

Someone asked me recently what I liked most about living in Florida. I told them I love the sunshine. I love to take a walk in the early evening when the sun is getting ready to set. Goodbye Michigan. No cold, winter weather. No snowstorms. No Snowblower. Beautiful sunny days and warm weather. The Florida Sun is a great pick me up. It picks up your spirits, relaxes you, those stiff joints and limbs seem more limber. The sun has healing qualities.

But the sun is not always a warm healer. Sometimes, that same sunlight can be destructive. How many of you full-time Florida residents have been in to the dermatologist to deal with skin cancer. How many of you have experienced a good sunburn? Several years ago, my daughter Carolyn and I climbed Mt Sinai in Egypt. Why is it when we climbed Mt. Sinai that the tour began at 2:00 A.M. in the morning with flashlights? Why did we climb in total darkness up a rocky and steep path? Oh, yes, you might say, it was because you wanted to have the breathtaking view from the top of Mt. Sinai of seeing the sun rise at 5:00 A.M.? That may be true. But the real reason is that the temperature goes anywhere from 100 degrees to 130 degrees in the Sinai. The sunlight would have drained the energy out of us, and hindered the enjoyment of our climb. Plus a sunburn could have really made our body miserable for days to come in the future.

The point I am making is that the sun can be a blessing or it can be a curse. As we study God's Word this morning, we see that our spiritual lives face a similar dilemma. Jesus, the Real Son, will either be a blessing or a curse for you when He returns for Judgment Day. It is important that you be prepared for his return. That means Christian that you "Use Sonscreen to avoid SonBurn!"

Malachi was the last prophet that the Lord spoke through to warn his people about their sin. Those Israelites had a very storied past of wickedness and rebellion. God led them out of Egypt but they complained about being in the desert. God sent them food and water in miraculous ways, but they didn't like it. God warned them not to get mixed up with Canaanite practices when they entered the promised-land. But they started to worship their false gods. They were very immoral. They would lie and cheat. Their leaders and priests were corrupt. Finally, God punished them by allowing the Assyrians and Babylonians to conquer them and carry them off into captivity. That brings us to the time of Malachi, about 500 years before Jesus. God mercifully allowed the Israelites to return to their promised land. But they still continued in their sin. They moved farther and farther away from a heart-felt love for God to a mere outward show.

Now God was telling them what was going to happen. There would be a "day" coming, and coming soon, when everything would be destroyed and every sin would be punished. It wasn't going to be a good day for sinners: "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." Not knowing when this day would come was supposed to "scare them straight," so to speak. The impending disaster and destruction and pain and punishment of this day was a call to repentance—a call to turn from their evil ways and to turn back to the Lord. They didn't know when this "day" was coming, so sinners had better beware.

From the rest of Scripture, we know what “day” God is speaking about through Malachi. It’s the same day he speaks of through a number of other prophets. It’s the same day that Jesus spoke of in the gospel today. That coming day is Judgment Day.

Listen again to the Lord’s words: “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.” There appears to be two kinds of fire or heat that are going on here. First on Judgment Day itself. We find out in other parts of Scripture that this world will be destroyed when Jesus returns. But it is the second kind of heat or fire that is the scary part: “All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire.” This second kind of heat or fire would be hell. It is interesting to see how the world views hell. Some think of it as just a hot place way down there for really, really bad people. Some view hell almost comically, like the cute little red guy with pointy tail and a pitchfork. Some don’t even think about it.

There is nothing funny about hell. Nor is there anything funny about telling a person to go there or that God should send someone or some thing there. Ignoring it won’t make it go away. Hell is a terrible place. It is a place of fire and torture. But the real horror of hell is that it is the place where God’s love isn’t. Hell is when God surrounds someone with only His justice and hatred against sin.

Here’s the scariest part of all—listen carefully one last time: “All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire.” There are two words there that are absolutely terrifying—all and every. All the arrogant and every evildoer. Arrogance is thinking your life and your stuff is too important, more important than spending time with the Lord. It’s thinking your to do list is far more important than God’s to do list. Arrogance is thinking that your money is what you earned and that you got it for yourself, ignoring that God gives all blessings and refusing to give back what is due him. Arrogant is coming to church and hearing about your sin and thinking, “Oh yes, I shouldn’t do that,” but then going right out and doing the same thing all over again.” Arrogance is judging another person harsher than you judge yourself.

Evil is the opposite of good. Instead of benefiting someone it’s hurts them. Evil is talking with language and jokes that would make your mother—or God—cringe. Evil is thinking about someone else in even the slightest inappropriate way. Evil is causing problems. Evil is losing your cool and blowing your top in anger. Evil is gossiping about someone, with either lies or the truth.

That all describes us, doesn’t it? You’ve been arrogant. You’ve done evil. And so have I. And God says, “All the arrogant and every evildoer,”

So who can stand in the presence of the sun of righteousness and not get burned? Who will escape the flames of hell come Judgment Day? The reverent will. For while there will be no second chances come Judgment Day, none will be needed for those who have put their trust in Jesus. That’s what Malachi assures us of when he wrote: “But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings” (Malachi 4:2).

Have you ever gone camping in the rain? It's not a pleasant experience is it? You're cold. You're wet. And after a few hours of tossing and turning you're seriously considering pulling up stakes and heading home to a warm shower and a bed, even if it is 3 am and you'll have to drive hundreds of miles to get there. But what can make all the difference to such a camping trip? The sun can, right? If the sun should come out the next morning, it will quickly warm you and help you see everything in a new light. Mountains that looked foreboding in the damp fog the night before now stand as splendid sentinels begging to be conquered. After twenty minutes of standing in the rejuvenating sunlight you'll have forgotten the dreary experience the night before. That's what believers have to look forward to on Judgment Day. Jesus will return to warm us and make us forget the pain and suffering we have endured here. But how can this be? How can Jesus burn the arrogant and warm the reverent at the same time?

It's simple. The reverent are wearing sunscreen. They are dressed in a robe of righteousness that Jesus made with his tears, blood, and guts when he died on Calvary and came back to life again three days later. The reverent have all the carcinogens washed clean from their skin by Christ's death at Calvary. The arrogant, on the other hand, foolishly dress in their own "good" deeds. They think that because they've been pretty good people that they will be able to withstand the sun of righteousness. Well that's like a tourist thinking he can safely view a volcanic eruption up close because he's dressed in his lucky t-shirt and shorts!

Friends, don't be arrogant. Don't view yourself more highly than you ought. Instead be reverent. Humbly acknowledge before the Lord that you have not always put him first and stop blaming others for your sins. It's not the government's fault you don't give God your firstfruits. It's not your spouse's fault that you are losing your temper. The reverent are not only humble, they are trusting. They throw themselves on Jesus' mercy confident that he has paid for all sin. It's this confidence in Jesus that makes us ready for the day he will come to warm us.

And He won't just warm us but also free us. Malachi likens it to calves being released from their stalls after being penned up all winter long. Those words remind me of when I used to put our first golden retriever Sassy as a puppy into a kennel at night in the basement. In the morning when I would release her from her kennel, She would race out of the kennel, up the stairs, wanting to run around outside. Sassy felt so good. She would run and jump for the sheer joy of it. That's the way it is for Christ's people who have been cooped up in the kennel of this earth when Christ returns. We are free finally from the presence and effects of sin. We'll throw aside our walkers and our canes. We'll straighten out our backs bent over for so many years. We'll run and jump and roll down the grassy hills of heaven. Judgment day holds no fear for us. For we'll be going home. And forever we will be warmed by the love of the Son.

So when will the sun of righteousness rise? We don't know. We can say this though. The glow of dawn has been in the air for some time now. Jesus said that wars, rumors of wars, false prophets would all be signs of the End Times, as would the fact that his Word will be preached in all the world. I'd say that everything is set for Christ's return. It has been for some time. So get rid of the arrogance and reverently put on that heavenly sunscreen, Jesus Christ. For only then are we ready to have fun in the Son! Amen.