

The Blessing God Has Promised

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 February 1981

Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 0 0] Now may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be found acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer. Amen. This morning I want to conclude the series of four sermons in the book of the prophet Malachi, which is the last book in the Old Testament, and the chapter is chapter 4, and it's found in your pew Bible on page 843.

You'll find it helpful, I think, if you can turn in your pew Bible to page 843. Malachi looked out at his world and he found two kinds of people in it, the arrogant and evildoers, and he describes them fairly eloquently in the third chapter.

If you look at chapter 3, verse 13, you'll see, Your words have been stout against me, says the Lord. You say, How have we spoken against you?

The Lord replies, You have said, It is a vain thing to serve God. What's the good of our keeping his charge, or of walking as in mourning before the Lord?

Henceforth we deem the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper, but when they put God to the test, they escape.

[1 : 4 5] Well, that's a fairly clear picture, that there are those who are arrogant evildoers, and they are so convinced that the judgment of God is not going to come, that their arrogance is going to pay off, that they're prepared to defy even the existence of God.

Then go down to chapter 3, verse 16, And you see the other group of people within the nation that Malachi identifies. And they are described simply in verse 16 as those who feared the Lord and spoke with one another.

The Lord heeded them and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and thought on his name. So you have those two groups of people, and they were in competition, because the difficulty was there was no way of resolving the differences between them.

The arrogant evildoers could say, Look, we get away with it. What other proof do you need? And those who feared the Lord appeared to all intents and purposes to be suffering very considerably for their supposed righteousness.

So that's the setting. These two groups of people, when Malachi comes down to his last chapter, and then he says it. Chapter 4, verse 1, Behold, the day comes burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and the evildoers will be stubble.

[3 : 3 2] The day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. I wish if you can think back to some of the novels of Graham Greene, who seem to like to write novels about the tropics.

And when the noon sun was at the highest point of the day, and nothing dared to move, and nothing stood between the burning hot red disk of the sun, and the whole world cringing before it, as the intensity of that heat came pouring down on the earth, and seeping into every pore of people's hides, and filling them with a terrible lethargy, and all the green begins to shrivel, and the world seems to be going to go up in smoke.

Such terrible heat is burning down upon them. Well, that's the picture that he has. Now, I want to tell you that, because that's what happens.

It reminds me very much of the Okanagan Valley in the summertime, where you see this terrible, terrible heat coming down.

And unless you have a pool to sit beside, or a lake, or a stream of water, or if you can get under a tree somewhere, the sun which comes up full blast from first thing in the morning, and stays burning down on the Okanagan Valley all day long, is enough to turn you to a cinder.

[5 : 22] And it does most of the countryside round about. But the Okanagan Valley is also the place where all the fruit comes from, so that that same terrible sun that can so easily destroy, can also give light.

So look at the next verse. You who fear my name, the sun of righteousness, shall rise with healing in its wings.

And so there's another picture of the same sun. The same sun that burns root and branch also rises with healing in its wings.

The same sun that turns the Okanagan Valley into a desert also produces all the fruit. And so this is the kind of picture.

And that's why we should all very happily look forward to the day of the Lord. The day of judgment. Because it does two things.

[6 : 31] It destroys root and branch, the evil and the arrogant. And it comes with healing in its wings for those that fear the Lord.

It's a lovely picture. And of course it's consistent with the fact that our world is made that way. The most beneficial things for the preservation of human society have both the ability to build up and to tremendously increase the capacity of people to live happily on this earth, but they can also destroy.

And that's what judgment does. It can destroy, but it also can heal. And it depends on how it hits you.

The same sun does it in both instances. Well, unlike what happens, and you get this lovely picture which follows, you shall go forth leaping like calves from the stall, you shall tread down the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts.

And so there is tremendous joy. And where does the joy come from? It comes from the fact that man has not vindicated himself, the arrogant have not vindicated themselves, the evildoers have not vindicated themselves, those who fear the Lord have not vindicated themselves, but the Lord has vindicated himself.

[8 : 22] And there are those who, seeing it, appreciate it, and appreciate it with such outward signs of joy that they are compared to calves let out onto the green grass after a long winter in the stable.

And you know what they do? They dance like no one could dance, throwing their heels high into the air and jumping and gambling, spelt with an O.

And having this tremendous sense of joy because judgment has come. And in that judgment, God has been vindicated.

It's not a matter of any one person being vindicated. The terrible part of sin, as it affects people like you and me, is that sin is never all one thing or the other.

The way sin has messed up our world is that the bad is never totally bad and the good is never totally good. And so man is always somewhat sinful and with the potential to be a saint.

[9 : 43] But when the Lord comes on that day, then God will vindicate himself and justice will be done and justice will appear to be done and people will see that it's done and the arrogant and the evildoers will happily know that they got what was coming to them.

It didn't surprise them. I've met lots of people and I know when we look at all the things that we in our arrogance accomplish with our lives and those things are important to us, we know how easily all the attainments of our human life can turn to ashes.

They don't count for that much. We know that. And it doesn't come as a surprise when we are confronted by the judgment of God and we are, in a sense, destroyed.

All the sort of windmills of our mind, all the fantasies that we've created are just reduced to rubble. All the things that we take human pride in don't count for anything ultimately.

And you know that. You may be guarding yourself from the implications of it, but there's no question that you know it and that the arrogant know it, that we all know it.

[11 : 15] So when the judgment of God comes, I don't think it surprises anybody. You only have to go into conversation with your own heart for a moment to know what the judgment of God will bring to you.

No mouthy preacher needs to tell you. You can find out by a short counsel with your own heart where you stand before the judgment of God.

And Malachi says that that's what's happened. But then there are four words in the last two verses. The first word is remember.

And what he wants them to remember is the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and ordinances that I command him at Horeb. There are two characters that appear in this fourth chapter.

One is Moses and one is Elijah. This is the last book of the Old Testament. At the transfiguration story in the first books of the New Testament, there are two characters that appear on the Mount of Transfiguration.

[12 : 31] One is Moses and one is Elijah. The word associated with Moses and his giving of the law was remember. Remember what you've come from.

Remember what you've come out of. The law has been established. The law cannot be changed. One jot or one tittle will not be removed from the law.

Malachi says, remember that. You're not going to change the law. It's been established. It's there. It's there. Now, if somebody says, okay, now we're going to get back to it, don't listen to it.

That's behind us. Remember something that has happened before. The law is behind the people of God.

But that's what they're to do, is to remember it. To remember that's the basis of the relationship between man and man. The law has been established by Moses.

[13 : 40] But then the second word is, and if you look at it, you'll see it in verse 5, behold. Remember what's behind. Behold what's in front of you.

And what you're to behold in front of you is Elijah. And Elijah brings the fulfillment of the promise of God's blessing.

That's what lies before the people of God, is blessing. Tremendous and abundant blessing. Remember that the law which Moses gave, that's where you've come from.

Behold the promise that the prophets have given. That's where you're going to. Remember what's behind. Behold what lies in front.

And then he talks about the blessing and what it's going to be. And if you look in verse 6, you'll see. He will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers.

[14 : 47] That chorus that the children sang. Turn the hearts of the children to their parents. Turn the hearts of the parents to their young. Turn the hearts of us all to one another.

Turn the hearts of the people to the Lord. So as you behold the promise of God, then you are to recognize the blessing that God has promised.

a blessing means a turning of your heart. That's what God is going to do.

He's going to turn your heart so that all the bitterness and all the anger and all the resentment is gone. And all the jealousy and all the competitiveness, he's going to eliminate the generation gap.

And people are going to find themselves in relationship to one another because the Lord has turned their hearts towards one another.

[15 : 53] You know that lovely response to the Ten Commandments that we sometimes sing, incline our hearts to keep this law. It's the Lord who turns our hearts to one another.

It's the Lord who establishes that new relationship. And that's what God has chosen to do. That's the promise that the prophets bring.

That's what prepares us to receive Jesus Christ as our hearts are turned one to another and as our hearts are turned to the Lord.

But this is, in a sense, similar to the day of judgment in a way because it is the act of God. We can't, by some supreme effort of moral earnestness, turn to one another and say, I love you.

All we're saying is, I'd like to if I was in a better frame of mind, but I'm not. It doesn't work that way. But when the Lord turns our hearts to one another, then something happens which, like the judgment of God, we acknowledge to be from Him.

[17 : 17] And we find ourselves compelled to love and to receive and to understand one another. not because I've finally given in to your point of view or you've finally given in to mine, but the Lord has turned our hearts to one another.

Turn the hearts of the parents to their children. Turn the hearts of the children to their parents. That's what He'll do. And that's the promise.

Remember, behold, the fulfillment of the promise is hearts turned to one another. A deep turning of God which affects each one of us.

And I wonder how willing you are to have your heart turned. I don't know how willing, I don't know how willing you have to be, even.

But it'll happen in fulfillment of the promised blessing which we're to behold and which is to come upon the people of God. But, nevertheless, this is where Malachi ends.

[18 : 34] Lest I come and smite the land with a curse. There is no in-between ground. There is the blessing and there is the curse.

And the curse that is spoken of here is a terrible curse. It's the curse under which those who resisted the people of God when they came into the promised land were put.

That they were to be utterly destroyed. There wasn't to be anything left at all. They were to be put under such a curse.

And that, that ultimately is the reality. That's the reality which is spoken of when chapter 4, verse 1, when it says, Behold, the day comes burning like an oven.

And that, that terrible day will come and it will bring a burning which will destroy root and branch. But that same coming will bring blessing.

[19 : 41] It will come with healing in its wings. The son of righteousness. Righteousness brings condemnation, but it also brings blessing.

So that as we struggle on in the life of our parish, as we seek to work out what it means to be the people of God, the disciples of Jesus Christ, there is blessing and there is judgment.

and we look that we may be those people who fear the Lord and upon whom he can bring abundant blessing.

And you know what your heart desires and I know what my heart desires. may God grant us grace to open our hearts' desires to one another as he turns our hearts to one another.

Thank you. and to the Muchas as you as you and as I go