



## Sermon

For the week of November 8

Sermon Series: COMING SOON  
Part 2: Coming Soon - The Fire

### **The Sun of Righteousness Will Rise**

- 1. To burn the arrogant**
- 2. To warm the reverent**

*based on Malachi 4:1-3*

Peter the Great, 17<sup>th</sup> century Czar of Russia, lived in a palace full of beautiful and exquisite artwork. Yet, whenever he saw a sunrise he wondered why many more didn't get up earlier to view what he considered to be one of the most glorious sights in the universe. This is what he said: "They delight in gazing on a picture, the trifling work of a mortal, and yet neglect the one painted by God himself." We cannot deny that the dynamic colors and majesty of a sunrise are more spectacular and stunning than anything we humans can put on canvas.

Have you noticed, however, that in the last twenty years or so the sun has become an object of fear rather than wonder? That giant orb in the sky that puts on a show at dawn and at dusk, that gives us light and warmth, that can make all the difference in the world between a day that's blah and one that's hurrah, is now seen as a threat. We're told that the sun's ultraviolet rays cause wrinkles and, even worse, skin cancer, and can be fatal. Should we fear the sun? Not necessarily. Apply sunscreen, and the sun and its rays are a blessing. Skip the Coppertone, and be prepared to suffer the consequences.

Today the Prophet Malachi reveals to us that on the last day "*the sun of righteousness will rise.*" This "*sun of righteousness*" is none other than the Son of God, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Malachi goes on to tell us that the day of Jesus' return will be one of wild extremes. In fact, for some it will be great, while for others it will be terrifying. In the words of our text:

### **The Sun of Righteousness Will Rise**

- 1. To burn the arrogant**
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1. Malachi lived and labored about 430 years before Jesus was born. He served at a time when the Jewish people had grown tired of seeing the wicked prosper, while those who did good had nothing to show for their efforts. God sent the prophet to assure the people that, in time, he would punish the wicked. But before they rejoiced at this bit of good news, the people were to consider carefully whether they were counted among the good or not.

In the opening verses of our text God describes the wicked as being arrogant. To whom is God speaking? The Paris Hiltons of the day? The overpaid athletes in professional sports B.C.? Not at all. The book of Malachi begins with these scathing words: "*It is you, O priests, who despise my name*" (1:6). "*When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?*" (1:8). "*You profane [my name] by saying of the Lord's table, 'It is defiled,' and of its food, 'It is contemptible.' And you say, 'What a burden!'"*" (1:12,13).

Ouch! These words hit close to home, and they hurt. Have I, like the clergy of Malachi's day, shown contempt for God's awesome name? Have I dared to bring him less than my best in my sermon work and in my Catechism and Bible class preparation? Have I looked at my calling to serve you as your shepherd as a burden? With shame I must confess, "Yes, I have." And with that I am counted among the arrogant whom God condemns to the fire of hell.

If God's spokesman shows contempt for his name, should it be surprising that members of the church family do the same? And so God says to the people of Malachi's day, "*You flood the Lord's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. You ask, 'Why?' It is because the Lord is acting as the faithful witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant*" (2:13,14). When God rants against the

arrogant, he's not confining his words to those people "out there," to those outside the church. He's talking to you and he's talking to me, his beloved bride, we who come to worship, who even bring our monetary offerings, but who often decide that worship ends even before we have finished singing the first hymn. All too often we forget that worship of the Lord God continues long after we have left this house of worship. It continues and is carried out in the way we relate to and deal with one another. To one degree or another, we have all broken faith with God and are counted among those whom God calls arrogant and condemns to the flames of hell.

You think God's done? You know better, don't you? Listen to him as he continues. *"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. 'Test me in this,' says the Lord Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it" (3:8-10).*

Now we all have to exclaim, "Ouch!" The truth of God's law hurts. Have we not withheld from God our firstfruit offerings? Have we not viewed our minutes and our money to use as we see fit? Haven't we readily made excuses as to why we can't give of our time or our talents or our treasure the way God wants us to? How quick we are to refuse to put God and his principles of stewardship first, choosing instead to follow the self-centered financial philosophy of the world. We who are so attached to our money and our things are also counted among the arrogant and are condemned by God to the fiery furnace of hell.

For sure, then, it's not just the Hollywood acting stars, the professional sports figures, and the CEOs of major corporations that God condemns as being arrogant. All who have chosen to put God in anything but the Number 1 place in their hearts and lives are, by divine definition, arrogant and fall under God's scathing condemnation. That's us, isn't it? And that's terrifying, because this is what God tells Malachi to say to us: *"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 branch will be left to them.'*" The sun of righteousness will rise to burn the arrogant.

2. So, who can stand in the presence of the sun of righteousness and not get burned? Who can face the flames and the fire of hell on Judgment Day and not get torched? It's the reverent. For while there will be no mulligans on the great and dreadful day of the Lord, no second chance to believe and be saved, none will be needed for those who by faith have embraced Jesus as Savior and Lord. Through Malachi God puts it this way: *"But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings."*

Have you ever gone camping in the rain? It's not a pleasant experience, is it? You're cold. You're wet. After a few hours of tossing and turning you seriously consider pulling up stakes and heading home to a warm and dry bed. Even if it's three o'clock in the morning, and you have hundreds of miles to drive, it becomes a serious consideration, doesn't it? What, however, can make all the difference in the world? What is it that can make you change your mind? It's the sun, right? When the sun comes up in the morning, it quickly warms and dries you and helps you to see everything in a new light. Just feeling the first few rays of rejuvenating sunlight on your body, you begin to forget the dreary experience of the night before.

That's the way it is for us who believe in Jesus as we look forward to Judgment Day. Jesus is going to come back to warm us and make all things right. As a result, we'll forget all the sorrows and sufferings, pains and problems, trials and tribulations we have for so long endured here. As Malachi puts it: *"You will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. 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.*"

But how can this be? How can Jesus burn the arrogant, on the one hand, and warm the reverent, on the other? It's simple. We who are reverent are wearing sunscreen. We have been bathed in Jesus' blood and are clothed in a robe of righteousness—that which Jesus stitched when he suffered and died on the cross. The arrogant, on the other hand, have foolishly dressed themselves in their own righteousness, their so-called "good" intentions and deeds. They're convinced that, because they've been pretty good people, according to the standards of the world, that is, they'll be able to stand up to the sun of righteousness. Sort of like the tourist who believes that he can safely view a raging forest fire up close because he's dressed in his lucky T-shirt and shorts.

My friends, don't be like the arrogant. Don't think of yourselves more highly than you ought. Don't blame others for your sins. It's not someone else's fault that you bring God your seconds and your leftovers. It's not someone else's fault that you're materialistic and are all too concerned about money and stuff. It's not someone else's fault when I'm not faithful to my calling as your pastor and fail to see my work as a privilege for Jesus' sake. It's my fault. It's my sin. In humility we all need to confess before God that way too often we don't put him first. And then we need to trust. That's what the reverent do. They trust. They repent of their sins and throw themselves on Jesus' mercy, confident that he has paid for every one of their sins. It's this confidence in Jesus that makes us ready and longing for the day when he will come to warm us and make all things right.

So, when will the sun of righteousness rise? We don't know. Only God knows. We can say this though. The glow of the dawn has been on the eastern horizon for some time now. Jesus said that wars, rumors of wars, and false prophets would all be signs of the end, as would his Word being preached to all the world. I'm confident in saying that everything is set for Jesus' return. It has been for quite a while. We're living in the last times. So, repent of your arrogance and reverently put on the heavenly sunscreen, that is, Jesus' blood and righteousness. For only then will you be ready to have some fun in the Son! Amen.

St. Paul's, Muskego, WI  
Pastor David M. Kuehl  
dkuehl@stpaulmuskego.org