

Longing for God's healing intervention 2

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[0 : 00] Malachi chapter 3 starts from verse 16. Then those who feared the Lord spoke with one another. The Lord paid attention and heard them, and the book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed his name.

They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts. In the day when I made up my precious possession, and I will spare them as a man, and spare his son who served him, then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.

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 son of righteousness, shall rise with healing in his wings. You shall go out, leaping like calves from the store, and you shall tread down the wicked, for there will be ashes under soles of your feet.

On the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts, remember the Lord of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.

[1 : 34] 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 fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and stride the land with the decree of utter destruction.

This is the word of the Lord. Well, good morning everyone. Question to get you all thinking this morning. Is judgment negative or positive?

Both. It always has to be... Well, yeah, okay, that's both. All right. Our society, I think you're right, our society almost invariably sees judgment as negative.

I think that's why, you know, the common protest of society these days is don't judge me. That assumes that any sort of criticism or challenge is negative because it's a restriction of personal freedom, a restriction of the right to pursue happiness as people see it.

But imagine this. Imagine you're a parent and you're walking down the road and your child starts to bolt across a busy road into oncoming traffic. And you just lean forward and you yank that child roughly back, yelling at them, don't ever do that again, it's so dangerous.

[3 : 10] Your child might well think that judgment was rather negative. But from your perspective, it was actually positive. It was life-saving. So yes, judgment very much depends on the intent and the context in which it occurs.

And that's a really important perspective to bring into Malachi. The end of Malachi's prophecy, particularly, because judgment is dominant. But it's also the end of the Old Testament where judgment is dominant.

If you look at chapter 4, verse 6, that very last phrase, lest I come and strike the land with a curse or with a decree of utter destruction.

Now that seems like somewhat of a rather negative statement to end up the whole of the Old Testament, end up this prophesy of Malachi. Malachi. Effectively, this is God's last word until we hear from the Gospels when Jesus comes into the world.

Yet simultaneously, Malachi measures on the theme of hope. So if you look at chapter 4, verse 4, there's another decree that the Lord urges his people to remember.

[4 : 39] And that is, and it doesn't come out in the English version, but it's remember the decree of my servant Moses, the decrees that I commanded him at Horeb. Sorry, it should have been remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees that I commanded him at Horeb, or Sinai, for all Israel.

And if you go back to that decree, that was the Ten Commandments. That's loosely what this refers to. And the Ten Commandments were that which were born out of God saying, I have now entered into a relationship with you.

I will be your God and you will be my people. And this is what our relationship will be framed by.

And this is what it will look like. This is what the good life under my love and under my rule will look like.

So side by side with judgment and curse is hope. Judgment and hope. So we need to think of judgment and hope like conjoined twins.

God's judgment promises both destruction to those who continue to rebel. And we'll see a bit more of that from chapter 3 verse 18. Or chapter 4 verse 1 rather.

[5 : 51] Promises destruction for those who continue to rebel and healing, renewal to those who esteem and honour his name. Both happen simultaneously.

One event, two very different outcomes. Malachi, therefore, may be the end of the Old Testament but certainly not the end of God's story of salvation.

We find, we get to the end of Malachi, that there has to be a sequel. There's more of the story to come where judgment and hope will move to a final climax as the Lord judges sin and heals his people and renews them to worship him as he deserves.

So the question I want to take with us into the text now is why does hope need to be there so buoyantly, so much in your face as we finish up with this threat of curse?

Well, the answer is because God's healing, God's healing intervention is so desperately needed.

[7 : 03] So right through, over four weeks now, we've seen what's happening here in Malachi. The Lord, through Malachi, is forcing his people to recognise the awful state of their relationship.

It was a relationship in name only, really, as far as the people were concerned. And the Lord's forcing them to see how empty and shallow it is.

Why? That they might recognise once again the desperate need for God's radical intervention to save the relationship.

We've seen over three weeks that God's covenant faithfulness was beyond question. We started with covenant faithfulness. I have loved you, said the Lord.

He had loved them uniquely. He had loved them exclusively. He had loved them generously over generations. Last week we saw in chapter 3, verse 6, the sheer fact that the people of Israel still existed was all the evidence you needed of God's love.

[8 : 14] Equally true, but in sharp contrast, their covenant unfaithfulness was beyond question.

We've seen that again over three weeks. Essentially the Lord said, you have spurned my love at every point.

Chapter 3, verse 7, we looked at it last week. From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. But, they've thrown God's love back in his face.

They'd chased other lovers to follow the metaphor through here. They'd chased a good life apart from God. Still booked taking the relationship, but deep down their hearts were devoid of any respect for the Lord.

And certainly devoid of any affection for Him. And then again, we bounce again, God's faithfulness was beyond question in response to that.

God says, being true to His character, you will experience my righteous character in judgment. You see, God takes Himself very seriously.

[9 : 30] He will not allow Himself to be treated with contempt. Back in chapter 1, verse 14, we saw that verse, He says, For I am a great king, says the Lord of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.

Chapter 1, verse 11, For from the rising of the sun to its setting, my name will be great among the nations. And in every place, incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering.

God takes Himself very seriously. And if people don't respond as they ought to God's love, mercy, and grace, then God says, you'll experience my covenant faithfulness in a different hue.

You'll experience it in judgment. Both are covenant faithfulness. Both reveal my covenant character.

And if you experience my judgment, then either that will be in partial judgment, and the partial judgment we saw last week in chapter 3 was disciplinary and correctional or restorative.

Or, says the Lord, we'll see in chapter 4, verse 1, you'll face my judgment ultimately and final. that is punitive and condemnatory.

[11:01] So, where are God's people in all of this? Well, if you look at chapter 3, verse 18, God's people are found out. They knew that God's judgment would bring division.

But they'd come to believe that that division would be along racial lines. On the one side would be Israel and all the other nations on the other side and all the other nations would get it from God, get it in the neck from God and they would be preserved.

But the Lord doesn't say it like that. The Lord says, yes, you're right and there will be division. And in a sense, you are right. I will look at my nation, Israel, different from the other nations.

But, ultimately, the divide in my judgment will be between those who fear me and those who don't. Those who serve me and those who don't.

Those who esteem me and those who don't. We saw last week in the first part of this, looking at judgment and God's intervention, that God's judgment on his people would be severe but partial.

[12:08] We had those metaphors like the refiner's fire. And that's serious heat to melt down ore and float off all the dross. And the whole idea of that is that in the old days the refiner knew it was perfect when he could see his own reflection on the top of the metal.

That's a really lovely metaphor. That was serious heat the Lord's going to bring to his people. But it was designed to discipline, to bring them back, to purify, to bring them back to himself so they might worship him in spirit and truth.

And in chapter 2 verse 2 we saw two weeks ago the Lord says, outs his people by saying look you've gone through all the motions of serving me but here's the real problem for you guys.

You've not set your hearts to honour me. The heart of the problem was the problem of the heart. And God knew that his children, his people were unable and unwilling to obey him, to respond properly to his love.

And since that's true, God's people needed the real hope of God's intervention, of God's healing if God's judgment in a final form was not to settle upon them.

[13:38] Chapter 4 verse 1 the day is coming burning like an oven when all the arrogant all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze.

There's a wildfire coming. God's people need serious intervention, serious help, serious healing. the sort that only the Lord could deliver to reformat them from the inside out.

If the problem was a heart, then they needed new hearts. And all the prophets before him had spoken of this same problem and offered the same hope that the Lord would intervene and renew hearts so his people could worship him as he expected them to and wanted them to.

Amen. So God's intervention is seriously needed but secondly God's healing intervention would be just what is needed. Surprise, surprise. It's tailor made to what is needed in the situation.

[14:43] Chapter 4 verse 1 again. God's intervention is pictured as one day. But the metaphor gets mixed up a little because there's two types of fire in here. There's a fire like a wildfire that just consumes everything before it and then there's the fire that's associated with the sun, the rays of the sun.

One's consuming, one's restorative. Both are controlled. So when we think of a wildfire we often think of something being out of control. Well that's not the picture here.

A wildfire is the heat of the thing. It burns, if you remember last year the wildfire swept through Tasmania. There were some places where the soil was burned down six inches deep all the organic material was burned out at a depth of six inches.

There was never going to be anything to recover from that. That's the sort of serious fire, the consuming fire that's been spoken here. But it's not out of control. It is precisely as the Lord means it to be.

It will deliver the precise and distinct outcomes that the Lord means it to deliver for God's people, for those who fear his name.

[15:58] Look at chapter 3 verse 16. Then those who feared the Lord spoke with one another. 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. 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.

We have a group of people here in amongst the vast part of God's people who have got no affection, no esteem for God. We've got a group in here who still do fear the Lord and who are talking with one another, presumably, to encourage one another, to keep on fearing the Lord, not to

go with the flow, to keep on esteeming him or valuing him as a first order.

People who, chapter 3 verse 18, who desired to serve God because he was worth serving. For this group of people, God's judgment would result in perfect righteousness.

It would be the healing they long for. In chapter 4 then, we get the metaphor continued, the son of righteousness shall rise with healings in its wings.

[17 : 36] The picture here is of the sun rising. And what happens when the sun rises? Well, firstly, it brings to an end the dark night. So the picture here is the son of righteousness.

God's intervention is going to bring to an end that long, dark night of sin and misery and disobedience and struggle. That very stuff that marked the life of God's people.

And as the sun comes up, it's a fresh day, a fresh start in righteousness. righteousness. Now, I suspect that's a very easy picture for us to engage with.

At least I find it really easy to engage with. Having been out camping under the stars many a night when it's been seriously cold, perhaps even wet and there's nothing nicer than the sun coming up over the horizon and immediately you just feel its warmth and suddenly you just feel lifted, don't you?

It's a fresh start. It's therapeutic. That's the picture here. It's a moment to be longed for. It's a moment to be savoured.

[18 : 56] As even pictured here, it's probably something only people in the northern hemisphere would understand this idea of you shall go out leaping like cows from the stall. It was a big thing for us.

Our animals were always penned up for six months of the year over an hour old. It used to be no end of fun for us, probably a bit pathetic, that was fun for us, but come time of spring when you let them out and they absolutely went psycho for perhaps a couple of hours.

They would just race around and kick their heels up and snort and get on in among the fresh grass enjoying the spring day. That's the picture here. It would be such a time of excitement and joy and no wonder because it would be the time of healing.

It would be the time of finally getting what they've longed for, the ability to properly worship God.

The time they would be what they knew God had created them to be as they worshipped God.

The time when they knew they were actually being what God wanted them to be all along. People of righteousness, faithful and delightful to the Lord.

[20 : 14] So, God's judgment would just be what was needed, exactly what was needed for God's people. And it would just be exactly what's needed for God's glory because the two things exist side by side as we come to the end of Malachi's prophecy.

sometimes we tend to be a little bit focused on our own sort of situation, the people situation. But God's glory is working here as much as anything else. God's intervention would showcase that what he said earlier in the prophecy was true, that he was a great king.

It would demonstrate why his name is great across the world. His holiness would be known by his consuming judgment.

those who refused to bow before the Lord would experience this consuming judgment. It would be a wildfire. It would just consume them.

Nothing would survive. So God's glory would be established as the wicked get precisely what they deserve.

[21 : 27] And 3.18 Finally, the rubbish talk that we talked about last week, the rubbish talk of many of his people.

Remember they were complaining in their hearts that, well, look, what's the point of serving the Lord? There's actually no difference between the righteous and the wicked. What's the point? And suddenly the Lord says, well, you will then see that your rubbish talk was rubbish and you will see there's a vast difference between the righteous and the wicked.

And both will ascribe their situations to my character and my covenant faithfulness. And so as it's been right through, the Lord's really seen his people, well, my greatness will be seen in my consuming judgment, but my greatness will be seen also in my grace and love and mercy to you and my healing of you.

And even more so if you'll return to me. If only you'd trust me, says the Lord. You'll prove that beyond measure.

You see, in among all of that, the Lord knew only too well the inability of his people to do that on their own steam.

[22 : 57] We're back in 3, 16, 17 again. The Lord knew. He knew right from day one that his people didn't have the ability to serve him and obey him as they ought.

But here's the rub in verse 16 and 17. The Lord was delighted when he saw his people trying to do that, trying to esteem him, trying to fear him.

That's what got God's attention. Remember last week the Lord said he was just tired. He was sick and tired of listening to the ear bashing they were giving him, all the rubbish talk. But what gets his attention?

Well, when his people are trying to honour him, even though they know they fail in doing that. And what's his response to that?

Well, this book of remembrance, I think again it's most likely a picture. It's a commitment of the Lord to actually write down as it were and tuck it into his brain if we can think of the Lord like that.

[24 : 04] All these people and he says, wow, this is exactly what I'm about in my grace and mercy and love. And he commits himself to giving these people secure, everlasting relationship.

He commits himself to being close to them in an intimate relationship. They shall be mine. Now, it's important to remember here this isn't a commitment.

this book isn't listing all the good people as if somehow or other they deserve God's blessing. This book of remembrance is about sinful people whom, as it says in verse 17, he would spare.

Very powerful word that one. He's not rewarding them for their goodness, he's sparing them as a man spares a son who serves him.

In contrast to those who would be consumed by his fire getting exactly what they deserved, this group of people because they sought to fear the Lord would get precisely what they didn't deserve and could never really earn.

[25 : 25] They would and it's all theirs because of the Lord's grace and mercy and love and commitment to them.

But there's something else happening in verse 17 because the language there takes you back to Exodus chapter 19 verse 5. Remember the Lord, the Exodus, the Lord brought his people out of Egypt and he brought them to himself in Mount Sinai under Moses.

In chapter 19 verse 5 the Lord there says I will be, I brought you in eagle's wings and it's very interesting there's another bird reference here in chapter 4 verse 4. I just don't have time I spent a lot of time getting lost in that this week but I don't have time to follow it through now you can think about it yourself.

The Lord said I brought you to myself on eagle's wings I will be your God and you will be my treasured possession forever. So what's happening here in chapter 3 verse 16 17 the end of Malachi's prophecy is simply an affirmation that the Lord is still doing what he had promised to do all the way back at Exodus.

He promised to rescue his people and he actually did rescue his people. He brought them to himself he made himself their God and called them his treasured possession and that's exactly what we're hearing here again.

[26 : 54] Once again we're seeing God's glory because we're seeing God's covenant faithfulness. And look at chapter 4 verse 4 5 and 6 now.

As we end up the Old Testament end up prophecy of Malachi what will allow God's people to live confidently in God's future promises or God's hope God's promises of healing and intervention in the future.

Healing and remuel. Well I think it's this confidence in God's promises going forward is based on God's character and actions in the past and specifically what these two guys here Moses and Elijah represent.

To live confidently in God's future promises is verse 4 to remember. Look back don't be old fashioned that's not what he's saying but be people of the past truly in the past in terms of what God has done.

Remember that God does what he says he will do. And so God's last words to his people here before a sound of some 400 more years is remember Moses and remember Elijah.

[28 : 30] So remember Moses. What do they remember? Well we've just spoken about it in 3, 16, 17. Remember that the Lord initiated relationship with you in spite of your sin and failure.

The Lord brought you to himself simply because it was an act of God's grace and mercy. Not because you deserved it. The Lord committed himself to you and made you his treasured possession because that was God's covenant faithfulness working out. Remember that God gave you his love to shape the relationship and said this is how you're going to enjoy the good life with me.

And then remember also that the Lord knew even as he gave you his commandments that you wouldn't be able to obey them. And so what did the Lord do? He provided a means of dealing with your sins so that the relationship might continue even though your sin is just all over it. And remember Elijah. Elijah perhaps not so well known to some of us but Elijah he was the great prophet that God's people look back to.

[29 : 54] As I said last week he was the sort of pin-up prophet as it were. he was the pinnacle of prophecy for many of God's people. He was the one who challenged God's people to address God's character and God's promises when it looked like God's cause had been lost in the face of evil attack.

Elijah was a man who took on the enemies of God as it were and defeated them. But he also was a man who confronted God's people with their sin.

He urged them to repent and turn back to the Lord for renewed blessing. And remember that I'm sending you a new Elijah.

One who will take up and complete his original mission. Some commentators think that because Elijah didn't die, he was taken up to the heavens in a chariot, that that sort of left God's people thinking that there would be another day when Elijah would return to complete his mission.

Whatever you make of that, the Lord through his word here is saying I will send a new Elijah. One who will take up and complete that original mission, however you see it being connected into that.

[31 : 16] He will turn God's people back to serve the Lord. He will confound God's enemies. enemies. And so my friends, as we wrap up this Malachi series, the Old Testament, the whisper of Jesus has suddenly become a roar.

God's promised healing intervention comes reality with the birth of Jesus more than 400 years later. Quite literally, we step from Malachi into Matthew.

And in a sense, that's how it happened in history. God's next word was with the arrival of Jesus more than 400 years later. And what we find when we move into Matthew's gospel, is that even then, there were some among God's people who had remembered and who continued to fear and esteem the name of the Lord.

Lord, there were a group, a couple we'll meet next week as we start our next series leading up to Christmas, Christmas songs. Two people will meet, Anna and Simeon. And they were part of a group that's described in Matthew's gospel as those who are waiting for the consolation, and that word healing is there, the consolation of Israel.

They continued to fear the Lord. They continued to meet and encourage each other to fear the Lord. They continued to esteem the Lord. Jump forward a few more years, and I want to take you into Matthew 17, as we finish up this series and finish up this morning.

[33 : 01] Matthew 17 is that episode, that incident we call the Transfiguration. In the Transfiguration, we have the festival for the Old Testament, the Feast of Booths, and what we have initially is Moses and Elijah appearing.

That's the next time these two characters appear together. Moses and Elijah appear and they're chatting with Jesus. The disciples have no idea what to do with all that. So they initially start to treat them as equals.

So let's make a booth for each of the three of you. And then things take a very quick turn. Moses and Elijah fade into the background and disappear. and Jesus is transformed with a supernatural voice saying this is my beloved son.

What's happening there? Well, firstly it's an intersection of Jesus, Moses and Elijah. But secondly, it's Moses and Elijah recognising that they will step into the background now and as it were disappear and the spotlight will quite literally come onto Jesus.

In other words, Moses and Elijah both recognised that Jesus is the one who would bring that healing intervention which Moses and Elijah represented but were unable to deliver.

[34 : 38] so it's a connection but a connection deliberately puts the focus onto Jesus. Jesus would be the new Moses and we see that through the early chapters of the gospel.

He would be the new Moses leading God's people in a new exodus. That is, once again rescuing God's people from bondage to sin and death, bringing them to the Lord as his treasured possession, renewing them and creating a new servant nation, a global servant nation which we call the church.

Jesus would be the new Moses and Jesus like Moses would remind God's people that God demanded perfect obedience to his law.

But as the new superior Moses, he would actually, keep God's law for God's people. Because they couldn't keep it for themselves.

They couldn't have that standard perfection that the Lord demanded of his people. So, Jesus keeps the law for us. He gives us his righteousness so that we might have the necessary righteousness promised so that we can have ongoing relationship with the Lord.

[36 : 06] And this might be more controversial, but Jesus in a sense would be the new Elijah. Yes, Elijah was the first and foremost John the Baptist, but in a sense, Jesus is an Elijah figure as well.

Except that he completes what Elijah was unable to do. He calls his people back to the Lord to see their sin. But this time, Jesus actually deals with their sin, changes them from the inside out, makes new in our hearts and minds by the finding presence of God's Spirit, gives us a fresh start in the good life of God.

Friends, all God's purposes and promises of healing and restoration are fulfilled in Jesus. that's the sum of it.

In him, we are the righteousness of God. And we need to understand that as Christians today, we have everything that those who feared the Lord in Malachi's time could only look forward to and long for.

All God's promises are yes and amen in Christ, and therefore in us as Christians. So I just finish up with this challenge. The challenge is really the same as it's been every day and always been for God's people.

[37 : 34] Will we live in the righteousness as now ours in Christ, and thereby show the Lord to be worthy, to be served and honored?

God? It's a very personal question. Use the language of chapter 2, verse 2. Will we set our hearts and minds to honor God?

So the reality is for us as Christians, we can still be Christians and go through the Christian life as a box-ticking exercise. God's life. That is a relationship with God that's a mile wide and a centimeter deep.

We have so much privilege, so much more privilege than the people of Malachi's day, because we have the reality of the healing and the reality of God's enabling and empowering spirit with us.

So, in keeping with what the Lord expected from his people and Malachi's day, since we have so much privilege, since we've experienced so much mercy and grace and love, then our delight ought to reflect that.

[38 : 54] Our delight in the Lord ought to reflect that. And how do we see delight in the Lord? Well, it's not just words. Delight in the Lord will involve what we say, but primarily it will overflow.

It will be the overflow of what's in our heart, overflowing into our actions, actions of obedience, actions of praise, actions of struggle, to be faithful, to show that we esteem the Lord, that is value more than anything else in this life.

Will you set your heart to honour the Lord? pray with me please. Lord, forgive us for being utterly self-centred in thinking about our salvation so easily and so regularly, Lord, we think about it in terms of a personal benefit.

And Lord, that's all true. We have been forgiven. we know that we'll no longer be held accountable for our sins and sins, though many of them continue to be. We know, Lord, that we are now joined to you, united with you, and will one day be home with you.

And Lord, we find that so amazing, and yet so often we stop there, halfway through the story. And as we discovered in our Colossians series, we don't ask the question, what have we been saved for.

[40 : 32] So Lord, I pray that we might be those who truly respond to your love and grace and mercy. We pray, Lord, that we might be those who truly delight in you, that we esteem you, and that those around us, Lord, might see us esteeming you, that is valuing you above all else in our lives.

Lord, keep us from being mediocre or cold in our worship of you. keep us, Lord, from being segmented in our worship of you, thinking that simply turning up on a Sunday morning is worship, and the rest of the week is ours to live as we please.
Lord, help us to delight in you. Help us to make every day a day of worship and praise and thankfulness. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.