

# Day of the Lord

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Preacher: Derek Lamont

[ 0 : 00 ] We're going to turn for a short while this evening to Malachi chapter 4, the last chapter in the Old Testament as Al Sir mentioned when he read from that passage.

And that will bring to an end our short study from this last book of the Bible. We've just looked at each of the chapters consecutively in the last four weeks.

So pray that the Spirit will help us and lead us and guide us. I feel we will need the Spirit tonight for this particular subject. And also we'll need the Spirit because it's warm in here.

And I feel I'll be on a battle just to do my best to keep you awake. But the Spirit of God will deal with that and we'll manage to get through. It's that time of year, isn't it?

January. A miserable long month. Anyway, so let's go back to Malachi chapter 4.

[ 1 : 04 ] I suspect that there are at least two questions we often ask in our lives and at least two issues that we think about a lot in our lives which may be focused in questions.

The first being, what does the future hold for me? I think we're all interested in the future and our future.

And maybe not everyone asks this question explicitly but maybe implicitly, very often we are thinking about this in our lives, will there be a day of judgment?

So what does the future hold and will there be a day of judgment? I think clearly we've got an interest in the future. We all have an interest in the future, a deep-seated interest in the future. We see that in the political arena that we're living in just now, environmentally even, culturally, politically. There's a lot of talk about the future.

[ 2 : 07 ] We hear a lot about the future and personally we think about the future. But sure whether it changes as we get older, I think probably it does in some ways.

I think as you get older we maybe think more about our own very personal future and what it's going to look like in terms of health and in terms of how things are going to work out in this life anyway.

And maybe the younger generation, I may be wrong here, maybe the younger generation are thinking more about the future of the world as it were, the future.

We've seen that a lot in the way the younger generation have driven the environmental concerns that we have. The future of this world is maybe more of a passion. There's maybe in younger people more of that presumption that their own lives will just go on and that lies ahead of them. But they may be more concerned about the world in which they live. When you get to your mid-fifties you start thinking much more about your own personal decrepitude and what the future will hold.

[ 3 : 19 ] So we do think about the future. But we clearly also think about accountability. Will there be a day of judgment? We all believe in justice, absolutely.

That's clearly an experience that we have, we may not formulate it biblically, but we are hardwired to consider justice in our lives.

And in many ways we are relentless legalists. Sometimes we'll put our hands up and recognize that we've done wrong and we're guilty and we'll say it's my fault.

But very often we'll also blame other people or blame God and hold other people to account. But it's all part of this hardwired reality of judging and recognizing justice and the desire for justice.

We often resist its glare, I think, in our lives and often make ourselves the standard by which we judge other people and that makes it easier then to justify what we do and how we live and the choices that we make.

[ 4 : 31 ] And even when we recognize we're the recipients of a just judgment, we tend to be very defensive. We react badly to it even if it makes sense or if we know it's right.

Someone who's been caught having an affair will often justify their own behavior and justify their own actions and blame the other person, lack of love, lack of attention. I was drawn aside. Or a more kind of trivial example of maybe a speeding ticket in the city, wow, it's 20 miles an hour.

The road were quiet, it was late at night, I was breaking the law but it wasn't quite so significant. And it may be little things like that but it was ever thus.

But the question that we so often ask, why, that question that we ask why, is a question which recognizes justice and accountability.

[ 5 : 33 ] However we ask that question, we want somebody to be held to account to answer that question. Why? Why has that happened? Why is that the case?

And every time that question is asked and increasingly people will want to hold, someone has to blame for everything. Someone has to be held to account for what is going on.

Very often for us in the world is God that gets the blame. And that's an interesting consideration for us.

But I think when you're defending your faith as a Christian, when you're standing up for what you believe and people question what you believe as a Christian, I think these kind of questions are very useful to have with people.

Very helpful to open up sometimes some of the preconceptions, the misconceptions or the facts that are taken for granted by so often.

[ 6 : 37 ] What by people so often? Why do they ask these questions? Why are people held to account? Why do we believe in justice? And unpack some of these questions with those who would quickly deny and rubbish sometimes even the existence of God and the existence of accountability to Him.

So there is this within our DNA that sense of justice and accountability. And this passage among many others reminds us that that is the case because we are image bearers of the divine.

We are made in God's image. We are accountable to God because we are made in His image. He's made us. And we are therefore both like Him in seeking and looking for justice and also in being accountable to Him.

That's clearly what the Bible teaches. It is God to whom every one of us, every single living being will give account. Sanctity is five, for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each one may receive what is due for what He has done in this body, whether good or evil.

The Bible clearly teaches both here, it speaks about the day, for behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven. Later on in this short passage it speaks about the day of the Lord coming.

[ 8 : 05 ] And throughout the Bible, the day of the Lord refers to the day of God's judgment, the judgment day of God. And the Bible has a beginning, and the Bible has an end.

And history under that umbrella is linear. It is not cyclical. So there is that beginning and there is that end, and the end will be when Christ returns on that final day of judgment.

God is on His throne and He will judge all because He has fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by a man who is appointed.

And this He has given assurance to all by raising Him from the dead, or from revelation also. This is a slightly longer passage, but you know that great passage when I heard a great white throne and Him who was seated on it in the presence, earth and sky fled away and no place was found for them.

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne. The books were opened. And another book was opened which is the book of life, and the dead were judged by what was written in the books according to what they had done.

[ 9 : 22 ] And there is this ongoing and clear emphasis throughout God's Word of a day of judgment. And at the end of the Old Testament, at the end of this book, this minor prophecy that Malachi has written to the Old Testament people of God, we have this prophetic forward look to God's purposes and God's plans.

So can I ask, what can we take explicitly from this chapter? What is this chapter saying to us today? What was it saying to its original readers? And what is it saying to us?

Well, the first thing that I want to mention, and I think this is very important for us as we sit here this evening representing as it were the church.

First thing I want to say, it was written to believers in Invericomas, okay, just imagine Invericomas, it was written to believers who didn't believe.

So we remember that, okay? So this wasn't God's message for the lost or an unbelieving world out there primarily. It was written to the Old Testament church as it were, the Old Testament people of God.

[10:39] And that's significant. And we've seen that throughout this book, that this is a book that God's bringing a message to that Old Testament church of His, Old Testament people of His who have drifted far away from Him.

And there's this intercourse between them, this discussion between them. And God is exposing their kind of, you know, this title series for this is questions, because there's lots of questions in this book that reflect the kind of things they were asking.

They weren't, for the most time, they weren't great questions. They weren't good questions. They weren't, they were poor questions, because they were questions that exposed their rebellion and their lack of understanding of God and their lack of faith.

How have you loved us? They said, how have we defiled you? How have we wearied you? Where is the God of justice? How do we rob you?

What have we said against you? And these were the questions that come through the book again and again. These defensive questions, you know, where God is exposing their lack of love and following of the living God.

[11:48] And they're asking these questions, no, it's not like that. We're religious. We're the people of God. We belong to a really significant culture. Of course, everything's all right for us.

And yet, their circumstances and their life didn't seem to be great as followers of God and so they were blaming God. And they thought it was a waste of time following God.

They didn't really understand Him or know Him. Chapter 3 and verse 14, they basically say, it's vain to serve God. It's futile. It's a waste of time.

Why in earth would we follow God? And what we find in this book is that God's kind of exposing the fact that they're going through the motions religiously, they're cold, unbelieving hearts.

They didn't really bother getting to know God. They were resting on their laurels and presuming that a few sacrifices they offered and a few ritualistic religious things they did now and again, yeah, that will please God and will be fine.

[12:50] And God's saying, no, you've moved far from me. And so He brings this message of judgment, as it were, into their own circumstances first and foremost.

And I think that's important for us to remember in the New Testament, 1 Peter 4. Peter says, for it's time for judgment to begin at the household of God.

It begins with us. Well, then shall be the outcome for those who do not be the gospel of God. And I think that's an important biblical truth is that when God shines His light and when God speaks, when God reveals, it's always first significant and relevant in our lives as Christians before we want to push it out into the world in which we live.

It's significant that we find God's Word tests our own hearts and a self-examination of our lives go hand in hand with God speaking to us so that there's a sense of humility within us and a recognition that we should be distinctive followers of Jesus who love Him and who serve Him from our hearts. I think in chapter 3 and verse 18 it speaks about that, there once more shall they shall see a distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between the one who serves God and the one who does not serve Him.

[14:14] And in a sense, God is bringing this message to them to show them that their lives, their hearts, their burning passions should set them apart as distinctive.

And should remind them that God first judges our own hearts and our own lives and drives us back to Him for grace and for favour.

So it's important that we see and recognize that God sees the heart and as we worship this evening and as we worship in our lives, God sees our hearts.

That's the really significant reality, isn't it? That outward religion never saved anybody. And we can't simply be content with that.

And He uses His Word to remind us to examine our own hearts, to see where the trust, where our trust lies. And not to be quick to ask ignorant questions of Him, faithless, cheap questions that are defensive and not willing to hear what He says about us in our lives.

[ 15 : 32 ] We in many ways as Christians are to be the hardest and most honest critiques of our own hearts because it helps us then to find the beauty of grace and forgiveness.

So when we look at a passage like this which is written to the church, which is written to the Old Testament church, the question is always with regard to judgment. Well, am I a genuine believer? And that's not, I'm not, you know, to ask that question to be scary, but simply to be self-examining because there's plenty of evidence in the Bible, there's plenty of evidence of what the true believer is who bears fruit in the knowledge of Christ.

You know, the parable of the Sauron say Luke chapter 8 speaks about those who bore fruit and those who didn't. And those who didn't bear fruit, they heard the Word of God with their mind, but as soon as they heard it, it was taken away from them because they didn't allow it to go deep into their hearts.

And then there was others who did hear the Word of God and who enjoyed it, maybe emotionally were touched by it, and it went down into their hearts a little bit. But they loved other things more than that, and the roots of the weeds of sin went deeper and so choked the Word and absolutely destroyed it in many ways.

[ 17 : 01 ] But the understanding of the gospel in people's hearts is when they hear and know the Word and are moved by that Word and allow it to penetrate deep into their hearts as we kind of looked at it a bit this morning to the point that it affects their will and their lives and their obedience and they bear fruit.

And fruit bearing Christians is what we're to be. We're not all going to be the same, we're not all going to be as fruit bearing as the next person. Sometimes we'll not bear that much fruit, but we will bear the fruit of grace and of the kingdom of God.

So it's important for us, I think, in our lives to allow His loving gaze in our lives as Christians first to deal with ourselves as we think about the future judgment of God because you recognize that sometimes He brings testing in our lives and difficult times because He is getting rid of the stuff that keeps us from Him.

You know, the testings and the trials that are spoken of in 1 Peter 1, so that on that great day our faith will be resting on the Lord Jesus Christ because we've come through these judgments and these difficulties.

But remember what Jesus warns. Sorry, no, that's Matthew. I think, no, sorry, I didn't have that.

[ 18 : 42 ] Forget that. But in Matthew Jesus says to those who said, Lord, Lord, Lord, Lord, did we not do great things in Your name?

Did we not cast out demons in Your name? And Jesus says, depart from me, I never knew You. Lord, Lord, I went to church twice on a Sunday. Lord, Lord, I read the Bible. Lord, Lord, I went to Sincere.

I said, depart from me, I never knew You. So there's that sense in which the judgment that He speaks of here which was given to the people of the Old Testament to challenge them about their relationship with God is something that we must recognize and challenge ourselves about.

So when we come to speak about the day of judgment, we should never be kind of rubbing our hands as Christians saying, oh, that's great. That's wherever we'll get our comeuppance and I'll be fine on that day. It's not the attitude that we should ever have to the teaching about the day of judgment.

It should always humble us and it should always make us examine our own lives and humbly return to the fruit of the cross to where our hope and our future lies.

[ 19 : 46 ] So it's the first thing we want to say. The other thing, one of two things I want to say as well is that judgment has already begun. In John's Gospel, Jesus says, whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already because he's not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

And there's a reality in which what is spoken of here as the day of the Lord, the day of judgment, has a future reference to the final day.

But also it reminds us that this is a world that is under God's judgment. Romans 6 speaks about the wages of sin being death, so that there's already a judgment.

The reality of death in this world is a reality of judgment, a separation from love and warmth and life and family and joy.

We should never shrug our shoulders at death as if it's just a natural part of life. Spiritually, the Bible makes clear that the wages of sin is death, it's that separation from Him.

[ 20 : 54 ] So there's the reality of death, but there's also of course already in Jesus there is the defeat of death, the highly significant reality that Christ has come and Christ has come to defeat death, and that is part of His great atoning work.

In this chapter it speaks of Elijah, here it says, behold, I will send you the prophet, Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes, he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, the hearts of the children to their fathers.

Now we've already seen that, I think in our study in Matthew, when John the Baptist came, there was a link between John the Baptist coming and Elijah, he was going to be the kind of second Elijah as it were, and that clearly could be a reference here to the coming of John the Baptist, but also it could speak of the transfiguration which is recorded in Matthew 17 where Jesus is transfigured on the mountain top in a remarkable way, and on either side of Him you've got Elijah and also Moses who's mentioned in the previous verse here, in verse 4.

And it's as if the coming of Jesus fulfills everything that Moses speaks about and all that Elijah was pointing forward to, because as we saw this morning, the center of history is the crucifixion, and that is the great work of God's judgment on sin.

Calvary is God's great victory over death and the grave and Satan, because it's there that he turns the eye of his perfect justice in judgment on himself, in the person of his son for us.

[ 22 : 52 ] So that cataclysmic divine act of judgment is what is being prophesied here by Malachi, this great and awesome day of the Lord, at least in part, because it is a great day of judgment, the crucifixion that's passed.

The whole world goes into darkness for these three hours because it's such a deep act of God's judgment. He does it because he takes the judgment that is our deserving.

He takes the death that is due to us. So that act is as far as possible from being the incidental death of a Galilean, itirian street preacher at the hands of an oppressive power, as it possibly can be.

It's not just some random act that happened to be taken on board by the early disciples and made into something it wasn't. This is the whole picture of Scripture from the beginning, right through the Old Testament, as it comes to the end of it here in Malachi, which speaks about the day of judgment and the day of the Lord and the coming of Elijah and the fulfilling of Moses' law.

He gave himself into judgment on that day in our place and said before he died, it is finished. It's finished. Divine judgment is finished.

[ 24 : 17 ] No judgment therefore left for any who put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. No judgment left for any who put their trust in Him.

He drank the cup of God's judgment to its dregs, which we remembered this morning at the Lord's Supper, enabling us as believers to begin to experience the healing and the freedom that's spoken of in verse 2.

But for you who fear My name, the Son of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. Healing and freedom is what's spoken of here.

So there's that sense in which the judgment of God has come, but also there's the reality biblically that this day of the Lord that's spoken, this awesome and great day of the Lord that's spoken of here also has an ongoing future fulfillment.

Not only is it fulfilled in Jesus, but it's fulfilled in Jesus' return, where death, ultimately Revelation 21 tells us will be destroyed forever.

[ 25 : 32 ] Death and hell, Satan, having been defeated once for all on the cross, will be destroyed in that final judgment. But that final judgment, therefore, as it's spoken of here, is a coin of two sides, if we can talk about it that way.

And we must never forget that in the gospel message. It's kind of a coin of two sides. This chapter begins, behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all the evildoers will be stubble, that day is like the coming shall be, that day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that will leave them neither root nor branch.

But for those who fear My name, the Son of righteousness, as we said, shall rise with healing in its wings. And that moves on in a sense to speak of, or at least it refers to the fact that final judgment is a double-sided coin, and the gospel message illustrates that.

Take the phrase that's used here, the Son of righteousness. Now if you notice it's spelled S-U-N, it's the sun over at the sun as in this case.

But we have here's not what we would expect if it's speaking about Jesus which would be S-O-N, the Son of God, the Son of righteousness, because it's an illustration of who Jesus is, and it's an illustration of Jesus as the blazing sun.

[ 27 : 07 ] And that reminds us of the two sides of the coin of judgment. So what can I say? Rouge or beach, if we take two illustrations of the sun and the sky, you've got, for example, what's happening just now, the forest fires in Australia, and the great drought that has been caused, and the great destruction that's happening there, and the sun and the sky and the drought that the sun is exacerbating make worse, is one outworking of that heat of the sun and the sky.

But then you go to a beach holiday, paradise, and it's beautiful and warm, and you're lying on sunbathing in that with the blue sky, and there's that healing and that beauty of the sun on our skin. And it's not a completely different perspective of the same reality in the sky, of the same object in the sky.

And there's that reality also of that day of judgment with the Son of righteousness. It is spoken of a great and awesome day in verse 5, or a dreadful and great day.

So there is a sense in which on that day there is a great sense of dread, because justice will be done on that day. Wrongdoing, not by our own understanding of the courts, of the land, but by the great size in heaven, the great heavenly court, all wrongdoing will be dealt with, all pride, as the spoken of here will be humbled, and as an ultimate role reversal for all who set themselves up against God.

[ 29 : 00 ] You don't need God, not interested in God, no time for God. God's a figment of the imagination, he's for just the unintelligent and the unscientific and the irrational.

On that day, all those who set themselves up against God in power and significance will have to face that divine judgment.

And so to be out of Christ is a dreadful reality. And we need to pray as believers both to examine our own hearts, but to have a great, passionate love and concern for mission and for the lost and for the gospel, because we were all in the same place.

It's a dreadful day, but it's also a great day. It's a glorious day and an awesome day for those who have already returned to God and put their trust in Him.

There is healing in its wings, and we leap like calves from the stall. That's a picture of the calves that are born into the cold winter darkness in the shed.

[ 30 : 11 ] And then eventually when spring comes, they get released and they jump out and there's freedom and warmth and joy and happiness. And as we have returned to God and put our trust in Him, what we will recognize on that day is the judgment day has already been.

It's already been for us, because our judgment was in Jesus Christ and He paid the price. And God is just, He will never punish twice.

There will be ultimate healing and freedom. Yes, we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ, but for those in Christ, it will be declarative. It will be declaring what we already know is ours in Christ, that we are redeemed by Him.

And that great imagery of freedom and healing will not just be for ourselves as individuals, it will be for this universe of which we are apart.

It's a great environmental gospel, as well as a personal one, because God is saying there will be a complete renewal of the environment in the new heavens and the new earth, complete restoration.

[ 31 : 18 ] And so in conclusion, how do we react? Well, I think one good way to react to this truth of the last day is to ask the one good question that there is in this whole book.

Remember we talked about it being a book of bad questions. There's a good question in verse 7 of chapter 3, but you say, how shall we return?

That's the one good question in the book. And I think that's always a good question for us to ask.

How can I get back to God? And the answer is always extremely simple, is that we just turn towards Him and ask for His forgiveness and His grace and His renewal.

And ask, if you've never been a Christian, you ask to put your trust in Jesus Christ and understand and see what that means. Pray against the passive, complacent attitude that sometimes that we have.

And pray just for a sharper and deeper understanding of the person of Christ, His justice, His work, and His great love for the lost.

[ 32 : 25 ] He came not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. And experience as we ask that question, the great picture of the prodigal Father with His arms open wide, who will take us and will continue to heal us and give us freedom.

And then as well as that also, can we do what God asks His people to do here, were to be those who remember. And verse 4 of that chapter, remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules.

Remember God's perfect standard, that is the Ten Commandments. And what are the Ten Commandments? Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul, strengthen the mind, and love your neighbour as yourself.

And remember that that is what Jesus came to do, because we can't do it in our own. We can't love God and we can't love others the way He wants us to, because we are spiritually dead without salvation.

But that is the work of the gospel, turning the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers. The gospel is about bringing an estranged family back together, first with our heavenly Father and then with one another, that we live in unity together, reconciliation at every level, turning our hearts towards Him and turning our hearts towards one another.

[ 33 : 49 ] That was a great message, and it was a great message going into the New Testament, also where in the society and the generation where Jesus lived, children were insignificant and unimportant, and weren't cared for and weren't loved, and were aborted and were killed.

And fathers particularly were poor at their task of being fathers. And there's this great sense in which God is saying, we will be completely counter-cultural in reconciling families together and healing brokenness that sin has caused.

My niece was married a couple of summers ago up in Dornach, and I was part... participating in the wedding. But I wasn't doing the sermon, but one of the sermon bit was being done by my niece's brother-in-law who's a minister, Andy Robertson, some of you will know him, he's planting a church in Charleston in Dundee.

And the first thing he said when he stood up to speak to the newly married couple was statistically he said, the person standing next to you is the person most likely to kill you.

So it wasn't what people were expecting to hear at a wedding, and obviously it was a kind of humanist comment. And I can't remember his point of...

[ 35 : 10 ] As usual, you can never remember the point. You can't remember the kind of the joke or whatever, but you can't remember what he was saying. But it's a right statistic.

The reality is that sin often is most intensely felt in family first and in community and sometimes in church. And statistically, that's where most murders happen, I don't know what church, but certainly family at that level.

And so the speaking of the fathers being reunited to their children. Was that... just that recognition of turning the effects of sin on its head and grace changing our families and changing our churches and changing our communities.

Please remember that as we live our lives in the church. And please remember that for those who reject Jesus Christ, there is no hope whatsoever.

There was utter destruction for the Old Testament people of God in the New Testament because they rejected Jesus.

[ 36 : 16 ] Destruction of their land, destruction of their temple and the destruction of their hope. But we believe and pray that He will bring His people home. And a brook like this, as it ends, should always bring us to our knees and give us a passion to pray for ourselves, to bear fruit and for our lost family and friends that they will come to know Jesus.

Let's pray. Father, help us to know You and love You better. Help us to remember that Your salvation is an absolute gift, that we don't earn it, we can't make ourselves right before the great judgment seat.

But that God in Christ took our place, was our substitute and lived the life we couldn't live yet, died the death that we deserve.

Great gift, great hope. Great joy that we have when we know Him and know that judgment has been meted out on Himself as it were.

He's born the punches Himself because of His great love for us and His great awareness that we couldn't put it right and we couldn't overcome death ourselves.

[ 37 : 29 ] So may we renew our trust tonight and may we have a greater and deeper passion for family and friends who don't know You and just that we would love them and that we would serve them and that we would share Jesus with them in a respectful and gentle way.

Amen.