

November 11, 2012
Last Judgment

"Leap for Joy Judgment Day Is Coming"

MALACHI 4:1,2

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. ² 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.

The Bible uses pictures from farming and ranching to show God's love for us. "The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want." The sheep that is under the care of Jesus the Good Shepherd is always safe and secure. Today we have before us a lesser known picture from farming and ranching. The calf leaps and kicks up its heels after being released from the stall. That's what you will do this week if the Lord returns on clouds of glory. The Apostle Paul writes in Philippians "Rejoice always! The end is near!"

We also call this last day judgment day. This is the day when we will have to stand before the Lord and answer to him for the lives we have lived. That's scary if you think of how often you have failed to live up to what God expects of you just in this past week, let alone your whole life. How can the last day or judgment day be a happy day, a day when we kick up our heels like calves released from the stall? With the perfect life Jesus lived for you and the perfect payment he made for your sin, you already know what your verdict will be. If facing God in the final judgment depends on me, then there can be no joy in my life. If facing God in the final judgment depends on Jesus and what he has done to save me, then I have hope and the greatest joy that anyone could ever have.

See the fire that will burn

How scary the last day would be if we did not have Jesus! "Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evil doer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire." Notice it does not say the day might come. It says the day is coming. The Lord does not tell us when this day is coming, but he tells us simply that it is coming. Jesus gives us signs that keep reminding us the day could come at anytime, even before you go home from this worship service. You know the signs: the wars and rumors of wars, false teaching in churches, famines and earthquakes. You do not know what the rest of this year will bring for our nation or for your personal life. Costco sells survival kits. Perhaps you store extra water, flashlights and some extra food just in case. We don't know what the future holds but we do know who holds the future and we do know the Lord has already determined when the last day will be. The day is coming! That is a rock solid truth that looms up large before us every day.

When the last day comes there will be fire. The Lord tells us "it will burn like a furnace." The Hebrew word for "furnace" refers to the small clay ovens people used at that time for turning their flour in tasty bread. Picture in your mind a clay pot with a hole in which you could start a fire. The fire would heat up the clay pot. Then you could place your flour

tortilla or flat bread on the hot surface. Look into the clay pot and see the fire burn. So there will be fire on the last day. 2 Peter 3 describes the fire of destruction on the last day with these words, "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare." Some would say that the greatest problem facing the world today is global warming. We would say the greatest problem facing the world is global fire that will take place on the last day of which the Bible speaks so often.

Some suggest that when Jesus returns in glory he will set up a kingdom here on this earth where he will reign for a thousand years. That won't happen. If the world in which we live is destroyed by fire as the Bible teaches, there will be nothing left to rule. All of this destruction by fire will happen quickly, in a moment and in a flash. Acts 24:15 also says that there will be a resurrection of the just and the unjust. Everyone will immediately stand before God in the judgment as we were told in our second lesson, "man is destined to die once, and after that comes the judgment." There are no second chances.

The fire will destroy the world. Fire will also punish forever those who are the arrogant and evildoers. "All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire. Not a root or branch will be left them." It is so hard to grasp this teaching from the Bible about eternal fire for those people who are arrogant and evil. We can only believe it is true with faith that accepts the words of the Bible to be literally true. Jesus spoke about such eternal fire when he told about the king who says to the wicked, "Depart from me you who are cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." I have seen up close what fires in Santa Barbara County can do not just to grass and stubble but to branches and tree trunks and even burn so hot the roots in the ground are burnt up.

God has eternal fire reserved for the arrogant and evildoers. The arrogant had their fun mocking God and the Christians when they lived on this earth. 2 Peter 3 says of them, "First of all you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own desires. They will say, 'Where is this coming he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.'" If only people believed in creation. Did you hear of the people in Georgia who cast 4000 ballots for Charles Darwin? How they must have chortled with delight as they arrogantly wrote in the name of "Charles Darwin" on their ballots. This past week an evil doer was sentenced to life in prison for shooting people in Arizona including a congress woman. He will have to stand before God in the final judgment and answer to God for the sins he has committed.

Who are the arrogant? Have I been arrogant? Have I ever thought too much of myself and put myself ahead of the Lord? I wish I could say I have loved the Lord God with all my heart, all my soul and all my strength, but I have not. Being arrogant includes coming to church and saying "I am going to change my life" and then going back to doing the same old things again and again and again. If doing evil is only opening fire with a gun at a crowd of people, then I am not an evil doer. If doing evil includes having evil thoughts towards other people or not loving them as much as I should, then I am in the class of people the Lord calls evildoers who will burn like stubble on the last day.

The prophet Malachi tells the people they have wearied the Lord their God by saying, "All who do evil are good in the eyes of the Lord, and he is pleased with them. Where is the

God of justice?" The city of Jerusalem and the temple of the Lord were in ruins during the Babylonian Captivity and no body cared. People were not bringing their offerings to the Lord and nobody cared. They were defrauding people of their wages and oppressing widows and orphans. Nobody cared. By his very nature our God must punish all sin with his system of justice which is perfection. Whatever and whoever does not measure up to his holiness and perfection must face his wrath and anger on the last day. The words "all" and "every" includes all of us. Romans 3 says, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."

See the Sun of Righteousness rise with healing

God cares about what will happen to you when judgment day comes. God cared about these people living in Jerusalem at the time after the captivity who were cutting corners with God and trying to get by with the minimum.

Listen to how much God cares about people. "But for you who revere his 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."

You know the name of the Lord. You revere your Heavenly Father because your Father has given his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for your sin. You revere and love the name of Jesus. The name Jesus means Savior, the one who rescues you and delivers you. When you are facing your last hours of life on this earth you want to be surrounded by people who sing to you, "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so." You want to have some saying to you, "The Lord is my Shepherd" whether facing death or the greater challenges of life itself. You want someone praying with you the words of the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father..." You love and you revere the names of the Lord that he has revealed to you here in the Bible.

We revere and love God's name. We love the name given to us here for Jesus, this comforting name, "The Sun of Righteousness." Just as I have nothing to do with the sun shining through my office window as I typed the words of this sermon in my computer, I have nothing to do with the righteousness that God's Son provides me as a free gift. The warming rays of sun and the light from the sun bring life to this earth. Look at Jesus and see in him the perfect life you could never live. Look at Jesus and see in him the perfect payment for every bit of arrogance and every evil deed done in your past life. How clearly Paul expressed his hope in this righteousness that is found only in Christ, "that I may be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ-the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith."

In our gospel for today, Jesus spoke these amazing words, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned, he has crossed over from death to life." Notice Jesus did not say, "will have eternal life" but "has eternal life." He did not say, "will cross over from death to life" but "he has crossed over from death to life." Colossians tells us that our life is already hidden with God in Christ. Because of Jesus you already know what your verdict is when the final judgment comes. Instead of spending eternity in the lake of fire, you look forward to the place that God has prepared for you.

Maybe you have days when you feel like a calf that has been spending its winter locked up in the barn. Now it is spring. The sun is shining. The grass is green. The gate is open. It is time to kick up our heels. We live each day in anticipation of hearing Jesus say, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. And so with our feet kicking high in the air like calves released from the stall we say, "Come Lord Jesus, come quickly." Amen.