

God says: I will act

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 31 May 2026

Preacher: Johan DeJong

[0 : 00] If I can draw your attention back in the direction of God's words, that would be great. I don't know if this week has left you thirsty, has it? I feel like the book of Malachi has left me thirsty in some ways.

It's kind of been a long, hard, hot ride in places, hasn't it? Today we come to the end. I think that is God's will for this book, actually, to leave us thirsty for what comes next.

Before we pick up this last part of the book of Malachi, shall we just pray together? Let's pray. Lord God, we thank you for your word. We thank you that it tells us the truth.

Lord, it is precious to be told the truth in this world. Father, we pray that you would help us to treasure your word.

Lord, we pray, Lord, that you would help us to treasure it as much as our brothers and sisters in Iran do, who perhaps have little else sometimes. Lord, it is precious to them. May it be that precious to us, to us whom you have given so much more.

[1 : 12] We pray that in Jesus' name. Amen. I've got a confession to make to you guys. I don't know about you, but I find it really annoying and slightly difficult to deal with when people have a conversation with you, and they think they know better than you in the thing that you're trained to do.

You ever had that experience? Where it's like your specialist subject, I don't know what it is at school or at work, and they come up and they think, yep, but I know better than you do.

It's fine if that person comes up to you and says, I hear what you're saying, and I'm not sure I agree. Will you help me understand? Can we have a discussion about this? Then, of course, you think, oh, yeah, sure, of course.

But if not, it's a different kettle of fish, isn't it? I think we probably all do that to each other sometimes. I suspect that's the truth. We all have conversations where we're the know-it-all, even though we're really a know-nothing.

It's very human, isn't it? What's God's specialist subject? What is he good at that no one else is?

[2 : 22] Well, it's being God, isn't it? Isn't that God's specialist subject? Knowing everything, seeing the end of the story, having the power that we don't have, showing grace and forgiveness where it's not deserved, patiently loving people.

That's God, isn't it? And all through Malachi, actually, humanity in general, God's people in particular, have been that annoying person who think that they know better than God does.

Because we do it to him too. It's what humans are like. Why aren't you doing this, God? Why haven't you sorted that problem out yet?

What's the point of all this? And today, in our passage, God calls that out one final time. We've been in a cycle where he challenges the way that his people are thinking and talking about him through the book of Malachi.

This is the final cycle. And at the same time, to encourage those of us who love God, he pulls back the curtain. Pulls back the curtain on heaven and he shows us what he's doing right now.

[3 : 34] And he gives us a vision of what he's going to be doing in the future. And he's really saying this. I will act. He wants to remind us, all the way through Malachi, to guard our hearts, right?

To be careful of this way of thinking that he sort of sets in front of us through the mouths of his people, Israel. He says, you're talking like this, but that's not right. Guard against that.

And it's the same here in these final words of the Old Testament. And before the long wait, before Jesus comes. So what does the Lord have to say?

First of all, he wants to warn us that hard words come from hard hearts. Let's pick it up at verse 13. You have spoken arrogantly against me, says the Lord.

Yet you ask, what have we said against you? You have said, it is futile to serve God. What do we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the Lord Almighty?

[4 : 31] But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly evil doers prosper. And even when they put God to the test, they get away with it. In other words, giving your life to God, it's pointless.

You know, doing what he says is good all the time, being sad about the state of the world, miserable. Why? You know, the reality is the people with the biggest mouths, they come out on top and the people who do the stuff that God says is wrong, they get away with it.

There's nothing to be gained by carrying on like this. God's probably just a myth or something. Just go with the flow. That's really what they're saying here. In other words, we know better than God. He's asleep on the job. Because if he was doing his job properly, he'd be doing it like this. That's the thinking, isn't it? But in their hard hearts, they say something very revealing.

Look again at verse 14. It is futile to serve God. What do we gain by carrying out his requirements? More confession.

[5 : 40] There's some stuff I got really annoyed about this week. Stuff that just seems to have been a part of my life for ages. And ages. Problems that won't go away. Struggles that seem to have been there forever.

And I just got really fed up with them. And a conversation in my head with God went something like this. God, why haven't you fixed that stuff yet? I keep showing up.

You know, doing what you tell me. Showing grace. Patience. Doing the right things. Why hasn't anything changed? And what is this relationship we have anyway?

Where I do all the stuff you tell me to and nothing happens. And other people seem to have a lovely life. What's the point?

And then you read verse 14. It is futile to serve God. What do we gain by carrying out his requirements? And then I realise I'm just like them. What am I gaining?

[6 : 45] Hard words from a hard heart. The problem is, you see, that God's people were serving God for what they could get out of it. For pay. Not for love.

And so then when the payout doesn't come, they say, well, what was that for? Everyone else around here is getting theirs. Why not us? Think about it for a minute.

That's the kind of relationship you have with the vending machine, isn't it? Not with almighty God. Maybe the fact, reflecting on what we've just heard about being a Christian in Iran, maybe the fact that God doesn't fix things when we think it's about time is one of the hardest things about being a Christian in the West.

The pain of waiting for him to act. It is hard, isn't it? And listen, it's not wrong to bring those things to God, to cry out to him honestly and say, I hate this and I don't understand it.

As long as you're looking for love. As long as you're looking for him in that situation. As long as you're not looking for a payout or the treat from the vending machine that will make it all right.

[8 : 00] Because otherwise, where does this thinking lead? Verse 15. But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly evil doers prosper.

And even when they put God to the test, they get away with it. In other words, calling the arrogant blessed, it leads to the blurring of right and wrong. We go with what we think works instead of what we know is right.

And that in the end leads us to believe that God doesn't exist. And certainly to reject any idea that he might hold us to account for the things that we do wrong.

Hard words from hard hearts. But this is in the Bible. And of course that means that God isn't deaf and dumb. It means that he has heard.

He's heard them. He's heard what they've been saying to each other in the pub to bolster their unbelief. He's heard all the things they've been bouncing around the echo chamber to keep from actually submitting to God and his ways.

[9 : 08] And of course if he's heard, then verse 15, they just get away with it. It's not true, is it? God hears every word and he calls it out.

And he warns. What does God say about this? Verse 13, you have spoken arrogantly against me. To say God doesn't see, he doesn't know, and he can't or won't do anything about these things is to deny who God is.

It's to say, if he really was God, he'd be doing it like this. I'd do a better job. And he says that's arrogant.

Think about it a bit more. How many times have we heard this kind of conversation in Malachi? Three, four? The calling out, the warning, that too is a grace, isn't it? A grace from God that God holds up the mirror and says, not like this, God owes us no warning. He could let them talk and never tell them of what's coming, but he doesn't do that. [10:20] Hard words come from hard hearts. Some, though, you will have picked up fear the Lord. Well, when you hear the phrase fear the Lord, I don't want you to think, oh, they're terrified of God, so they do what he says.

That's not what that means in the Bible. The fear of the Lord, when it appears, means affectionate awe. Right? Tuck that away somewhere in your brain so that whenever you read it in the Old Testament, fear of the Lord, you hear affectionate awe because that's what it means. Not being scared. So, verse 16, then those who feared the Lord talked with each other. And literally, that means each turned to his companion and talked together.

And what they're saying, let's, we've heard God, let's keep doing the right thing. Let's trust this God who keeps his promises. Let's stay faithful to the one that we know and love.

That's what they're saying to each other because we're not supposed to do it alone. Are we? If you've got a Bible there, turn to Hebrews chapter 10, verse 24. Let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds.

[11:38] Not giving up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another. And all the more as you see the day approaching. Can you see the links? Here?

Meeting together, encouraging one another as the day approaches. That's what's going on here. In other words, don't give up coming to church.

Find your companions. It probably won't be all a hundred and something of the people here, but the person you can turn to to talk to when you need that encouragement.

Find them. Keep faithful together. That's what these folks did. Those of you who know me know that I'm a fan of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was a German pastor imprisoned by the Nazis and eventually executed.

He says this, the prisoner, the sick person, the Christian in exile, and who hasn't felt like that, sees in the companionship of a fellow Christian a physical sign of the gracious presence of the triune God.

[12:43] In other words, we embody Jesus to each other. Keep faith together. And when we do that, what happens?

Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other and the Lord listened and heard. In other words, he's listening to us right now when we meet together to encourage each other.

And he not only listens, but he hears. What's the difference? It implies that he's going to do something about it, that he is going to act, which is what happens next. Verse 16, a scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honoured his name.

Can you see the curtain being pulled back? What's going on in heaven? God recording our names and our faith in the eternal book of remembrance.

God does not ignore. He takes note. I want to tell you about the golden book. This is a wonderful story. Go and find a book about it if you can.

[13:53] This is the golden book of the Warsaw Underground. In 1943, during the middle of the Second World War, there was an uprising in Warsaw in the Jewish ghetto and predictably it was crushed by the Nazis.

And in the wake of their defeat, a Jewish resistance group gathered together in secret with a mission. They figured it was too late to do any more to save people.

But if they couldn't do that, then they could at least save their names. So they began an underground archive known as Oineg Chavez.

And by candlelight while the deportations and the executions unfolded outside, they collected the names and the testimonies of everybody who had resisted, teachers, fighters, children, everybody. and it was called the golden book. It wasn't because the book was beautiful. It was because the names in the book were so precious.

[14:53] It's a dangerous book, isn't it? Because if it gets found, we can all guess what happens. So what did they do? They buried the records in metal boxes and milk cans underneath the rubble and the ruins of the ghetto hoping that one day somebody would dig them up and know, know that

in life and in death those people had been faithful, faithfully resisting.

And after 1945, you guessed it, survivors, investigators, did discover the hidden containers underneath the rubble of Warsaw and inside preserved thousands of pages.

so the names written secretly during the occupation became then a memorial and an honour roll all at once.

God has a golden book of remembrance and honour roll of faithful people who love his name and he will publish it in the end.

And if you're a Christian, your name is in it. And he's recording more and more names all the time right now. He is remembering us.

[16:12] What does he call us to do? Just scan down to chapter 4, verse 4. Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel.

In other words, even as God remembers us, he wants us to remember him and his words through his messages. Moses, the law, Elijah, the prophets.

And of course, we know what that means because we're this side of Jesus, aren't we? We know that Jesus says, these are the scriptures that speak of me. He wants us to remember the words of Jesus.

Living the law of Christ, which is the royal law of love, Galatians 6.2. believing that he remembers, helping each other to remember that.

Living out the love of Christ, that's what it means to keep faith together. just want you to invite, to invite you for a moment to reflect on what we've heard so far.

[17:19] Let's ponder this question. What does it mean for you that God takes note and remembers your faith like this, if you're a believer? What does that mean for you?

What does that do to your heart? And what stops you believing that and keeping faith together with other people? Just think about those two things for a moment and then spend a moment in prayer and then we'll pick it up again.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Don't forget that prayer.

Don't forget that thinking. Pick it up again later. Let's turn now to the final section of our time together today. We know from these verses, don't we, that God hears and takes note of those who reject him.

[19:17] We say it's pointless to serve him. And we know now that God takes note of those who faithfully help each other turn towards him, don't we?

He hears and he records. But what's he going to do about it? When will he act? When will he speak? Let's pick it up at verse 17.

On the day when I act, says the Lord Almighty. And then 4 verse 1, surely the day is coming. What day are we talking about here?

Verse 5, see how I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. See, all the way through the Bible, God promises there is a day coming when he will act, when he will answer all, when he will answer the faithless and when he answers all of the cries of the faithful.

form. Now, how do we understand that day? If we're going to understand that day, you need to understand how biblical prophecy works as well, don't we?

[20:28] Otherwise, we'll never quite know where we're at. It works according to what's called the law of successive fulfillment. Big words, but what it basically means is this. God's spoken words come true in stages.

So when he says something will happen that will come true in stages, usually there's an immediate fulfillment for the people to whom that message was given, the original hearers.

Then there is a fulfillment in Jesus and there is a fulfillment when he returns for a second time. It's a little bit, if you like an example, it's a little bit like thinking the sun will set in the west.

But that's true today, isn't it? The sun will set in the west. And it will be true tomorrow, but in a slightly different way. It won't look exactly the same as it looked today. And of course, the sun will set in the west is also true in a kind of a final way.

Eventually, the sun will set for the last time. Here, the day of the Lord is the day that Jesus comes. And also, the day when he comes again.

[21 : 37] What will happen on that day? Verse 17 again. On the day when I act, says the Lord Almighty, they will be my treasured possession. I will spare them just as a father has compassion and spares his son who serves him.

On that day, his children will be his treasured possession. What does that mean? What it doesn't mean is, great, I've added another jewel to my collection.

Like, you know, the crown jewels in their glass cases in the Tower of London display. No. treasured possession means things like the diary that you write in every day, the old Bible that your mum gave you, your favourite paintbrush, the screwdriver that just fits perfectly in your hand and has never failed you.

Right? That's what he means when he says, you are my treasured possession. That's what we are to God. And he will compassionately spare us because now we are the sons that he loves who serve him, sons and daughters of the king.

He looks at us and he sees Jesus, the son who perfectly served him and who he did not spare judgment in order that he could spare us.

[22 : 54] Are you hearing the gospel, friends? He will treasure and spare us. But secondly, he will heal us and give us joy.

Look at 4, verse 2. But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays and you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves.

It's quite a mental image, isn't it? Anyone else been loving the sun this week? I mean, I guess some of you probably are a bit fed up of it and eventually it gets a bit much, doesn't it?

But usually, especially after a cold grey winter, you go outside and you just raise your face to the sun and you feel its warmth on your face, on your back. We feel better, don't we?

If you know your Bibles well, you'll know the day of the Lord is a day associated with darkness, thunder, lightning, terrifying. Think about the darkness that came over the land when Jesus was on the cross.

[23 : 57] But for those who love the Lord, this is the day the sun rises with healing, casts its healing rays over our scarred minds and broken bodies and restores us.

We should be thinking about the dawn on resurrection day, right? Not the darkness of the cross. Can you feel that, friends? Just when you go outside after this, turn your face up to the sun and think of this.

The healing rays that God has in store for you, that cold that sits deep inside your heart that you just can't seem to shift, that's gone. The times when you feel like you're sitting shivering in the dark, that will be gone, driven away like the sun drives the chill out of your bones.

I didn't tell you what oinig shabes means, did I? Probably got the pronunciation wrong as well. It means the joy of the Sabbath. You see, those people who in the middle of that conflict and without hope really were recording those names in the golden book of Warsaw were doing that looking forward to a day of rest that would bring eternal joy.

That's what the day of the Lord is for believers in Christ. And on that day will be vindicated. Verse 3, then you will trample on the wicked. There will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act.

[25 : 22] You see, trampled now, raised then. So God will vindicate us. But we have to mention here as well that God will divide.

Look at verse 18. You will see again the distinction between the righteous and the wicked. Who are they? Between those who serve God and those who do not.

You might be thinking, oh, come on. It's 21st century. Surely we're beyond all that. You know, these people are good. Those people are bad. Stuff. Surely that whole resistance idea with the golden book of Warsaw, well, it's just not really appropriate, is it?

Because we're in peacetime. But we aren't in peacetime, are we? We're in a spiritual battle that has been going on for thousands of years.

And God himself says there is a dividing line between the righteous and the wicked. And God defines that for us as those who serve him and who don't. And Jesus distinguishes in exactly the same way, Matthew 25.

[26 : 33] As should we when we share the good news. There's no good news if there's nothing to be saved from, is there? And it is only good news if it is for people who need saving like us because we once didn't serve God.

God will divide. And God will destroy. Verse 1. Surely the day is coming, it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble and that day that is coming will set them on fire, says the Lord Almighty. Not a root or a branch will be left to them and then right at the end or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.

Now we don't rejoice in this but it has to be heard, doesn't it? God will completely uproot and destroy the one who does not serve him. Those who mock the idea of God or that God could be angry at anybody, God says it will be like a furnace, it will be like a forest fire that burns leaving nothing behind except room for new life.

See, when Jesus comes and dies on the cross in place of sinners and God spares him by resurrecting him, that's the down payment and it's not just the down payment on our resurrection if we trust Jesus, it's the down payment on judgment too.

[28 : 08] Judgment for the wicked, healing for the faithful and this is the part, guys, that should make us either really grateful or really angry. If we just don't care, if it's just water off a duck's back, friends, then that indicates that you're probably spiritually deaf or more likely spiritually dead.

Wake up. Choose the healing rays that God offers. Be part of his treasured possession.

Make sure your name is in the golden book. What happens to that book? Let's turn to Revelation chapter 21 and verse 11.

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and heavens fled from his presence and there was no place for them and I saw the dead great and small standing before the throne and books were opened.

another book was opened which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them and each person was judged according to what they had done.

[29 : 30] Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. That's our healing. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.

That's not what he wants. What he wants is verse 6 sending the great prophet Elijah to us before that day comes to announce the coming of Jesus in order to turn the hearts of the parents of Father God to his children and the hearts of the children to our Father God.

And so this is not a call to live a better life is it? It's not a call to moral reform or behaviour modification. This is a call to trust the one who spares not his own son in order that he can spare you.

This is a call to serve God instead of putting him to the test. this is a call to turn your hearts towards God just as he in Jesus has turned his heart towards you.

Amen. Let's pray. Lord God we thank you so much for the promises set before your people here for healing that we are your treasured possession pointing towards the Lord Jesus where you have proved that you are willing to pay the greatest price in order to make us yours and have us with you forever.

[31 : 14] Lord please will you help us to guard against hard hearts to guard our thinking carefully help us to keep faith together to keep turning to each other reminding one another of your goodness and your greatness.

Lord pray that we would put our trust in you not put you to the test in Jesus name Amen.