

2013\_11\_17 Pentecost 26 | Sermon  
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL  
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## **The Great Day is Coming**

Malachi 4:1-6

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Grace and peace to you, from the Lord our Savior, who has laid up for you the crown of righteousness, the crown which He will , on that Day, give to you and all who believe. Amen. (2 Timothy 4:8)

All Scripture is God-breathed. That inspired Word which God's Spirit has prepared to prepare us comes from,

### **Malachi 4:1-6 (NKJV)**

**1** "For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven, And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up," Says the Lord of hosts, "That will leave them neither root nor branch.

**2** But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings; And you shall go out And grow fat like stall-fed calves.

**3** You shall trample the wicked, For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet On the day that I do this," Says the Lord of hosts.

**4** "Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, With the statutes and judgments.

**5** Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

**6** And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.

This is the Word of the Lord.

### **The Great Day is Coming**

1. A Day of Great Fear
2. A Day of Great Rejoicing
3. A Day Greatly to be Remembered

**Let us PRAY: LORD keep us ever ready, steadfast in Your Word. Amen.**

In Jesus name, to all who long for our Lord's appearing,

Taking an important exam can produce a completely different experience from one person to the next. Especially if it impacts your hopes of graduating. We're talking about the Final Exam here. For the person who has been attentive in class, who has done the homework, who has studied for hours, exam day can be a great day, a day that leads to the graduation celebration! But for the person who has skipped or slept through classes, who has not opened the text book, who has squandered his time with friends and fun, the final exam can be a day of great fear.

In either case, the day is coming. The question is whether or not the student will be prepared. The Great Day is coming – for those who are unprepared, it is a day of great fear; for those who believe in Jesus, it is a day of great rejoicing; for all, it is a day greatly to be remembered.

### **1. A Day of Great Fear**

I can recall bad experiences with exams, especially in college. One of the "hard knock" lessons I learned was when in college, all of a sudden they didn't check homework. I thought – "great!" I began to think, "I don't really need to do all the assignments, just wait for the test." However, the closer and closer that final exam came, the more and more I got nervous. And the more and more I got nervous, the more and more I tried to distract myself with other things – video games, friends, sports – whatever it took to keep my mind off that important day that I knew was coming.

Within each of us is a natural knowledge that the Final Exam is coming. And so many think they know it all, think they have all the answers, but really know nothing. Paul writes, *although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man. (Romans 1:21-23)*

They haven't really done the homework. They haven't really paid attention in class. Instead, they rely on their human reason to save them when that day comes. U.S. News reports that, according to a poll taken in the year 2000, it is estimated that about 60% of Americans believe in hell. Of those 60%, most believe it is either a place of fun or a place of purification. They have molded God's true identity into something more like us. Something a little less than holy. And what do we end up with? ... a popular evangelical preacher like Rob Bell who says: "A loving God would not condemn anyone to hell."

And what of Jesus do we end up with? A Jesus who was crucified by the foreknowledge and purpose of God for no reason? A Jesus who did not really endure the agony of being separated from His Father for us? A Jesus who is nothing more than a good example?

What we have here is a student who doesn't take the homework seriously, who sleeps through class, who leaves the textbook closed; who is so distracted and preoccupied with fun and friends that he is left unprepared.

*1 "For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven, And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up," Says the Lord of hosts, "That will leave them neither root nor branch.*

The final exam is not about big sins vs. little sins. It is not about enough goodness to pass. It is not about comparing answers. What brings us a failing grade on that Final exam is really just ONE SIN – pride. Pride distracts; changes hell into a place of fun; refuses to ask for help; thinks it can cram in enough works at the last minute to pass. And it is never enough. It is pride which damns the wicked to hell forever. Because in that day, there will be nothing left. Neither stump nor root. Not the greatest of all man's "goodness" will be left when laid bare before God's holiness. It is the great sin of unbelief which makes that day a day of great fear.

## **2. A Day of Great Rejoicing**

How could we possibly prepare for such a day? For such an exam? After all, there is nothing we can do. But if pride defines the wicked, then what defines the righteous? What defines the other group of people who do not go to hell? It is really about knowing nothing. That is what it means to be prepared. Knowing nothing. Knowing you know nothing, and knowing God knows everything. Now you are prepared. Now you are ready. This makes the Last Day, a Great Day. A day of great rejoicing.

*2 But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.*

And as Proverbs says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs).

The images of Typhoon Haiyan were unbelievable. It brought so much sorrow, much pain. To lose a child is perhaps the greatest pain I could imagine in this world. But it is not God who lays this evil upon us. It is sin. Sin has boarded us in for the winter

months. Boarded us in, waiting. As whole communities lie in ruins, what remains? As lives are devastated; homes lost; loved ones lost; what remains?

God's name is really all that remains in the end. It is the eternal "I AM" who, as we said last week, rescues us. It is in that unchanging name – "THE LORD" – where hope is found in all sorrow. There is so much we don't know. Why did this happen? Yet in knowing nothing, we really come to know everything. Because there in that ruin, in that loss of a loved one, as the powers of heaven and earth are shaken – the name of the LORD prevails. For it is in the name of the LORD that God's promises endure to eternity. It is in that name where Jesus is known. It is in that name where God laid Himself bare, stripped Himself of all glory, exposed Himself to the pain of humanity, exposed Himself to the cross where our sorrows and sins became God's. It is in the name of the LORD that you pass the exam, that you are ready for the day of graduation.

And how we long for it. How we long for that day when the sun of righteousness will arise to heal all our pain and sorrow. How we long for that day to be free. To trample the pain, the sorrow under foot. The guilt, the sin, the accusations, the questions, will be ashes that poof under the sole of your feet. All that has stood against God's saving grace and purpose will be destroyed.

You will go out like calves from the stalls. As the ESV translates – "You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall." Literally, "You shall kick up your heels." Malachi uses the picture of calves who have been boarded up all winter, finally released from the stalls. When a calf is released from the stall, it's as if it can't control itself. This is the joy of heaven. Free from the wicked; from your sinful flesh; from constraints of time, money, abilities; from the devastations that a whirlwind of sin would leave in its wake; from ever calling to mind past guilt and sorrow; you will kick up your heels for the joy of God's new creation. The Great Day is coming.

### **3. A Day Greatly to be Remembered**

And yet still we wait. Still we are boarded in by sin. What shall keep us prepared? When I reached Seminary, not only did they not check homework, they did not even have exams. And yet, it was in that freedom that Seminary, that I probably did more studying and homework than ever before. I knew the day was coming when these things would matter, when these subjects would impact not only my life, but the lives of others. I knew the day was coming, when these things would be worth remembering.

*4 "Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, With the statutes and judgments.*

Readiness is remembering. That Law of Moses was in every way, designed to point the people to Christ. To fence them in from the ways of the world. The ten commandments were both a reminder of what has gone wrong and a guide in the ways that are right, the ways of love. The temple worship was designed to always remind the people of the need for atonement. In that Lamb who was slain was their hope; a picture of what their eyes could not see; the promised coming of Christ; the promise of a day of rejoicing. Without that Word we are left unguarded, exposed for the next typhoon. Without it, your eyes will deceive you and leave you unprepared. Without that Word, a single Typhoon can wipe out faith. The Word reminds us of that day which is coming and keeps us eager and ready.

*5 "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.*

Jesus would later point to this prophecy, applying it to John the Baptist – calling John “Elijah who is to come.” (Matthew 11:14). Like Elijah, John the Baptist would call the people to readiness. It was His proclamation of sin and God’s grace, Law and Gospel, that would turn hearts.

Sometimes we think memory work is only for catechism class. After all, we’re not being assigned any homework today. And yet, that memory homework is really for every age – young and old alike. From one generation to the next, from the father to the children, to remember God’s Word is what keeps us prepared. It is such a dear appreciation for the Word that turns a father’s heart to his child and a child to his father.

When I was in Seminary, I came to appreciate the homework most when I wasn’t forced to do it. It is in such freedom, we as redeemed children of God find appreciation. God doesn’t force us to do the work, to open the textbook. He welcomes us with His promises of great joy; He reminds us how His Word will keep us and our children, from one generation to the next, prepared for the Great Day. And it will make that day – a day of rejoicing.

Now we can call it a day – a Great Day. Amen.