

Malachi 4:1-6
"The End!"
Pentecost

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Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
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Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God, our Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen! Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

[Introduction]

The people of Israel were once powerful, then crushed and taken captive.

By God's grace they returned to their land and rebuilt the temple.

Yet their community soon became one corrupted
by false priests and deceptive people,
and what they saw with their eyes became "reality" for them.

Into that setting came Malachi, one of the last of the Old Testament prophets.

He was sent to call the people to repentance and
to proclaim the truth of God in the midst of the ruin and confusion of humanity.

Though he prophesied more than four hundred years before Christ, his words are
as vivid and applicable to today's church as they were when they were first spoken.

It was easy then
and it's easy now
to let what our eyes see become the defining reality not only for our lives,
but also for our very understanding of our relationship to God.

What a tragedy, says the message of Malachi!

There is something far greater and far more real
than THIS present moment OR THIS present world.

Although we can't see it now, we will see it on that great and final day
when Jesus returns as Lord of lords and King of kings.

Everything else, including this moment in time and all that appears to be so real,
ultimately will pass away.

[Our Eyes]

It is NOT what we discern with our eyes.

Sometimes we think we know what is real and substantial by looking at the world around us. The people of Israel thought they had it all worked out. Everywhere the wicked seemed to do just fine. They even said to the Lord and his prophet, ***“All who do evil are good in the eyes of the LORD, and he is pleased.”*** (Mal 2:17)

When the Lord confronted them, they sought to evade the question by asking, ***“What have we said against you?”*** (3:13). And the Lord responded, ***“You have said, ‘It is futile to serve God. What did we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the LORD Almighty? But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly the evildoers prosper, and even those who challenge God escape’”*** (vv 14–15). They were convinced that what they saw was all there was, and so they lived as if it were.

Okay. That was then and now is now. It’s different for us, right? Or is it?

It does seem as if the arrogant and evildoers prosper.
Immorality is portrayed as a healthy alternative lifestyle.
Celebrities can live reprehensible personal lives and still be lauded as great people.
Popular role models for children seem to be models of rebellion against God,
not people of virtue.

Even the church seems enamored with what we see around us.
Some have a watered-down version of religion,
far removed from the biblical tenets of Christianity.

We’re told:

“All gods are the same.”

“It’s intolerant to insist that there is absolute truth.”

“The church must look and act like the world to be accepted by the world.”

And we buy into it!

We essentially say: ***“It is futile to serve God. What did we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the LORD Almighty? But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly the evildoers prosper, and even those who challenge God escape.”***

We can no more get away with this than those who heard Malachi could.
Our Lord in his mercy confronts us as he confronted them so long ago.
What condemned the ancient people of God

also condemns the modern people of God.
But, more important,
what redeemed, renewed, and reclaimed the ancient people
also redeems, renews, and reclaims us!

[**Word**] The tragic fact is that not all who heard the prophet believed his words.

Some did, however, for we're told:

“Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name” (v 16).

From the tragic mass of rebellious Israel, God called forth his faithful ones.
They saw with their eyes the same things others saw.
But they knew that the Lord had a greater reality
—a reality defined not by sight but by faith.

What did they say to each other?
We're not told, but it's apparent that it was pleasing to God.
No new actions on their part were required;
they simply confessed.

Now, what about you and me?

We are indeed called to faith through things not understood by this world.
Have you heard a pastor with his all-so-human voice say,
“Your sins are forgiven”?
Have you been touched by the water of Baptism?
Have you knelt at the altar and received bread and wine
while fully believing they are the very body and blood of Jesus?

Then you have experienced in this world the very promise of God's future!

All this is based solely on the magnificent grace of God.
It was his grace that sent his Son into this world to share our humanity.
It was his grace that led Jesus to Calvary,
where he, the Lamb, was slain once and for all for all humanity.
It was his grace that raised Jesus on Easter morning,
granting freedom and forgiveness and hope beyond this world for all humanity.

This day the God of all grace
sets us free from the world by presenting to us again his word of forgiveness,
a forgiveness that we share with the world around us.

[The End]

All will see the real world of God's future.
Listen again to the final words of our text.

***“But for you who fear my name,
the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.”***

What will you see in God's future?

You will see the redeemed of God, his own Israel (Ps 130).

You will see the blessed Son of God, who redeemed you

through his holy, precious blood as the great Alpha and Omega (Rev 22).

You will fall in wonder at the new heaven and earth, the home of righteousness,

as you stand among those whose robes are made white in the blood of the Lamb.

This is your future for it is God's future.

This is the guarantee of God's own holy promise.

This is the end of all he has done for you and in you.

This is what defines you: you are his child,

being prepared for a life far beyond anything this world has seen or known.

[Conclusion]

Until then you and I will live in this world.

It's Pentecost; you have the Holy Spirit,

But here we live as strangers and pilgrims.

Our reality is greater than that granted by this poor world.

By his grace we go beyond what our eyes see

to what our hearts believe without seeing,

which will ultimately be seen by all creation!

Even so, come, Lord Jesus! AMEN!

Now you are the body of Christ, each one of you part of it! Amen!