

# Malachi 4

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Preacher: David Helm

[ 0 : 0 0 ] Malachi chapter 4. For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble.

The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.

You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall, and 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, remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and the rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. Behold, I will send you Elijah, the prophet, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes, and he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with the decree of utter destruction.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, good morning. Good morning.

[ 1 : 1 4 ] It's my privilege to preach today. If you're visiting, we are concluding an Advent series in the book of Malachi, and looking forward to Christmas Eve, especially enjoying this morning in the sense of seeing people that are new to the church.

Perhaps today is the first day you've walked in, as well as people that have come back after having been here for many, many years. It's nice to be coming a church where people are returning to Christmas.

So it's great to have you here this morning. I want to title this Christmas sermon from Malachi 4, The Day is Coming.

Well, the day is coming. It's nearly upon us now. You know the day I'm talking about, the day that children have been longing for, the day that every adult has been preparing for, the day that many are buying gifts for.

I'm talking about Christmas Day. That day is coming. But surprisingly, while any right-minded person would think that God's last word before Christmas would concern Christmas Day, we get Malachi 4 closing off our English Bible with a day of another kind.

[ 2 : 4 4 ] Before Christmas Day, take a look. Chapter 4, verse 1. For behold, the day is coming. It won't be the day of Christmas.

Again, verse 1. That day is coming. Or verse 3. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on that day when I act.

Or all the way down at the end of verse 5, the great and awesome day of the Lord. Four occurrences of the day. Four opportunities Malachi has to connect God's last word before Christmas to Christmas.

But he doesn't. Now for some of you, that's going to be difficult to hear. Because Christmas is your favorite day. I would probably count myself in and among that kind of crowd looking forward to Christmas.

But for others of you, the fact that Malachi doesn't close out on that day is, why, that just made you happy to come to church. Because Christmas is a difficult day. This time of season is a difficult season.

[ 4 : 0 4 ] After all, yesterday we just passed through the shortest day of the year. Darkness falls. The aged are reminded of their condition. The anxious of heart are weighed down.

This season is not, in their minds, the day we've been looking for. There was a song, I think one of the Christmas carols.

They sing it, I've got the L.A. Christmas blues. Did you know that stress and anxiety and loneliness make the holidays difficult for many?

The mental state of individuals around Christmas, 24% begin to think that their mental state is a lot worse. 40% say it's somewhat worse.

And I'm here to encourage you this morning today. Malachi is not going to talk to you about that day. So, what are we in for from this text?

[ 5 : 05 ] This skipping over of Christmas to a consummation. It comes as a surprise. It raises some questions. Not merely, why does God's last word before Christmas do a flyover of Advent and touch down instead on a day of final accounting, but why should that matter to us?

Why should that matter to you? Not merely, why does Malachi blow past Christmas the way you and I blow past fence posts on a road trip?

But what does that mean for you? I'm really hoping and praying that we get the so what of Malachi's movement to a future day.

Those are the questions the sermon has to answer. And so why does God's last word before Christmas from this text fly over Christmas itself?

I want to say a couple things on that. Evidently, there's a bigger day for us in store than Christmas.

[ 6 : 16 ] Verses one to three. Not only is there a bigger day for us in store for Christmas, but there are other days that he would point you for or toward instead of Christmas.

Verses four through six. There's a bigger day for us in store than Christmas. Again, look at verses one to three. Behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and the evildoers shall be stubble.

The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But as for you who fear my name, the son of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings, and you shall go out leaping like calves from the stall, and you shall tread down the wicked on that day.

Notice in verse one there, that bigger day than Christmas is something he wants you to behold. He wants you to see. He wants you to put your eyes on that second coming rather than the crash.

In place of Christmas, then, we get a devastating day of judgment, and yet a cataclysmic day that's not without deliverance. The advent depicted here is an apocalypse, a conclusion of human history that brings both salvation and judgment.

[ 7 : 48 ] You can see that it's universal. In one sense, in verse one, all the arrogant, all the evildoers. But then verse three, but for you who fear my name.

He sets up the categories that he concluded chapter three with. There is a distinguishing eternal difference now between the righteous and the wicked. And it comes with two metaphors.

Do you notice it there? The oven and the sun. Complementary metaphors, but they contrast one another.

They speak of the same day that he would have you consider. The oven or the sun, depending upon who you are and your relationship to God at the conclusion of human history.

Let's look at what it's like for those in Malachi's day who don't repent, who come to the end of life, the end of human history, in terms of his judgment.

[ 8 : 54 ] It is an oven. And then it's got the imagery of trees, branches that are not just burned, but consumed.

You see, this is the ingenious invention of the solo stove. I built a lot of fires in my day where the oxygen couldn't get up underneath it.

So the wood that I put on it just smoldered. And you could leave it there for four or five days and try to light it and try to light it, but because air couldn't get up underneath it, nothing was actually ever consumed.

But then the solo stove came along and brought air from underneath and the wood that I put in there is burned and consumed. It is nothing but ash at the end.

This redo of the old 55-gallon drum that stood in alleys where men warmed their hands by is now a small, multi-hundred-dollar thing that you can burn things till they're totally consumed.

[ 10 : 06 ] And what he's saying is the day is coming when the wicked will be like the wood, the dead wood, placed in a solo stove until it's all consumed.

Now that's quite a striking thing to think about. Do you believe it?

Is it believable? Is there really going to be a future day of judgment? A day of reckoning? I mean, that is the question that's been running through human history.

Do you remember in Genesis 1, 2, and 3, the evil serpent comes and says to Adam and Eve, did he really say these things?

You're not going to die. See, the very first seed that was planted in the human mind was to help us put away the idea of a day of wrath.

[11:16] There will not be a day of final accounting. One doesn't die if you do what you want to do. That sense of disbelief had emerged even in Malachi's day.

We've seen it in the letter where they doubted whether or not he was coming. Peter, 400 years later, will pick it up again and say, well, everyone wonders when's the day of his coming.

And today, your heart and mind, tempted, are we not to doubt, to disbelief, an actual day of reckoning for all of human history? Hasn't the world always gone on as it is and won't it always be that way?

I will say that there's one thing in favor of Malachi's view on a day of judgment. There's one thing we can take refuge in on the Christian view of a day of reckoning.

reckoning. This idea that you and I have likewise planted in our mind of a universal and innate sense of justice. See, the idea of justice, righteousness, which is within us, which we believe in and we do not doubt, that idea of justice requires a reckoning, does it not?

[12:37] It requires a putting right of things that have been wronged. And the Christian church has taught all the way through that the day of reckoning allows, in one sense, God to put things right.

I don't know if you believe the Christian gospel or not this morning, but if there is not a day like we find in this text, then there will never be recompense for wrongdoing.

It will never come. The world will always be as it is. And for me, well, I prefer to believe that an accounting is coming.

So did Johnny Cash. Oh my, I've been listening to him this week. Can't believe he's already been gone 21 years.

His last album, When the Man Comes Around, there's a man going around taking names. He decides who to free and who to blame.

[13:49] Everybody won't be treated all the same when the man comes around. The hairs on your arm will stand up at the tear in each sip and each sup.

Will you partake of that last offered cup or disappear into the potter's ground when the man comes around? And then that lower bass note just dong, dong, dong.

Voices calling, voices crying. Some are born and some are dying. It's the Alpha and Omega Kingdom come. It's coming.

I want you to know that the doctrine of a final judgment is something that he would have you lay your eyes on now. It ought to prick our hearts to prepare for it.

It was that way for me at the age of five at my Grandma Helms' home in central Illinois. I considered, because my parents had told me about things like eternity and that there was a final destination of both heaven and hell.

[15:02] And while I didn't understand the gospel fully at all, I knew that if we were going to be eternally bearing soul weight, I would rather be in heaven than hell.

I didn't want to be under a day of judgment. And so even at that early age, my mind began to consider my own life in light of this.

I hope that it will do that for you today. But there's more. There's the sun.

Do you see it there? The sun is here, not merely the oven. And here, the metaphor of the sun asks you to consider a day other than that of the solitary Christ candle which we're going to light on Christmas Eve, that light which long ago illuminated that darkened stall in Bethlehem.

Here, you don't have the star over Bethlehem. You have a sun stretching out across the horizons of the earth as a sun of righteousness rising with healing in its wings.

[16:18] I'm sure some of you, many of you, most of you, perhaps all, have seen that sun emerge over the lake. Have you not? Have you not been on Lakeshore Drive early enough to see the darkness give way to a long, thin light of white and over time it emerges with colors and the sun rises and it almost seems to wash the entire view of the Chicagoan like a watercolor paintbrush moves from one end of the canvas to another signifying that another day is dawning and on that day of final accounting it will not only be an oven which consumes the wicked it will be like the

sunrise of righteousness rising across the horizon of human history for those who know him.

Now I haven't been thinking about heaven enough. Is my view of heaven so impoverished that I would rather just remain here and things never change and Christ never come?

Have I come to a point in my life at age 63 where I feel like arriving at heaven might just possibly be one big, long, eternal, boring existence floating from cloud to cloud?

Have you? Franklin Roosevelt ironically on one of his fireside chats if you want to keep the metaphor in play during World War II said never before have we had so little time in which to do so much.

But sometimes when it comes to heaven I'm thinking like never before will we have had so much time to do so little. but I'm missing something here.

[18:19] We're missing something here. Malachi flies over Christmas Day because he's aware that there's a much bigger day in store for us and that should matter to us.

Malachi wants you to be prepared this week to stand in his presence forever more under the warmth of his approval under the strength of his life.

I hope we are ready for that. It says we're going to be like what's it say? Calves skipping from the stalls.

I've never seen a calf birthed a calf calved whatever they call it on the farm. We're city folk but some of you have probably seen something like this.

I did see once driving to a doctor's appointment early in the morning along a country road a doe that I don't think had emerged into life more than a minute or two.

[19:42] It almost looked as though it stumbled right from the side of the road having just been given birth still wet finding its footing.

But Malachi is saying that when the day comes it's going to be such that we're those who are righteous or have God's approval are going to be skipping like calves from the stall.

The day ought to actually ignite within your affections a desire for his advent. It ought to kindle your heart to a longing for his return.

There ought to be a mindset that emerges within us that Paul had at the moment of his death when he said there's a reward laid up for me on the day of his appearing and not only for me but for all who have longed for that appearing.

This ought to be longed for but the affections of the heart will be ignited for his appearance as we understand that on that day we will be like calves skipping from the stall.

[21:00] We'll be finding our footing on lush ground in the eternal provisions of our Lord. Earlier this week I zoomed with a dear friend of mine 99 years old.

He said what are you preaching on? I said I'm preaching on calves skipping from the stall. I said you feeling like a calf? He said no I'm feeling like I'm going upstairs on my hands and knees.

But it's good for me to consider that this day in our aging and aged states we're not going downhill but we're entering into something like that when he appears.

Is that not good? Is that not healthy? Think about it for those of you who are anxious. Think about it when you think Christmas is not my day. This is not my season. Well the anxieties of this life, the pressures of this life, the stress of this life, the things that aren't going right in this life.

Well this is not your life in total. The day on that day you're going to be like young again. You're going to be able to run again.

[22:14] You're not going to have any plantar fascia. Those little calves they just get up and go.

You know I've been suffering from plantar fascia. I think I might have mentioned that to a couple of you. Now I sat and watched people what these old men are doing when they're walking around like this.

When they go like that they all got plantar fascia just like I got. It's not going to be there forever. Consider that.

I'm asking you to think about this line. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. Put your mind on that day.

Well Malachi is telling you first there's a bigger day in store for you than Christmas. And it matters because he wants you to be ready to stand in his presence forever.

But he blows by Christmas the way we speed past fence posts for a second reason as well. Take a look at chapter 4 verses 4 through 6.

[ 23 : 32 ] He blows by the fence post because there are two lamp posts he wants to put your attention to. It's the lamp post of law and Elijah.

Take a look at verse 4. Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes and he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.

Two other days other than Christmas are significant for us. Two days neither of which are Christmas. Verse 4.

This remember this message to listen to means your obligation before God.

He's a holy God and he will hold us accountable for unholy ways and our minds better be fixed on all that Moses gave us in the law.

[ 25 : 00 ] What he wants to say is rather than Christmas there's a message I want you to listen to rather than forward you onto the crash scene I want you to go back to Mount Horeb and listen to the law it's all there and it's all good this is the way one loves the Lord these are the blessings and the curses that you need to be aware of before that day comes he turns your attention then first to a message but then second to a messenger first to one you look back at but second to one you need to look ahead toward there's that word behold again that second literary hanger on the entire text behold verse one a day is coming and verse five behold

I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes there are three good reasons for you this morning to think that this prophecy was fulfilled through the birth of John the Baptist three quick reasons let me signpost it you should think that that prophet Elijah which came before the great day of the Lord that would bring utter destruction was John the Baptist because of what Zachariah sang what Mark wrote and what John the Baptist said let me just be quick what Zachariah sang about the birth of his own son John he prophetically says your child will be called the prophet of the most high before you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways to give knowledge people in the forgiveness of their sins because of the tender mercy of our God whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high Zachariah himself connects the birth of his son to the language of our text could Elijah be John the Baptist is that who we were supposed to look for I think so not just because Zachariah sang it but because what Mark wrote about it Mark chapter one introduces John the Baptist this way now he was clothed with a coat of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist guess what we heard language like that before how about 2nd Kings 1 8 in regard to Elijah himself where Elijah is introduced this way he wore a garment of hair and a belt of leather around his waist see Mark is trying to say Zechariah wore is kind of mirroring what Elijah wore not only because of what Zechariah sang what Mark wrote but what John the Baptist himself said John the Baptist says after me comes one mightier than I am and then he says behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world and if you don't want Zechariah and you don't want Mark and you don't want JB's word on himself then take Jesus' word I know you're all looking for Elijah but Elijah has already come and it is John the Baptist now this is fascinating as you and I are given this word of one to look for it actually doesn't lead you to the crash it leads you to the final prophetic witness of the Baptist let me land this thing

John the Baptist even by Leonardo da Vinci who did the great painting in about the year 1513 on walnut wood pictures John the Baptist holding a red reed cross in his left hand and his right hand is going like this he's pointing pointing before the day of the Lord comes let me tell you he's pointing to heaven he's pointing to the descent of the Lord he's pointing to Jesus himself can I can I tell you what this should mean for you if you if you've been lost come on back the law from Moses and the prophetic witness of Elijah and the final prophet the Baptist are sufficient for you to be ready for the final day didn't even hit on Christmas the law remember the law look for the prophetic witness to be fulfilled they are essential for you especially if you want to get a handle on

[ 30 : 24 ] Christmas there was a parable Jesus told Luke 16 about Lazarus and this rich man and the rich man ends up kind of waiting for judgment and Lazarus this poor man who held on to the promises of God and the rich man comes and says you know send somebody back tell my brothers what's going on because when they come to their final day and we all come to the day I don't want them to be where I'm at what's really fascinating there is Jesus says in the parable concerning this if they don't believe he says if they have Moses and the prophets if they don't believe them they won't even believe should someone rise from the dead what is Jesus saying he's saying look even Easter

isn't going to get it done Advent is not going to get it done you got everything you need in the law of Moses and the prophets which means that there's a pre proclamation of the gospel in all that stuff that just as

John the Baptist is pointing to him all of the scriptures are enough for you to see the great glories of God that save so here we go why isn't God's last word before Christmas about Christmas two reasons because Malachi wants you to know there's a bigger day than Christmas it's the second coming and he wants you to know there are other lights to look at that are sufficient for you to prepare today not merely the star over Bethlehem read the scriptures listen to the prophetic witness they will point you to everything that's coming in Christmas it's ironic isn't it how the second coming can enhance your appreciation of the first coming and it's interesting how the second coming is what's in the prophet's mind rather than the first coming this reminds me of Isaac Watts he wrote a Christmas carol famous Christmas carol joy to the world he wrote it reflecting on Psalm 98 98 ends like this let the rivers clap their hands before the Lord comes to judge the earth he will judge the world with righteousness many people think that he wrote joy of the world while reflecting on the second coming of Christ but when you sing it it helps you appreciate everything about Christmas I hope you've got enough to believe that there's a final day of reckoning I hope you know where to look and I hope it all leads you to our Lord our Heavenly Father we give ourselves to you as we prepare for the day in Christ's name