

## A Day to Remember

✦ **Coming in fire (v.1)**

✦ **Rising in righteousness (v.2)**

In the name of Jesus, our righteous Judge, our Savior and Friend, dearly redeemed believers:

One of the great lessons of history is the helpful perspective that there is really *“nothing new under the sun.”* (Ecclesiastes 1:9) For instance, historians tell us that during the American Revolution about 1/3 of the colonists were Tories who wanted to go back under the English government, 1/3 were Patriots fighting for freedom and about 1/3 didn’t care. They were just going about their lives as best they could. Likewise in the American Civil War there were God-fearing people on both sides of the firing line, and thousands more who just wanted to mind their own business and stay home. American elections can make citizens pretty depressed because one side has to lose. In human history kingdoms rise and nations fall according to the plans of God Almighty. But people tend to think this all just endless history.

“Not so!” says the LORD God through His holy prophets. They still cry out in the Holy Scripture that *“the Day of the LORD”* is coming. It will be **A Day to Remember** – first of all because it is...

✦ **Coming in fire (v.1)**

It’s easy to get cynical and careless about life. In America we’ve seen men and women who once had high ideals to be good civil servants. But then they turn into self-seeking politicians. It makes people throw up their hands in dismay lamenting, “They’re all the same anyway!” And ultimately, we humans are all sinners. But soon we may begin to ask, “What’s the use? Why even try? What does it matter if your life is good or bad?” We may even start asking such questions about God. At that point we’re right where the Israelites found themselves in Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament – 400 B.C.

Try to imagine the deep disappointment of the Jews in Jerusalem. They had a fine governor in Nehemiah who actually paid his own expenses and got them organized to rebuild the protective wall around Jerusalem in spite of strong opposition from their Palestinian neighbors. Unfortunately, it seems Governor Nehemiah had returned for the second and final time to Persia and his duties as trusted cupbearer to the king. The temple in Jerusalem had been rebuilt before Nehemiah’s time, but it was just a tiny stone shell compared to the grandeur of Solomon’s temple which the Babylonians demolished and burned with the city in 586 B.C. Everywhere you looked inside the city walls were houses in need of repair and streets still filled with rubble. We sometimes complain if it takes too long to remodel our house or apartment. But just imagine a whole city in shambles and not enough time or money to rebuild and repair. No one had heavy equipment like cranes and bobcats. Arms and hands were growing weak.

Now can you understand why the questions started coming? “What does it matter whether we are the chosen people of God? Is He even aware of what we’re going through down here?” *“All who do evil are good in the eyes of the LORD, and he is pleased with them.... Where is the God of justice?”* (2:17) Pride and arrogance make us hopeless. We challenge God with evil if we think He does not care. People will throw away all moral constraints and demand equal rights for all sorts of perversions when they think God is not watching or does not even exist. People call evil “good” and good “evil.” It’s so natural to our sinful nature to start enjoying the bad things God forbids and ignoring the good things He requires.

What kind of video would roll on our lives from those sad times when we thought no one was watching or that God was unaware? If we were always aware of the loving way our Creator feeds and clothes us, would we worry about food and clothing? If we really gave God credit for all the gifts He gives day by day, would spreading God’s Word seem too expensive? Are we ultimately any different

than the careless Jews of Malachi's Jerusalem who brought diseased and crippled offerings to the temple? Why do we give God the leftovers of our money, our time or our talents? We bury ourselves in our work, our fun, our families as if the Day of the LORD will never come. Everyone needs to hear this and more than ever today. If God said that the Day was coming quickly thousands of years ago, then God's judgment **Day to Remember** is much nearer now. The prophets cry out as the Holy Spirit shines the powerful beam of God's spotlight into the murky darkness of tomorrow. *"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."* No houses, no cars, only pain and anguish. We cannot take anything with us. Hearse have no trailer hitches. Faith in Jesus will be all that matters on the LORD's **Day to Remember – Coming in fire**, and...

### ✦ **Rising in righteousness (v.2)**

But what about those who do care? What about us whom God has brought together to listen to His Word today. We admit we are sinners. We confess to God the sins we know and those we do not know. *"Who can understand his errors, forgive my hidden faults."* (Psalm 19:12) We *"revere"* God's Name because we know He deserves so much better from us. He deserves our deepest love and our best work in everything. He deserves to see us loving our spouse and caring for our children when we're home together and when we're far apart. Yet it troubles us deeply that our hearts are so often far from home and even farther away from our heavenly home because our thoughts are so far from God.

That's why God does not wait for us. He comes to us in His Word first to warn us, but then most of all to comfort and console us in His loving kindness and tender mercy. All the prophets pointing to the LORD's **Day to Remember** were pointing first to the cross of the coming Christ. God teaches us to know the LORD and fear His Name in the godly sense of deep reverence and awe. He takes away our worries, doubts and fears by His promises of grace and blessing. He does not want us to live every day in a shadow. God gives us the wisdom to see that money cannot buy happiness. Worldly position and power cannot give you peace. There is so much more to life than fear and mindless pursuit of pleasure.

"Yes, there is!" say all God's prophets. They all agree with the Holy Spirit's encouragement here through Malachi: *"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."*

This is easy to imagine if you grew up on a farm. Little calves feel frisky and full of energy after being cooped up for months in the barn. When springtime finally comes, and the gate is thrown open, you have to laugh as those little guys jostle each other racing out into the knee deep grass. Kicking up their heels, they don't look back. The barn is quickly forgotten in all the fun and frolic of eating to their hearts' content as their little bodies grow big and strong in the spring-green pastures.

But right now in God's world the grass is brown and the leaves have fallen off the trees. Global warming will soon give way to the global burning on God's great **Day to Remember**. God has promised that the elements will melt with fervent heat. (2 Peter 3:10-12) God plans to make everything new.

It's as if we were standing in the middle of a dry and blistered prairie. The hot wind starts to whip the clouds of dust on the horizon. A tiny spark will set this world ablaze. When prairie fires were coming, the ranchers out west knew what to do to save themselves and their homes. They started small, controlled fires to burn up all the grass as close to their buildings as they could in hopes that when the firestorm finally came, there would be no fuel left to burn. The flames would race past their little island of safety. That is where God wants us to run today, dear friends. Listen to God calling through the wind and smoke to the safety of the cross. When Christ came and died, His blood washed away the tinder dry fuel of our sins that would set our souls on fire like stubble in hell. God's Word and sacrament are His little island of safety in a dangerous world. For all who trust in Jesus, healing will come in the evergreen pastures of heaven. And you and I will kick up our heels forever. Amen.