

Sing before the service: Psalm 66:6

Our help is in the Name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.

Beloved, grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Psalm of praise 40:3, 4

Prayer

Psalm 118:13

Scripture reading: Malachi 4

Scripture text: Malachi 4:2; Catechism Lord's Day 5

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. (Malachi 4:2 NIV)

The sun of righteousness will rise. The Bible tells us that it will be a dreadful day when it happens.

- For the wicked it will be a very gloomy day because they will not be able to escape God's punishment.
- But at the same time it will be a glorious day for those who received free pardon through Someone else.

For those who were saved it will be a glorious day when the Sun of righteousness will rise over them.

- They will stand before God in the light of Jesus Christ's redemptive sacrifice.
- He will be the Sun shining upon them.
- This is how they are justified.

From time immemorial it has been important for people to know this.

- This is why the Heidelberg Catechism (HC) deals with it to remind us that the light of salvation will break through for us (Q & A 12 of HC).
- Here we do not only confess about our sins and the death penalty that follows.
- We place our hope on being saved from the severe punishment of God if only full payment could be made to satisfy God's justice.

This section of the HC lets us focus on hope – the hope we read about in the book of Malachi.

- Our life is not filled with darkness and judgement only.
- We know that all mankind live in the darkness of the shadow of death.
- But the Bible tells us that the LORD also knows people who do not belong there:

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. (Malachi 4:2 NIV)

These people do not enter darkness when they die, and for them the sun doesn't set when the Lord comes again.

- For them the sun of righteousness will rise.
- For them the eternal day begins.
- The eternal day of joy with God.

Now we must first learn what the Bible means with these words:

you who revere my name.

We also have to ascertain how we must revere the Name of the Lord. What do we do when we revere the Name of the Lord?

To revere the Name of the Lord means that we must believe in the majesty of God.

- It means that we will literally fear the power of God's holiness.
- The result is a chain reaction.
 - When you fear the Lord you will try to find out more about Him.
 - Fear of the Lord will prompt us to increase our knowledge of Him,
 - so that we will know exactly what angers the Lord,
 - and also what we should do in order to escape from his anger.

And this again results in better self-knowledge.

- I will then realise that I very well deserve the Lord's punishment.
- I do not want to be destroyed – no man wants to be destroyed – and therefore we ask: Is there any way we can escape the punishment of the Lord?

All these things are preached and symbolised by the night in this passage. Darkness is the symbol of sin and condemnation and misery.

BUT then the sun rises. God teaches us about his grace. This is the light that breaks through.

- The grace of the Lord is that someone can satisfy his justice.
- The law of the Lord can be executed. When this happens we can be saved from our sins.

This is then the grace of God: He will not punish us if his justice can be satisfied.

Can we satisfy his justice? Can I personally do anything to bear the punishment of God for my sins and still survive to go to heaven?

- No, unfortunately not, because we daily increase our debt.
- But can we be saved through Someone else?
- He is the Sun of righteousness Malachi speaks about.

This is exactly what the gospel is all about.

- We are saved through the Son of God – Someone else.
- The entire Old Testament preaches it – we who were totally lost through sin, will exult before the Lord in the hereafter!

In chapter 4:1 (and in HC 13 and 14) we learn about people who will remain in darkness.

- They are the people who do not seek salvation through Christ.
- The truth can only be found from God – and everyone who does not want to truly know Him and worship Him, will be in great trouble when the Jesus Christ arrives like the sun.
 - They have great trouble because man in his sins are linked to lies and evil.

The gospel of salvation requires that we should seek our salvation outside of ourselves – through Jesus Christ.

- We should completely part with the idea that we can save ourselves, or go to heaven under our own power.
- So often we hear people say: Whatever I have achieved was under my own power. Nothing and nobody supported me. I myself!

If we do not plead with the Lord for salvation, it means that we'll have to find it somewhere on earth.

- Either by someone else or by oneself – and this is after all out of the question.
- Hence such people are doomed because their guilt before the Lord increases instead of diminishes.

The problem arises from our kind of thinking because what we think and what the gospel preaches are totally conflicting.

- We think a lot of ourselves
- The gospel requires humbleness and self-knowledge.

Then listen to our conversations:

- Forever the chorus: I, I, I!
- Most of the times it's all about ME.
- This is a gospel where you are God yourself.
 - You bring about your own salvation.
 - God does not take you to heaven – you get there yourself.
- Many believers believe this!

If you think your life is good enough to deserve something, listen to what is written in Job 9:2:

Indeed, I know that this is true. But how can a mortal be righteous before God?

(Job 9:2 NIV)

Job knew very well that the kind of man he was could not appear before the Lord as he could not defend himself because of all his sins.

- Whoever overestimates himself, underestimates the Lord.
- Something is the matter with the way such a person worships.

Hence man is totally unable to pay for his sins.

- Also, nothing else in the creation can satisfy God's justice, because neither plants nor animals can be punished on our behalf. After all, they didn't sin.
- God is not so unrighteous that He would allow anything to be punished for trouble it has not caused.
 - The justice of God requires that the culprit himself has to be punished.
 - In other words, man had to pay for his sins.

One person cannot pay for another, because they are both evil. Everyone should pay for his own sins!

- After all, nothing in the creation can possibly sustain the burden of the wrath of God because of our sins.
- Therefore, if we continue seeking help on earth, God's sun will never rise over us, and then we'll remain in darkness.
- Nothing on earth can save us from eternal death; how can anything on earth then give us eternal life?

But it is still possible that the Sun of God's righteousness will rise over us.

- The Old Testament says a Saviour will come to earth.
 - And it happened.
 - The Son of God was born on earth.
 - And He was a true man.

At the beginning of this sermon we said we must fear the holiness of God.

- This is kind of easy, but another requirement is that we must believe that God became a man. And this is not so easy.
- You must know that the almighty God of heaven and earth became a true man and that He was born on earth. He was born as a human being so that there would be one man who could bear the punishment of God.

He can appear before God because He is God and therefore He can also sustain the burden of the wrath of God.

- And so He did, and through that He restored eternal life for us.
- He then also returned to us through the Holy Spirit.
- The Holy Spirit tells us about the justice of God. He preaches love and protection and preservation.

It's not just about the death of the Lord Jesus.

- We must also know what his death on the cross led to – final judgement.
- On that day it will just be about whether we believe in the Name of God and his meritorious sacrifice on the cross.
 - Then our salvation will depend on whether we believed that the Sun of God's righteousness rose over us when his Son died on Golgotha.

Malachi says the Second Coming will be a day that burns like a furnace.

- On that day the wicked will be set on fire like stubbles.
- They are the people who did not believe in the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus.
 - All they will be aware of on that day – and thereafter – is judgement, fire and eternal misery – the wrath of God because they pay for their sins.

Upon those who believed shines the sun of righteousness and glory.

- Their sins have been paid for.
- The redeemed will rejoice on that day.
- The prophet Malachi says that they will leap like calves released from the stall.

Beloved, forget about being able to escape from God's judgement on your own merit.

- The work of the Lord Jesus is sufficient.
- We do not worship Him in vain.
- Seek Him and worship Him and the sun of righteousness will rise over you.

Let's read how our confession about all this is formulated in the Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 5:

12. Q. Since, according to God's righteous judgment we deserve temporal and eternal punishment, how can we escape this punishment and be again received into favour?

A. God demands that His justice be satisfied.[1] Therefore full payment must be made either by ourselves or by another.[2]

[1] Ex. 20:5; 23:7; Rom. 2:1-11. [2] Is. 53:11; Rom. 8:3, 4.

13. Q. Can we ourselves make this payment?

A. Certainly not. On the contrary, we daily increase our debt.[1]

[1] Ps. 130:3; Matt. 6:12; Rom. 2:4, 5.

14. Q. Can any mere creature pay for us?

A. No. In the first place, God will not punish another creature for the sin which man has committed.[1] Furthermore, no mere creature can sustain the burden of God's eternal wrath against sin and deliver others from it.[2]

[1] Ezek. 18:4, 20; Heb. 2:14-18. [2] Ps. 130:3; Nah. 1:6.

15. Q. What kind of mediator and deliverer must we seek?

A. One who is a true[1] and righteous[2] man, and yet more powerful than all creatures; that is, one who is at the same time true God.[3]

[1] I Cor. 15:21; Heb. 2:17. [2] Is. 53:9; II Cor. 5:21; Heb. 7:26. [3] Is. 7:14; 9:6; Jer. 23:6; John 1:1; Rom. 8:3, 4.

Amen.

Closing prayer

Scripture hymn 5-3:1 (8:1)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

Amen

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