

Sunday Sermon: November 11, 2018: Last Judgment Sunday

Sermon Text: Malachi 4:1-2

Sermon Theme: Truth We Need to Hear

“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.”<sup>2</sup> 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.

It’s hard to find truth today. With political ads that spin the truth, change the truth, or flat out lie we might get a little bit of truth, but many times we just aren’t sure.

There also seems to be a movement that tries to make us believe the truth isn’t the truth anymore. This shows itself in a number of different ways. You might hear the phrase, “This is my truth” or “I am owning my truth.” This would be a very good phrase if it meant that people were actually seeing and understanding life according to God’s truths, or even seeing things in the way that most people do. But that’s not what they mean. What they really mean is that they want their own thoughts, feelings and perceptions to be the truth for everyone. What they really mean is, “This is what I think the truth is and you should believe it too.”

Others teach that there is not set of objective truths that are true for every person. They teach there is only the truth you make for yourself. This means there is no lying or deception, there is no right and wrong, only your truth.

If God and his Word did not exist, we would all be free to do whatever we wanted to do and to decide for ourselves what was true and what we wanted to believe. However, because we have a God who has created us and our world, who loves us, sends his Son to save us, and continues to build us up through the Holy Spirit, we better listen when he tells us the truth. On this Last Judgment Sunday, as we look at that last day when Jesus will come again, God gives two huge truths that we need to hear: When judgment day comes, there will only be destruction for those who do not believe. But there will be joy and great blessing for those who believe in Jesus.

The truth can be pretty hard to hear sometimes, especially when that truth is about us. I don’t know if you are like me or not, but when someone comes to me and tells me something that I don’t want to hear, I don’t really want to hear it. When someone tells me the truth, I might be upset at first. I think, “That can’t be true.” I’m not upset at the other person, I am upset at myself that I have let someone down or done something wrong. That feeling consumes the rest of my morning, my afternoon, maybe even my evening. But after a short time I actually think about what the person told me. Were they trying to help me or hurt me?

Has this ever happened to you too? It’s not that we don’t want to listen to the truth or can’t handle the truth, it just takes awhile to actually hear what they say, think about, and process that truth in a positive way and make changes that are necessary.

The Old Testament Jews had trouble hearing the truth and doing anything positive with it. Over the many years since God had led his people from Egypt, there was a steady decline of faith and trust in the God who loved them.

God led his people directly through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses. But, the Israelites rejected those words of God and the signs he sent and chose to do what they wanted to do. God tried to lead them through priests as a representative of who he was. But they didn’t want to think about the picture of the Messiah, they wanted to do things their own way. God led his people through kings. The kings rejected God’s ways in favor of their own sinful ways. God had led his people through prophets. The people rejected the true prophets and put many of these truth tellers to death.

All that God did through his prophets, priests and kings was to show his people the truth: he loved them and wanted the very best for them not only here on earth, but also forever in heaven. He called out to them with the truth of their sinfulness and unbelief through prophets, priests, kings but they did not believe in him or listen to him. Instead they acted like children, who put their fingers in their ears, and pretend not to hear.

In the last book of the Old Testament, God inspired the writer Malachi to place his truth right in front of the people and us. He did not tell a parable or hide it in picture language. His truth is clear for us to hear and

understand. God lays out his truth for his people and then is silent for 500 years until he would reveal his truth in Bethlehem.

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Let’s look at some of the truth in the first verse here. The Lord is real. His justice is real. The Day of Judgment is real and is coming. The judgment that will come to the unbeliever is real. God’s truth is that there is a hell and there will be people who do not believe in Jesus that go there.

Today when there is a harvest, machines separate the wheat from stalk. The wheat is taken in the stalk is left behind in the field. When the harvest is over, the farmer will usually turn the ground back under, stalks, weeds, roots and all, with a tractor and tiller. This happens either in the fall or in the spring to get ready for the next planting season.

The picture Malachi uses is harvest time in Bible days. This is very different from what we know today. The wheat stalks were cut near the ground, and were taken to the threshing floor to be separated. After the process of separating was done, all the worthless chaff and stalk parts were collected, thrown into a fire and burned.

That’s the picture that God inspired Malachi to use about the Last Day. There will be no pass, no exceptions, for those who do not believe in him on the last day. There will be no “good enough” or “tried hard enough”. God’s justice, his objective truth, is clear. Those who do not believe in Jesus will be thrown into the fire of hell. There will be no unbeliever that will be spared from God’s justice no matter how honorable, or nice, or pleasant they may have seemed in life.

This is might be a truth that is hard for us to hear. We think in terms of goodness and badness or niceness. But God’s judgment is not about goodness or niceness, it’s about belief or unbelief. What do we do with this truth? Do we act as the Jews did? Do we reject God’s truth because we don’t like it and try to live by our own truth.? Do we live as unbelievers do, rejecting the truth as a fairy tale or myth? Do we become Christians in name only by straddling the fence and living in God’s ways sometimes, but thinking that his judgment and justice is far off so we have time to figure it out eventually. I want to live like I want to live?

What do we do when we hear this truth? There are a lot of things that go through our minds when we hear these words. Hopefully, we are thinking that we need to be in the Word. We need to hear that Word so the Holy Spirit can build us up in faith so that when the last day comes we are found standing firm in faith.

What about the people who do not believe, what do we do about them? Do we allow them to live that way, never opening our mouths? Do we pray that someone else will confront the sin that lives in their lives, just not us? Do we allow them to walk down a road that leads to justice and judgment?

What do we do with God’s truth that says that those who do not believe will be condemned? First, we realize that we have work to do in sharing the Gospel of salvation that they may know their Savior and believe.

If Malachi were to end with those words of judgment, it would be a pretty bleak future for us and man others. But Malachi doesn’t end there. There is more truth for us to look at and this truth is wonderful. <sup>2</sup> **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’s more truth here. The Lord is real and his Messiah, his Savior, is real. The love of our Lord for you is real. The Lord has sent a Savior who has taken away your sins. God’s glorious truth is that those who believe in Jesus will be saved.

For those in whom the Holy Spirit has worked faith, there is no need for fear when we hear these truths of God. We know that God has already sent that Savior and has done the work to save us. **When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under Law, to redeem those under Law, that we might receive the full rights of Son.**

In Jesus, we have the amazing truth that we are forgiven of our sins that once separated us from our God. God has made us his own children and because we are children we are also heirs of all that Jesus won. Those gifts that Jesus purchased with his body and blood on the cross are now ours.

The picture Malachi uses is one of freedom for the believer. The sun of righteousness, Jesus, who is the source of righteousness and gives righteousness to all who believe.

With this freedom in Jesus, we are released from our sin-filled prison for the joy of heaven. A calf that has been kept in the barn all winter long will not just stand still when it is let out. It will be filled with joy that it is free. It will leap, it will run, it will show the happiness that it has.

This is the truth that fills our hearts with joy. This is what God has done for you. This Savior has done all that is necessary to make you his own child and a member of his family of believers, heaven is already ours. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, the faith you have in your heart is a sign from God that we will be with Jesus in heaven.

Truth is sometimes hard to hear especially when it is about us, but when God speaks his truth we should listen, especially when he is talking about heaven. God's truth is not based on good or bad, trying or lack of trying. God's truth is based upon belief or unbelief.

For the unbeliever there is a lot of fear in God's truth. Those who do not believe will not receive the blessing of heaven. But there is no fear for the believer, only God's eternal love and promise. Those who believe will enjoy the eternal blessing of a life with Jesus in heaven. This is the truth we need to hear.