

Smack dab in the middle of the state of Wisconsin lies the town of Wisconsin Rapids. Not far outside of that town is a road with two curves that form an “S”. They are sharp enough so that you need to slow down to take them safely. Unfortunately, not everybody does, and some cars have driven off the road, resulting in several fatalities over the years. In fact, that stretch of road has earned the nickname “Dead Man’s Curve.” One of the local churches once put up a billboard right beside the curve. It said something like this: “Are you prepared to meet your Lord? Repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Malachi is a lot like that sign, only the view is not from a sudden death in a car accident, but from the sudden return of Jesus on the Last Day. For Malachi, this great and terrible day was just around the corner. It was certain to happen, and Malachi urged the people to prepare for it.

On that day, judgment would be rendered. God will separate people into two groups. Either you would be one of the righteous or one of the wicked, the servant of the Lord or arrogant and an evildoer. When the day came, you were either in or out.

If you were judged to be wicked and arrogant, and then thrown out, that day would be terrible. Malachi sees it like being thrown into a furnace. Not some warm, preheated oven, but a fire that burns everything to ashes. I’m reminded of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego being cast into the fiery furnace in Daniel chapter 3. God protected those faithful men in the midst of that blazing fire, yet the flames from that furnace were so hot, that the King’s soldiers who cast them into the furnace were burned to a crisp. Malachi sees the Last Day as that kind of end, burned to a crisp, for those judged wicked.

But if you are judged righteous, the Lord’s servant, welcomed in, that day would be one of joy, wholeness, and victory. Malachi pictures it like a calf jumping in spring. Some of you who grew up on farms are very familiar with that kind of picture. After a long cold winter where the calves have been penned up in the barn, spring time comes and it’s time for them to be let loose from their stalls. The warmer days melt the snow and ice, the calves are let free into the muddy barnyard. The calves are so

happy. They jump around, kicking up hooves, with mud flying all over. It's plain to see from looking at the calves how excited and joyous they are.

In the Day of the Lord, those who are righteous will be so excited, so healthy, and whole. No more pain or tears. No more dead man's curves. Victory and vindication. No more being made fun of by unbelievers and no more sin to make us feel as though God is weak and distant from our lives. As for there being any mud in heaven, that's questionable but we'll be kicking up our heels in happiness there.

How will God decide who is in and who is out? Malachi lets us know that too- earlier in his book. He challenged the people of his time in a couple key areas. First, they had become too captivated with money and possessions. Second, their worship life was in shambles.

Malachi could give his prophecy to us, couldn't he? Money and possessions- stuff- has become all too important in our society. Having the nicest car, the latest video gaming system, the most stylish clothes, and more. One of the results, there's a record amount of people with overwhelming credit card debt. Sadly, many are having real hardships paying their bills after spending money they don't have on stuff they can't afford to try to impress people they don't even like. Meanwhile many charitable organizations including churches are constantly running short on money. No shortage of money is being spent on the gambling industry, though. Casinos are flourishing.

So, Malachi's words of warning to his people apply just as much to us today: You're dangerously close to the wrong side of Judgment Day when money means that much to you that you use it in the wrong ways.

Then he turned to the people's worship life. He challenged them about halfhearted worship, showing up only part of the time, and giving leftovers instead of their best to the Lord. He could be speaking to us. Sometimes we stay up too late on Saturday night and barely get to church on time, or we're too tired to pay attention. Or we just go through the motions, not really singing or responding or listening. Maybe the hold money has on us keeps us from giving generously, sacrificially, cheerfully, right off the top. Our offerings are scraps rather than deep expressions of love for our Lord. As God says in chapter 3 of Malachi: "You are robbing

me.' But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions" (v. 8)"

Malachi's words of warning to his people apply just as much to us: You're dangerously close to the wrong side of Judgment Day when worship is treated so poorly. Malachi's words make the heat from the furnace on the Last Day just too close for comfort. And that's the way it would be if he hadn't mentioned two key figures: Moses and Elijah. There are other big, important days of the Lord besides Judgment Day. Transfiguration is one of them.

Jesus goes up on a high mountain. Peter, James, and John are with Him. He is transformed right before their eyes with dazzling, bright white light. They fall down in fear and amazement. Then who appears but Elijah and Moses? And Peter says, "Lord, it is good for us to be here" (Lk 9:33). And Peter's absolutely right! Jesus is brighter than the sun, brighter than a fiery hot furnace, but it's good to be near Jesus. It's safe to be near Him. He doesn't burn the disciples to a crisp. Instead, He brings them to the right side of Judgment Day.

How? Watch as Jesus comes down that mountain and heads straight for another big, important day of the Lord- a judgment day like no other. This day is Good Friday. On the cross, Jesus takes the judgment against us on Himself. Our wickedness, love for money, messed-up worship lives, rebellion, and arrogance become His, and "the sun of righteousness" (v. 2) gives us His righteousness. It's good for us that Jesus is there on that great (for us) and dreadful (for Jesus) Day of the Lord.

Then comes another calf-jumping, big, important day: Easter. Jesus rises from the dead, and His victory becomes ours. His disciples, the women who come to the tomb, and Christians throughout all time leap for joy. Judgment Day, the Last Day, becomes our day of wholeness and health because on Easter Day Jesus is alive and whole, offering healing for all eternity. It is good to be near Jesus, because He makes the Judgment Day safe for us, just as He kept His disciples safe during His Transfiguration when Elijah and Moses were there with Him.

Just like Peter said at Jesus' Transfiguration, it is good for us to be here, in church, because in a way every time we worship it's a Day of the

Lord. No, our gathering together is nothing as earth-shattering as the day Jesus talked to Moses and Elijah and the disciples listened in safety, and certainly not anything as incredible as Good Friday or victorious as Easter. Our gathering is definitely nothing as great and terrible as the Last Day. But every Sunday is a little Day of the Lord because He is here and we are with Him, and it's safe to be near Him.

What a difference that makes in our worship! It's not about you or me. It's about Jesus and singing praises to Him. It's about coming to hear **His** Word. It's about growing closer to Him. Whether it's on Sunday for Worship or Sunday School or Bible study or at home in devotions in His Word. It's good to be near Jesus and His Word. It's about doing just what God said when Jesus was talking to Moses and Elijah during His Transfiguration: "This is my beloved Son' listen to Him" (Mk 9:7). It's about walking up to the altar and being so close to Jesus that you take His body and blood into yourself during the Lord's Supper. He is in you and you are in Him, and it's safe. Yes, it is good to be here because Jesus brings us safely to the right side of Judgment Day.