

Sermon 06-21-2026  
 Fathers and the Dreadful Day of the Lord! – Rev. Markus Wegenast  
 Malachi 4:4-6 (NIV 1984)

4 "Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel. 5 "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. 6 He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."

1)

How do you feel about that scripture reading we just heard? Pretty Old Testament, isn't it!? There are some nice and encouraging words like "remember the law" and something about "fathers turning their hearts to their kids" – that's all positive. But then you hear about a "dreadful day of the Lord," and a real threat that God may strike the land with a curse – yikes! What's that all about?

I have to tell you I've been debating for a while if I should go into these harsh aspects of today's Bible reading. At one point I was even second guessing if this is an appropriate passage from the Bible after an exhilarating week of Vacation Bible School.

If you feel this is a harsh passage of the Bible you are not alone. People have struggled with this short passage of three verses for a long, long time. Take a look at the last verse:

**He [the new Elijah-like prophet] will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I [the Lord] will come and strike the land with a curse. – Malachi 4:6**

This is the last sentence in the Old Testament. How can you end the first part of the Bible with such a threatening sentence? With a curse?!

Did you know that the Jewish Old Testament – the Tanach, the Bible that the Jews use, does not end with the book of Malachi? They have ordered the books of what we call the OT in a different way – sometimes I wonder if part of the reason was so Malachi chapter 4 would not be the end of their Bible! In our Christian Bible we at least have the NT to follow that can make up for that curse language.

Though, actually, did you know that the NT of the Bible also ends with a curse?! Revelation 22:18f contains a pretty severe curse (fortunately there are two more verses that close the book and the NT a little more peaceful, but it doesn't change that even here we have a curse).

So really now, what's up with that?

I am not doing a good job right now making the Bible an attractive book for you to read, do I?

Here is the thing:

**Life is full of curses and sometimes we have to walk through them and trust that even in the midst of living through a curse, God is still good.**

Is that possible? Can God truly be good when he is the one who initiates a curse? I think that is exactly the question God wants us to ask. Contemplating God in the midst of the difficult times tremendously helps us to grow in discipleship.

God revealed himself in his son Jesus. In Jesus we see God's purest nature, he is full of love, grace and mercy for us. In this light we have to understand even the sharpest off-putting passages of scripture. "God is full of love AND can be harsh" - doesn't that remind you of parenting?

Jesus introduced God to us as our heavenly father. In fact, Jesus instructed us to lean into God as our dad in heaven when he taught us to pray. What do dads do? Sometimes they are severe and sharp when they deal with their kids. A healthy dad is not harsh with his kids because he doesn't like them, a healthy dad is sharp with his kids because he loves them.

Why do you think does the OT end with a statement about fathers anyway? What about the mothers? What about people who don't have children?

You will find that in most modern English translations of the Bible the word fathers has been replaced by the word parents. I had to go all the way back to the 1984 edition of the NIV to still find the word "fathers" in the last sentence of the OT!

I thought on this Father's Day Sunday it is fair to bring this Bible passage to you in a more literal translation from how we find it in the Hebrew OT. It does say fathers there. I'm not doing this to suggest this passage is only for fathers, on the contrary. This passage is for all people including children, youth, single, anyone... For today's Father's Day I think it is good that we let the passage speak to us with the explicit father language.

2)

Let's clear up some of the puzzles so we get a sense of what God has in mind for us here. I really do believe that this is for all of us. For this we need to shift our focus on the sentence that precedes that "father" sentence:

**"See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes..." – Malachi 4:5**

The Prophet Elijah was one of Israel's greatest prophets. He lived over 400 years before Malachi and now Malachi says that a version of this great prophet from the past is coming again right before the great and dreadful Day of the Lord.

Many people regard this as a prophesy that points to John the Baptist, the cousin of Jesus, because he is often seen as a future version of Elijah who came to prepare the people for Jesus. I don't know how successful John was to turn the hearts of fathers to their kids before Jesus started his minister - I do know, however, that John was quite successful in preparing people for that great day of the Lord.

Why is the great day of Jesus' coming also called dreadful? What do we call that holiday in December when we celebrate Christ's birth? ... Wasn't Christmas a good thing?! Wasn't Jesus teaching and preaching a good thing? Wasn't Jesus dying for our sins a good thing? Why does Malachi call it a great & dreadful day?

It's because it all depends on perspective!

For king Herod, the coming of Jesus was not a good day – he got so scared he did some really bad things. For the societal elite in Israel Jesus' coming was not such a good thing because he scolded them for not caring for the less fortunate. For the religious temple cult in Jerusalem the coming of Jesus was not so good, because Jesus marked the end of the temple business.

### **Whether something is dreadful or great is always a matter of perspective!**

If you love the Lord then the day of his coming is great, if you don't want anything to do with the Lord, well then naturally his coming to you is dreadful!

The Lord came to us at Christmas and according to the Bible the Lord will come again in the future. That coming too will be great and dreadful depending on your perspective. If you love Jesus that day will be great, how can it not be? If you don't love Jesus and prefer to live without him I imagine it to be quite dreadful when Jesus comes and say: "I'm here, I want to be with you!"

Blessings and curses are a matter of perspective – Life is a matter of perspective (this would actually have been a much better sermon title for this FD weekend!).

3)

So what is your perspective on life, ...on Jesus, ...on healthy fatherhood? We all have fathers. Not all of us had the privilege to get to know our dads and some of us may even have had/have a negative relationship with their dad.

May I ask: What is/was your relationship with your father? Dreadful? Great?

If you are a dad – what is your relationship with your son(s) or daughter(s)? Is it great or dreadful? What can you do to make it great or greater?

I told you that I believe this passage from scripture today does not only address fathers. We all have a call to be Elijah's who encourage others to turn their hearts to their children. So let me ask you:

**If you are a mother, an aunt, a grandpa, a friend, a neighbor,... what can you do to turn your heart toward the children in your life?**

This week's VBS, there were fathers who turned their hearts to their kids. There were also many mothers, grandparents, singles and youth that did the very same.

VBS is over now but our task turning our hearts to the children in our lives is not over. See, when I say children, that means a whole generation. Have you noticed that we live in a time of generational conflict?

It is so easy to be suspicious about 'oh, all those millennials that are so lazy' – or all those spoiled gen Z kids, or that Generation alpha that doesn't know life without smartphones...

How can we protect our hearts from getting swallowed up in the dreadfulness of polarization that plagues our society in this 21<sup>st</sup> century?

So often we think we are powerless when it comes to changing society but that is not true. You may not be able to make the video feeds of your social media any better, but you are very much able to be a person who doesn't contribute to making things worse but better – and that, over time will make things better.

There are so many actions each and every one of us can take to turn our hearts toward a younger generation. I want to thank all of you who helped out with VBS this week. I want to thank you as a congregation to be committed to be in the business of raising kids that know the love of God and the older generation.

Last Sunday I encouraged you to try something new and work your way up to pray for 15 minutes in one sitting. How did that go? (Did you forget? Feel it's impossible? Get frustrated over it?... > embrace it...)

*"If you are a mother, an aunt, a grandpa, a friend, a neighbor,... what can you do to turn your heart toward the children in your life?"*

**Pray!**

Pray not so much to fix the world, pray to fix your own heart, so it loves to incline towards those around you, including a younger generation. On this father's day, may you feel God's call to not let your heart grow cold – that would be dreadful. May our hearts be hot with love and make this world better. Amen.