a blast furnace. It will blaze like a furnace. Picture maybe more what you studied when you read in Daniel where there was the fiery furnace that they stoked so hot that when the doors opened, the three guys around it were incinerated immediately because it was burning so hard. Only here is the difference. When Judgment Day comes, this fire where everyone is going to be burned will not consume them. God tells us it is an unending fire. Unending agony, unending torment, and he tells us that those that believed in Christ and lost that faith are going to be in worse torment than anyone else will have. They will be in an eternity of knowing that "I had the most important thing in the world and I decided to chase something else. What kind of fool am I?"—an eternity of that kind of agony.

He also says that that day that is certainly coming is a Day of Judgment and those who have turned their back on God will be condemned to an eternity in hell, but he also says that it is a certainty. It is a final thing. He says there will be no root or branch left to them (see Malachi 4:1). What that is really saying is that this is it. It is final. There is no second chance. The imagery of root or branch we probably know if you know of the promises of the Messiah to come. He says that even though David's throne had

stopped, a root would remain for Jesse. A branch would come out of Jesse's stump. The children of Israel had turned away from God, so God's judgment fell on them and they lost their place in their own land. They were carried off. They had other kings that came and ruled them, but he said, "There is still going to be a root. There is still a branch. There is still a hope because I am going to place on David's throne one who will rule over David's kingdom forever." He was talking about the Messiah. In Advent we sing, "Behold, a branch is growing." He was talking about the promise of the Savior to come, but on that day there is no more root. There is no more branch. There is no more second chance. Either you believe that Jesus is your Lord and Savior and through faith in Christ, your sins are forgiven and eternal life is yours, or you don't. No more second chances.

That is why it speaks such volume to us today on the importance of not only knowing our Savior, but growing in our Savior day after day so that we are ready whenever the judgment may come. Even if Judgment Day does not come with the Last Day that ends the world in our lifetime, the day comes when God calls us out of this world and then we face, in essence, judgment. That judgment will be made public on the Last Day, but the soul goes to the Lord who gave it and God sends that soul to heaven, for those who believe, and for those that don't believe, they are in hell.

The importance of knowing what takes away sin—that it isn't our efforts, it isn't our work, it isn't our intentions to be good, it isn't even the fact that at times we appear to be good outwardly as others look at us—the only thing that makes us good in God's eyes is faith that Jesus lived in our place and died in our place. When we recognize just what we deserve and we see what should be awaiting us, this is what we each have earned and deserve. Every now and then in life we think, "God, how could you let this happen? God, how could you let that happen? That's not fair." Be very careful. You and I don't want God to be fair because if God is fair, you and I, who are sinners and can't pay for our own sins, would spend eternity in hell. That would be fair. We couldn't argue with God and say he is being unfair.

God's unfairness is that he put all of our sins on Jesus. God's unfairness is that he carried the punishment in our place. God's unfairness is that he takes Jesus' perfection and gives it to us and clothes us with it at our baptism or when he brings us to faith. This is the glorious thing that our God has done for us. That is why we want to revere the Lord—stand in reverent awe of him, stand with our mouth hanging open that our God loves us this much even though we don't deserve it. We want to grow in that reverence and grow in that awe and respect of our God.

The reason we stand in this respect of our God is because we know that when he comes again, even though he comes as judge, that holds no fear for us. The children sang the song leading into the gospel today, did you catch that phrase that they sang that said about *lift up your faces, lift up your eyes when Jesus comes again?* Any of you here ever do anything and you got caught red-handed by mom or dad when you were a kid? Anything at all that you weren't supposed to be doing and you did it and they caught you and you had to answer to them? Maybe your mom said, like my mom always used to do, "Wait until you dad gets home. He will talk to you." Those weren't happy words. When my dad got home, if I was sitting in a chair, did I lift up my eyes to

look my dad in the face? Or did I try to burrow a hole in the floor with my eyeballs so that I could fall into the basement and make a dash out the back door?

We don't naturally look in the face of someone that is going to judge us when we know we are guilty, right? It's not natural to look them in the eyes. In fact, if I would have, my dad probably would have taken it as defiance. But you and I can look God in the eyes. In fact, he tells us to when he comes again. And it's not defiance. It is reverent awe because we know that he has told us he has taken away every one of our sins. Everything that condemns us to hell, he has already punished in Jesus. Every piece of perfection that he demands of you and me—to love perfectly, to encourage one another perfectly, to grow in our faith and knowledge of Christ perfectly—everything that we don't do he has clothed us with it in Christ.

That is now why you and I revere God and want to know him better. That is why time in God's Word is not a burden, time in worship is not a chore, it's a time where we get to say to God, "I love you" and hear him say to us, "I love you and here is what I have done for you." We get to encourage one another in that love so that we can grow in our faith and serve our God more faithfully and more fully. When that day comes, it is going to come with healing in its wings for us.

Yes, we are forgiven now, but we still live in a world that is affected by sin, right? We still have the sufferings. We still have the challenges. We still have tragedies. We still have ill health. We still have to struggle with depression. We still have to struggle with all kinds of things that are a result of being in a world that is not perfect. But when that day comes where God calls us to heaven, either on Judgment Day or when he calls us out individually beforehand, it comes with healing in its wings because we are taken out of all of that. We go to a place where there is no more suffering, no more sorrow, no more tears, and no more heartache. We go to a place that is filled with God's presence himself and God tells us it is a place of unending blessing.

When you think about that at times, you think, "Boy, I would love to be there now." The closest thing that you and I get to heaven right now is the time that we spend in the Word and the time that we spend with the Sacrament where God comes to us and says, "I love you. I have taken away your sins. You are my own. I have called you by name." The more time we spend with that, the more we will grow in living for God and doing what he has called us to do. We will spend time growing in that Word—not because we have to or because mom or dad or someone else tells us to. We do it because we know God blesses us through it so that we can face the things that are uncertain today with the certainty of heaven always lifting us up.