

Malachi 3:16 - 4:6

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[0 : 00] Amen. Wouldn't it be so nice to get away this winter?

! Wouldn't it be lovely to soak up some rays?

The winter break cell. It sounds so appealing, doesn't it? Because life is dark. And life is cloudy.

And so is there somewhere that we can escape?

That we can escape the long winter? Forget cheap flights. Forget weekend breaks. Because

Malachi this morning calls us to dream big.

He calls us to dream big about getting away from it all for good. He pictures a day when sunshine will fill this world.

[1 : 13] And God will make that happen. If you look at chapter 4 verse 2. He says, picture the day when the sun of righteousness shall rise.

With healing in its wings. It's really hard to imagine. But he's saying, think of a place with me full of a brightness that will scatter every kind of darkness that you can imagine.

God promises at the end of Malachi's prophecy there will be a grand conclusion to life in this world.

A light at the end of the tunnel. When God will send to be born in the night by starlight.

A king whose brightness his people will bask in forever. And it will be a brilliant, incandescent, glorious day.

A sunrise on you. And on this world. And when this sun appears. When this day comes. Malachi says three things are going to happen.

[2 : 13] The first thing that's going to happen is that the sunshine will reveal all. It will be a revealing sunshine. The sunshine will bring everything into light.

Whether good or bad. And as we've gone through Malachi. One of the things that we've noticed in the life of God's people. Is that they are thinking. That God cannot see the difference.

Between evil and good. Do you remember back in chapter 2. It was their complaint about him wasn't it. They said everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord.

They were thinking God isn't bothered about right and about wrong. And in our section this morning there's a similar sentiment. If you look a little bit back from the reading that we had actually in verse 13.

God says your words have been hard against me. And what are they saying? Verse 14. It is vain to serve God. What's the profit of keeping his charge or walking in mourning before the Lord of hosts?

[3 : 22] They were doubting whether it was really worth serving God. Because he doesn't seem to treat people fairly. Verse 15. Evil doers prosper.

They said. They put God to the test and they escape. And all through the book we've seen this underlying doubt of God's justice. On the face of it that living for him doesn't seem to get you anywhere in this world.

Now they said we call the arrogant blessed. And it is part of the dark world that we live in isn't it? Where right and wrong seems muddy on the face of it.

Good things happen to bad people. Bad things happen to good people. And God maybe we feel doesn't seem bothered at all. So why bother with God? And that is a construction that they were making of God.

Who doesn't care. And who isn't generous. Who doesn't do good things for people who trust in him. And seems to bless people who ignore him and don't live for him.

[4 : 32] Shakes us doesn't it? When we see militant atheists having a great life. We ask what real advantage is there in being a Christian?

When I can get rich and I can live life to the full without God. But Malachi wants to say to us. When that day comes. When the sun rises.

All will be revealed. There will be fair and just treatment of everyone. The light of this sun will end all doubt. And reveal who you really are before God.

And verse 18 he says. And once more on that day you shall see a distinction. Between the righteous and the wicked. On that day of the sunrise.

All relationships with God will be made clear. And destinies will come to light. People will be seen for what they are. And among all the varieties of different people there are in the world.

[5 : 32] There will actually only be two groups on that day. A distinction will be made between the righteous and the wicked. And hypocrisy will be exposed in and outside of God's visible people.

A distinction between the hardened cynical Israelites of Malachi's day that we've gotten to know. And another group who are introduced in verse 16.

If you look there. Those who feared the Lord. And spoke with one another. There they are. This other group.

They have this kind of meeting don't they? They gather together to talk with one another. We don't know what they say. We haven't got a kind of recording or minutes of the meeting that they had. But they seem to be this faithful subgroup within Israel. And they are struggling. They cannot believe that God is unjust. And they fear him.

[6 : 34] And they are looking to him for blessing. And what we know is. We don't know what they say. But we do know what God does as a result. He pays attention. And he hears them.

Maybe it was prayer. Maybe it was confession together. But they are a group that is still waiting and holding on to fair treatment. Still fearing God.

And waiting for blessing from him. And they've been faithful to God. And they've felt the pressure of the world around them. And of cynics around them. But they haven't given up.

And these two groups are going to be distinct. Separated and clarified for all to see in the light of this rising sun.

In the ancient Near East. A king or an emperor would keep a book. A book of the work of his subjects.

[7 : 34] It was a book. It was kind of administrative file really. To make sure that any faithfulness of subjects within the empire would be rewarded one day.

Do you remember in the book of Esther. The king. Ahasuerus. The king of Persia. He has his kind of bedtime story. Doesn't he. What does he like to have.

The book of the remembrance. The book of the chronicles. Of the Medes and the Persians. And he hears about Mordecai. Esther's relative. And he rewards and rescues Mordecai.

For his faithfulness. And we're told that on this day when the sun rises. God has a book like that.

Verse 16. A book of remembrance. And he's going to open it.

And the names of people who fear him are written there. And they will receive honour. And recognition from him. They will be brought together and made into a treasured possession.

[8 : 36] Verse 17. God says that I will spare them in that day. As a man spares his own son. Those who truly fear him. On that day will glisten.

And they will be set amongst the crown jewels. The Christian who waits for help from accusers. The believer who's been rejected by family.

The Christian at school who is different. And looks to God for help with hope. God's people who meet in secret. In caves.

And who hide in fear. Will be remembered and spared. And dignified. And on that day there will be no more doubting God's sense of justice. Because people will be treated absolutely fairly.

And on that day there will be no more doubt. And on that day there will be no more doubt. And that distinction is the only one that matters. The righteous and the wicked. And the only thing that matters is which group you are in on that day.

[9 : 41] The sun will reveal all. And there are two more things that are going to happen at the sunrise. The next thing that will happen for one group. Is that it will be a burning sunshine.

It will be a burning sunshine. Sun, sunshine can have two effects on you, can't it? The sun, it brings life and energy. Without the sun we would die, wouldn't we?

The world would die. But the same sun, if you're in a desert. It can burn. And it can kill.

Just look at chapter 4 verse 1. The day, that same day when the sun appears. Malachi says, is burning like an oven.

The arrogant and evildoers will be stubble. That day is coming and it shall set them ablaze. Says the Lord of haste.

[10:43] He speaks of the final removal of one group. Doesn't he? In that distinction. In this oven. With no chance of life again.

You see he says that this burning will neither leave root or branch. It will be total and complete. With no way back. Remember the images of those fires in Australia and America over the hot summer that we had. Imagine it like that.

It is that these people will be like the stubble that kind of gets left on their fields. In a hot country. And what happens? The sun gets so hot, doesn't it?

And maybe it reflects off a piece of metal somewhere and it catches. And that stubble, it's just combustible. Just bursts into flames.

[11:39] And one group will be like that on that day. It will be a final consumption of wickedness. But not just wickedness. Wicked people. It will set them ablaze.

Strangely this day of light. For some it will be very, very dark. Elsewhere in the Bible the prophet Isaiah speaks of the same day.

The day of the Lord. And he describes it using the absence of light. He says on that day the stars of heaven will not give their light. And the sun will be dark at its rising.

And the moon will not shed its light. The light of this sun on this day that is coming will not be pleasant and warming. It will be a kind of dark light for them.

A sorry light. A burning light. John Milton in his novel Paradise Lost. He describes it as one great furnace flamed.

[12:48] Yet from those flames no light. But rather darkness visible. Served only to discover sights of woe.

Because God will show on that day that right and wrong does matter to him. And all those causing evil and wrong will be removed forever.

And the only thing that matters is which group you're in on that day. The righteous or the wicked. There's a lovely piece of prose in Charles Dickens' Oliver Twist.

After the character Bill Sykes commits murder. It's a really grisly episode. And he's trying to kind of hide his crime. He does it at night time.

But as the sun rises his crime is exposed. Dickens writes, The bright sun that brings back not light alone but new life and hope and freshness to man burst upon the crowded city in clear and radiant glory.

[13:54] Through costly coloured glass and paper mended window. Through cathedral dome and rotten crevice. It shed its equal ray.

And he tried to shut it out. But it would stream in. If the sight had been a ghastly one in the dull night. What was it now in that brilliant light?

The message for Sykes. It won't matter what sort of windows you've got. The light will flood in all the same. And that same sun which brings life to some will expose him.

And it won't matter whether you're rich. Whether you're upper class or lower class. Which caste you come from. If you live life and work in a cathedral.

Or in a cave. Whether you're outwardly part of Israel or not. The sun will rise with its equal ray. And bring us into judgment.

[14:58] And sun will be burnt by it. He calls them the wicked. They will be set ablaze. It's horrific language isn't it?

It's just terrible. And what we are hearing here in Malachi is a description of a reality. The Bible and Jesus Christ called hell.

Jesus teaches more about it than we like to think that he does. And we don't like it do we? But not liking it doesn't make it untrue. We wonder if God is so loving.

If he cares so much about right and wrong. Then how can he send people to this place? How can he act in this way? And the Bible says God is loving doesn't it?

God is love. But the Bible also tells us that he does send some people to hell. And one reason for that is that even though God is loving.

[15:58] God does not love everything. God loves but he also hates many things. He hates pride. He hates murder.

He hates lying. He hates false worship of gods that should not be worshipped. He doesn't love child abuse does he?

Or stealing. He doesn't love everything. Thankfully. He hates some things. And God promises to do something about all those things that he hates.

He promises on that day nothing will dull the sunshine of his goodness. And all evil will be removed. And so the only thing that matters on that day is which group you're in.

The righteous or the wicked. Since the final thing that will happen for the remaining group. The sun will reveal all. The sun will burn the wicked.

[17:02] But then the sun thirdly will heal the righteous. It will be a healing sun. In the ancient world.

That kind of great big disc that's in the sky. That we get all this heat from. It gives out rays doesn't it. And it was pictured in the ancient world as this kind of disc with wings coming from it.

And these wings were the rays of the sun sort of touching the earth. And warming it and giving it life. And for the remaining group on this day.

The rays of this sun will touch them. And they won't burn or destroy. But verse 3. Look. The sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.

That same sun will have a totally different effect on them. And Malachi says it will be like newborn calves on a spring morning. Picture them. Kind of a newborn calf.

[18:09] Shivering. Kind of as they do. Isn't it? In the barn. And then they're released. And they're dried off in the warm sun.

And they kind of wobble around. Don't they? Sort of all clumsy. That kind of Bambi image. But then when they get into the sun. They kind of warm up. And get this new lease of life.

And they start leaping around. And for this group. For those who fear God. It'll be like that. You'll be like that. All the aches.

And all the pains. The popping joints. The tired muscles. The dodgy hips. The sciatica. You'll be hurdling.

And you'll be warm. It'll be a sunshine of physical healing. But not just physical healing. Because actually.

[19:05] What kind of sunshine do we really need? What kind of sunshine do you need? What sort of sunshine does Drayton Green need? The sunshine that we had over the summer was nice.

Wasn't it? But it's kind of gone now. And in a way. We haven't changed. Because of it. Would taking all of us now. If we could kind of pay for a flight to Hawaii.

For the week there. It would be nice. Wouldn't it? But would that do it? Would that solve all of our problems when we came back? Will a winter break do it?

What really is the problem that we need sorting out? Well we seem discovered don't we? That in life. The darkness is not just out there.

But it's in here. The darkness lingers in our lives. And so what we need is not just ultraviolet rays. We need the rays of a different kind.

[20:06] And thankfully this is the sun isn't it? Of righteousness. We need to be changed.

We need the kind of light that is going to rid the shadows of our hearts. And of our sinfulness. And so this is the day when the world will bask in absolute goodness.

And justice. And there won't be a shadow of wrong anywhere. There won't be any more dark corners. The clouds morally and spiritually will scatter.

And I think that is what Malachi 4 verse 4 to 6 is about. They're funny verses aren't they? Notice in verse 4 the command to keep the law of Moses on Mount Horeb.

That's the ten commandments. The law given to bring life and to sustain life amongst God's people. But on this day the life that the law of God commands will be kept.

[21:15] And there will be an integrity of obedience from generation to generation. I think that is what verse 5 is about. Look at that. Behold I'll send you Elijah the prophet before the great Norton day of the Lord.

And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children. And the hearts of children to their fathers. Lest I come and strike the land with a decree of destruction.

There are lots of interpretations as to what this verse is going on about. Some say that this is John the Baptist. Which I think it is.

Luke 1 refers to him doing this. Turning the hearts of the fathers to the children. And the children to their fathers. Speaking of John the Baptist. And some think that he is going to somehow bring families together.

And that's going to be part of his ministry. I don't want to discount that. But I think maybe that is to miss the point here. Because we need to think like an ancient Near Eastern Israelite family.

[22 : 20] We need to see how important the family and the generations were in keeping relationship with God. And the kind of sustaining obedience of his word.

The Bible word for this relationship is covenant. And the prophets were sent to make sure that people kept that covenant with God.

In that relationship. Of obeying his law. Of trusting in him. Thanking him for rescue. And living in response. And a sign of a good covenant relationship with God.

Was when it was sustained along the generations. The fathers teaching the children the ways of the Lord. It was essential wasn't it? Parents were to teach their children what the Passover meant.

They were to instruct their children. And the children were to listen and receive wise instruction. From their mothers and fathers. Children were to obey their fathers and mothers.

[23 : 28] And part of the darkness of their story as the people of God. Is that generational chain of obedience to God's law has been broken. One generation might serve the Lord.

But the next might fall away. Remember back in chapter 3. God's goal in sending the Lord Jesus Christ. As this refiner.

Is to relink the intergenerational chain of worship. He says in chapter 3 in verse 4. Then your offering will be pleasing to the Lord.

As in the days of old. Back when your fathers did it. This is my stab at verse 5. I think that the fathers turning towards the children.

Is about passing on the legacy. Of holy obedience and worship. And the children turning to their fathers. Is a receiving. And confirming of that legacy.

[24 : 30] Where children's hearts. Will look to the God of their parents. And parents' hearts. Will teach and train children in the gospel. And so what this day signifies.

What this sunshine signifies. Is a day when there will be unified. And perfected. Ongoing obedience to God's covenant.

In a relationship with him. And John the Baptist. Will usher this age in. It will be a day that God's promises. Are kept.

That he will act. On this day. And all will be revealed. All wrongs will be put right. He will remove all wickedness. And restore those who fear him.

And those people will live in purity. And goodness and righteousness forever. In a few moments. We're going to sing the famous carol.

[25 : 30] Hark the Herald. If you just look at that hymn. Just on your service sheets. I just want to say that. There is not a typo. In verse 3.

Second line of verse 3. Hail the son of righteousness. That is not a mistake. Light and life to all. He brings. Risen with healing in his wings. That is a direct quote. From Malachi 4. And it's talking there isn't it. About the son. S-U-N. As in the sunshine.

Not the son. S-O-N. Of a father. But the context of the carol. Shows that Wesley actually gets. That's what Malachi 4 is about.

Because as we see this day approaching. Closer in the New Testament. We realise that the sunshine. Risen with healing in its wings. Is not an it.

[26 : 33] But it's a hymn. He is the heaven born prince of peace. And at the incarnation. The sun. Begins to peek over the horizon.

And we see a glimpse. Of what is to come on this day. And it's going to happen. A day when those who fear the Lord.

Amidst all this doubt and cynicism. Those who fear him. Like Mary and Joseph. And Elizabeth. And Zechariah. And Simeon. Who was waiting for the consolation of Israel.

Will be rewarded with the appearance of a saviour. With healing in his wings. And for a time. They will bask. In his rays.

Many will be healed. And welcomed. But others will be scolded. And burnt. And rejected by Jesus. It is a glimpse.

[27 : 32] Isn't it. In the life. And the ministry. Of the Lord Jesus. Of a glimpse. Of this day. When it comes in its fullest. And we see this day. John tells us of it.

In Revelation 21. When the Lord Jesus returns. And he brings. His people to himself. As his prized possession. In that place.

There will be no need of sun. He says. For the glory of God. Will give it light. And its lamp. This place. Is the lamb.

God doesn't love everything. And actually. The more you think about that. The more you think about our own lives. The more we realise. That what he loves.

And what he hates. That the more difficult it gets for us. Doesn't it. And actually. The hotter the sun might feel. Which group we are in on that day.

[28 : 31] Is the big question. Which group do we. Do we deserve to be in. He is a God of love. But he doesn't love everything. He doesn't love pride.

He doesn't love anger. He doesn't love envy. Or selfishness. And as we. As we think about our own lives. That hot sun. Feels. Hot.

Doesn't it. On us. That the truth is. None of us deserve to be his treasured possession. To be spared like a son. Spared by a father on that day. And you remember those forest fires.

That we thought about earlier. In the summer. And it's quite interesting. One. Family. Had a house. I think it was. Where was it? In California. Wasn't it? They had a house.

And they realised. The only way. That they could avoid. The great fire. Coming towards their home. Was to start another fire. It's really interesting. They kind of set this fire.

[29 : 28] Around their house. They realised. That the only way. They could do it. Was to kind of burn up. The fuel. Before the big fire. Got there. And when the big fire. Got there.

It would kind of come to. This scorched ground. And it would just stop. Right there. There is only one place. That you can stand. In the sun.

And not get burnt. On that day. It's in the place. That's already been burnt. And God. Amazingly. In the person.

Of Jesus Christ. He comes. To take our darkness. Doesn't he? And he takes it. Into the light. Of God's judgment. And it burns him.

To death. He is set ablaze. In judgment. As he dies. And he is the son.

[30 : 23] Who was not spared. But was given up for us all. So that you and I. Who are wicked. Might be amongst the righteous.

And one day. When he returns. All will be revealed. In his light. And judgment will come. And he will appear. The burning sun. Or the healing sun.

And so. Stand in him. Trust in him now. Because all that matters. Is which group you're in. On that day. Isn't it? Because that day.

Is coming. The sun is coming. The sun is rising. Let's pray. Yay!