

The Day of the Lord

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[0 : 0 0] Heavenly Father, thank you so much for your word, the Bible. Thank you that you continue to speak to us through it. And Father, even though this was written thousands of years ago, there is still a message very much relevant for us today.

And so please give us minds that would understand your word and hearts that would seek to live in light of it. For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, no one likes suffering or trials. I'm pretty sure that's a safe statement to make. Though sometimes we respond differently when they come. And so, you know, when it comes to the trial of getting your vaccinations or your shots, needles, sometimes we might respond with shock, like this next kid on the next slide. We might respond with a scream of pain, like the next kid on the next slide. I love the second one in line. He's going, I'm next. Or we might just, you know, respond with sheer determination. I will survive. Of course, jokes aside, there are much, much worse trials and suffering in life, aren't there, than needles.

[1 : 1 1] And if we're honest, for some people, whether it's their own suffering or whether it's the suffering of those around them and the injustice they see, it's often enough for them to give up on believing in God, to give up on following God.

And the response is, if God is going to allow this to happen, then it's not worth serving God anymore. Perhaps you know people like this. Perhaps you've even sometimes felt this. Last Wednesday was the shooting in California. With 14, we were killed and 21 injured. And on the next day, the New York Daily News put this next slide on the front page of the newspaper. And it's not really so much a go at God as a go at the politicians who are praying. They're sending tweets out and praying for the families and not doing anything about guns. But for many people, it was still confirmation that God is not doing anything either. And so he's definitely not worth following, not worth believing in.

[2 : 1 7] Certainly this is how the Israelites felt as we come to this sixth and final issue in the book of Malachi. Now you remember the book of Malachi is broken up into six conversations where God addresses an issue in the covenant relationship with Israel.

And so the book is a bit like six marriage counselling sessions, if you like. And each session addresses a different issue in the relationship. And so if you've got outlines there, on the back is a table where I've tried to just summarise the book so far to try and bring it together.

If you just go down the middle column under the heading issue, you can get an idea or just be reminded of what we've looked at. So God begins by reminding them that he does love them because they feel unloved.

Next, he says, well, actually, you've been dishonouring me by not giving your best. Third, they've been unfaithful to God, profaning the covenant because they're being unfaithful to each other. And then we saw, fourthly, that they accuse God of injustice, which is going to be similar to today. And then last week we saw the key verses in chapter 3, verse 6 and 7, where God reminds them he does not change.

[3 : 2 8] Therefore, they are not destroyed. He's still going to love them. And he's still going to call them to return, to return to him. And if they do, he will return to them. And this call to return is important because it's not just that they needed to return from being unfaithful and dishonouring and all those other issues.

But as we come to this last issue today, it's as though they've given up on God. And so the call to return is really important, that they might come back, stop giving up on God and recommit themselves to following God.

Because as we'll see, well, let's look at their response. Point 1, chapter 3, verse 13. It says, you have spoken arrogantly against me, says the Lord. Yet you ask, what have we said against you? Well, you have said it's futile to serve God. What do we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the Lord Almighty?

And now we call the arrogant blessed. And certainly evildoers prosper. And even when they put God to the test, they get away with it. You see what they're saying?

[4 : 38] They're saying, what's the point of serving God? What gain is there? Remember, Israel has not long returned from exile. They return to the promised land and their temple has been rebuilt.

But yet life is not what the prophets said it would be. Not yet. Instead, life is hard. It's a trial. There's suffering. And the arrogant and evildoers, well, they prosper.

And so they ask, what's the point of carrying out God's requirements? What's the point of mourning in repentance? And at one level, we can understand how they're feeling, can't we? I mean, when we see bad things happen, we question sometimes, don't we?

Why would a loving God actively allow such things to happen? I mean, even the psalmist question God. But the problem comes when we move from questioning God to concluding that God is not worth following.

And that, verse 13, is to speak harsh words, arrogant words against God. Why? Because God has kept his promises in the past. He made them into a great nation as he promised.

[5 : 49] He gave them the land as he promised. He brought them out of exile as he promised. But because God does not work according to their timetable, because God doesn't answer their prayers the way they want, then they've concluded it's not worth serving God anymore.

And this is arrogant because it says that God ought to act according to our timetable. That God ought to answer our prayers the way we want. In the end, it's to say that God should answer to us as though we are God.

And that's what makes these words harsh and arrogant. We have a kids club that runs on Wednesday afternoons here at church. And I remember giving out some permission notes to the kids to then give to their parents.

And one child went to hand the permission note to the parent and dropped it. And the note fell on the floor. And so the parent politely asked, do you mind picking that up for me, please? And the child responded with, no, you can.

And started to walk off. Needless to say, the parent was angry. I'm not sure what happened after that because I quickly found I had something else to do elsewhere. But you see, such words are harsh and arrogant because the child was acting as though they were the parent, as though the parent answered to them.

[7 : 04] And that's what Israel was effectively doing. Whether they realised it or not. To speak like this was to forget both what God had already done, the promises he's kept, and ultimately who God is.

God. Now it seems that some of the Israelites realise this, for some of them then respond by returning to God in fear, re-fearing God, treating him as he deserves.

So verse 16. Then those, after hearing this, those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard.

And a book of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honoured his name. Here we see that some of the Israelites returned to God by fearing God, treating God as he deserves.

And this, the fact that this response comes at the end of the book of Malachi, I think suggests that it's a response not just to verse 13, you know, about saying it's not worth serving God, but perhaps a response to the book as a whole.

[8 : 07] Here are some people who finally get it. And so they respond by fearing God again. And they talk with each other, it says. It's as though they decide together to keep trusting God, to serve God again, to recommit themselves to God.

And we know this is the case, because when God hears them, he returns to them, by having their names written in a book of remembrance. I notice this scroll or book is written in God's presence. It's not on earth, it's in heaven. It's as though their names are written in heaven. So he returns to them and secures for them their eternity, as it were.

But also notice, God does not immediately then judge the wicked who are prospering. He does not then immediately save them from their suffering or trials. But he does give some encouragement by saying that he one day will do those things.

When? Well, on the day of the Lord. Point to verse 17. And this day runs through the rest of the passage, essentially. He says, On the day when I act, says the Lord Almighty, they will be my treasured possession.

[9 : 18] I will spare them, save them, just as a father has compassion and spares his son who serves him. And then you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.

You see, on that day, those who fear and serve God will be spared or saved. And they will become part of God's treasured possession, which is an extraordinary thought. The God of the universe, who owes no one anything, decides to make people his treasure, his treasured possession. But doing so will also distinguish them from the wicked, who are not his treasured possession. Our youngest daughter has a teddy, a dog, a Dalmatian, who she very cleverly has called Doggy. And it's her treasured possession. Here she is, yep. And this dog is in a privileged position, goes everywhere. It's the only teddy that gets to sleep next to her on the bed.

The rest of the teddies are down at the end of the bed. And the fact that she treats Doggy as her treasured possession, privileged position, that kind of stuff, distinguishes Doggy from the rest of the teddies, you see.

[10 : 37] Well, so too with God here. He will save and make those who fear him his treasured possession. He will give them a privileged position next to him.

And in so doing, he will distinguish them from everyone else who does not fear him. And in case we haven't quite got the distinction that will happen on that day, then God spells it out even more clearly in chapter 4, verse 1.

He says, literally, For behold, the day is coming. It will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble.

And the 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 fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.

And you shall go out leaping like calves from the store. Then you will trample on the wicked. They will be like ash underneath the soles of your feet.

[11 : 39] On the day when I act, says the Lord Almighty. Here, the distinction is pretty clear, isn't it? Between the wicked and the righteous.

Between those who do not fear God and those who do. And what's more, we also see here an answer to their complaint. At Jeremiah chapter 3, verse 15, they complain that God does nothing about the arrogant or evildoer.

In fact, they say that the arrogant and evildoer are blessed. Well, here God says, A day is coming when the arrogant and the evildoer, same words, will be judged.

He says, Not a root or branch will be left. In other words, it will be a complete and thorough judgment for their sins. It may seem like they prosper now, but on that day, there will be a great reversal.

And they will become like ash under the feet of those who fear God. On the other hand, those who fear God, who seem to suffer now, well, verse 2, they will be healed.

[12 : 39] And they will go out leaping like calves, just released from the store. I don't know if you've ever seen a car leaping, just the first time on the grass after it's been born, leaping around.

Have we got any farmers here that's seen that? No? Maybe? Maybe? I don't know. Anyway, I wasn't sure if it was a real thing or not. So I went on to YouTube, and it is. So let's see if we can play it.

Oh, look at that. How cute is it? First time on the grass, not long born, and it's with some other ones. Off they go. And that's enough.

That's pretty cute. But the real point is, it's a picture of joy and happiness, isn't it? Of being let out into green pastures to enjoy life as it was meant to be. And that's what God is saying.

He's saying, look, on that day, there will be a great reversal, not just for the wicked, but for the righteous as well. You might suffer all sorts of trials now, but on that day, you will go out leaping, like calves released from the store.

[13 : 45] And he does that so that they might keep serving him. It's meant to be an encouragement to keep going. I was saying to someone this morning from church, he was saying he's just so tired, and the only thing that's keeping him going is the holiday at Christmas time.

He says, the light at the end of the tunnel. That's what God's doing for the readers. This is the light at the end of the tunnel. This is meant to keep you going. And so point three, keep going, keep remembering the law.

Do you see chapter four, verse four? Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and the laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel. Keep remembering God's word, in other words.

Keep going, and not just remember it, you know, read it and go, oh, that's right, it says that. The word remember here means to act on it. It's no point remembering your wife's birthday and then doing nothing about it.

It doesn't count. I know. Rather, to remember means to act. And here it means to trust and obey God's word until the day of the Lord.

[14 : 52] Don't keep laughing, I'll get in more trouble. But you see the point? You know, this day is coming, it's going to be a great reversal, so keep going, keep remembering God's word, keep trusting and obeying it.

And yet there is one more final word in Malachi, which is a warning to repent. He says, see, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes.

He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.

Here God says he will send Elijah before the day of the Lord, which is both great and dreadful, I guess depending on whether you're the righteous or the wicked, whether you fear God or not. And this Elijah character is the person from chapter 3, verse 1, the messenger who will prepare the way for the Lord.

And Elijah's job is to turn everyone's hearts, whether they're parents or children. And the word turn here is the same word for repent. The idea is that people will repent and return to right relationships with each other and with God.

[15 : 59] And the warning is if you don't repent, then you won't be saved. Instead you'll be struck with utter destruction, judgment. Now this final warning of Malachi might seem a pretty depressing way to finish a book, isn't it?

But actually it's a word of kindness because it speaks of how God will give us yet another warning through Elijah so that people might be saved and not judged.

And so it's actually a word of kindness, a word of grace because it warns us and gives us more opportunity. Of course for us, this side of Jesus, Elijah has already come, hasn't he?

In the person of John the Baptist. We've seen this but let me show you again from a different passage. This time on the next slide from Luke chapter 1, John the Baptist's father, Zechariah, is told this, he, that is John, will go on before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah.

To do what? Well to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. Straight out of Malachi.

[17 : 12] And so if John is Elijah and Jesus comes after John, then Jesus is the Lord. And so the day of the Lord has actually begun because Jesus has already come.

And when Jesus came to earth the first time he was born to grow up and die for us and by his wounds we are healed spiritually, that is we're forgiven and we are brought into God's family.

We are made part of God's treasured possession. I don't know if you realise but it's 18 days until Christmas. You've all suddenly remembered what you have to do in those 18 days haven't you?

But we must remember at Christmas above all else the first coming of Christ who started this day of the Lord who grew up and died at the cross so that we could be spiritually healed, forgiven.

It's like the carol Hark the Herald Angels Sing I don't know if you've ever noticed this line but there's a line in that carol from Malachi 4. So on the next slide I'll skip over that one.

[18 : 19] Here's the verse Hail the heaven born Prince of Peace Here's the line from Malachi Hail the son of righteousness light and life to all he brings risen with healing in his wings Malachi 4.

You see Charles Wesley who wrote this carol understood Malachi chapter 4 that the day of the Lord began with Christmas when Jesus came to earth the first time to grow up and die for us so that he could bring healing forgiveness light and life to all who believe.

And yet the day of the Lord has not yet fully come has it? Because the wicked still prosper don't they? And while we might leap for joy from time to time there is great joy to be had in the Christian life our joy is often pierced with suffering and trials of various kinds and so we don't fully experience this joy.

We're not led into the green pastures of the new heavens and earth that we heard from 2 Peter. And so there is more of this day of the Lord to come. And so as we saw a couple of weeks ago this one day of the Lord in the Old Testament is really split into two days of the Lord in the New Testament.

First when Jesus came to bring forgiveness and second when Jesus will come again to judge the living and the dead as we just said in the Creed. And then we will see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked and it will be as clear as day.

[19 : 45] As we saw a couple of weeks ago Paul says in 2 Thessalonians on the next slide he says God is just look at the reversal he will pay back trouble to those who trouble you reversal and he will give relief to you who are troubled and to us as well and this will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels and he will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus they will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power when?

On the day he comes. You see there is a day still yet to come when there will be that full judgment of the wicked and that full salvation of the righteous and so it matters which side you're on doesn't it?

It matters if you fear God or not doesn't it? And so I guess the first question we need to ask ourselves is do we? Do we fear God by believing in his son Jesus?

Because if we don't then we won't be saved on that final day and if we are if we have believed in Jesus then we are to remember that final day and let that motivate us to keep serving God just like it did in Malachi's day.

In fact our future glory will be so glorious it will more than make up for our present sufferings. As Paul writes on the next slide from Romans chapter 8 he says I consider that the sufferings at this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us.

[21 : 25] And so we are to keep longing for that day. Peter talks about speeding its coming by sharing the good news with other people. That's the only reason God delays so that more people can come to know Christ as Warwick said in the kids talk before.

And we are to keep longing for this day and remembering that it is going to come. I mean if the day of the law has already begun in Christ's first coming then it's going to finish with his second coming isn't it?

And so it will come it will be worthwhile serving God. And so we are to do what Malachi's readers were to do chapter 4 verse 4 we are to remember the word of God not necessarily the law of Moses but the person whom the law who fulfilled the law rather Jesus.

We are to remember Jesus. And by remember not just think about him and go oh yeah that's nice but act on it. It means serving and pleasing the Lord Jesus. It means fearing and submitting to the Lord Jesus and it means trusting the promises of the Lord Jesus that he will come back again and living in light of them.

Let me finish with a old but true story. It's of a man called Eric Fellman who met a Chinese man whose name I can't pronounce so I'm going to call him Joe.

[22 : 42] Sorry about that. And it was in the 1980s and Eric met Joe and Joe's wife at their home in China. So when Eric met Joe they were in their late 60s and they invited Eric into their home and Eric was watching them interact with each other and he noticed how Joe and his wife would often look at each other with a loving smile and gaze and how they were quite gentle and warm to each other and it just kind of struck him.

Not that all old married couples are not gentle but it got him wondering and Joe saw him staring and he said it's okay we are actually newlyweds. You see what had happened was this couple was engaged in 1949 when Joe was a student at Nanking Bible College and on the day of their wedding rehearsal Chinese communists seized the Bible College and put the students in prison and sentenced them to hard labour and for the next 30 years I believe this is a true story the bride was allowed to visit Joe once a year and after each visit Joe was called into the warden's office and told you may go home with your bride if you renounce Christianity if you say it's not worth serving Jesus anymore like the Israelites thought and every year Joe replied with one word no went back to his

cell when Eric asked how he could have continued to follow God all those years when it cost him all that much the Chinese man looked rather surprised at him and he said how can I betray the one who died for me and will bring me to glory you see this

Chinese man remembered like Malachi's day the Israelites were to remember he remembered that Jesus came and died to bring him forgiveness that the day of the Lord had begun and he remembered that Jesus would come again to bring him to glory the day of the Lord will end and so he remembered to keep serving the Lord Jesus despite suffering despite injustice because he knew it was worth it friends I started by saying we all respond differently to trials and sufferings but when trials and sufferings come our way we're to remember the day of the Lord that it has begun that Jesus has come to bring us healing and he will come again and it'll be more than worth it so in the meantime we are to keep serving the Lord Jesus who died for us and was raised again let's pray our gracious heavenly father we do thank you for this book of Malachi father we thank you for the many lessons that it teaches us and for the truths that it reminds us father we thank you for today's truth that there is a day of the

Lord and that it has begun in the coming of the Lord Jesus that very first Christmas who grew up to die on the cross whose blood brought us healing and made us your treasured children father we thank you that Jesus will return again to complete the day of the Lord and bring us into a new heaven and earth a home of righteousness where there be such joy and happiness and so father until that day help us to keep remembering your word and to act on it by living not for ourselves but for the Lord Jesus who died for us and was raised again we pray these things in his name amen