

The Day of the Lord

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[0 : 0 0] We're going to begin reading from Revelation chapter 21. We're going to be thinking for a few minutes together about the day of the Lord in Malachi chapter 4.

So here's another way for the people of God to think about what the day of the Lord looks like. My favorite passages in all of the Bible. Revelation 21, we'll read the first five verses. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.

For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.

[1 : 0 6] He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain. For the old order of things has passed away.

He who was seated on the throne said, I am making everything new. Then he said, write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.

So the book of Malachi, we've got to that final chapter, chapter 4, where the prophet's message closes with a focus on the day of the Lord.

So let's hear God's word together. 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. But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.

[2 : 1 3] And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. Then you will trample down the wicked. They will be like ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things, says the Lord Almighty.

Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel.

See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes.

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.

So the day of the Lord, which is a key theme of the later prophets. You can find Ezekiel, Joel,

Amos, Obadiah, Zephaniah, Zechariah, all talking in different ways about the day of the Lord.

Which, in a nutshell, I guess, is a promise of the day that the Lord will come both as judge and as saviour. And in the context of what Malachi is saying to the people, he's really saying to them, live in light of that day.

[3 : 1 8] Remember the day of the Lord is coming. And because that day is coming, you need to change your hearts and you need to change your lives to be ready for that. There was in Israel sometimes a presumption that God would come and all would be well with them.

And Malachi is giving to them a different message. This is one of those Bible passages that's got that sort of classic Bible presentation of the two ways to live.

There is the way of blessing or there is the way of curse. There is the way of accepting God or there is the way of rejecting God. And this is brought to the people in Malachi's day.

And it's something that we need as well. It's something that we need as a motivation for our evangelism, I think, to reflect on eternity and to reflect on judgment and salvation.

We need it too to comfort us in our discipleship, to help us to persevere as we remember the hope of salvation for the people of God. But Malachi's message on the day of the Lord begins with judgment.

[4 : 24] We saw that very clearly in verse 1. The day is coming. It will burn like a furnace. We've seen in the news, haven't we, the destructive power of fire.

We've seen the Glasgow School of Art being ripped apart by a blaze again. We've seen the devastation caused by volcanoes. We've been remembering as a nation the Grenfell Towers. Here is a terrifying picture. A terrifying picture reflecting the fact that God is holy and that God will act in the end to judge those who don't turn from sin to trust in him.

The whole point of Malachi's prophecy, it is really a warning to say to the people, your thoughts about God are wrong. Your actions towards God and your actions towards others are wrong. And so Malachi speaks to the arrogant who say, I don't need God. I don't need Jesus. To the evildoers who say, I won't listen to God. I'm going to pursue my own way of life at warning of this day of judgment that will bring the certainty of eternal day.

[5 : 38] Now, it's a hard message. Some people would say, well, that's very primitive. That was Old Testament, New Testament. Everything changes. God is love. But I just want to remind us that this is not sub-Christian.

This is not for then and there's a different message now because I'm sure we remember that Jesus teaches on hell and eternal judgment a lot more than any other Bible teacher.

So, for example, in Luke chapter 7, Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father in heaven, I will tell them plainly, Jesus says, I never knew you.

Away from me, you evildoers. Or we can think about the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matthew chapter 25 when there is that final division based on how people have lived, demonstrating how they have responded to God's word.

And Jesus says they will go away to eternal punishment. Those who didn't live for God, but the righteous to eternal life. It's exactly the same message that Malachi brings, that Jesus brings because God, of course, is unchanging.

[6 : 54] He remains perfectly holy. He continues to hate sin and he must act as judge of those who don't come to Jesus for mercy and forgiveness.

He must deal with sin else he stops being holy and righteous and good. And that's something we need to remember. But it's difficult, isn't it?

So there is judgment on the day of the Lord, but there is also salvation. Judgment is one side of the coin. The day of the Lord as blessing and salvation is the other.

In verse 2, there's a picture of heat again, but it's very different. This time it's more like the summer sun, the dawning of a new day that brings healing. It's a lovely picture in verse 2.

For you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. How do we experience the day in this way? Well, the word is to revere, to honour, to fear.

[7 : 56] To respond appropriately to who God is. To respond appropriately to Jesus, his Saviour. And for those who turn in repentance and faith, there's this promise that the day will be one of joy.

We get a picture of these calves released from the stall and they're all excited and they're jumping about. And that's a picture of joy for the people of God. There's also, and maybe this is hard for us to enter into in verse 3, the promise of vindication.

So it says, you'll trample down the wicked. There'll be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things. And again, that sounds really hard to us. But when we think about what we see of God's people globally, we used to have a map, it's up the back, map of the persecuted church.

They know this and they have hope that one day that God's people will no longer be crushed and attacked and persecuted and hated and humiliated.

That for them, there is the great hope of enjoying the final victory of the Lord Jesus. And again, this isn't Old Testament and the New Testament speaks a different word.

[9 : 10] 2 Thessalonians chapter 1. This is how Paul or God through Paul comforts a church under pressure. He says, God is just.

He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled and to us as well. And when will this happen?

This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. Judgment for some, vindication and salvation for others.

And that will bring them joy and it will bring God glory. It's a day of grace. It's a day of healing. How is it that any of us can experience the day of the Lord as salvation and not judgment?

Well, it's because Jesus knew the judgment of God. Took hell in concentrated form on the cross for his people.

[10:17] So that we can live with hope. We can know this final victory of salvation accomplished. Because Jesus saves and Jesus keeps his own.

He is the true son of righteousness. We trust in his righteous life. We don't trust in our righteousness and goodness. We trust in his righteous sacrifice.

So the day of the Lord is a day of judgment. But it's also a day that brings full and final salvation for the people of God. That's where that wonderful picture from Revelation 21 kicks in.

That's the hope for us in Jesus. And then Malachi goes back to warning. His prophecy ends on an urgent warning.

Because as we've seen over the weeks, these are people who the priests are corrupting worship. The people are living immorally. They're refusing to bring God what he's due.

[11:21] They're not honoring him. So they need to hear this. And so Malachi calls the people to look both backwards and forwards. Backwards first. Verse 4. To the law of Moses.

Whenever the Bible says remember, it's not simply a mental thing. It's a mental thing that leads to action. So keep those laws in mind and put them into practice is what Malachi calls the people to. Remember how you became the people of God. That you were saved by grace in order to obey. In order to be his holy people. In order to be a light to the nation.

So here they are being called to faith that shows itself in obedience. And what we've seen in Malachi is not evidence of them remembering.

But evidence of them forgetting. And there was a complacency about the people. And they need to realize. They needed to realize that it's their theology.

[12:26] It's their thoughts of God and that response. And their ethics. Not their genealogy. Or not their race that will determine how they experience the day of the Lord.

And so Malachi needs to say to them, remember. Remember how you ought to live. How you ought to live before God. For us too, we are called to remember.

Remember God's call to salvation. Remember the cross of Jesus with thankfulness. Remember to work out our salvation.

We too are to work out our salvation. In fear and trembling as God works in us. That we too are to remember that we are called to be a holy people.

Living in faith and obedience. So we need to remember and look back. And here they're also called on to look forward.

[13:27] They are reminded of this promise of God of a second Elijah. Gospel of Mark tells us this is fulfilled in John the Baptist.

Verse 5. See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers.

Or else I will come and strike the land with a curse. Here is the promise of one who will come, a great prophet who will call the people back to repentance. Call them back to a restored relationship. And that, of course, is what we see John the Baptist doing in preparation for the ministry of Jesus. Like Elijah on Mount Carmel. Remember that story of Elijah on Mount Carmel with the prophets of Baal.

1 Kings chapter 18. So he challenges those false prophets. Well, let's see whose God is the true God. And he speaks to Israel. And he says to them, How long will you waver between two opinions?

[14:34] If the Lord is God, follow him. But if Baal is God, follow him. And what we've got at the end of Malachi is really the same kind of picture.

There's the same stark alternative being presented. You can listen and you can be part of God's community and you can know salvation and blessing. Or you can turn away.

You can refuse. You can keep going the way you're going and you will end up living under God's curse. And that's the fundamental choice that all of us, all of humanity has to make.

We too are called to decide where our loyalties lie and then live on that basis. And again, we're called to hope in Jesus.

We got that great gospel verse in Galatians chapter 3 where we read, We avoid the curse. [15 : 41] We avoid judgment by looking to Jesus, by trusting in Jesus. And so we need this warning. We need this reminder. So we're constantly trusting in the righteousness of Jesus and not ourselves.

So that we're taking seriously this call to live in faith and obedience, putting sin to death. So that we're ready for Jesus' return. And we remember that the decisions that we make now have eternal consequences.

And we need this warning so we don't forget the importance of our mission. Because people need to hear the good news of Jesus. It is something that is urgent.