

Have you ever watched a movie where the bad guy wins at the end? I don't mean a movie where it seems like the bad guy is going to win, but a movie where evil wins the day. How did you feel about that movie? If I had to guess, I guess that you hated it. It isn't the way that it was supposed to go. The bad guy isn't supposed to win. Good is supposed to triumph over evil. Even when it seems predictable, we like movies where the hero saves the day, wins the girl, and beats the bad guy.

But when we look at the world, it seems like evil wins far more often than good does. Every day, it seems like the world gets just a little bit worse than yesterday. We hear in the news about some new disaster or some new crime in the world. We see on Facebook and Twitter the nasty things that strangers say to one another. We heard this year about riots in the big cities, and the way that people are trying to change this country. We've even heard unbelievable things, like the scandal surrounding Jeffrey Epstein last year or the human trafficking that continues in our world, even in North Dakota. Evil seems to win over and over and over again. When will it all come to an end? We just want somebody in a white hat to come and clean up this mess, but it seems like he will never come.

In the midst of all of this evil, it's very easy to become discouraged. And when we are discouraged, Christians, it's very easy to become discouraged with God. When will He come and do something about all of this? What's He waiting for? Why do evil men win so often and good people suffer in this world? Come on, God! Do something about this! We get impatient and then we take it out on God.

But this isn't a new thing, Christians. God's people have always struggled with evil, and God's people have always struggled with waiting on God. In the book of Malachi, which we read this morning, God's people were struggling with evil. Malachi says, just a little bit before our reading: "Your words have been hard against me, says the LORD. But you say, 'How have we spoken against you?' You have said, 'It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the LORD of hosts? And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape.'" When Malachi wrote these words, Israel had seen God do some amazing things. He had brought His people back to the promised land after 70 years of exile. He had helped them rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. He had helped them rebuild the temple which had been destroyed. Again and again, God had done some amazing things for His people. But now they struggled with evil in the world. It seemed like the wonderful things God had done were long gone, and God wasn't going to do them anymore. So Israel asked, what's the point of following God? It doesn't make any difference anyway.

Have you ever felt the same way, Christians? Have you ever been angry with God, wondering why evil seems to win in this world? Maybe you don't want to say that you have been angry. Maybe you just want to say you've been frustrated or impatient. But it's the same idea. God seems far away, and evil seems so close. When will God do something about it? But let me ask you this, Christians. Why do you feel this way? Do you feel this way because you think that God can't or won't do anything about it? Or do you feel this way because you know that God can do something about it? Those are two very different reasons, and they make all the difference in the world.

In the book of Malachi, Israel felt that God couldn't or wouldn't do something about the evil they saw. They felt like God was far away, and it was pointless to serve Him. That's why God says: "Your words have been hard against me." Israel spoke against God as if He couldn't do anything about evil in the world, and that was their sin. If we think that God can't or won't

take care of evil, we speak hard words against Him. If we see the way this country is going and think that it can't possibly turn around, we speak hard words against Him. If we see the riots and the violence in the cities and think that God doesn't care, we speak hard words against Him. If we see evils like slavery in our nation and even in our state and think that God is somewhere far off, we speak hard words against Him. It's one thing to be angry with God, but it's another thing entirely to be angry because you think He is powerless against evil. It's easy to be pessimistic, jaded, or cynical about the world. But being pessimistic, jaded, or cynical about God is a hard word against Him.

So it's one thing to feel this way because you think God won't do something about it. But it's another thing to feel this way because you think God can do something about it. When we cry out to God to do something about evil, we can sometimes feel impatient because we know that God has promised to do something but He is making us wait. It's sort of like that feeling we get toward the end of a movie when the bad guy seems to be getting the upper hand. We *know* the good guy will win, and we feel impatient for that moment when good begins to win again. When we see evil in the world and know that God can and will do something about it, we start to wonder when it will happen, feeling anxious or even angry it isn't happening as fast as we would like.

Just look at the Psalms. There are so many of them which sound impatient or even angry with God. But they always trust in God, because God can do something about evil. Think about the words of Psalm 3. David says: "O Lord, how many are my foes! Many are rising against me; many are saying of my soul, 'There is no salvation for him in God.'" David was dealing with some pretty powerful enemies, and it looked like there was no hope for him. But David trusted in the Lord, because he knew that God could do something about it. David says: "But You, O Lord, are a shield about me." David knew that God would do something about it, and he said: "Arise, O Lord! Save me, O my God! For you strike all my enemies on the cheek; you break the teeth of the wicked." God could do something about evil, and God would do something about evil. All David had to do was wait.

And this is the message of our Old Testament reading from Malachi. God can and God will do something about the evil we see. Malachi says, "Behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch." A mighty day is coming when God will deal with all of the evil that we see in the world. On that day, God will rise up like the hot summer sun, and all evil will burn away before Him. It will not be able to stand against Him. God has promised to judge the world, and God will keep that promise. Good will win over evil forever. Every crime committed in this world will be judged. Those who bring chaos into the world will be condemned. Those who mistreat, abuse, or even enslave their fellow man will be thrown into hell, because God will make all things right on the Last Day. He can and He will also bring judgment before the end, because God will never let evil win.

And that's good news, Christians! I know we sometimes think of God judging the world as a bad or as a negative thing, something to be avoided. It is true that we do not want to fall into the hands of an angry God! But it is also good news for us, because God does not forget what has happened to His people. God knows every evil we suffer. God knows every terrible thing which happens in the world, even the things we would never even dream of. And God will do something about them all. God judges evil, Christians, because He loves you and He will take care of you forever.

When we see God rising like the sun, we shall “go out leaping like calves from the stall,” like calves that have been penned up too long and set free again, jumping and snorting and running. It will be a day of joy, a day unlike any other. God can and God will act, and evil will be no more. “You shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet.” Victory will belong to God and to the Church forever.

How do we know that this is true? How do we know that God can and will act? We know it because of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus suffered the very worst evil in the world. His own people rejected Him and crucified Him, murdering the Lord of glory. He was denied justice and suffered because of it. But the Father raised Him from the dead and set Him at His right hand, so that victory belongs to God forever. And when Jesus comes again to judge the world, burning like an oven, He will deliver us from every evil and bring us to Himself. Jesus shows us the power of God and the victory which will be ours. As Paul says, we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us, so why fear anything in the world?

So it’s OK to be impatient, Christians, impatient about the evil that we see. This isn’t the way the world should be. But trust in the Lord. He will do something about it. Good will triumph over evil, because God will judge the world. And when He comes, we will rejoice, because Jesus comes to save us.

To Him be the glory, now and forever. Amen.