

Second Sunday of End Time - Last Judgment
November 8, 2009
Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Malachi 4:1-2

"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. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them. But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall." (NIV)

Try to think of something that puts people on two very opposite sides of the spectrum. Think about the World Series winners and losers. The emotions and actions by both sides were obvious. The winners jumped up and down, celebrated, poured champagne on one another, and burst out at the seams in joy. The losers walked away slowly, hung their heads, possibly even expressed their great sorrow and sadness with a few tears. Another example I thought about was when a verdict is read in a courtroom. Again the actions and emotions would be obvious. To hear either not guilty or guilty divides the room. One side is relieved and excited by the outcome; the other side not so much. That side instead may be filled with anger, sadness, and even some terror.

Today our focus is on something that puts people on sides as opposite and as far apart as two sides could ever be - something that will divide people forever. This morning we catch a glimpse of the actions and emotions that will be evident on each side. What will this be? What event am I talking about? I am talking about the event, the time, the final hours that is simply referred to as *"the day."* That's all the description this day needs for it will be a day unlike any other. We often call it the "Last Day" or "Judgment Day." This is the day Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead. This is the day everyone will stand before the judgment seat of God. This is the day the earth and everything in it will be destroyed by fire. This morning, as we look at God's Word, I pray we recognize it will be - **A Day that Dramatically Divides.**

It is kind of fitting that the very last chapter of the last book of the Old Testament would focus us on the Last Day - a day that dramatically divides. Malachi writes: *"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. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them."* As it says in the book of Hebrews: *"It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (10).* When Jesus returns all those who rejected Him will realize just how dreadful. All who oppose God, all the arrogant and every evildoer, all who think they can stand before the judgment seat on their own merits, will be consumed by God's wrath. The punishment is described like a hot oven, a burning furnace. They will be like stubble set on fire and nothing will be left (not a root or a branch) for them.

It is hard to even imagine, isn't it? What would it be like to be separated from God forever - to be separated from everything that is good? The closest thing we might have to compare is the anguish and agony Jesus suffered on the cross when the earth went completely dark and our Savior cried out: *"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?"* It is that ugly. It is that painful and dreadful and horrible. Hell is no

laughing matter, no matter how many cartoons portray cute little devils with pitchforks surrounded by flames. Hell is serious no matter how much the word gets carelessly used. Jesus describes hell as a place of outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Isaiah speaking for the Lord describes it this way ***“dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind”*** (66). In Revelation we are given a glimpse of the terror of this Last Day: ***“They called to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?’*** (6).

This will be a Day that dramatically divides forever. On one side there will be anger, and sorrow and terror. There will be pain and anguish. There will be a whole lot of weeping. People will realize they are the losers eternally. No wonder there are so many people who don’t want to think or talk about such a day. No wonder so many churches shy away from teaching about this Last Day. It will be a day of final judgment - the day when every single person’s time of grace runs out - a day when no one will ever come in or out of heaven for the door will be shut - a day Jesus will say to many ***“Depart from me...into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels”*** (Matt. 25). And it is truly a day that is coming. : ***“Surely the day is coming,”*** Malachi writes.

So what is our reaction to this truth? How do these truths of God’s Word concerning Judgment Day make us feel? Seems kind of like a scary, uneasy day, to say the least, doesn’t it? If we are living in a deliberate sin, or our house is not in order, and we are not standing safely upon the merits of Jesus our Savior it should strike fear into us. But by grace the Lord opens our eyes ahead to see a far different day for His people. ***“But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall.”*** There will be safe ground to stand upon on Judgment Day. That safe ground is Jesus who suffered our punishment and hell so we never have to for our sins. That safe ground is His perfect life, and innocent death on the cross, and victorious resurrection. Those that fear the Lord and revere His Holy name - which is everything He reveals about Himself in His Word - know Jesus is our Savior who will return for us. Jesus will come again as the ***“sun of righteousness.”*** He will come to heal and restore. Jesus will be back to bring all believers to a perfect home of righteousness. He will deliver us from this sin sick world forever. This sun or Son will bring all believers only warmth, and healing, and happiness, and eternal life.

I love the second picture of calves being released from the stalls. After a long winter think of those calves set free. Think of the joy. Imagine the joy of running free into Jesus’ arms for all eternity. Imagine the joy being released from all that is bad and running into a place that has only good. Imagine the joy of the day Jesus will say: ***“Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world”*** (Matt. 25).

Some of my favorite words in the Scriptures are what Jesus says to His disciples to remind them this Last Day is nothing for them to fear. Picture the scene. The disciples asked Jesus questions about the signs of the end and final judgment and Jesus answers with graphic detail. Jesus tells of persecution. Jesus teaches of tragedy and turmoil. He describes awful events leading up to this day of judgment. Then He talks about the Day - the Day some people will ask for mountains to cover them - the Day

there will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars - the Day people will faint in terror - the Day heavenly bodies will be shaken and the Son of Man will come in a cloud with power and great glory. Just imagine what the disciples might have been thinking or feeling at that moment! But then Jesus says: "***When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.***" (Luke 21) What comfort!

Jesus says to His disciples - to you and to me - that when Judgment Day comes stand up and lift up your heads. Here is your redemption. Now you will be free. This is the feast of victory. Now every tear will be wiped from your eyes. This is not a day to fear because this will be a great Day. On this side where Jesus gathers all His own there will be only peace, and joy, and happiness. We will celebrate with our Champion who has put us into the winners circle with Him for all eternity. The jumping up and down, celebrating, pouring champagne on one another, and bursting out at the seams in absolute joy will never have a reason to cease. The not guilty verdict will be read and upheld forever.

There has not been nor will there ever be another event that places people on such far opposite sides of the spectrum as Judgement Day. There will be feelings and emotions to the wildest extremes. It will be a Day that dramatically divides! Thank the Lord today and everyday for putting us on the side where we stand by grace through faith in the redemption that comes through Christ Jesus. Jesus is our safe ground and the reason this Day is not one to fear. Yet, this teaching about the Day leaves us with a certain sense of urgency, doesn't it? Use the time we have now to tell others about Jesus because the day is surely coming. If you haven't filled out your friendship cards for those who don't know Jesus please do so and pray for them. Pray for opportunities to tell them of Jesus' great saving love. I agree with Martin Luther when He says now is not a time to spend so much time arguing or debating what heaven is like, but to spend our time making sure we get there. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.