

Rev. Seth D Bode + Sermon 290 + Last Judgment

"Lord God, You have appointed me as a bishop and pastor in Your Church, but You see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked Your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon Your Word. Use me as Your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all."

"Sir, we would see Jesus."

TWO VERSIONS OF JUDGMENT DAY

Sermon Text – Malachi 4

¹Look! The day is coming, burning like a blast furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble. The day that is coming will set them on fire, says the LORD of Armies, a day that will not leave behind a root or branch for them. ²But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise, and there will be healing in its wings. You will go out and jump around like calves from the stall. ³You will trample the wicked. They will surely be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I take action, says the LORD of Armies.

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There I was, serving at a high school basketball game.

- The referee derangement syndrome was hard to describe.
- Things can get ugly when we care about the outcome.
- There are many different opinions about the final outcome of all the things we care about.

The Last Thing Sinners Want God To Be

1. Their Judge of personal actions

The day of judgment is compared to a blast furnace.

- Nothing will be left.
- Compare it to that empty feeling when you come up short. (responding in two different ways)

This total judgment is because of this world's total arrogance.

- For many in Malachi's day, God was not allowed in. (his Q&A flies in the face of that; consider many in our day)
- It will not matter what other lists your name is on.
- The state of selfie-deaths is tragic.

2. Your Sun of righteousness and renewal

In verse two there is a different version of the Last Judgment.

- The second version is marked by a different kind of warmth.
- Instead of fires that destroy, there are wings that heal. (
- Those who experience it will be those who fear the Lord. (OT "faith-word", or better, for Luther, for Christians, fear stands next to faith)

The joy on the Last Judgment is hard to describe.

- Malachi uses the figure of "calves springing from the stall."
- This is not a race out of the gates, but a renewal.

Grace and peace to you from Him who is and who was and who is to come; and from the sevenfold Spirit before the throne; and from Jesus Christ; the faithful Witness, the Firstborn from the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth.

It is hard work being a judge. **There I was, serving at a high school basketball game.** As a high school teacher in South Dakota, I wasn't the judge and I wasn't the referee. But I had the chance to announce the games. Behind the stat table sat the opposing team. It was a different perspective than the home side. Things look different when you see it from the opposing perspective. It could get ugly. One time I remember things getting especially rowdy. A player fell hard, it looked like he was pushed, and the refs called the opposing player. It seemed like everyone was angry, a derangement that seemed to ignore the fact that the referee was a human being with a family.

- **The referee derangement syndrome was hard to describe.**

One team thought he should have called something earlier, the other team thought the current call was bogus. Parents were standing up, frustrated and shouting. It seemed the last thing they wanted the referee to call, he had called. Both home and opposing fans felt the game could be lost due to calls like this. The game was deteriorating. It wasn't about the game anymore, the players, or life lessons.

- **Things can get ugly when we care about the outcome.**

Cries of "not fair," "are you crazy," "what game are you watching" aren't limited to referees. These are the cries of moral outrage when people feel judged. "Not fair," "are you crazy" when it comes to what I have done right or wrong in my life. Some like to say, "Only God can judge us," as if that's not what God intends to do at the end of time. In fact ...

- **There are many different opinions about the final outcome of all the things we care about.**

Many of them are a soft version of God who knows we do wrong, but in the end will simply overlook all our wrongdoings. There is a much different version of God in our reading today, and it is the true God. He's not a referee, because He doesn't make mistakes. This is a version of God who does that last thing sinners want. The true God is ...

The Last Thing Sinners Want God To Be

1. Their Judge of personal actions

Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament, and it was about 400 years before Jesus Christ came to save His people from their sins. We are in the last chapter of the book of Malachi, the last inspired revelation before the New Testament. One of the last things that the last inspired prophet of Scripture has to say is that there will be a day of judgment.

The day of judgment is compared to a blast furnace. This is a dangerous day. It is as nasty as it sounds. Ten years ago to the month I arrived at my church in California, but something was different. The sky was a sickly yellow; there was ash falling from above; it smelled strongly of smoke; across the ridge we could see flames burning up the hillside. We were still three miles from that fire, but the sight alone was devastating. Those who are "arrogant and wicked" will be burned up on that last day.

I also learned that year in California that fire doesn't always burn evenly. Sometimes it skips a row of houses only to eat up a few in between or the next row. In days after the flames, we drove past clusters of trees that were unburnt at the base and there were green leaves at the top. But all the leaves and branches in the middle were charred. The last day will be very different.

- **Nothing will be left.** This fire on the day of judgment will leave behind not a root or a branch.

We certainly don't like to hear that. *It is an dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. He is a consuming fire.*

- **Compare it to that empty feeling when you come up short.** Do you know when you've been guilty? Have you realized when you failed to meet a deadline, failed to be there in someone's time of need, failed to

This total judgment is because of this world's total arrogance. They were stuck on themselves.

- **For many in Malachi's day, God was not allowed in.** People were intermarrying with pagans, and were being influenced by false gods. They were failing to pay sacred dues. They were heartlessly divorcing their first spouses. They were losing the struggle to give God something

good. Malachi's rhetorical book of questions and answers flies in the face of that. He was there to remind them that God loved them, and that God's protection stems from His love. Consider many in our day. Is God allowed in? Do people treat marriage and divorce as they ought to? Do people treat themselves as the bride of Christ? No, people are lost in arrogance and evil. They would not stand to be judged if they can help it. The last thing they wish for is a God who

- **It will not matter what other lists your name is on.** The Bethlehem membership lists, the voter registration, the community list of volunteers, the confirmation roster.
- **The state of selfie-deaths is tragic.** (you know what a selfie is? a picture of yourself, usually with a cell phone camera. Do you know what a selfie-death is? It's when people tragically die somehow taking these pictures of themselves. Someone did a study on selfie-deaths between 2013 and 2017. Nearly half of them (57 deaths) were drownings; 27 died from falling; and 18 were a train wreck. I heard of a couple taking pictures at the Grand Canyon who fell to their death. I heard of two teenaged girls on a runway in Mexico a couple years ago who were clipped by a landing plane and killed. How self-involved do you have to be? We may laugh, but the danger of the last day is the same.

Another thing that people do not want Jesus to be is ...

2. Your Sun of righteousness and renewal

In verse two there is a different version of the Last Judgment.

- **The second version is marked by a different kind of warmth.** Instead of a blast furnace and a great all-consuming fire, there is a bright light reminiscent of warm vacations, health, and light. It is a different kind of heat and it lifts, from horizon, high into the sky. What could this sun be other than the true Son of God who brings joy, peace, and brings healing? He was true God and came as a man. His name was Jesus, because He came to save His people from their sins. He lived perfectly, lovingly, with no self-involvement. He had only his brothers and sisters to think about. He was delivered over to death for our sins. He was raised again three days later, in an event that outshines the sun of vacations.
- **Instead of fires that destroy, there are wings that heal.** We may not always picture Jesus in our mind's eyes as winged, but the rays of the sun may appear that way. How He lifts into the sky with His promises! How those promises remind us that our sins cannot save. His promises even remind us the next time we do it right, that isn't salvation. He saves. He brings righteousness and a right status before God our Maker and Judge. Because of the love of Jesus, God offers us His protection once again in this perfect marriage of saints who were once sinners and Savior.
- **Those who experience it will be those who fear the Lord.** (OT "faith-word", or better, for Luther, for Christians, fear stands next to faith. When all things blast against us, weather or kings or governments or wars or personal battles, we stand and weather the storm. After all, we fear God more than anything, but that fear is tied to a loving trust that God is our own and we might live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.

The joy on the Last Judgment is hard to describe.

- **Malachi uses the figure of "calves springing from the stall."**

Those who know animals better than I do understand that there is a period of time when cows have calves. They do this whether the weather is cold or warm. There is a period in Spring when it is still too cold at night to risk cows giving birth, so the calves are born in the barn. They stay there in their own filth for a few days until it's safe and they're strong enough to go out. They start out hesitant, but then realize there are so many new things in this world – grass, leaves, insects, and sunshine. And they say it's hard to describe, but they just begin to leap, jump, and frolic as if they live in a new world entirely.

- **This is not a race out of the gates, but a renewal.** We may look at God in a different way, not the last thing we wanted Him to be, but the first Being who knew how to judge us – and the first Being who knew how to love us and renew us. Amen. [To God alone be the glory.]

