

Our cynicism, the day of the Lord

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Preacher: Aubrey Dunford

[0 : 00] Good morning everyone and welcome to our service this morning. This is the first Sunday of Advent.

Now we got a bit confused, well I got a bit confused last week because we lit a candle, but this is actually the first Sunday of Advent. So we're going to be celebrating the season of Advent and that's quite exciting, isn't it? Because it's looking forward, it's looking forward with expectation to when God comes. My name is Judy Pantridge and I'm a deacon here at Union Baptist Church and I welcome you all if you're here and if you're watching or listening at home. So we're expectantly waiting, we're preparing, I expect everybody's done some preparations, some Christmas preparations already, yeah, oh yes there are some very certain nods here and we're waiting to celebrate the mystery of God coming among us as a son, among humanity as his son Jesus, as was promised by the prophets long ago. So it's a reading from Isaiah, a voice of one calling, in the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord, make straight the desert, in a, sorry, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low, the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain, and the glory of the Lord will be revealed and all people will see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken. Let's pray. Advent God, we worship you, the God who comes. You are not remote from the world you have made, but each day you come to us, blessing us with your presence. You came in creation itself as your spirit moved over the waters of chaos. You came in Jesus Christ, made flesh in our world of weakness and need. You came in power to raise him from death, a mighty promise for all creation. Each day you come by your spirit, gently and powerfully working in the lives of men and women and children.

At the end of time you will come in power and righteousness, in mercy and redeeming love. Grant us the grace to welcome your coming.

Inflame our love to yearn for your presence. Enlarge our vision to recognize your coming day by day.

[3 : 01] We greet you, Advent God. Amen. So, let's sing and worship Christ our Saviour who is coming, the heaven-born Prince of Peace, the Son of Righteousness, the one who brings light and life to all. Please stand as we sing. Hark! The Herald Angels Sing.

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Let's pray.

Let's pray.

Let's pray.

[5 : 26] Let's pray. Let's pray.

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Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.

[6 : 54] Let's pray. Let's pray. Thank you.

Arise, shine, your light has come. The glory of the Lord has risen on you. Arise, shine, your light has come. Jesus, the light of the world has come.

Darkness like a shroud covers the earth. Evil like a cloud covers the people.

But the Lord will shout upon you and his glory will appear on you. Nations will come to your light.

Arise, shine, your light has come. The glory of the Lord has risen on you. Arise, shine, your light has come.

[8 : 24] Jesus, the light of the world has come. Clearer of the stout, brighter light. Kindles brighter flames in our trembling heart.

Living world, our land come, died on me. As we walk as one in light and peace. Your grace is a true light like the sun. Arise, shine, your light has come.

The glory of the Lord has risen on you. Arise, shine, your light has come. Jesus, the light of the world has come.

Jesus, the light of the world has come.

Thank you. Please sit down. Now I'm going to have two young people going to come and have a help me now. Oriana and Luca are going to come. We've just been singing about the darkness that covers the earth.

[10 : 26] And Jesus comes as the light to give us life. And as a symbol of that, we have our, do you want to come up this way? Oh, come up this way. Come up this way. Because we're a bit, oh, okay. You can squeeze in.

There we go. Good job. We're going to, we're going to, we light our Advent wreath to show that the light is coming. Last week we lit one candle. That was the candle of hope.

Today we light the second candle as well. And that's the candle of peace. The joys and blessings that Christ brings when he comes. I wonder, just before we do that, I wonder, does anybody have anything to remind them that it is Advent at home?

Does anybody have an Advent candle? Do you have an Advent candle at home? Do you know?

No? I should have given you one as a present. Does anybody have an Advent candle? Oh, yeah. A few Advent candles there. Excellent.

And the reason that we have an Advent candle? Why do we have Elliot? That's right. Yes. So, it light, it gradually melts down.

[11 : 39] We do, we light it every day and one number goes down. And it's like, as you said, Elliot, it's like an Advent calendar where you're opening doors. Has anybody got an Advent calendar at home? Ah, a few more. You've got one. Has it got chocolate in it?

Oh, excellent. Has yours got chocolate in it? No. No. There we go. Excellent. Who's got chocolate in their Advent calendar? Oh, well, there we go. Well, bless you with your chocolate, love it.

And sometimes there's a little story or a Bible verse, part of the Christmas story. It's to remind us, isn't it, that Christmas is coming, that the coming of the Lord Jesus is almost here.

We know he's come, but at this time, we think of what it was like those days before he'd come. And the world was in darkness, and they didn't know what was happening. It had been prophesied for many, many years.

But we light our candles, we open our Advent calendars to remind us that Jesus is coming. So you can enjoy your chocolate, but remember that Jesus is coming, and his birth means God with us.

[12 : 44] This candle actually has a name of Jesus, one of the names of Jesus for every day. So it helps us to focus and think about who he is. Okay, so here we go.

We're going to light the candle first. Oriana, you're doing that, aren't you? So we're going to light this one that we lit last week. Okay, so if I light the spill and give that to you.

I love these long matches, right? There we go.

Okay. So Oriana, I'm just going to light the candle of hope, which was last week. Yeah, well done.

And the candle of peace.

Hold on. Well done. Thank you. Turn that round so that you can see. And Luca is going to read the prayer.

[13 : 52] Gracious God, as we light the second candle of this Advent wreath, we seek your peace. In a world filled with turmoil, may the light of this candle remind us of the peace that only you can bring.

Help us to be instruments of your peace. Help us to be instruments of your peace in our homes, communities, and the world. Amen. Amen. Thank you, you too.

So just be careful as you go down here. Now, that reading with the hope and the peace reminded me of our Bible verse for the year.

Last Christmas, you were sent a card with a Bible verse for the year. Can anybody remember what it is? You may still have it propped up in your home. Go on then, Lucy.

Romans 15, 30. Okay. And Lucy? Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[14:57] Thank you. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him. We're thinking about hope. We're thinking about peace. Joy is to come.

So I thought we should sing our song that we know. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace. There are some signs which Marianne and I are going to lead in if you'd like to join in.

Please stand as we sing. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. in him so that you might overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit so that you might overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit Father God I love you Father God I trust you Father God I need you every day fill me with your hope Lord fill me with your joy Lord fill me with your peace and your love thank you well done good way to remember the Bible verses please sit down now the children and the young people are now going to leave for their groups let's pray for them as they go

Lord God we thank you for our young people children of all ages we pray that you will be with them now as they go to their groups be with their leaders bless them in their time together may they enjoy being together and in your presence learning from you Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Thank you.

[18:07] Thank you.

He brings us joy and the promise that he will be with us forever, ruling in our hearts until finally he raises us to heaven and to his glorious throne.

Let's sing again. Advent hymn, Come Thou Long Expected Jesus. Please stand. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

blessed Lettera emphasized him sprang down by the DENHA Let us find our rest in thee.

[19:37] Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth, our hearts.

Dear desire of every nation, joy of every loving heart.

All thy people to deliver, born a child and ever be, born to reign in us forever.

Now thy gracious kingdom reign. By thine own eternal spirit, ruling all our hearts alone.

By thine own sufficient merit, praise us to thy glorious throne.

[20:51] Thank you. Thank you. Now Mary is going to come and read to us from Malachi, and then Aubrey is going to come and open God's word to us.

So this morning we're completing our study of Malachi, and I'm starting to read verse 17 of chapter 2, and reading through chapter 3 and chapter 4.

So I hope you're sitting comfortably. You have wearied the Lord with your words. How have we wearied him, you ask?

By saying, all who do evil are good in the eyes of the Lord, and he is pleased with them. Or, where is the God of justice?

I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly, the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple.

[22:12] The messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come, says the Lord Almighty. But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears?

For he will be like a refiner's fire, or a launderer's soap. He will sit as a refinerer, and purifier of silver.

He will purify the Levites, and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men, who will bring offerings in righteousness, and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem, will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years.

So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers, and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows, and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you, of justice.

But do not fear me, says the Lord Almighty. I, the Lord, do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.

[23:38] Ever since the time of your ancestors, you have turned away from my decrees, and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord Almighty.

But you ask, how are we to return? Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, how are we robbing you?

In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse, your whole nation, because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house.

Test me in this, says the Lord Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven, and pour out so much blessing, that there will not be room enough to store it.

I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe, says the Lord Almighty.

[24 : 53] Then all the nations will call you blessed. Yours will be a delightful land, says the Lord Almighty. You have spoken arrogantly against me, says the Lord.

Yet you ask, why have we said, what have we said against you? You have said, it is futile to serve God.

What do we gain by carrying out his requirements, and going about like mourners before the Lord Almighty? But now we call the arrogant blessed.

Certainly, evildoers prosper, and even when they put God to the test, they get away with it. Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard.

A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honoured his name. On the day when I act, says the Lord Almighty, they will be my treasured possession.

[26 : 08] I will spare them, just as a father has compassion and spares his son who serves him. And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.

Surely the day is coming, it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and 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 revere my name, the sun of righteousness will shine with healing in its rays, and you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves. Then you will trample on the wicked. There will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act, says the Lord Almighty. Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees I gave him at Horeb for all Israel.

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, or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.

[27 : 45] Amen. Well, good morning.

I hope you're prepared for some interesting biblical verses for us to look at as we come.

And as Mary said, we're concluding our series this morning of looking at the book of Malachi. And we've been looking at this both on our Sunday mornings and in our small groups.

And this is our fourth passage. If you haven't been here for the past few weeks, then all the sermons are available on YouTube. I checked that last night.

They're all there. And I guess they'll some be available on the website as well. Looking at Jane, she's nodding. Yes, they will be. You know, excuse not to listen to the previous ones.

[28 : 58] But just to repeat a little bit of the background that we've heard in previous weeks. excuse me while I get rid of candles and matches and a few other things down here.

Right, that's better. So candles and certainly matches and fire will be needed later on in the sermon. We know nothing about Malachi. In fact, we're not even sure that his name was Malachi.

Because Malachi means my messenger. So it is possible that this was kind of a given name. Some theologians think that. Some others and probably the majority of people think it is likely that it was his real name.

But of course he was named that because people thought perhaps his parents. Again, like most of the prophets, we know that they're sons of somebody. Malachi, we know nothing about him.

Don't tell him, don't we not told anything about him at all. But he was writing at a time when the Jews had returned from exile. The temple and the walls of Jerusalem had been rebuilt and we all know, I guess, the stories that we find in Nehemiah and Ezra.

[30 : 17] And Judah had become a peaceful, small backwater of the Persian Empire. And this, as we've seen in the past couple of weeks, had led to a disillusionment with God.

God had restored them and brought them back from exile. But now, nothing happened or nothing appeared to happen. The glorious future that had been announced by the prophets had not yet been realised.

God had not yet returned to his temple to exalt his kingdom in the sight of the other nations. And so, the Jews of this restored community had lost hope.

They doubted his love. They no longer trusted his justice. Their worship had degenerated and they no longer took obeying the law seriously.

And this was the background to the message that Malachi was bringing to the people. Now, the book of Malachi basically splits into seven sections, which are listed up here behind me.

[31 : 33] And you'll see there that the first one was chapter 1, 2 to 5. And we come down this morning, we're starting with the fourth section, the Lord is coming with justice, which started at chapter 2, verse 17.

And we go on throughout the last sections. Now, not quite sure why Andrew got one section to preach on, Pete got one section, George got one section, I got four.

Sorry? I was going to say, I'm going to blame Malcolm, because I don't, it was, it was, it was set before, I always thought Malcolm had it in for me, but there we go. So, we're not going to be able to get into some of these sections in quite the detail, well, not if you want to get home for lunch anyway.

There is a lot, there is so much in this passage, and I'm afraid some of it we're going to have to skim over this morning, because we just don't have the time to look at these passages.

Now, the other thing just to notice here, if you look very carefully on this slide, if you read that, you'll see that God's final judgment, section 6, goes from chapter 3, 13, to verse 21.

[32 : 53] Well, if you look in your Bible, you won't find verse 21. We will find chapter 4, verse 3.

And this is, for some reason, and I can't find anybody who has given us a good reason for this, in the original Hebrew text, and indeed, if you go to a Jewish synagogue nowadays and pick up the book of Malachi, you will find it only has three chapters.

Why the Bible, somebody decided the Bible to lop off the last few verses and make them a separate chapter, nobody seems to be able to tell me.

If you know, I'm interested. Anyway, a few weeks ago, Andrew helped us to look at a privileged people. Malachi starts by reminding the Jews of God's love towards them and the fact that he had chose them not because they deserved it, but just because as he chose Jacob rather than Esau, they were the chosen and that was their privilege.

And Andrew powerfully reminded us of what that meant, that we were loved because God chose to love us, not because we deserved it, not because anything we had done.

In fact, I think he pointed out that Jacob was perhaps not quite a nice guy. He kind of cheated Esau out of his birthright.

[34 : 30] And we'll come back to that in a moment. They were chosen. God loved them. And despite all these very difficult verses we're going to get to in a few minutes, the main theme of Malachi remains that God loves his people.

And in two weeks after that, Pete Montague spoke about the responsibility in the priests that they were neglecting and what God had to say to them about that.

And then last week, George helped us as we looked at the importance of family life and what a covenant relationship entails. So, as I said, that just leaves us the last four sections.

Hence the quite long reading that Mary had to take us through. I guess also, I need to point out that some of the things that Malachi says in these last two chapters are not easy to understand.

And it may be it's not easy for us to hear them any more than they were easy for the Jews of about 400 BC to hear. So, we'll start at chapter 2 verse 17.

[35 : 46] Now, as we've seen in this book of Malachi, he uses the construction of posing a question or a statement from God and then posing a question as if it was asked by the people in response.

So, in verse 17, we read, you have wearied the Lord with your words. Well, how have we done that, says the people? Well, let's deal with one thing first of all.

God loves to hear our prayers. We cannot pray enough to him. He certainly never tires of hearing our prayers.

Whatever this verse is saying, it is not saying that we can weary God with our prayers. Look what it says. It doesn't say weary us with his prayers.

It says weary us with words. No, they're words, not prayers. You see, we need to see that the people were ignoring God's words. If we were not in a relationship with God, then our prayers are not prayers.

[36 : 58] words. They're just words. Also, we need to see that to be prayers, the words are addressed to God, not about God.

Let's be very clear, brothers and sisters, too often we talk about God when we should be talking to him. And we'll see that in a moment. See, when things go wrong in our lives, we can talk to God. We can pour out our hearts to him. We can shout at him. It doesn't matter. He's big enough. He'll take it. What we need to guard against is when these things happen and when we feel that God isn't listening, when we feel that there's something wrong.

We don't do what the people of Israel were doing. They were complaining about God. Not complaining to him. What was wearying God was the people talking about God instead of listening to him.

He'd given them the law. He'd given them the priests. He'd given them everything when they were restored. Nehemiah had set everything up. And the people basically were discouraged, disillusioned, and so they started chatting about God.

[38 : 25] What they failed to do was to talk to him. So today, however you're feeling, after the service, if you want to talk about God, that's good, but make sure you talk to him about it as well.

And what were these people saying? Well, basically the Jews were looking around and saying that these other people are sitting doing, and God is doing nothing about it. See, if he isn't doing anything about it, then he must approve of what they're doing.

Where is the God of justice? I guess that virtually all of us have felt something like that at some time.

Certainly the psalmists did. I think you also can see that some of the people in the New Testament did. Why do those who do wrong seem to be getting away with it?

I'm sure that's a cry that many of us have felt in our hearts. Do we really have the idea that life would be simpler if God judged all sins immediately?

[39 : 41] Just think about that for a moment. It meant that the first time you sinned, which was probably when you were a child, God would need to punish you immediately.

Doesn't sound quite so attractive like that, does it? See, waiting for God to act is usually extremely difficult. Why doesn't God do this?

Why doesn't God do that? Well, those are very good questions sometimes, particularly when we see people who are close to us, who we pray for them and they're not healed.

Why doesn't God do something now? The point is, we've got to understand that it's sometimes a very good thing that he doesn't do things immediately.

See, the point is that those of us who have come, who have known God and have given our lives to Christ, we've all relied on the fact that God has been patient with us.

[40 : 46] He did not judge us. He's given us a chance to repent. He's given us a chance to receive his forgiveness. Yet, somehow we seem to begrudge the fact that God is being patient with other people.

The point which we will deal with in a few moments is that God will deal with all sin. God says that. He is going to deal with all sin. We might find that difficult to get our brains around sometimes, but he's going to. It may seem that they've got away with it, but in God's timing, they will not.

God delays his judgment because of his mercy, but he will not delay forever. The day is coming, as we will see, says Malachi.

So, how does God respond to this question? Where is the God of justice? Well, he says, I will send my messenger who will prepare the way before me. Then, suddenly, the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple.

[41 : 58] The messenger of the covenant who you desire will come, says the Lord Almighty, chapter three, verse one. Jesus himself, when talking about John the Baptist, quotes this passage from Malachi.

We read in Matthew chapter 11, verse 10, this is the one about whom it is written, I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will repair your way before you.

God did send his messenger, John the Baptist. And who was he the pre-runner of?

He was pre-runner of the Lord, who was the messenger of the covenant. And when Jesus came, as we know, he did visit the temple.

God did come back to his temple. Maybe it was 400 years later than the people of Israel were expecting. And when he did come, they weren't expecting it, but that's just the way it is.

[43 : 13] Jesus came, he came to the temple. He told the people that had been turned into a den of vipers. He turned the tables over.

He got very angry. One of the few times actually we read that Jesus did get angry. Angry because of what was happening in the temple. But he came, he came to replace it. He came to get rid of the temple and all its sacrifices. He brought a new covenant sealed by his blood. We don't have time this morning to really get into this next bit, which is a beautiful idea of this refiner.

The refiner and the launderer's soap, the making clean, the making pure, literally with the refiner. I don't know if you understand much about refining, particularly silver. you warm it up until it gets really nice and hot. Then all the impurities come to the surface and you scrape the surface off. Then you keep going in and more impurities come up and you scrape the surface off.

[44 : 26] How does a refiner know when it's completely nice and pure? Well, if you've done this, you look into it and if you can see your face, there's no impurities on the surface.

There's this beautiful picture here of God refining, refining his people, making his people. It's a beautiful picture of salvation. We don't have time to go into that this morning. But Jesus did come. See, the people were asking, why doesn't God act? And God's answer is, well, if I were to act, would you be ready?

I sometimes think that's a very good point we need to hear. When we say, why doesn't God do something? Do we need to actually say to ourselves, well, what would happen if he actually did? And are we ready for it? Peter, in his second letter, says, do not forget this one thing, dear friends, with the Lord, a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.

[45 : 43] The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with him. bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation.

If you see people who you think are getting away with it, pray that they will come to understand the Lord's salvation before God deals with the sin.

return to me, don't rob me.

Now, I have a very good friend. His father spent almost his entire life in the ticket office at Victoria Street Station in Manchester.

[46 : 50] and he tells the story of a man who came to the window one day and said, I want a return ticket. And Steve's father said, certainly, sir.

Where do you want to get to? And he said, well, back here, of course. what does that imply?

You see, when you say return, you're coming back to where you've already been. God says, return to me. Which means, first of all, that he left him in the first place.

It's not come to me, it's return to me. And also, it implies that he has not moved. He has not changed.

And you get that in chapter 3, verse 6, if you're following this in your Bibles, which I hope you are. I, the Lord, do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.

[48 : 00] Ever since the time of your ancestors, you've turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord Almighty. Look, says God, I haven't changed.

I'm still the God who chose Jacob and loved him. Remember that back in chapter 1? I love Jacob, and I love you.

The real problem here is that you haven't changed either. God is utterly consistent. He loved Jacob and has not ceased to love his children, although they've taken after their father and their cheats and supplanters.

God has not changed. He loved Jacob despite his character, and now he loves them despite their characters. Return to me, says the Lord.

So, immediately we get the question and answer again. How are to return? Well, God's answer is by not robbing me.

[49 : 09] And the people come back, well, how are we robbing you? Well, Jacob was a cheat, and now God says, you're cheating me. You're robbing me.

In this particular case, you're not keeping the covenant about tithes and offerings. Trust me in this, says God. If you're faithful to the covenant, then I will keep my side of the covenant, which was to bring you to a land of plenty.

Now, again, we don't have time this morning to get into this too deeply. So, these verses have sometimes been taken by people who preach a prosperity gospel. Come to God and you will have everything you need. Well, the problem is that most of us know that's not true. Well, I haven't got my private jet yet. I'm still waiting for it. Certain pastors in America have got theirs because they believe it. They've managed to persuade people to give them the money. So, we don't have time this morning to completely unpack what this says about our giving.

[50 : 23] The whole of this section is to emphasize that God wants to bless us. The same way he blessed Jacob, he longs to bless us. That does not mean we're going to have a lot of wealth now.

You see, so often when we read promises of God, we look at them in human terms. We think about now. God never says you're going to have a lot of wealth now.

You see, what God is promising us is the same as he promised the people in the Old Testament. He promised a land flowing with milk and honey. That's what he's prepared for us.

Now, we haven't got our land flowing with milk and honey. We're doing much better here in this country than many people in other places of the world. But God's not talking about that. He's prepared a place for us.

It's called heaven, which will be a land flowing with much more than milk and honey. And we're going to have that one day because of his grace and his grace alone.

[51 : 30] One day we will have prosperity. But not perhaps prosperity as we understand it in human terms. We will have prosperity in God's terms, in spiritual terms.

One day we will receive what he has promised us if we are faithful to him. But we need to move on. Having said that God longs to bless us, the prophet returns to the subject of judgment and the judgment goes much deeper.

This is where it starts to get really quite difficult. The section starts with the usual statement, with a question and reply. you have spoken against me, says God.

Have we done that, say the people? God's reply is, you have said it is futile to serve me. What do we get out of serving you?

[52 : 38] you? What do we get out of serving you? Have you ever felt yourself saying that to God?

Come back to that in a second. God's question. See, this of course goes right back to the beginning. This is the fundamental thing of sin.

It started, when you think about it, with Satan's original question to Eve in the Garden of Eden. Well, what's God said? God said that we're not to eat of the fruit of that tree.

Basically, the devil says to Eve, yeah, but what are you missing out on? Look at what you'd gain by disobeying God.

Or think of Satan tempting Jesus. You can have all of this or all of that if you do things my way. And I guess all of us know the feeling of working really hard at something for God and no one seems to notice.

[54 : 02] Have you sat up late one night preparing a Sunday school lesson? Have you arranged a meeting and everybody comes along and nobody says thank you?

Have you tried being the church administrator? Nobody seems to say thank you. why am I doing this? No one seems to notice.

Well, God notices. The problem is you see that we are all self-centered. And that is, and I'm sure you've heard this many times, the center of sin is I.

that goes right back to the beginning to Adam and Eve. Think about some of the many things that come out of this self-centeredness.

George was, last week, was talking about marriage. marriage. Well, anybody who's in a marriage relationship knows that marriages get into trouble when you start going I, I, I, I rather than we, we or you, you.

[55 : 25] Think about some of the problems that we see in our society with children and parents nowadays. somebody was saying the other day, I heard them say it and I thought, well, you know, kind of, well, I never realized that children were going to stop me doing so much.

I was also tempted to say, why did you have children? What about teenagers who say, well, not an old mum and dad, they don't give me what I want, they don't allow me to do something.

You see, relationships usually, not always, but a large part of relationships breaking down is when we start talking about what we want, when we become self centred and that's the same with our

relationship with God.

Our relationship with God needs us to put him at the centre, even when he doesn't give us what we want.

we also have to understand that he doesn't give us the things that we also sometimes want because there's a very good reason. And Malachi changes tack a little bit now in verse 16 chapter 3.

[56 : 55] Malachi now talks about those who have feared the Lord. See, maybe some of these people who were the ones who had been complaining and had heard what God had said and had taken the rebuke and are beginning to encourage one another in their faith.

See, when we start to try and build up our faith, God hears and responds. He doesn't expect us to be perfect. He doesn't expect us to know it all.

He just wants us to see that we're seeking more, that we're looking at him. I'm sure we all know the story of the prodigal son. the son turned and went back to the father.

And while he was still a long way off, the father runs to him, welcomes him, puts the royal robe on him, hugs him, even though he's straight out the pigsty.

That's a beautiful picture when we turn to God. We don't have to be perfect. We don't have to get home, have a bath, have a shower, get ourselves presentable, purify ourselves.

[58 : 08] We just have to turn to God and he will come to us. And what were these people doing? Well, they were talking to each other.

They talked with each other. What a beautiful picture perhaps. You know, today, over coffee, we can talk to each other about the Lord. But what does he do?

Well, he puts these people's names were written in a scroll. We find this picture of the scroll throughout scripture. It actually starts back in Exodus. And of course, in Revelation, we hear finally about the scroll.

The scroll is the Lamb's book of life. Here is the amazing fact. If you come to Christ, if you seek to follow him, no matter how good you are at it, then he writes your name in his book.

The book that one day, when we get to the judgment, which we're going to talk about in a few seconds, he'll look at. And what does he say about this book? Look at what he says about this book in verse 17.

[59 : 24] Sorry, verse 16. Those who feared the Lord and honoured his day. on the day when I act, says the Lord almighty, they will be my treasured possession.

See, when we started this, the theme that we used for this whole of this Malachi series was loved. And Malachi is pointing out that despite all their failings, God loves them.

He wants them to return to him. And once again, they become his treasured possession. He loves them. And verse 18 is a key verse.

And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not. See, the righteous is the one who serves God and the wicked is the one who doesn't.

And this very clear dividing line shows us what final judgment in God's eyes will depend upon. see, ultimately judgment will turn on our relationship with God and that is determined by our response to the invitation to return.

[60 : 39] And that brings us unfortunately to the most difficult part of this whole book. Malachi talks about the final judgment. And I guess most of us find that very uncomfortable to think about.

I just want to make one point here and during the week I talked about this with my dear friend at the back there to make sure that I wasn't going too off.

I've got problems with this word forgiven. You see, the problem with the word forgiven is that when we say our sins are forgiven, we can get this impression that God is saying there, there, never mind.

It doesn't matter. Let us get completely away from the idea that God does not take sin seriously.

God is a God of perfect justice, absolute perfect justice, and the price for our sins must be paid.

God takes sin so seriously that he sent his son to die in our place. To do what? To pay the price for our sins.

[62 : 03] Now, we have a long discussion about the word forgiven. I'm forgiven, yes. I'm forgiven for all the sins I've committed, that's a lot, and all the ones that I will in the future, and that's even more.

I'm forgiven of those. Not because God says, there, there, never mind. God minds. He minds so much he sent Jesus to die on a cross in my place and in your place.

That's how seriously God takes sin. Some years ago, I think I've mentioned this before, I was involved in the evangelism course called Evangelism Explosion.

One of the illustrations we used to say was the man who was in the dock who had been found guilty. The judge sitting on the bench and he says, well, the fine for this is something, and it's got to be paid.

The law demands, that's the law, the law says, this fine must be paid. And the man says, I can't pay it. The judge gets off his bench, comes down into the dock, pulls out his check book, and writes a check for the fine.

[63 : 22] He says to the man, the fine's paid. You can go free. And that's what God has done. God is the just God. He cannot clear the guilty, the Bible says.

But, he's paid the price in Jesus. And so in these last few verses, we have some very difficult pictures.

The sun rises, and we get this picture of this desert, and everything is being burnt up. God is going to bring an end to this sinful world.

It will burn like a furnace, or the arrogant and evil doer will be stubble, and the day is coming, will set them on fire, says the Lord of Maldi.

Not a root or a branch will be left to them. That's difficult to hear, isn't it? But, for those who have been cleansed because we believe in what Jesus has done, we will be able to celebrate.

[64 : 35] And there's this picture of a group of calves. Perhaps they've been in the cow shed a long time. and suddenly they're set free. And the picture is these calves.

You'll go out and frolic. Good word used in the Bible. You'll go out and frolic. They'll be dancing with joy because of their freedom.

Then you get this very disturbing verse which I've struggled with a lot. It says you will trample the wicked under your feet. then you'll trample on the wicked.

There will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act. Let's be clear. This is not revenge. This is not us saying, oh, look at those nasty people. I can get my own back now.

It's a picture of the end of the great battle between God and Satan. God is victorious. All evil is done away with. don't have time to dig into some of the references to Revelation.

[65 : 43] Finally, everything will be completed. We will be celebrating because God will be celebrating God's victory with him because he has justified us.

And then finally, Moses gets a mention because Moses indicates the law and Elijah indicates the prophets. Everything is going to come to its final conclusion.

God is going to bring everything to its final conclusion. Malachi is the last book in the Old Testament.

Not sure it was the last to be written. Again, don't really know exactly when Malachi was written.

Certainly, bits of other books were written later than Malachi, but he might have been one or if not one of the last prophecies, but those who put the Bible together and put the Scripture together made Malachi the last book.

I don't know whether that's by accident or whether it was God's purposes. As George reminded us last week, in our Bibles, we finish Malachi. We turn over a couple of pages, they're usually blank, unless you're in a study Bible, in which case there'll be a lot of stuff in between.

[67 : 10] And what you walk straight into, the start of Matthew, the genealogy of Jesus. Today we're in Advent. I don't think it was an accident that we're finishing Malachi at the beginning of Advent.

Because what's Malachi pointing forward to all the way? He's talking about God's love, but he's pointing forward to Jesus. Turn over a couple of pages and we start reading Matthew and the Christmas story.

Jesus has come once. He's come, he's showed us how to live and has died for our sins. And now we're living in the days of grace.

And Malachi pointed out that God is patient to allow us to repent. He doesn't want people to perish.

There's a complete sermon in there somewhere. But now we're waiting for Jesus to return again.

Yes, it's Advent and we're looking forward to celebrating Christmas. But we're also Advent. We're looking forward to the day when Jesus comes again. And all sin will be dealt with.

[68 : 25] Let's pray that many, many, many people who we might look at now, who we might say, well, they got away with it, will turn to Christ before it's too late because they won't get away with it.

God doesn't say, they're there, never mind. I'm sure over the next few weeks we shall sing this. Not in that poor lowly stable, with the oxen standing by, we shall see him, but in heaven, set at God's right hand on high, when like stars his children crowned, all in white, shall wait around.

we will be in the promised land. We will have prosperity. Let's listen to what God says to us this Advent.

Sorry, I've been going too long. Goodbye. God's word through Malachi is as relevant for us today as those who were hearing the words then.

God always wants our best, and he rightly deserves it. So in a time of silent prayer now, let's listen to God.

[70 : 11] Let's consider what he is saying to each of us. And as we respond to God's word this morning, please ask yourself this question. Am I showing that God is first in my life with the time, the talents, and the treasure, the finances, and material things that he has provided?

And am I offering my best back to him? I'll say it again. Am I showing that God is first in my life with my time, the talents, and the treasure that God has provided?

And am I offering my best back to him? Let's listen to God. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[71 : 37] Amen. I'm sorry, Lord, for the many times when I do not put you first, when I fail to trust you in every aspect of my life.

Forgive me, I pray. Help me to give you my best in my time, my talents, and the treasure and resources you have provided me with.

Forgive me when I grumble and complain, forgetting that you, my loving Heavenly Father, out of your goodness and mercy, continue to provide for my every need.

Forgive me when self-righteousness creeps into my thinking, affecting my attitudes to others. Help me to realign my thinking, my goals, my life of service, so that they align with yours.

thank you, Father, for sending your promised Son, Jesus Christ, who was the final, complete, and absolute offering for all sin.

[72 : 57] Cleanse me from my sin, I pray, purify my heart, and make me holy as you are holy. Amen.

I ask the music group to come please and lead us in the song, Purify My Heart. You stay seated for this as we think on what's been spoken and as we continue to offer ourselves to God.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Silver, purify my heart Let me be as gold Pure gold Refine as gold My heart's one desire I choose to be holy Set apart for you, Lord I choose to be holy Set apart for you, my master Ready to do your well

Purify my heart Cleanse me from within And make me holy Purify my heart Cleanse me from my sin Deem within Cleanse me by the star My heart's one desire I choose to be holy Set apart for you, Lord

[76 : 09] I choose to be holy Set apart for you, my master Ready to do your will Helen is going to come and lead us in our prayers for intercession Shall we pray together?

Father, we thank you for this, the first Sunday of Advent Thank you for the gift of Jesus The light of the world Thank you that we have called by you Out of darkness Into your wonderful light Father, this morning as we come before you in prayer We ask that you bring your light Your restoring presence to any dark places in our own lives Or those around us On this first Sunday in Advent We pray for the world We pray that you would drive away despair from our politics Revive our dreams of justice and truth Restore our passion for what is good and right We pray for peace in Ukraine, Gaza, Egypt, Syria, Afghanistan

And other places in the world where there is conflict We ask that you protect families, children, civilians caught up in these conflicts Comfort and strength all your people And we ask particularly for Christians That they would see your hand at work Even amidst the devastation We pray for the homeless The refugees The expelled And forgotten people everywhere May they know that your

guiding hand is with them In their daily work and tireless endeavours We ask that you would govern the hearts and minds of those who lead our nations For those in authority That they may act justly And with honesty and integrity According to your will On this first Sunday in Advent We pray for our local community

Father, we long to see High Wycombe transformed by you Through your loving, serving and worshipping church We pray for coffee and chat And Cap Job Club And for other ministries For all that go would find a welcoming, safe space And enjoy the company there We pray for the team serving at Plugin And give thanks for the vital welcome offered to rough sleepers As the weather gets colder We bring before you the vital work of One Can Trust Wickham Homeless Connection And the Wickham Rent Deposit Guarantee Scheme And also give you thanks for the growing work of growing hope in High Wycombe And for Open Doors We pray for those in our local community And especially for those for whom this day will seem long and hard

For those in hospital or ill at home Those struggling with despair, depression Those seeking work Or for those for whom this day will be their last Comfort and heal all those who suffer Give them courage and hope in their troubles And bring them to the joy of your salvation On this first day in Advent We pray for your church here at UBC We pray that you would work within each one of us And build us to be a community of Christians Who love God, follow Jesus And share the hope that we have in Him Give us a sense of expectation as we look forward to Christmas And inspiration as we seek to discern how we can use the opportunities that this brings

[80 : 57] We ask that you help us to use our gifts and talents For the greater good of all Challenge us to drive away complacency and timidity when serving you As we work together as the body of Christ Help us to put aside any differences we may have And unite us together as we worship and serve you We pray for your blessing on all those who preach and teach the message of your salvation And we pray especially for all those serving you in any way in the events taking place in the coming weeks On this first Sunday in Advent We pray for our own Christmas preparations May your light shine through us So that our actions and words may be salt and light in this world May we reach out to one another

And especially those in need Or those who don't yet know you To share the hope of your son's birth Your son's birth That Advent brings Give us the boldness to speak of you as the reason for the season And courage to invite our family, neighbours, colleagues and friends To share in the upcoming Christmas services and events So that your kingdom will come And your will be done On earth as it is in heaven Amen Amen Thank you Helen Thank you Helen Just a few notices before we sing our final song God's call to his people is to worship them with their whole lives And as we heard in the passage this morning Giving of financial resources is part of God's work

So, and to run the ministry of this church To maintain the buildings, to pay the staff We depend on the giving of the church family At our church meeting last week Ian, our treasurer, shared about how God has provided for the church this year And as we look ahead to next year, staff vacancies to fill and the rising cost of energy We currently have a deficit budget for next year So, we're asking members and regular attenders to spend time in prayer Considering and reviewing giving as part of our worship and commitment to this church So, on behalf of the leadership, I'd like to invite you to consider Firstly, if you haven't yet committed to regularly giving to the church Then ask God if he is prompting you to do that Secondly, if you are giving regularly but not tithing

That's giving a tenth of your income To pray about whether God might be prompting you to take that step of faith And tithe your income And thirdly, if you are already tithing Praying and ask God if he is prompting you to go beyond your tithing There's information on the website on how you can give Or you can pick up one of these leaflets which is here About how to go giving financially Or if you want to speak to any of the leadership or the finance team Or the administration, then please do so So, this evening, first Sunday of the month But there is not an evening service We would normally have So, instead we're asking you to join for the Romanian carol service Which will be next Sunday on the 10th Here at 6.30 So, don't come this evening Come next week instead This week on Thursday, the 7th of December

There's going to be a carol service held at Rye View Manor At the end of the Rye Helen Mayling is organising this And she would love some people to come and support And take part in that So, it's at 2 o'clock in the afternoon Helen, would you just like to stand up and wave, please In case people don't know you And there she is Please speak to Helen, if you would be able to go She would welcome some extra singers and bodies and people around So, thank you And then as we have

just prayed Please invite your friends, family, neighbours To the carol services on the 17th of December At 10.15 in the morning or 7pm at night And or the Chris Dingle service on the 24th of December at 4 o'clock You do need to book online Or call the church office, please Phew, that's it Lots of notices there Thank you, thank you for being here this morning We're going to sing our final song now We're in Christmassy theme

[86 : 12] It Came Upon a Midnight Cliff Please stand Please stand Please stand The Please stand The Giant The SILENTész To hear the angels sing

Still through the globen skies they come With peaceful wings undone And still their heavenly music flows For all the weary world The broken sun and lonely place They bend from the offering queen And ever o'er its faithful sound Her blessed angels sing Yet quick the woes of sin and strife The world has suffered more Beneath the angels' strength have grown

A thousand years of hope And then the door with manly snowed The love so great they bring For gosh the noisy men of strife And hear the angels sing For now the days are hastened on Thy prophet God's not told When with the ever-serving peace Comes round the angels' hope And peace shall over all the earth His angels' splendors' play And the whole world sent by the soul Which down the angels sing

The blessing to send us on our way May the God of hope Fill you with all joy and peace As you trust in him Amen Amen Amen