

Malachi 4:1-6 - EHV

Look! The day is coming, burning like a blast furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble. The day that is coming will set them on fire, says the LORD of Armies, a day that will not leave behind a root or branch for them. ² But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise, and there will be healing in its wings. You will go out and jump around like calves from the stall. ³ You will trample the wicked. They will surely be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I take action, says the LORD of Armies.

⁴ Remember the law of my servant Moses, which I commanded to him at Horeb to serve as statutes and judgments over all Israel. ⁵ Look! I am going to send Elijah the prophet to you before the great and fearful day of the LORD comes! ⁶ He will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers. Otherwise, I will come and strike the land with complete destruction.

Dear children of God who wait for the coming of our Savior,

Who's ready to go? As a parent, we seem to find ourselves asking that question a lot – especially if you have kids. Whether it's going to church, school, running errands, or the store. Get your socks and shoes on. Grab your jackets and backpacks and lunches. So many things to remember. So many things that are easily forgotten. When it comes to life, you could say we're on our way out the door. When Jesus returns on Judgment Day, he's going to take his children home to be with him in heaven. So the question we need to be asking ourselves on a regular basis,

THEME: Are You Ready To Go To Heaven?

- 1. On our own we are never ready**
- 2. By God's grace, we are always ready**

It's probably safe to say that every parent has made a trip or two home to grab the forgotten book, forgotten lunch, or forgotten backpack. I try not to get too frustrated because I know how often I forget things. Nobody's perfect, and yet that's what God demands of us in life. He says, **“So then, be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:48)** You could say our lives are kind of like a test where God demands a perfect 100% -- A+. How would you do on some of these multiple choice test questions?

Question 1). When you see a neighbor in need, should you, a) look the other way and hope someone else helps him out. b) think of ways that he probably doesn't deserve your help because he's obviously made some bad choices in life. c) think of excuses as to why you can't help him out because you've got enough problems of your own. Or, d) seek to do what you can to help him out. We know the correct answer is d, but how often haven't we answered with a, b, or c in our thoughts, words, and actions?

Question 2). When someone says something mean and nasty to or about you, should you, a) think of ways you can say something mean and nasty back. b) think of ways you can gossip or spread rumors about them to give them a bad name. c) let it bother you day and night. Or, d) forgive and forget and let it go. We know the correct answer is d, but how often haven't we answered with a, b, or c in our thoughts, words, and

actions?

Question 3). When it comes to an opportunity to be in church this week, should you, a) think of all the reasons why you can probably miss just this once. b) think of how busy you are and all the things you've got going on in your life. c) make yourself feel better by thinking there are lots of others who probably won't be there who haven't been there as often as you have. Or, d) gladly and willingly go because you want to, not because you have to. We know the correct answer is d, but how often haven't we answered with a, b, or c in our thoughts, words, and actions?

These are just some of the test questions we face on a regular basis. God demands perfect answers all the time. But we aren't perfect. Paul writes, **“there is no one who is righteous, not even one. . .all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. . . and . . . the wages of sin is death.”**

So, who's ready to go? Not me, not you, not on our own that is. That's why God gives us His Word. Spiritually speaking, the bible gives us all that we need for this life and the next. It gives everything we need for the final exam of life. The final exam question that some have stated this way, “if you died today and stood before God tonight and he said, ‘why should I let you into heaven?’” How confident are you that you would have the right answer? Or, if Judgment Day came today and Jesus asked you, “why should I take you to be with me in heaven?” How confident are you that you would have the right answer? If your answer goes something along the lines of “I tried to go to church whenever I could. I tried to be a good spouse, a good parent, a good employer or employee. I tried to help others out whenever I could.” The buzzer is going to sound and you'll find yourself locked out of heaven. But all those sounded like pretty good answers. Pretty good, but not good enough because did you notice what all those answers started with? They started with I. They focused on what I do rather than on what Jesus has done for me.

The right answer doesn't begin with you or I. It begins with Jesus and ends with you and I. The Holy Spirit worked ability to say, “Jesus died and rose again for me.” Paul tells us, **“if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” (Romans 10:9)** Jesus tells us, **“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”** Jesus took the exam of life as our substitute. He always had the correct answers. He never did or got anything wrong. He never thought a bad thought. He never talked back to his parents or teachers. He never misbehaved. But God treated him as though he had. God took all of our bad thoughts, bad behavior, wrong answers and placed them on Jesus. Jesus carried them to the cross where he suffered and died to forgive them. Jesus rose again from the grave to give us the gift of heaven. Through his death and resurrection, God took Jesus' perfect test and made it yours!

Those who believe all this are ready to go. And even believing this isn't something we do, rather it's something the Holy Spirit does for us. Working through Word and Sacrament, the Holy Spirit has given each and every one of us a report card. Look carefully and you'll notice that your name is on the top. Look closely and you'll notice that it doesn't contain all the F's you and I deserve, rather it contains all A+'s because of Jesus! And God has taken your report card and posted it on his fridge in heaven filled with the food and drink that will be served at that Wedding Supper of the Lamb. Paul writes, **“faith comes from hearing the message and the message comes through the Word of Christ.” (Romans 10:17)** Jesus says, **“I am the Vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him is the one who bears much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5)** You could even say that those who stay connected to Jesus don't have to worry about giving an answer to the final exam of life because Jesus is

going to be right there with them telling the Heavenly Father, “this one’s with me” as he walks you through the gates of your heavenly home.

But for those who don’t see the need for Jesus in their lives, Jesus says, **“if anyone does not remain in me, he is thrown away like a branch and withers. Such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.” (John 15:6)** In our text the prophet Malachi describes it this way, **“Look! The day is coming, burning like a blast furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble. The day that is coming will set them on fire, says the LORD of Armies, a day that will not leave behind a root or branch for them.”** Everything they worked so hard for. Everything they’ve stored up in life. A beautiful home here on earth doesn’t guarantee you a home in heaven. The fastest car here on earth won’t enable you to outrun God’s Judgment. God won’t judge you based on your portfolio or how many things you’ve done for others. He’s going to look into your heart. If he sees Jesus there, you’re good to go. If he doesn’t see Jesus there, you’re in store for some bad news. That’s why it’s so important to make sure Jesus is there and stays there. Time spent in His House and in His Word does just that. What role and priority does Jesus have in your life? We’re all busy.

We all have lots going on. But nothing is more important than Jesus and His Word. A woman by the name of Martha learned this lesson. She had lots going on. She was making dinner for Jesus. Her sister Mary was just sitting there listening to Jesus instead of lending a hand. When Martha asked Jesus to rebuke Mary, she was the one who received the rebuke instead. **“The Lord answered and told her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but one thing is needed. In fact, Mary has chosen that better part, which will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:41-42)** In our text the prophet Malachi describes it this way, **“But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise, and there will be healing in its wings.”** This is healing that can only be found in Jesus.

The wildfires in California remind me a lot of this picture from Malachi. As you watch people’s lives being destroyed by the uncontrollable flames of these massive forest fires, we can see in a small way a reminder that the things of this world won’t last forever. People who worked so hard to build beautiful homes that found them completely destroyed in a matter of days. Many were fortunate to escape with their lives. Many will have the opportunity to rebuild and move on with their lives.

It won’t be like that on Judgment Day. Judgment Day will whisk everything away in the blink of an eye. No one will be able to escape. No one will be given second chances to rebuild. Those who build their house on the sand of this world will see everything come crashing down, and worst of all, they will be doomed to spend an eternity in hell. But those who build their house on the rock of Jesus will stand firm, and best of all, they will spend an eternity in heaven. That’s why Peter writes, **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he gave us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, into an inheritance that is undying, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you. Through faith you are being protected by God’s power for the salvation that is ready to be revealed at the end of time.” (1 Peter 1:3-5)**

Dear friends in Christ, you have the question and answer to the final exam of life. In the eyes of the world, it might be considered cheating to pass these things along to others. Not in God’s eyes. In fact, God wants us to pass these things along to everyone. He wants everyone to be with him in heaven. He gives us His Word. He gives us Jesus. He gives us the assurance that we are ready to go. Stay connected to Jesus and we will always be ready to go! Amen.