

#1808
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Malachi 4:1-6¹

The LORD sends the Prophet Elijah
before the Great & Dreadful Day
of the LORD
3rd Sunday in Advent
Supplementary Lectionary Series “B,”
Old Testament

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^{4:1} “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 [of Sabaoth, Hosts, Armies]. “Not a root or a branch will be left to them. ² But for you who revere [fear] my Name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in his 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 [of Sabaoth, Hosts, Armies].

⁴ “Remember the Law [Torah] of my Servant Moses, the Decrees and Judgments I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.

⁵ “Behold, I am sending to you the Prophet Elijah before the coming of the great and dreadful Day of the LORD. ⁶ He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.”

THE DAY OF THE LORD IS COMING
I. BRINGING DESTRUCTION
II. BRINGING DELIVERANCE

In the Name of Jesus, whose Birth we will soon celebrate, and whose Second Coming we will soon see and experience, Dear Fellow-Redeemed,

It has been mentioned before: The first emphasis of the Advent Season is preparation for a proper celebration of Christmas – Jesus’ birthday. The second emphasis of the Advent Season is preparation for Jesus’ Second Coming, when he will take all believers in body and soul to be with him in heaven forever.

Jesus’ Second Coming will not be like his First Coming. The Apostle Paul in his Epistle or Letter to the Philippians gives a brief summary of Jesus’ First Coming when he says,

¹ *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984. All Scripture references are taken from this translation unless noted otherwise.

⁵ ... **Christ Jesus:**
⁶ ... **being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God
something to be grasped,
⁷ but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death—
even death on a cross!** (Philippians 2:5b-8).

We will make this confession later in the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed:

I believe in Jesus Christ, [God's] only Son our LORD,
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
Born of the virgin Mary,
Suffered under Pontius Pilate,
Was crucified, died, and was buried.²

Jesus' First Coming was in humility to accomplish our redemption. Jesus' Second Coming will not be in humility but in exaltation and glory.

In the Apostle's Creed, we also confess Jesus' exaltation:

[Jesus] descended into hell.
The third day he rose again from the dead.
He ascended into heaven
And is seated at the Right Hand
of God the Father Almighty.
From there he will come to judge
the living and the dead.³

The Holy Scriptures summarize Jesus' Second Coming in these words:

⁷ **Behold! He is coming with the clouds,
and every eye will see him,
even those who pierced him;
and all the peoples of the earth
will mourn because of him.
So shall it be! Amen!** (Revelation 1:7).

² *Christian Worship, A Lutheran Hymnal, Authorized by the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House), pp. 19, 41, 146, 150.

³ *Ibid.*

Jesus described his Second Coming in these words:

³⁰ ... all the nations of the earth ... will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. ³¹ And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other (Matthew 24:30b&31).

On that Last Day, all people will be raised from the dead (cf. John 5:28&29) and stand before Jesus for judgment. Believers in Jesus will be given eternal life in heaven. Unbelievers will be assigned to eternal punishment in hell. Jesus makes this division and judgment clear when he says “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16); and, when he says, “Whoever believes in [God’s One and Only Son, Jesus] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the Name of God’s One and Only Son” (John 3:18). Similarly, John the Baptizer said about Jesus, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him” (John 3:36). And so, our text this morning, from the Last Old Testament Prophet Malachi, gives warning of Jesus’ Second Coming – The Day of the LORD.

Malachi says: THE DAY OF THE LORD IS COMING. THE DAY OF THE LORD IS COMING ... I. BRINGING DESTRUCTION; and, THE DAY OF THE LORD IS COMING ... II. BRINGING DELIVERANCE.

THE DAY OF THE LORD IS COMING I. BRINGING DESTRUCTION

The first thing that Malachi mentions as being destroyed is this world and universe. He says, “Surely the Day is coming; it will burn like a furnace” (4:1a). The entire universe will be destroyed. The Apostle Peter makes this clear when he writes in his Second Epistle,

¹⁰ But 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.

.... ^{12b} That Day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat (2 Peter 3:10&12b).

There will be a universal destruction such as has never been seen or experienced before. This destruction will be worse than the destruction of the world by the water of the flood during the time of Noah, for that destruction was only of the world. This will be a destruction of the entire universe. Moreover, on this Last Day of the LORD, the LORD describes through Malachi what will happen to the wicked, that is, to unbelievers – those who rejected Jesus as their Savior.

Malachi writes,

4:1 “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 [of Sabaoth, Hosts, Armies]. “Not a root or a branch will be left to them....³ Then you [the righteous, believers in Jesus] 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 [of Sabaoth, Hosts, Armies] (4:1&3).

Unbelievers will experience destruction in eternal fire. This destruction will not be annihilation; that is, there will never be a time when the punishment of unbelievers ends. The Book of Revelation describes this punishment as a lake of fire or a lake of burning sulfur into which unbelievers along with the devil and the Antichrist are thrown and suffer eternally (cf. Revelation 21:11-15). The words of the Prophet Isaiah, which are repeated by Jesus in the New Testament, describe hell as a place where “their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome” (Isaiah 66:24b; cf. Mark 9:42-48). Elsewhere, this hell is described as a place of outer darkness and a fiery furnace, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (cf. Matthew 8:12; 13:42&50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28). But Malachi gives this description so that the unrepentant might be brought to repentance.

The LORD says through Malachi, “Remember the Law [Torah] of my Servant Moses, the Decrees and Judgments I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel” (4:4). Remember what the LORD God gave to Israel through Moses. He gave the Law, summarized in the Ten Commandments. He gave other decrees, regulations statutes and judgments, which explained the applications of the Ten Commandments. What was the LORD’s purpose in doing this?

The Apostle Paul explains the purpose of the Law. St. Paul says, “Through the Law we become conscious of sin” (Romans 3:20b). The Law reveals sin. In addition, the Law also brings punishment. Again, St. Paul, quoting from the Old Testament, writes, “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law” (Galatians 3:10b; cf. Deuteronomy 27:26). The Law curses and condemns even the so-called “best” of people, for James says, “Whoever keeps the whole Law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it” (James 2:10). And so, through Malachi, the LORD was giving warning so that people might come to repentance.

The LORD gave warning to the people of Malachi’s time as well as to the people in the future. The LORD said,

⁵ “Behold, I am sending to you the Prophet Elijah before the coming of the great and dreadful Day of the LORD. ⁶ He will turn the hearts of

the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse” (4:5&6).

During the time of Jesus’ earthly public ministry, the LORD sent John the Baptizer in the spirit and power of the Old Testament Prophet Elijah; John the Baptizer called the people to repentance (cf. Matthew 17:10-13; Luke 1:17; 7:17). Through his preaching and pointing to Jesus, John’s message was intended to turn the hearts of fathers and children to repentance. If people did not repent at the preaching of John, then only the curse would come for them – damnation.

APPROPRIATION

The LORD’s warning of coming destruction continues to be proclaimed today – and we need it! The LORD speaks to us still through the Old Testament Prophet Malachi, as well as other Old Testament Prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah and others – through these writings the LORD calls you and me to repentance. Through John the Baptizer, the LORD continues to speak to us. John’s message is for us too:

⁷ John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. ⁹ The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire” (Luke 3:7-9).

Through this written Word, John the Baptizer continues to warn us of the coming destruction on the Day of the LORD. That is also why the LORD continues to have his Law preached to us today.

Recall that the LORD said through Malachi, “Remember the Law [Torah] of my servant Moses, the Decrees and Judgments I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel” (4:4); and recall also St. Paul’s reminder, “through the Law we become conscious of sin” (Romans 3:20b). God continues to have his Law proclaimed to us today to penetrate our hearts, so that we may know the punishment that awaits us if we remain impenitent. The LORD gives us that Law that we may recognize our sinfulness, repent and turn to Jesus as our Savior from sin. Otherwise, as the LORD says through Malachi, “I will come and strike ... with a curse” (4:6c).

And so, let us repent. Let us live in daily repentance for our sins of thought, word, action, attitude and behavior. Let us repent of those things we have done and should not have done; let us repent of those things we have not done but should have done. And, in that repentance, let us look forward to Jesus’ Second coming in grace and mercy.

THE DAY OF THE LORD IS COMING II. BRINGING DELIVERANCE

The Day of the LORD is coming. The same Day that brings destruction and punishment for unbelievers brings deliverance for believers.

You heard Jesus speak about his Second Coming and what it would mean for believers. Jesus said,

³⁰ ... all the nations of the earth ... will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. ³¹ And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other (Matthew 24:30b&31).

The “elect” – those called to faith by the Gospel – will be gathered together into heaven and have eternal life with Jesus in body and soul. The LORD describes these “elect” through his Prophet Malachi in our text.

The LORD says,

^{4:1} “Surely the Day is coming ² But for you who revere [fear] my Name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in his wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall (4:1a&2).

The LORD speaks about those who fear or revere his Name. This fear is not the slavish fear of terror and trembling; rather, it is the trembling anticipation that believers have for their deliverance. Moreover, believers “revere” the Name of the LORD. The LORD is the God of free and faithful grace who gives to believers in Jesus the forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation that Jesus earned for them. And, believers experience this deliverance, this freedom, this release.

Believers are described as going out and leaping “like calves released from the stall” (4:2c). Those who have had the privilege of working on a farm that has farm animals can probably visualize this. Those calves, often cooped up in the barn for an entire winter, are finally released into the yard in the spring. They run, jump and frolic. (Do not get in their way or you will be trampled.) This is the picture that the LORD paints of that Last Day when believers are freed from their graves – absolute joyful release, exuberance and freedom. But freedom from what and freedom for what?

The freedom believers experience is freedom from sin, death and the grave, from hell and from the devil and his power. Believers have freedom from sin now – although it is a daily battle and struggle for them. The Apostle Paul reminds believers of this when he writes that, in Holy Baptism, “our old self was crucified with [Christ] so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin” (Romans 6:6). St. Paul comments additionally, “Sin shall not be your master, because you are not under Law, but under grace” (Romans 6:14). Then, believers have freedom from death.

When her brother Lazarus died, Jesus told Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die” (John 11:25b&26a). Listen to Jesus’ words. The one who believes in him lives even though he dies. The one who believes in him never dies. Believers have that life now. Believers are also freed from the grave.

Again Jesus says it, “He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die” (John 11:25b&26a). For believers then, the grave is only a temporary sleep from which they will awaken to share the glories of Jesus in heaven in both body and soul. Believers are freed from hell and from the devil’s power.

John writes in his First Epistle, “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work” (1 John 3:8b); the writer to the Hebrews states,

¹⁴ [Jesus] ... shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— ¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death (Hebrews 2:14b&15).

Believers in Jesus are freed and released from sin, death and the grave, from hell and from the devil and his power. For what?

For what are believers set free? For life eternal with Jesus in heaven. Once again, we listen to Jesus’ words to Martha, “He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die” (John 11:25b&26a). Believers in Jesus live; believers in Jesus never die. The Book of Revelation describes the eternal life of joy that believers have:

¹⁵ ... “they are before the Throne of God and serve him day and night in his Temple; and he [Jesus] who sits on the Throne will spread his tent over them.

¹⁶ Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat.

¹⁷ For the Lamb at the center of the Throne will be their Shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Revelation 7:15-17).

In addition to all this, on that Last Day, the Day of the LORD’s Second Coming, believers will also join in victory over unbelievers.

The LORD says, “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 [of Sabaoth, Hosts, Armies]” (4:3). The wicked, those who ridiculed, laughed at, ostracized believers – the wicked, who caused believers to weep and cry and mourn during their time on earth – the wicked, who were the source of sadness and heartache for believers – the wicked, unbelievers, unrepentant, will be trampled down by believers. Believers will join in the victory of their LORD and Savior Jesus. And, again, the LORD, through Malachi, indicates how believers came to be believers.

The LORD said, “Remember the Law [Torah] of my Servant Moses, the Decrees and Judgments I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel” (4:4). When the LORD says, “remember the Law,” he uses a word that has a broader definition than just commandments. The Hebrew word is Torah [**hr ; /T**], and it means “instruction” – all of God’s Word, both Law proper and Gospel. This is also what the LORD is saying when he refers to the coming of John the Baptizer in the spirit and power of Elijah:

⁵ “Behold, I am sending to you the Prophet Elijah before the coming of the great and dreadful Day of the LORD. ⁶ He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse” (4:5&6).

Just as the preaching of John the Baptizer during the time of Jesus, brought many to repentance and faith in Jesus, so through the pages of the Scriptures, the same message of John continues to work repentance today and faith in Jesus the Savior. It is this faith in Jesus, worked through the Gospel, which turns hearts of parents to children and children to parents.

APPROPRIATION

So dear friends, fellow-believers in Jesus, the Day of the LORD, the Last Day, will bring deliverance, freedom and release for you. By grace through faith in Jesus, you are among those who “revere” the Name of the LORD. You are among those who have been brought to faith in the Name of your LORD Jesus.

Recall your Holy Baptism; there the Name of Jesus was placed upon you. In Holy Baptism, you were made part of God’s family and an heir of eternal life in heaven with Jesus. Now, you can only imagine leaping like those calves released from the stall in springtime – leaping and running and frolicking when Jesus brings you up from your graves to enjoy eternal life with him in both body and soul. Indeed, you too will trample down all unbelievers who have ridiculed you for your faith, who have made fun of you for your faith, who have lied to you because of your faith. So do not lose heart. In addition, continue to testify to your faith in Jesus.

The LORD said,

⁴ “Remember the Law [Torah] of my Servant Moses, the Decrees and Judgments I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.

⁵ “Behold, I am sending to you the Prophet Elijah before the coming of the great and dreadful Day of the LORD” (4:4&5).

By his grace, the LORD has had his Law and Gospel proclaimed to you. By his grace, the LORD has caused you to hear the words of the Prophet Elijah as well as the words of John the Baptizer who came in the spirit and power of Elijah. These words were written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and by that faith have eternal life in his Name (cf. John 20:31). Now you and I can carry that same Word – Law and Gospel – to others. For it is only by God’s Word that the Holy Spirit works repentance and faith, so that others may enjoy in eternity the glorious freedom and release of the children of God.

CONCLUSION

The Day of the LORD, the Last Day, Judgment Day, is certainly coming. God’s Word makes that clear. Now is the time for you and me to live in daily repentance. Now is the time for you and me to live in faith in Jesus alone for the forgiveness of our sins and for the enjoyment of eternal life, freedom and release in heaven. Now is the time also for you and me to bring that same Word of God to others, that others too may join us in repentance and faith in Jesus. Amen.