

This is the time of year when many retired Michiganders head south to the great state of Florida. We know why they leave Michigan. It gets dark, cloudy, cold, and snowy around here. We don't get to see the sun much in the next 5 months. Studies have found, that where there is an absence of sunlight, the depression rate in people goes up as well. Oh boy, can't wait for another Michigan winter. But things are different in Florida. No cold, winter weather. No snowstorms. Beautiful sunny days and warm weather. In the Fort Myers area or Miami area, you can actually swim in warm waters while others up north are freezing. The Florida Sun is a great pick me up. It picks up your spirits, relaxes you, those stiff joints and limbs seem more limber.

But the sun is not always Mr. Sunshine. Sometimes, that same sunlight can be destructive. Why is it when I climbed Mt. Sinai last June, 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 lived about 430 years before Christ was born. He lived at a time when God's people, the Israelites, were tired of seeing the "wicked" prosper while those who did "good" had nothing to show for their efforts. God sent Malachi to assure his people that, in time, he would punish the wicked. But before they rejoiced at that bit of news the people were to carefully consider whether or not they were among the wicked. In our text God described the wicked as those who were "arrogant." Was God speaking about the Paris Hiltons of the day? Was he ranting against overpaid professional athletes? No he wasn't. The book of Malachi starts with these words: "It is you, O priests, who show contempt for my name... When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?" says the LORD Almighty.

Ouch! Those words hit close to home. Have I, like the clergy of Haggai's day, shown contempt for God's awesome name? Have I dared to bring him less than my best in sermon and Bible class preparation? Have I used old material rather than spending time developing my own through personal study of the Word? Have I looked upon at times my calling to serve you with God's Word as a burden? With shame I have to say, "Yes, at times I have." And therefore I am among the arrogant that God speaks about in our text.

If God's spokesmen show contempt for his name, should it be surprising when parishioners do the same? And so God said of the people of Malachi's day: "You flood the LORD's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your

offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. 14 You ask, “Why?” It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant” (Malachi 2:13, 14). When God talks about the arrogant he’s not referring to people “out there.” He’s not speaking about those who slept in this morning and didn’t bother to come to church. He’s talking to us, his people who come to worship, who even bring offerings, but perhaps have forgotten that worship does not end with the final hymn. Worship of the true God continues outside of church in the way that we treat one another – including our spouse. If we have broken faith with our spouse through physical or even emotional adultery, we have broken faith with God and are also included in those whom God considers to be “arrogant.”

Does this sermon not apply to you because you’re not clergy nor are you married? Well God isn’t done describing the arrogant. He said: “8Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. “But you ask, ‘How do we rob you?’ “In tithes and offerings. 9 You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing me. 10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it” (Malachi 3:8-10). The arrogant are also those who withhold from the Lord their firstfruit offerings. The arrogant see their time and their cash as their own. They make excuses as to why they can’t give the way God wants us to. They may say that they’re waiting for a worthy project to contribute towards. Or they’re waiting to make that first million. But what does God say? He urges us to put him first NOW. He wants us to determine how much of our income we’re going to give back to him before we spend on ourselves.

No, it’s not just the self-absorbed pop stars, nor the greedy first round draft picks that God considers to be arrogant. All who have made God # 2 in their life are the arrogant. That’s us, isn’t it? And that’s bad news because God says through Malachi: “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” (Malachi 4:1). When the sun of righteousness, Jesus Christ, arises, the arrogant, whom God compares to stubble, the leftover, no good part of the grain that has been harvested, will be so thoroughly burned that there will neither be root nor branch left to it. In other words, once God gets hold of the arrogant on Judgment Day there will be no hope of salvation for them. Their future is bleak because God’s judgment is fierce and it’s final.

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 kilometers 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 church council's fault you don't give God your firstfruits. It's not your spouse's fault that you're showing more interest than you should in that co-worker. Just as it's not your fault when I see my pastoral calling as a burden. That's my fault, my sin, when I fail to see this work as a privilege for Jesus' sake. 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 my dog Brodie in the morning when I go to release him from his kennel where he has been cooped up all night long. Brodie races out of the kennel, up the stairs, wanting to run around outside. Brodie feels good. He runs and jumps 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. Our spirits feel good 24/7. We now will kick and frolic in God's sunshine forever.

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.