

The Day of the Lord

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[0 : 0 0] I don't know if you realise it or not, but something very significant, very special happened this weekend. This weekend is the Eurovision Song Contest weekend.

Do people know about this? I have a brother-in-law who lives in Sweden and so my wife is very big into it and we can't help but know about it in our house. In fact, she's such a big fan that for a significant birthday of hers, let's call it her 21st, her 40th, she was given a plane ticket by parents to go to Sweden to see Eurovision, I mean her brother, that's what she's going for.

And this weekend after a big day, a great day yesterday at the Entrust Conference, very tired, she set her alarm, got up at 4.30, quarter to 5 this morning to watch the finals live from Portugal.

And right now she's at home suffering a splitting headache and feeling sick with overtiredness because we're both not as young as we used to be. And as she was doing all this, I couldn't help but think, is it really worth it?

It's not, surely. But for her, she'd say absolutely. But we can sometimes wonder whether it's worth things in life and that includes being a Christian, can't it? Sometimes we can wonder if it's worth following God and serving Him.

[1 : 1 8] When we suffer, and not just from splitting headaches, but real suffering. Or when we pray regularly and yet our prayers aren't answered the way we want or as timely and quickly as we want.

Or we seek to live a godly life and yet bad things still happen to us, one after another after another. Have you ever noticed how things seem to just happen in threes or fours? It's not just one thing, it just all happens all together.

And yet we are seeking to serve God at the same time. And so we can think, is this really worth it? Well, as we come to our final talk in Malachi tonight, this is how Israel was feeling.

They were wondering whether it was worth serving God. Remember, they've come back from exile. Life is hard and things have not turned out how they expected, nor how they've been praying for. And so they all thought it was no longer worth serving God.

Point one on your outline, verse 13 in your Bibles. Have a look there. God says, What do we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the Lord Almighty?

[2 : 4 1] Notice verse 14 again.

They say it is futile to serve God. What do we gain, they ask, by carrying out his requirements? In other words, they are saying it's not worth following God.

Why? Well, because verse 15, they suffer while evildoers prosper. And so what's the point, they're asking? And again, it's easier to feel like this, isn't it?

You know, when we see non-Christians who mock God and yet they're the ones who get the job while we miss out and are still looking. Or when we see non-Christians get a boyfriend or girlfriend, but we don't have one because we want to just find a Christian person.

Or when we see non-Christians do dodgy things at work and get ahead and yet we do the right thing and miss out on the promotion or miss out on getting that bit extra. When these things happen, it's very easy to think, is it worth serving God?

[3 : 48] This is Israel's attitude here. And it's really the attitude behind all their bad behavior towards God throughout the book of Malachi. Now, let me show you and at the same time recap the book since this is our last talk.

You might remember me saying that Malachi is broken up into six sections or counseling sessions that address issues in the book. And I've summarized them on the back of your outlines there.

So you might like to turn over there and have a look. And under the issue column there, it all started with feeling like God no longer loved them. And then that led to the next four in the middle behaviors of Israel towards God.

So the next one, they no longer tried to honor God with their best sacrifices. And then they no longer tried being faithful to each other or to God. And then they accused God of no longer being around to bring justice.

And then last week, they no longer brought the whole tithe into God's house, the temple. But behind those four negative behaviors in the middle there of the book is really this attitude tonight.

[4 : 56] You know, if God no longer loves us, which is the first week, then it's no longer worth serving him the last week. And everything in the middle is a result of that. You see, tonight's issue really sums up the others.

And it helps us to understand why neither God nor Malachi respond directly to their complaint in verse 14 and 15. Because it's not really a new complaint.

And God has already given them an answer to these things. And so God has already told them that he will come in justice to end suffering and judge evildoers, put things right.

We saw that a couple of weeks ago. God has already pleaded with them to return to him and he will return to them. We saw that last week. God has already answered their complaints here.

And it seems that some had actually been listening to the prophet Malachi because some decide to return. Point to verse 16. It says, Then those who feared the law talked with each other and the Lord listened and heard.

[6 : 03] And so it seems there were some Israelites who still feared God enough to listen to his prophet. And having heard the prophet speak, they now speak with one another. And now we don't know here in verse 16 what they say, but presumably it was to agree they ought to return to God and keep serving him.

And the reason I think this is because look at what God decides when he hears them talking the rest of verse 16. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored his name.

This scroll or book of remembrance is not something that the Jews here wrote. For we're told it was written in his, that is God's presence, that is in heaven.

And so it seems it's God who writes their names in this book of remembrance. Not because he forgets names like we forget. In fact, I found out last week that I've been calling one man from nine o'clock church the wrong name for a year and a half now.

It was very embarrassing, but he was very gracious. But when the Old Testament says God remembers, it means he will act. And here he will act to spare those who fear him.

[7 : 22] See verse 17? 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.

And then you will see again the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not. You see, those who fear God will have their names written in his book and God will spare them and judge others.

Then all will see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked. All will see that it is worth serving the Lord. But it kind of matters then that your name is in this book, doesn't it?

I remember in primary school, the teacher would have a book on her desk and she would write the names of those kids who are naughty in class. So she'd remember to see them at lunchtime.

That was a book you did not want your name in. Believe me, I know. But God's book is one you do want your name in. Because this is not God's book of punishment.

[8 : 32] This is God's book of life. The Lamb's book of life. So on the next slide, we read from Revelations chapter 21. Nothing impure will ever enter it, that is the heavenly Jerusalem, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

You see, you want your name in this book of remembrance, this book of life. Because there's a difference between being one of the righteous or one of the wicked. The difference between being spared and not being spared.

As our names were written, and our names are written in it as we trust in the Lamb, the Lord Jesus. But did you notice that while God writes their names in his book, he does not spare them from their suffering, does he?

Not straight away. He said they will have to wait for the day when he acts. And they will have to wait for the day of the Lord. But it is hard waiting, isn't it?

I mean, people are generally not good at being patient. I mean, who really enjoys waiting in doctor's surgery when you're in pain? Who really enjoys waiting at the Vic Rhodes to get your license and so on?

[9 : 47] You know, you take a ticket and you sit down and you just watch those numbers. You're watching them, watching, and they click over so slowly. Our kids get frustrated now if the internet is slow or goes down and they have to wait to get online.

In fact, I get frustrated. Waiting's really hard. And so to encourage his people to persevere, God unpacks his promise to act on that day. Which brings us to point three and chapter four, verse one.

He says, Surely or truly 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. You see, God encourages those Jews who decided to return to him by not just repeating his promise about the day of the Lord, but unpacking it.

And so first, he assures them that this day will come. The day in verse 17 will come. He says, surely the day is coming. It's on its way. And the second, he unpacks what will happen to the wicked on that day.

[10 : 56] Remember in verse 15, they complain that evildoers prospered. Well, now God says a day is coming when evildoers, same word, will be stubble for the fire of judgment.

In other words, they may seem to prosper now, but they certainly won't then. And third, he unpacks his promise to those who fear God. For they will not only be spared, but they will enjoy life to the full.

I think on the next slide is verse 2. It's a bit of slightly more literal translation. But as for you who fear my name, so it's the same group of people in view, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.

You shall go out and leap like calves from the store. Now, I wasn't sure if calves actually leapt from the store or frolicked, and so I looked up good old YouTube, and sure enough, I found some calves who were let out for the very first time from their stores to a grassy paddock.

Take a look at the video. Pretty excited, aren't they? All right, I think that'll do.

[12 : 06] That's a true thing, right? It's meant to be a picture of excitement and joy, as their calves enjoy life in their new paddock for the first time.

And so on the day of the Lord, when God acts, he will not just spare people, but the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings and enable them to enjoy life in a new paddock or new creation with great joy and excitement.

Wait, there's more. Those who fear him will also reign with him over the wicked. Do you see verse 3? Then you will trample on the wicked.

They will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act, says the Lord Almighty. Remember, in chapter 4, verse 1, the wicked will be burnt like stubble in the fire of judgment, not literally, but metaphorically.

And when you burn things, what's left? Well, ashes. And so trampling the ashes underfoot is continuing the metaphor of judgment from verse 1. And it's a picture of ruling over the wicked who have been judged and are now spending eternity in hell, while God's people are ruling with God, or more specifically with Christ, over the new creation, just as God created us too from Genesis.

[13 : 31] In other words, there's this great reversal for both the wicked and the faithful. The wicked who prosper now will be judged later, and the faithful, though we suffer now, will be healed later and enjoyed life and reign in a new creation.

Then on that day, Israel's complaint of verse 15 about the wicked prospering will be answered. And on that day, their decision in verse 16 to follow God will be vindicated.

For all will see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked. And so all will know that it really is worth serving the Lord. But until that day, they had to do two things, which brings us to point 4 and verse 4 of chapter 4.

He says, Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel. So the first thing here, there to do, is to remember the law, God's word to them while they wait for this day.

And by remember it, it means not just read it and go, Oh, that's right. I remember what that is, that that's about now. It's the same sort of remembering as God. It's to read it and to act on it, to live it out.

[14 : 47] This is how Israel was to keep serving the Lord. And the second thing they had to do while they wait for this day, well, it's to look for God's messenger. You see verse 5? God 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 the parents to their children and the hearts of the children to their parents, lest I will come and strike the land with total destruction. This messenger that God will send before that day is the same messenger of chapter 3 verse 1 who prepares the way for the Lord's coming.

Only here he is named as Elijah. And the way he will prepare people is by turning their hearts. So the word for turn here is the word for repent. So he will call them to repentance and right relationships with each other, starting with the most basic unit, the family.

And he will do this so that God does not have to come and strike the land with total destruction. And so as they wait for this day of the Lord, they are to remember God's word and watch for God's messenger.

And when this day of the Lord does come, all will see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked. Or all will know that serving the Lord is and was worthwhile.

[16 : 09] The good news for us, of course, is whether you realize it or not, but the day of the Lord has actually already begun. As we saw a couple of weeks ago, what Malachi describes as one day, the New Testament actually describes as two events, two comings of Christ.

The first coming of Christ begins the day of the Lord and his second coming ends the day of the Lord. You see, the messenger that was spoken about, he's already come.

It was John the Baptist. So on the next slide, listen to what we read in Luke chapter one, where John's father was told about his son, the Baptist. He, John, will go on before the Lord.

So in other words, the Lord's going to come after him in the spirit and power of Elijah 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.

You don't saw the language straight from Malachi. And so if John is the Elijah, the messenger, then Jesus who comes after John is the Lord.

[17 : 17] The point is the day of the Lord has already begun. It began with Christ's first coming where he was born to die on a cross for us to pay for our sins so that we might be healed or forgiven.

That we might trust in him and have our names written in God's book. And one of my favorite Christmas carols is Hark the Herald Angels Sing. And for a long time, there was this verse in it which there were a couple of lines I just didn't quite get.

It's on the next slide here. So, how the heaven-born prince of peace, how the son of righteousness. And notice son, S-U-N. I thought, have they misspelt it? Isn't it supposed to be S-O-N?

That's God's son. And then light and life to all he brings, risen with healing in his wings. What on earth is that talking about the resurrection of Jesus? But you see, Charles Wesley, who wrote that carol, understood Malachi chapter 4.

He understood that the day of the Lord began with Jesus' first coming for Christ was born to die. And it's by his death that he brings healing. Risen with healing in his wings.

[18 : 26] It's talking about his death for us. That brings us spiritual healing, forgiveness. You see, the day of the Lord has already begun. And when Jesus returns, the day will end with judgment for those whose names are not written in God's book.

But joy and excitement for us whose names are. For then we will leap like calves in the new creation. Not literally, but metaphorically. And rule with Christ over it.

And so the first question for us tonight is, is your name in God's book? That is, have you trusted in Christ? Because if you don't, then your name won't be in his book.

And you won't be spared. So please trust in Christ. For the day has already begun. So now is the time to believe.

Now is the time of salvation. And for us who do trust in Jesus, then unlike Israel, we don't have to look out for God's messenger Elijah because he's already come.

[19 : 36] But like Israel, we are to remember God's word while we wait. That is, we are to read it and live in light of it. For this is how we keep serving him.

What's more, by reading God's word, we're also reminded that the day of the Lord has begun. God's word reminds us of God's son whose death has already brought us healing in his wings or his cross.

And that in itself is encouragement to keep serving him, is it not? But by remembering God's word, we are also reminded of God's promise at the end of the day.

The promise of glory in a new creation. And that will also make serving him more than worth it. I've mentioned to you before a lady that I visit regularly in a nursing home.

Her room is very small. She cannot walk. She has to have food fed to her by nursing staff now. And she's on the maximum amount of painkillers allowed.

[20 : 38] Her mind is still pretty alert, yet she's surrounded by people with dementia. So she has very few people to talk to. It's very lonely. And she's been praying for her children to become Christians for over 50 years, but none have yet.

What I didn't mention to you before is that sometimes when her children visit her, they say, how can you still believe in God when your life is like this? How's that for encouraging?

In other words, they tell her it's not worth serving God. What would you say to her? Well, when we spoke about it, she said that she keeps remembering Jesus.

In other words, she remembers God's word about God's son who died the death we deserve to bring forgiveness. And she said, how can I not keep serving him?

But then we also remember God's word about God's promise of glory. In fact, I read to her this verse on our last slide, on the next slide there, from 2 Corinthians.

[21 : 41] Paul writes, therefore, we do not lose heart, though outwardly we are wasting away, and Paul knew suffering, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day, for our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

to which this lady said, well, if all this, you know, pointing to herself, is light and momentary, then can you imagine how great and glorious that day must be?

And as we thought about that, it helped her to know it really is worth serving the Lord, no matter what her kids say. So when you wonder if it's worth serving the Lord, whether because of your own suffering or that of your loved ones, then remember God's word, read it, act on it.

Remember God's word that speaks about that day when he acts, which has already begun in Christ, that the day is already underway. And remember God's word about God's son who died to bring us healing.

And remember God's word about God's promise of glory that far outweighs it all. Remember God's word and know it really is worth serving him.

[22 : 59] Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we do thank you for this book of Malachi, which, although written thousands of years ago, addresses issues that we face here today.

Father, we thank you for the reminder of the day of the Lord that has begun in Christ at his first coming and that will culminate at his second coming. We thank you for the reminder that when we suffer, we are to remember your word, which points us to your son, who not only died for us to bring us forgiveness, but has also secured for us an eternal glory that far outweighs anything we suffer in this life.

And so with those truths firmly fixed in our minds, we pray that we might always know it is worth serving you. Help us to do this, we pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.