

The Second Sunday of End Time – Last Judgment

November 8, 2015

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

Malachi 4:1-3

"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. 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. (NIV)

Judgment Day. It's coming. What do you think of when you hear those two words – Judgment Day? I want us to think about Judgment Day this morning. What pictures come to mind? I have one for you. (show picture on screen) It is a calf which has been released from its stall. It is leaping. It is free. It is full of joy and glad to be able to run and play in the sun. The winter is over. It is no longer confined to its little pen. The time has come for the calf to be released. So it leaps for joy. Is this the picture you had in your mind when I asked you to think about Judgment Day? If not, fellow believers, I pray it will be from now on! I pray your Savior Jesus allows you to look forward to this day with confidence. I pray you see this as a day of redemption. I pray you will be able to easily answer this question: **Why will we leap for joy on Judgment Day?**

Just to be clear what we are talking about we are going to focus on the event, the time, the one day on which the whole world will be judged. In many places the Bible simply refers to this 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. 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.

The reason I would guess you did not think a calf leaping for joy when I said the words "Judgment Day" is because we have other pictures in mind – scary ones. Many movies envision the end of the world as a doomsday with disastrous and frightening scenes. The truth is God also never tells us this Day is going to be a good day for everyone. In fact, for many it will be the worst Day. God makes this clear again here through His prophet Malachi: ***"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...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.*** There will be no leaping but instead only burning for some. The punishment is described like a hot

oven, a burning furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be like stubble set on fire and nothing will be left (not a root or a branch) for them. The wicked will be trampled and be like ashes under God's feet.

I am reminded of the words in the book of Hebrews: ***"It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (10)***. Hell is real and it is no laughing matter. 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)***. No wonder there are so many people who don't want 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 on the way: ***"Surely the day is coming,"*** Malachi writes.

And there is one more reason we don't always think of Judgment Day as a picture of a calf leaping for joy. It is because of our sin. Our sin makes us want to hide from God just as Adam and Eve once did in the Garden. We know that because of our sin we can't stand in His presence. It is a scary thing to imagine standing before a Judge who knows everything we have ever done. He knows even our ugliest thoughts and worst intentions. He has all the evidence He needs and more to prove our guilt. We know we have not done enough nor could we ever do enough to make things right with God again. We are constantly facing the truth that the wages of sin is death. We understand that we deserve the same punishment as all the arrogant, the evildoers, and the wicked. That Day should also burn like a furnace for us.

But it won't! Why do we know this? How can we be confident of this? First of all, think about who will stand as the Judge on the Last Day. God has entrusted all judgment to His Son. Jesus will be our Judge. Our God who became a baby for us, our God who lived a righteous life for us, our God who suffered and died on a cross for us, will be our Judge. The One who on the cross suffered the agony of hell to pay for our sins and then rose again in victory will be the one to make the final verdict. Our Savior who cried out: ***"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me"***, so that we will never have to, will be the one to have the very last word! This is the why we love the name of Jesus. This is why we will be happy to bow down on our knees before Him and rejoice to confess Jesus Christ as Lord on Judgment Day. This is why we hold His name in greatest reverence. This is why we give thanks God has revealed to us His name for everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

This is why for you, and me, and all who believe, Judgment Day will be an awesome day! ***"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.” Do you see this beautiful picture Malachi puts before our eyes? It is a picture of Jesus **“the sun of righteousness”** returning. He will come **“with healing in its wings.”** Jesus will come to deliver and heal and restore us. Jesus comes to bring us to a perfect home of righteousness. He comes to take us away from this sin sick world forever. This sun or Son will bring warmth, and healing, and happiness, and eternal life. This is the feast of victory. Now every tear will be wiped from your eyes. **“And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall.”** When the Son comes you will be free. We will no longer see things as a poor reflection in a mirror. We will see our Savior face to face. We will no longer be confined to this sinful world with mortal decaying bodies. We will have perfect imperishable bodies fit for our new home in heaven. Yes, like that calf released from its stall we will leap for joy!

One of my favorite conversations Jesus had with His disciples was on the topic of the Last Day. Picture the scene. The disciples asked Jesus questions about the signs of the end and of 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 Judgment Day. 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. 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!

This is why it is my prayer as we talk today about the Last Judgment, and every time we bring up the topic of Judgment Day, we think about this calf leaping for joy. Picture a calf being released from the stall. After a long winter think of those calves set free. Now 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 on 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). 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 and others get there. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.