

The Great Day of the LORD

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Preacher: Ben Traynor

[0 : 0 0] Well, friends, this evening we come to the end of the prophecy of Malachi, and in doing so we don't just come to the close of a prophetic book, but we come to the end of the Old Testament. Malachi is the last prophetic voice in Israel for 400, 450 years. And so how does Malachi finish and wrap up the Old Testament? Well, he finishes by getting out his diary, by getting out his diary, but by looking ahead to the great day of the Lord that is to come. We get mention of this day, if you just look down, we get mention of this day in 317, chapter 3 verse 17, in the day. We get it in chapter 4 verse 1, for behold, the day is coming. We get it in chapter 4 verse 3, on the day when I act. And we get it, if you like, summed up in chapter 4 verse 5, behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. But why does Malachi end here? Does he just like to be kind of organized, get everything sorted? Well, maybe he was organized, but that's not why he finishes here. It's because as we're about to see God's people in Malachi's day, they can't make sense of the world they're living in. They can't make sense of the world they're living in, so God tells them about a future day, the day of the Lord, to help them make sense of this day, and so that they're ready for that day. Christmas presents are to be exchanged on Christmas Day. I hope that's not news to you, that that's coming on Wednesday. But that should change how we live today. Like, well, what time does Union Square close tomorrow night? Is Amazon Prime still delivering?

But this evening, we see as our diaries are opened, as Malachi looks ahead to that day to help those people how to live in their day, he also encourages us to have our diaries open. It is the same invitation.

Because although it's been 2,450 or so years since this, some of what Malachi says has still to come to pass. Some of it has come to pass, but not all of it. The great final judgment on the day of the Lord is still to come, and here's the thing, it's in all of our diaries. I wonder if you've got a 20, 25 diary or calendar yet. I guess if it's on your phone, it probably just flicks round, doesn't it?

But if you ever buy one, or even if you look at your phone diary for next year, there'll be days already in it, won't there? St. Andrew's Day, Christmas Day, bank holidays, whatever it is, it's already there. Well, dear friends, the world has a diary. Creation has a calendar, and written into it is the great day of the Lord. Now, we don't know when it will be, but it is coming. And this evening, Malachi writes so that we're ready for that day. But before we get to that day, before we open our diaries and look at that day, we need to understand the world as it's going on today, the issues that are going on in Malachi's day. And that's our first point, that the world as we see it today, the wicked are blessed, and the righteous suffer. The issue at play for God's people in the days that Malachi is writing is that wrongdoers, evildoers, the wicked, those set against God, seem to be thriving. They seem to be prospering, while those who serve God have no apparent gain. Look at chapter 3, verse 15 for me.

And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper, but they put God to the test, and they escape. In Malachi's day, the nations around them seem to be prosperous, ignoring God, and things are going well. Judah at this point are kind of a vassal state of the great Persian empire, a Gentile, godless nation, while no king is on David's throne. So Judah are weak politically, they're poor economically. If the year 450 BC had kind of top events and stories, you know these lists of the year that we all get at the end of 2024, the top 10 list of that or the next thing, Judah are not appearing on any of those lists, right? They're insignificant, they're small, they're weak.

[4 : 43] And of course, this is going to continue for God's people, because after Persia, who comes along? Alexander the Great. Alexander the Great comes and defeats Persia, and he then rules over Judah.

And then of course, after him, the Romans will arrive too. So weak, insignificant, poor, that's here in this day, and it's here to stay. And so how do God's people respond to what's going on? How do God's people respond? Well, one group respond this way. Some of them say, therefore, serving God is worthless. Worthless. And it's the response we've come to kind of expect in Malachi, if you've been here over the last number of weeks. This section opens with the kind of last complaint of the book.

There are six in Malachi, and the complaint they raise here is that serving God is in vain. It's just not worth it. So far, through the book, God's people have rejected God's love. They've scorned him in worship. The Bible teachers have twisted what the Bible is saying. They've redefined marriage.

They're not giving what they should with their finances. And they close off by saying, this is all in vain. It's not worth it. Verse 13, 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 us keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the Lord of hosts? They're saying it's vain.

It's an utter waste of time because the evildoers, they're blessed. They seem to drive all the nice cars, live in all the nice houses, and have trouble-free lives. And look at us. We're trying to do what God says, walking around in mourning, and it's getting us nowhere. It's a bit like us this evening, looking outside these walls of the church and saying, oh, look at those people off to the pantomime. Look at those people off to HMT, to the pantomime, or eating out in Union Square, or whatever it is they're doing. Don't they have the good life? Look how blessed they are. Whereas here, oh, look at us stuck in here this evening. That's the kind of complaint that they're making. And we've heard a similar complaint before. Chapter 2, verse 17, the people complain and say, everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord. And he delights in them, and they cry out, where is the God of justice?

[7 : 03] So, dear friends, this evening, I wonder if you've ever thought some of these thoughts. following Jesus, is it really worth it? Perhaps 2024 has been a particularly tough year. Health, family, work, exams, moving city, losing friends, whatever it is, disruption somewhere, and we've asked, Lord, really? Is this my lot? Or perhaps we see friends or family members, other people who aren't following Jesus and seem to be having so much success, climbing the corporate ladder, adding zeros to the end of their salary, doing really well. Hang on, Lord, what's the payoff for us?

And so, as we hear a complaint like this, we need to make a clarification. Because friends, God always welcomes us to come before him with our questions. He always welcomes our cries for help. He beckons us to come with our cries for help. So many of the Psalms, so much of Israel's own history records people crying out to God in a state of confusion or despair or hurt and crying, how long, oh Lord, will this go on?

And so, what's the difference here? Well, it's that this comes from a place of unbelief, a place of faithlessness. We've seen it all the way through, but it's summed up there in verse 14.

They've spoken hard words against God. They've complained and grumbled and scorned God's love, as we saw right at the start. And so, they're coming from a place of contempt for God, not childlike trust and faith. And so, dear friends, if this evening, as this day draws to a close, as this week draws to a close, as this year draws to a close, and you're asking, is this all worth it following the Lord Jesus? Well, what do we need to remember? What can help us in that?

It is remembering who God is. You see, these people in Malachi's day have forgotten who God is. And so, for us, it is remembering who God is. Chapter 1, verses 1 and 2, He loves us, and He chose us before the foundation of the world. Chapter 1, verse 6, He is our Father and our Master. As we saw a few weeks ago, He is unchanging towards us in His faithfulness.

[9 : 29] So, dear friends, this evening, if you're asking, is this all worth it? Remember who God is, who the Lord Jesus is, and take your cares to Him. But maybe you're thinking, is that possible? Is it possible?

Can I really do this? When a world in my world is full of pain and injustice, can I really come to God? Yes. Well, how do I know? Because we actually have an example of it here. In the very first time in this short prophecy, a second group appear. Well, where is the last five times complaints have been raised and kind of kept going? We get another response. People who think worshiping God is wonderful. Not worthless or wearying, but wonderful. They fear God and worship Him. Chapter 3, verse 16.

Verse 16, Those who feared the Lord spoke with one another, and the Lord paid attention and heard them. And a book of remembrance was written before Him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed His name.

Remember, this second group, their view, their outlook, what they see of the world, their newspapers and TV and radio. All that they listened to is exactly the same as the other group.

Evil seems to prosper and the righteous suffer, but they fear God. Now, fear in God, it's not fear like a kind of phobia fear, like being afraid of the dark or terrified of spiders or whatever it is.

[11 : 02] No, it's esteem. It's honor. It's reverence. It means they understand that God is not to be trifled with or taken lightly. You see this often in the Narnia books, the Chronicles of Narnia books, when the children meet Aslan. We had some C.S. Lewis this morning, a little bit more this evening.

They meet Aslan and they realize he is a lion not to be trifled with. He has a majesty, a bigness that draws them in and means they'll listen to him. And often in the Narnia books, when the children meet Aslan, they don't understand or can't make sense of all the circumstances of their lives. They still have questions and they're not all answered, but they look at the lion and they fear him.

And the fear they have of him is one that says, we can trust you. We can trust you for you're bigger and stronger than me and all the things that I face. Dear friends, in the midst of a world that makes no sense to our eyes, a world of injustice and of evil seeming to get the upper hand, these people worship and fear God. And that is the invitation to us as well, to come before God and worship him and fear him. And gloriously here then God responds to them. In verse 16, we read that God pays attention to those who fear him. And what he says to them then, he shifts focus in their diaries, in their calendars from today, this day that they live him, to the future day of the Lord. And that takes us to our second point, the world as it will be on the day of our Lord. Chapter 3, verse 17, speaking of those who fear his name, God says, they shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts. In the day when I make up my treasured possession and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him.

Then once more, you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between the one who serves God and the one who does not serve him. So God responds to those that fear him and say, a day is coming where you, you who fear me, you shall be mine, my treasure, you will be spared.

But of course, the implication in that, of course, is that some won't be his and that some won't be spared. In other words, as God lifts their eyes and looks at their diaries and looks ahead to that day, he says a day of separation is coming. Verse 18 speaks of a distinction, a distinction.

[13 : 40] Where we'll be like putting on new glasses and all will come into focus and what today is blurred and seems to be upside down in the wrong way around will be set right. Today, the wicked are blessed and the righteous suffer, but on that day, all will be reversed. And so on that day, what will happen to the wicked? What will happen to the wicked? They will suffer eternal judgment.

Chapter 4, verse 1, For behold, a day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day is coming that shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. And verse 3, you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet. On the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts. A day is coming, a future day in all of our calendars, where the evildoer, the arrogant, the wicked, who does not, the one who does not fear God will be punished. This week, I was trying to think of a way to kind of illustrate all this, but actually, the images, the pictures here carry it all for us, don't they? A burning oven, a fire. I wonder if you've ever made a huge bonfire, a huge bonfire at night that's reached six, eight, ten feet high, and you burn it ablaze, and you come back in the morning, and it's gone. All there is is ash on the ground, completely gone.

Or have you ever had a tree taken out of your garden? And perhaps gardeners, people come round, and they dig a huge hole, don't they? And they get every root or branch, they take it all up, and there's nothing left. Someone else comes round who's never been in your yard, in your garden, and you have a look, and there's nothing there, no roots, no branch, gone. Friends, these are pictures of finality, aren't they?

Of no return, of punishment of the wicked, of those who have not feared and loved God, and have turned from him. On that day, the wicked will be punished forever. But the events of this day also bring something else. It's like two sides of a coin, they bring something to the righteous, to those that serve and love God. For they will experience what? Eternal blessing. Chapter 3, 17, they shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son. Chapter 4, verse 2, but for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings, and you shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. What a difference from what we've just heard. Those who fear God's name are to be his treasured possession, his most valuable item. And on that day, that great day of the Lord, they will be spared the destruction that's to come. The heat of God's blazing righteousness isn't a blazing oven for them. Chapter 4, verse 2, no, it's like a sun, the sun rising with healing in its wings. In the middle of this kind of deep, dark Aberdeen winter, can you picture what it's like that first warm spring day where the sun comes up and just touches your face, heat, warmth, life?

It's glorious. Towards the end of the Lord of the Rings books, there's a big city, and there's a huge battle, Lord of the Rings, lots of battles, and these things going on, a great big battle between good and evil. And this city has been without a king for years upon years upon years. And a king who was lost and wandering, the king returns. He returns to the city and he defeats all the enemies. But as I was reading this just a few weeks ago to Joshua, when the king came to the city, he did something that completely knocked me for four at that point as I read it. Because what did he do? He healed. He healed.

[17 : 45] The king, having defeated the enemies, came to the city and healed. He went to the wounded. And more than that, he went to those who were injured in such a way that only the king could heal them.

And he restored life to them. It was so beautiful that the hands of the king are healing hands. And dear friends, for those who fear God, so it is on this day that the son of righteousness comes with healing in his wings. But it's more than that, isn't it? It's more than that. What's the last image we have there? It's that of a calf leaping from the stall. Now, some of you are farmers or live more rural. You're going to do a lot better than I am with this kind of image. But I think it's an image of just sheer joy, isn't it? It's a picture of total delight, of frolicking and playfulness.

In my mind, anyway, the way that worked is kind of the joy of a footballer who scores the goal to win the World Cup or to win the Champions League or whatever it is. Utter delight, sheer joy.

And so God says here through Malachi that a day is coming, one day, two groups of people, each with their own fate, eternal judgment or eternal blessing. Friends, this day is in all of our diaries. Why?

Because we either serve God or we don't. And that is the dividing line that runs through humanity, even to this day. Did you notice we read that, that there is no fence, that there is no third way, there is no third group. And so the question that begins to kind of boil and simmer to the top, as it were, is, well, as it would have in Malachi's day, as it would have for us, is, well, which side of this dividing line am I on? God is going to come in fire, but will it be that of an oven for me? Or will it be the warm rays of healing and joy? Well, the Bible is clear all the way through that we in ourselves, we deserve punishment. We don't deserve God's favor and blessing.

[20 : 10] And even in Malachi's day, as it is even more to our day, that's been going on for a long time. If you just look to the very end of chapter four and verse six, the very last word there of chapter four, verse six is translated destruction, but it can also be translated as curse. And God is saying in chapter four, verse six there, right at the end, is I might come in and curse the land. Right here at the end of the Old Testament, there's talk of cursing the land. But dear friends, where have we heard that kind of talk before? Right back at the start, Genesis chapter three, the very third chapter of the Bible, God curses the ground that Adam has to work. And so here we are all the way at the other end of the Old Testament and there's still a curse. Yes, talking about a slightly different one from there, but curse is still running through. Generation to generation through prophets and judges and kings and wars and exile and return from exile. Humanity, now we can see, surely needs something bigger and greater and deeper to rescue us, that there might be no more curse. And the good news this evening, as we read about that future day and the destruction that's going to come, is that there is good news, that something has changed, that rescue has come. Because you see, what's changed between Malachi's time and our day here today in 2024 in Aberdeen? What's changed? Well, chapter four, verse five has changed. It's happened.

God has sent Elijah. That is, God has sent the one to do Elijah's ministry, to prepare the way. John the Baptist has come. We heard about him this morning. We heard him read about earlier from Luke.

And John the Baptist was sent by God to prepare the way of the Lord. And as we heard in Zechariah's song, to give knowledge of salvation. But that is not all that's changed, is it? Because as we also heard from Zechariah's song, John came to prepare the way so that sunrise shall visit us from on high.

And dear friends, it has. Sunrise has visited us from on high. The one who John prepared the way for has come. The Lord Jesus, sunrise from on high, the sun of righteousness, has started to shine.

Forgiveness, light, life, the love of God. The Lord Jesus has come that we might not suffer eternal death and darkness. So dear friends, on that day that is to come, on the great day of the Lord, how are we safe? How are we among those? How are we going to be among those where there is healing and restored?

[23 : 10] How are we among the righteous? Only in the Lord Jesus. Only in the Lord Jesus. And why is it that Jesus can offer us that? Why are we safe in him? Because he who was the light of man became darkness for us. The Lord Jesus came into this world and took our sin and our darkness and gave us his light of man to the light of man. And he who was the light of man. And he who was the light of a cross. And there upon the cross, the full heat of God's wrath, blazing as an oven, was spent upon him for those that come to believe in him. That on the great day of the Lord, God's fire would not be as an oven for us, but would be warm healing rays of sun. So how do we know what the day of the Lord holds for you, holds for me? Well, the answer is who is Jesus to us? If you have believed upon him, trusted him, turned from sin and turned to him, dear friends, you are safe. You are safe. The heat of

God's wrath was spent on the Lord Jesus on the cross for you so that the day of Christ's return is a day of joy and restoration, the like of which you have never known. But if you haven't trusted Jesus, if you haven't turned to him, the day of the Lord as it stands will be a day of judgment and a day where the full heat of God's anger will be poured out against you for your sin.

But dear friends, if that's you, if you do not know the Lord Jesus, here's the good news. Here's the good news. That great and awesome and final day of the Lord hasn't come yet. And so Jesus holds his hand out to you today and says, come, come. You can't earn salvation with Jesus. You can't merit it. It's not about living a life that's good enough. No, it's about trusting Jesus, his body, his blood spent for you. So dear friends, if you're here this evening and you don't know the Lord Jesus, come to him. Come to him. It's not too late. The great call of this book to God is chapter three, verse seven, return to him and he will come to you. But for those of us who do know the Lord Jesus, as we wait for that day, what do we do? How do we live? And that's our final point, the last two verses here. As we wait for the day of the Lord, we trust and obey God's word. In verses five and six, Malachi names two major Old Testament figures, Moses and Elijah. And as we've said, Malachi is the last Old

Testament prophet. And it can be said, I think that there's 400 or 450 years of silence after Malachi. And in a sense, that's true. There is no other prophet to come to Judah. But in a sense, it's not quite true. Because Malachi here is saying in verse five of chapter four that actually, Moses still speaks.

Remember what Moses said and listen to him. While you wait, remember what he said and listen to him. And Elijah, well, he came to point you back to Moses too, didn't he, in his ministry, as did all the other prophets. So in other words, Malachi sums up here by saying, look, the whole of the Old Testament message that you have is really summed up in those two men. And he's saying, listen to them, listen to them.

[26 : 58] In short, listen to God's word and obey it. And for us too, well, it's really the same thing that we're called to do, to listen to them, to listen to Elijah, to listen to Moses. Why? Well, because they pointed to someone greater, didn't they? The greater Elijah, the greater Moses, the Lord Jesus. Trust God and obey God, listening to his word, listening to the Lord Jesus, prepares us for that day that is to come. It fits us for heaven to be with God there.

Dear friends, the complaint at the start of our passage this evening was that it was not worth serving God, that it was vain to serve God. But when this great day of the Lord comes, when the sun rises with warmth and we rejoice with a joy that we've never, have never experienced before, not one person, not one person that served and feared and loved God will say that. We'll say with all our hearts, it's been worth it. It's been worth it all. It's been worth it all to serve and to know Jesus and we'll have an eternity then to bask in the warmth of his presence and to worship and to glorify him forever. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we thank you so much for your word. Lord, we thank you for the great hope that this word holds out to us, that on the great day of the Lord, for those who are safe in you, there will be joy, there will be healing, there will be eternal life with you, that all that is wrong will be put right because, Lord Jesus, you came to save us.

But Lord, for those of us who don't know you, may we heed to the warning of these words. We pray that we would cast ourselves upon you, that we would kiss the sun, knowing that in him, there is safety, life, light and eternal life. Help us all, we pray, to turn to you, to trust you and to look to you for all our days. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.