

Sunday Nov.11 2018 – Last Judgment

My family had our very own *blast furnace* going this past week. Here's what we ended up with. Anyone guess what it is? The charred remains of a potato. | There was that distinct smell like something burning, so I stepped into the kitchen, and looked in the microwave. And flames were literally shooting out of this. It had been *set on fire*. |

A *blast furnace*, along with *the remains after it is through with its work*, is one of the pictures used in describing the Last Day – the Last Judgment. One group of people ends up like this.

We get a little further description in Malachi: "*Neither root nor branch will be left for them*" (v. 1). Torch a tree trunk? Leave it with no branches, leaves or roots? And what do you end up with? You end up with something that would look, and be, strikingly like this (the charred potato remains shown earlier). It's dead. It has no life. It still exists. But nothing good remains.

I got to thinking. | These charred remains, I gotta say, really drew in my attention. I remembered them after the event, after having taken them with tongs to get the smoking potato out of the house, after having left it sitting on the front walk for some time, I later retrieved it. This had become – this would serve – as a reminder of one of the judgments from the Lord, and outcomes for people, on the Last Day. One of two judgments is pictured like this.

The people of Malachi's day would have had a reminder *daily* before them of this whole image and outcome. How so? They used an oven for cooking their daily bread that required fire to heat it. At the end of each day, what would they have seen in the oven? Charred remains of the wood or *stubble* which had been *set on fire*.

You or I see this same kind of thing if we go camping and look in the fire-pit. But how often are we around a fire? So maybe since we don't have this [charred remains] daily before us, we should think about guarding against: the danger to forget this picture given to us in Malachi. It's given for our good.

If we do not know *from what* we have been rescued, will we continue to see the beauty of Jesus and all He has done for us to save us from sin and hell, as well as our ongoing need for Him?

If we do not remember *from what* we have been rescued – and how near danger remains for us believing mortals, with our sinful flesh, still breathing in a sinful world –, will we continue to treasure the Word of Him who is our Rescue?

The Lord speaks in dead earnestness about how important it is that we hear his voice now and trust what He says. Either the dead (the dead-in-sin from life's beginning, which is all of us) will live now by the Lord's saving Word, or they will forever be condemned by his Word. On the Day of Last Judgment, it will be a dreadful thing for the doubly-dead (those without faith in Jesus, and so with sin still on their record) to fall into the hands of the Lord - even though His hands have been marked by nails also for them.

That was precisely the doubly-dead trajectory upon which many of those in Malachi's day were headed. And so God lovingly gives warning of where that path leads. It is on that very same path that many in our world are still running in arrogance and/or in self-gratification.

And yes, it is on that very same path that my own dead-from-birth-nature would just as easily run in arrogance or self-gratification, if left to himself. Your dead-from-birth-sinful-nature is the same. And it is onto that path that your still-dead-sinful-nature is ever trying to divert you.

And it is good for us to hear warning and remember *from what* we have been rescued.

We should identify an added danger in the mix, against which to keep up our guard in this whole matter in front of us. Answer me this real quick: where is seldom heard a discouraging word? "Home, home on the range" – right? Join with me if you know it – "where the deer and the antelope play; where seldom is heard a discouraging word; and the skies are not cloudy all day."

That's an old song. Much of it is so dated it holds no relevance for the present. But I'll offer you an answer to a place where in our day "seldom is heard a discouraging word." A large segment of people around us desire just

that when it comes to any word from God – any message from Him. “We don’t want to hear anything about judgment” is their take. “We just want positive affirmations from God.”

This view has seeped from culture into some churches:

“Such is the current reality in many Christian pulpits. In misguided love preachers wash from their sermons any reference to God’s wrath, his judgment on sin behind that wrath, or that wrath becoming an eternal experience for the unbeliever in hell. [These are] left unspoken – or flatly denied – as if all that were outmoded church-of-the-middle-ages scare tactics. To use a current way of speaking, such talk is a microaggression to be shunned.”

– *Grow in Grace*, Prof. Gurgel, Nov.2018

It’s good to know what’s going on out there. But Prof. Gurgel is quick, then, to turn the focus of God’s law this direction, upon ourselves for application. Are we immune from such misguided ideas or action? Could it be true that “hell” at times gets little more thought than a few seconds when referenced at church or read in a Bible passage? Do descriptions like hell as “a furnace” and “fire” and “eternal death” make only brief cameo appearances in our thoughts, rather than having a regular place and awareness in our study and prayers and minds? Isn’t it good that the Lord has given us frequent reminders in His Word – sights like this – to see: *from what* we have been rescued by Jesus.

My sinful nature and yours is trying to coax us into thoughts like... “You don’t need to spend time and thought on that kind of stuff – not right now. That stuff will just drag you down. It’s all negative. And there’s plenty of time for all that talk later in life. For now just trust God loves you, and do what you want.” That kind of insidious temptation won’t go away.

So the warning that one of the two judgments received on the last day will be this – [charred remains] – is not beneath you or me to hear as a child of God. Such warning is good.

In fact, when you hear this truth of God – this warning about judgment, you are handed a precisely-fitted weapon designed for the daily clubbing to death of your old sinful self whose ears refuse to hear the Lord’s Word. It is the dead earnest voice of your Savior that gives you this weapon. He so loves your soul and mine that much.

- It’s by our Savior’s voice – in His Word – we’re brought daily to repentance, to admit our sin and to thank Jesus for His forgiveness.
- It’s by His voice – His Word – we’re equipped and moved to daily fight against the temptations and lies that come knocking at the door of our hearts.

God forbid that it would ever be my greatest joy to preach about God’s wrath, or that it would be the message I’d want to leave foremost in your heart or mind. But God equally forbid that the truth of His wrath over sin would seldom be heard and present in the message aimed at your heart and mine! For where that message is present in all its truthfulness, we will then with great delight rejoice to hear this other judgment of the Lord retold: *“But for you who revere – who trust - in my name,” says the Lord, “the sun of righteousness will rise, with healing in His wings.”*

You see now the other picture Malachi uses to describe the Last Day – the Last Judgment. One group of people ends up like this: the sun of righteousness shining on us.

This last chapter of the Old Testament is beautifully intertwined to the first chapter of the New Testament record of Jesus’ life in the book of Luke. Jesus’ birth had been announced. It was about to take place. And Zechariah spoke this about the event: “The rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on us.” Malachi’s words and Zechariah’s words are about Jesus. HE is the Sun of righteousness. You answer for yourselves: Do you trust in Jesus’ life, death and resurrection to save you? If that is so, then you are assured: Already now you are sheltered under Jesus’ wings. You call on Him – and trust Him – to give you the righteousness that He alone has. Your sin is removed. You already enjoy the healing he provides: your sin is removed, your conscience is unburdened, you know you have peace with him, and your heart is free to serve him.

So now already you have the protection that comes from being sheltered under his wings of righteousness. And you can look forward to his coming on the Last Day. For He will call you out of your grave on that Day to enjoy the eternal life - body and soul – with Him forever.

I don't know much about this, but I read an account – and I look into it a little bit – how there are some cemeteries in the South that were divided along racial lines. There is one in Georgia where you'll find a white man buried in a place that otherwise was only African-American people. You see, when he was still a boy, his mother died. His father employed Mandy, a Christian black woman, to help care for his son. Mandy gave the boy the love she'd give her own child. One such display of this was: she would come to his room, lean over, and wake him with a gentle, "Wake up, God's mornin' is come." Even when he had grown up and would come home for holidays and summers, Mandy still would begin the day with, "Wake up, God's mornin' is come." When Mandy died, he got the message: "Can you come to her funeral?" Standing at Mandy's grave, he turned to those with him and said, "If I die before Jesus returns, I want to be buried here beside Mandy. I like to think that on Resurrection Day I'll get to hear her say, 'Wake up, my boy, God's mornin' is come!'"

Did you hear what the boy had learned? When Mandy said "God's morning is come" all those days, she wasn't just talking about that ball of gas in the sky that brings physical light and warmth for each day. She taught him about Jesus – about Jesus' presence – about His return. Whether she took him to this Malachi passage, or not, he understood the truth that is here: "For you who trust my name," says the Lord, "the sun of righteousness will rise, and there will be healing in His wings."

Last Judgment is not a scary thing, the Last Day never need be a scary thought, for those who trust in Jesus. Every day of our lives here – though we don't see Him - we live under the shelter of Jesus' righteousness and love. And on the Last Day we will see with our own eyes: Jesus, our healer, our righteousness, our Life.

Thanks be to God. He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Stand firm then. Don't let anything move you from your faith in Jesus. Amen.