

The Best of Times, The Worst of Times

promise: Christ died for us so that we might be brought to the New Day

Pastor Timothy A. Duesenberg

Malachi 4:1-6; Psalm 98; 2 Thessalonians 3:1-13; Luke 21:5-28
(23rd Sunday after Pentecost, 11/13/22)

But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings – v. 2

Lead In – I remember back in High School in a English Literature Class we learned of the importance of a good first line to a story. And we were introduced to one of the best in Charles Dickens' "Tale of Two Cities". The memorable line goes, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair." Something like that is going on in our First Lesson...

I. The Prophet Malachi Introduces the Worst First

- Looking forward to the Day of the LORD, but...
- Anxious for justice, but thinking its not with me...
- Not only refiner's fire, but picture of clay and the kiln...

II. Malachi Saves The Best for the Other Hand

- But for those who fear God's name... Who are they?
- The dawn of a new day like none other...
- The righteous sun with healing in its wings...

III. The Awaited Day Has Come In Surprising Way

- John the Baptist came in the spirit & power of Elijah...
- The divine light enters into the world of darkness...
- The first advent without all the heat of the oven...

Parting Shot – So, for you and me, will Christ's return at the end of the age be the best of times, or the worst of times? Will the light of that day be an all consuming oven, or the most brilliant sunlight and new day ever imaged, in vivid color and splendor beyond anything eye has ever seen? The gospel has come to us, the power of God (cf Ro 1:16) for salvation giving us the victory Christ won on the Cross...

Am 5:18-19 Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! Why would you have the day of the Lord? It is darkness, and not light, as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him, or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall, and a serpent bit him.

Je 18:1-4 The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord: "Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will let you hear my words." So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do.

Luther's Expl to 1st Comm: We are to fear, love, and trust God above anything else.

Jb 1:1 There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job, and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil.

Malachi 4:1-6 ESV

The Great Day of the LORD

¹"For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. ²But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. ³And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts.

⁴"Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.

⁵"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. ⁶And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction."

2Pe 1:19 And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.

Ps 91:4 He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge.

Lk 13:34b How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!

Lk 1:16 (*The words of the angel to Zechariah about the birth of his son*) And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children.

Mt 11:14 And if you are willing to accept it, he [John the Baptist] is Elijah who is to come.

Mt 2:16 (*As Jesus begins his ministry He declares the words of the Prophet Isaiah*) The people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.

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