

Day Of The Lord

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[0 : 00] I'd like you to return with me for a reading this morning to Malachi chapter 4. It's the very last chapter in the Old Testament and as such it seems appropriate because it's the last chapter 400 years before the coming of Jesus.

It's not a particularly festive theme but it's real and unless we understand it then the festive theme is a waste of time and so this morning I want to look at the end of the Old Testament because God's placed it there and the verse and the chapter there and then look next Sunday morning at chapter 1 of Matthew which is obviously about the birth of Jesus but the birth of Jesus is meaningless without Malachi chapter 4 and with what it talks about. It's unpleasant, you don't want to hear about it today, you'll be uncomfortable in your seats and I'm uncomfortable preaching it but it's true and unless we come to terms with it then everything else is just vain sentiment and we're wasting our energies. So we come to Malachi chapter 4 and it speaks about the day of the Lord. The last message from God for 400 years, surely the day is coming.

It will burn like a furnace, all the arrogant and every evil doer will be stubble and that 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 Son of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings and you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall then you will trample down the wicked and they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things says the Lord Almighty.

Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him for all Israel. See I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers or else I will come and strike the land with a curse. So we have there at the end of the Old Testament a very solemn and a very serious message about God and God's purposes and one of the reminders that it brings us is that history isn't a circle. There's no repeats, there's no reincarnation, you don't get a chance second time round to live the life that you wanted to live despite what

I'll be saying this evening about Jesus pre-existing I hope no one will misunderstand that I know you weren't from the congregation but I hope no one else will misunderstand, I'll try and be clear on that, that his pre-existing doesn't mean ours nor our reincarnation. History is a straight line, there's a first day and there's a last day and that you know that's just like us, but none of us remember our first day and probably not many of us will recall our last day when it happens but that's life isn't it we've got a first day and a last day we start and then we finish in this life and that's like what God is revealing in Scripture that he's got Genesis chapter 1 which tells us about beginnings that although he pre-existed that the world began the world started and it started because he spoke and because he decreed that it would start and we recognize and know that and here in prophetic terminology he is speaking about the day when it finishes this world that we exist in, this world as it is that there will be a grand finale that the curtain will come down on this world not just on our own life but on this world as it presently is there will be a final whistle a closing bell it's not just going to carry on indefinitely into the future and the Bible makes clear interestingly that everyone will be present on that day whether we have died long before it or not that we will be present on that last great day no one will miss out it'll be a day of reckoning a day of judgment a day when our eternal fate will be sealed made clear now we all believe in a day of reckoning we all know that one day even in this life there's accountability for what we do don't we or do we think that we can just skim round the world and our lives without accountability that we can simply do what we want and that there'll be no one and nothing to give account to about our lives I think we all recognize the reality of a day of reckoning and here God is speaking the Lord Almighty here is speaking about the great day of reckoning that we will all be involved in all be part of so it's really very relevant to us all it's very difficult to think about because it's so different from what this life is like for us and it's so I don't even know if counterculture is the right word as out of any kind of cultural thought and in many ways that we have but it's hugely important and here the Lord

[6 : 35] Almighty and there's various different interpretations are not so much interpretations of the chapter but interpretations about the picture that is given in the chapter now take it very strongly to be a picture of God with the image of God as the Sun not as s on but as s you and you've got the Sun of righteousness here and the picture is of this great and bright and strong and hot Sun beating down on a field or on the land and it has two effects it has a destructive effect and it has a restorative effect now you know that can be true of the Sun don't you of the s you in it can be like that if you sit out in it too long you can get badly burnt and as pale faced Scots often know that to our cost when we have a semi-shaped burn mark on our chests but we also know moving out of a cold room into the warmth of the Sun how healing that can be and how often for many people the Sun has got great healing qualities so we recognize that the same Sun has two different priorities and properties and I believe that that is whether that is exactly the picture here we know that the that is the reality of what God is saying here and for many people that last great day will be a dreadful day and he says that it will be a dreadful day verse 1 speaks about that day burning like a furnace not a good day and not a good picture it is a picture in many ways of the light not just the heat of the Sun but the light of the Sun piercing and exposing darkness and leaving people without excuse and for those for whom those who are left without excuse on that great day it is a truly awful day a dreadful day the dreadful day of the Lord the Bible speaks about that a lot and who will it be dreadful for well he says all the arrogant and every evil doer will be stubble and he's simply referring there to people who spiritually have taken a position of arrogance before God who have said thank you God for my life thank you God for

Jesus but I don't need him I don't need Jesus Christ he's good I'm sure for others because there's lots of evil people my word this week has shown as there's lots of evil people in the world and maybe a savior they need a savior I don't need a savior Lord I've done my best I've tried my hardest I've gone to church I'm even free church you know I'm a member I've done my best and in a lot of our arrogance we can sweep aside the astonishing work of the cross and the amazing reality of the incarnation which we're looking at this morning because we feel that we know better than the living God but it means that we come to that great day and we face a crucifixion not literally but we face what Jesus faced on our path if we don't come to Christ we face the forsakenness of God and the judgment of God on sin if we don't come to Jesus

Christ for salvation because Jesus says unless I am the one who's your savior then you will face that great and dreadful day in your own and that's hugely unpopular today and it's hugely uncomfortable for us to consider but it we are required to consider what the cross is about do we go to the cross in our lives jumping and skipping and hopping like lambs in a in a field oh the cross is lovely it's beautiful it tells of a great love of course it does but it tells of a huge need that humanity had to receive a savior does it not and it says unless we are covered and protected by Jesus then that same judgment that fell on him as our redeemer as the one who was our substitute will be ours and that is the gospel the reality of the cost why are we having a carol service tonight because we like coming together and drinking mulled wine and eating mince pies and singing nice songs yeah I'm sure that's part of it and that's great it's good and significant but if we lose sight of the fact that it might be an opportunity for people to come and hear about Jesus because of the reality of a dreadful day then we're simply wasting our time we're playing at being Christians because it's a hugely significant reality that's why it's at the end of the Old Testament and there's 400 years of silence until Jesus comes because it sets the tone for why he needs to be there and it's a reminder to us of our own hearts and he says on that great day if you're unprotected by Jesus if you haven't accepted Jesus your Lord and the Saviour he says you'll be stubble not a root or a branch will be left and it's a picture of fruitlessness of lifelessness of destruction of death spiritual separation from the source of love and life no hope on that great day see the judgment day is a day when people need protected when you will need protected and when I will need protected because we will be standing before the sovereign Lord of the universe as guilty lawbreakers before him and although I can't see it just now I honestly can't I believe that everyone on that day will say yep God was absolutely right now I can't see that just now when I hear people's arguments and when I hear people's reasons for not coming I think they'll stand that you think they're gonna stand on that day and defend their case and say well wait a minute Lord what about this and that and they'll have their arguments and their lists and their defense lawyers and everyone there but I don't think it'll be like that with this great sovereign

Lord everyone will on that day recognize and know I am not protected and he is right he is absolutely right there'll be no strength and energy to fight back against God and the goodness that we have had showered on us to a greater or lesser degree by the living God in our lives that will have come to an end no root and branch left it's a final judgment it's a total judgment it's not that God will say okay well we'll give you a period of reflection we'll give you a few a few years just experiencing my grace taken from you my love taken from you there isn't a second chance the picture is very clearly one of hopelessness and of sadness and but it's do you recognize that today is really hard to think about you recognize is hard to understand when you're sitting here full of life and energy and you're busy and you're thinking about what lies ahead and then the next week and the next month and you get family and friends and and so much to consider so much that's happening in this life and you just you'd have time to to consider these things because it seems so far from my experience maybe if you're getting older and nearer the end of your journey on this life maybe it's a bit sharper in your focus these young people we think well did I include myself in that sorry I didn't mean to but as young people that you feel this is just out of my realm of thinking but we do recognize it the old testament and the new testament recognize it as a terrible day and I

I don't think it needs added to by me really from what scripture says in 2nd Thessalonians chapter 1 and verse 8 and 9 he says that Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven in blight such a different picture isn't it the Lord Jesus coming as the child in the manger and Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven in blazing fire with a powerful with his powerful angels angels powerful we also don't think of that maybe he will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus they will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on that day he comes to be glorified in his holy people we ask you Christians if you believe that today do you actually believe that or there are bits of the Bible that you no longer believe because they're just too uncomfortable or do you genuinely believe that this Christ who has come that we will sing about so sweetly this evening will also come again in pillar and it will come in judgment and just judgment and it will do so absolutely and definitively and the judgment will be in the base bases of those who didn't know him who hadn't come to faith in God through Jesus Christ so we use the phrase often don't we from Jesus himself who says I am the way the truth in the life no man comes to the Father but by me do we genuinely believe that I am the way but there's a few different roads that we can go I'm the way but I doesn't need to be the way that Jesus says I'm the way plus or I'm the way minus but and you know there's lots of things and I know there's lots of things that are gray in the Bible there's lots of things that we have different opinions about there's lots of things that are secondary how we worship secondary in terms of recognizing the basic principle of worshiping and spirit and truth how we do church secondary church government secondary understanding of how

[18 : 21] Jesus will come back whether he'll come post pre or in the middle of the millennium is secondary these are secondary things but what's black and white is that he's returning and what's black and white is that there's a judgment there's some things in the Bible that are black and white there's some non-negotiables this is one of them absolutely one of them and we we we've we're terrorized under it with a godly loving fear because so often we forget about the reality of this day of judgment and we a day of judgment which enters humanity into a different phase of either being with God in His grace and His love in heaven or being separate from God in His grace and His love in hell and primarily is hell's the place where he is not known in his loving grace where there's the gifts of pleasure and happiness and laughter and peace and security will be gone and along with that a knowledge of the fact that they have been lost and so we long for people you know we long for people to be shaken and I would happily offend people if I thought it would break their unbelief and draw them to the loving father and because there's is no greater love than what Jesus has done in going and experiencing that in order that we don't experience it and we need to move beyond simply concluding our own conclusion about our need of God or not in Christ and accepting what He says that we need Him because it's a dreadful day and my hope and prayer is that nobody here having heard and been under the sound of the gospel sometimes for many years will be in that position of eternal regret for not dealing with their unbelief but coming to faith in Jesus as He is revealed as the Savior so it's a dreadful day but it is also a great day it's a great day and it's a day that the incarnation points to because it's a day of fellowship and friendship and healing in relationship with God and that's one of the great concepts of redemption is healing that's what Jesus came to do isn't it when he healed people he was just pointing to the fact that he could heal now the great healing is not that he will heal a broken leg or heal a pain that you have or an illness that you have although he might well do that that all of that will only point to a deeper healing that he is wanting a healing that will only finally come to fruition on that great day when he says that for you who revere my name that is those who have come to take Jesus as Lord and Savior who recognize who he is and what he's done and who have invited him into their hearts because they know they need him then he says for such the Son of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings that are the most beautiful picture that you can imagine son of righteousness will come with healing in his wings so that son that picture of God as he scorches and destroys justly and rightly is also a picture of the God who comes with tremendous healing that in his wings that is the rays of the Sun and description of the rays of the Sun

with healing in his wings and isn't that the greatest longing we have is to know his healing it's a beautiful and positive word the power of Christ comes in and he heals us now for us in this life it's an ongoing process we're healed all at once in the sense of being made right with God and we're justified before God and no matter what happens when we die we die with him and we die as those who've been made right but in terms of our ongoing life there's an ongoing healing for us that will be completely brought to fruition on that great day there'll be a transformation in us on that great day that we are looking forward to and I wait you know for many people here their lives are full of sore and bitter experiences and memories there's many scars and many mistakes and much sadness and Christ heals that he redeems that in our lives here but we will know complete healing from it instantly on that great day the bodies and souls of believers when they're separated they're separated death will meet again on that great day but they will meet again differently will be will have been made whole body and soul gloriously renewed and healed forever that is one of the things that makes you different from someone who's not a Christian is you've got a different perspective many people are only looking to the next pay rise or the next holiday or the next weekend or the birth of children or the birth of grandchildren or whatever it might be an ongoing looking forward to something in this life and the irony and the kind of paradox of it all is as we're looking forward to all these things we're getting older and wrinkly at the same time and not able to enjoy them quite so much it'll not be very often that Billy Connolly's quote in this pulpit but

I remember Billy Connolly and many years ago saying that he just wished that you got younger instead of getting older because all the things you want to do that you save up to do by the time you can do them you're too old to enjoy them and half the time don't reach there well that's an interesting thought isn't it it's an instinct thought but it's not a wrong thought because in reality that's what we can look forward to in Christ that we will rise on that day with healing in our wings and we die sick in many ways I guardedly say that we'll be restored whole we die old in some cases we'll be restored to the vigor and the strength of youth eternally what a day for long what a day to long for what a day to hope for what a day to live with the perspective of as Christians and it should transform the way we think and act and react and respond and the priorities of our lives should be focused because we have this great hope of utter and complete healing that comes from him a great joy and it will be a day of blessed release and I think I think Neil said this recently I don't know if he said it in the pulpit and it's a very technical line was because nails are really technical theological guy but he talked about a lot of theological thinking today having an over-realized eschatology you know what that means don't you it means that they're they're expecting too much now and there's not a real sense of anticipation for the future we want God and we want him now and we want everything that he has to offer but then when trouble comes we can have questioned God he said well what is this great salvation why am I still suffering why there's difficulties because we can we want it and we want it now and we want it all but the reality is that this life is a battle for us as Christians that's what he says it's there's much suffering for us as

Christians there's lots of difficulties and we don't just skip around and think everything's easy or expect God to give us everything they want it's not a divine Santa Claus that's just giving us everything that we want we recognize a difficulty and a challenge and a struggle in so many things but he says that day will be a blessed release because he gives a great picture and you will go out like and leap like calves released from the stall and there's a fantastic picture there of blessed release you know like if you if you know anything about if you know anything about winter and calving and sheep and these things that they can be penned in for for ages in the winter in a shed or or even in tight sort of surroundings and I'm in the good weather comes you can open the gates and you know we have picture of the sheep and they just the act you've seen that they jump six feet high because they're released or the latter the calves when they're let out of the field they just let out of the gate they just jump and they run and they're free it's a great picture of freedom and release and in the Easter time and the spring time and the warmth of the Sun and they're they're getting fresh grass in the ground and not eating that horrible straw anymore and smell and the stench have been inside okay I'll not go any further but so that you've you move from that being cooped up in the darkness and the reality that that is for us so often our experience and we're battle weary sometimes and we struggle and we look forward to a day of will be released as God created us to be well will not know temptation and attacks and danger and enemies and fears and brutality and and sin and brokenness and and been beaten up and be lost will not know these things will know everlasting security and peace and freedom and bliss in his presence a great release and we thank God for that we thank God for that hope and that future I'd be a day of changed fortunes no one really listens to anything that people say any Christians say today and so many circumstances and much more importantly not listen to what God says and the God is ridiculed and mocked and laughed and derided and ignored by the vast majority of people today I don't need them but reminded on that day that there'll be a great turning around of fortunes and they will trample down the wicked they'll be ashes under the soul of your feet on the day when I do these things says the Lord

Almighty and it's a recognition of whose side you really want to be on on that day who is Lord and who is God and who is the one that is ultimately victorious at the moment sometimes the secular and unbelieving world seems hugely victorious over belief and faith and maybe you're challenged by that maybe you're tempted to say well I think the day of Christian belief is gone now it's moved on we've moved on to something better or or maybe not better but different and Christianity is for just for the past well you will think that if you don't really believe it and if God for you is not the God who reveals himself in Scripture but this is what we have and this is what we believe is truth I am the way the truth and the life so it's important for us in conclusion to remember the law of God remember the law of my servant Moses the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb that is remember all that's contained in that law not only if you're an unbeliever because it exposes your need for Jesus as a believer because it shows you how he wants you to live by his grace and in his favor out of gratitude for him whatever however we take it the law points us to Jesus it points us to Jesus and that is what we must remember it's the only place we can go and I encourage you to consider Jesus for yourself today and really you know to really pray for people this evening I only speak very shortly tonight I'm only going to speak for 10 minutes that should encourage you to bring people alone 10 minutes but pray that it will be passionately right for the people that hear it and that includes me and you pray that God will use it pray that people's barriers will be broken down pray that their hearts will be open to respond to the message of Jesus Christ what I'm going to do I'm going to tell you what I'm going to do so you could pray more about it I'm going to recognize the birth of Jesus as a prequel to the main event which is death and resurrection okay so I'm going to use that kind of picture using the birth of Jesus to think about the life and death and resurrection of Jesus so we're praying that people will respond to the message and he finishes with this great prophecy of the prophet Elijah who will come before the great and dreadful day of the Lord now there's an interesting thing happening there you know who that's speaking about with this I finish speaking about John the Baptist isn't it because on several occasions in the gospel Jesus refers to John the Baptist as the Elijah who will come again and what's interesting is that God says here that he'll send the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord from God's point of view he doesn't see much difference between the first coming and the second coming of

[32 : 35] Jesus you see it's all there it's all clamped into you it's called prophetic foreshortening it's like if you look at a range of mountains in a picture I've told you this before that they all look like they're in the same place don't they the different ridges and the different mountain peaks they all look just that they're beside one another but if you actually go to that place and you walk the mountains and you come up to the first ridge you go oh my goodness you've got miles to the second ridge and you've got to go down and up and down up before you reach the second ridge and as you're reaching it you realize it's further again because in the photograph it's just all one but in reality there's great depth and distance between them and very often it was called in the Bible prophetic foreshortening is that that God predicts the future all is one event that's how he sees it it's one event and really what I'm saying is we will spend so much time remembering Jesus coming his birth and his death in resurrection we can't leave out his return his glorious return because that will bring to a conclusion what he's done and it's all part of the one picture so we can't just have the incarnation and the loveliness of Jesus as a baby and and then the kind of brutality of the cross and not sure what all happened about an innocent man being and in his resurrection which well that's just what people Christians believe because it's wishful thinking and not have the cross and not have the second coming but we take it all as a one and we take it all as truth and we listen to John the Baptist what did he say I'm not worthy the greatest Old Testament prophets I'm not I'm not even worthy to tie this guy shoelaces listen to him he must increase I must decrease that's what John says the greatest of the Old Testament prophets you listen to John as he points to

Jesus and listen to Jesus who is the only redeemer the only savior the one who is the way the truth in life who will transform your life as he's transformed mine and will continue to do so and as Christians that we can have this perspective and this hope of a future a redemption and a freedom and a fullness of life that we can't even imagine how great it's going to be and it will put the troubles and the tensions and the difficulties of this this world in which we live and our experience which you might have come with this morning that is black and bleak and I don't in any way mean to minimize that but put it into the perspective of knowing you have somebody who loves you who died on the cross for you to save you from that great and dreadful day of the Lord so that you might know life and life to the full may that be our experience in our hope and our prayer for ourselves and for those who will come tonight also let's power heads and pray Lord God we ask and pray for your blessing on us and for your blessing on your word in our hearts we recognize that sometimes it makes us uncomfortable because it confronts us with truth that we would rather not deal with we know that we love things when they're great and things and life when it's good but we also need to be absolutely honest and recognize not just the evil that we will easily condemn and recognize as such in this world but recognize the evil in our own hearts and the reality of your grace keeping us from what we would be like if it wasn't for you and still our need for a redeemer a savior and one who will cover us completely from our sins forgive us utterly every sin thought word indeed past present and future who will set us free even in this life to be right with God and to look forward to fulfilling realising and knowing and experiencing that in heaven forever in a in a world that is just beyond our imagination and beyond our experience but Lord we believe because you came from there but you return to there that exists it's real and that we will go there if we trust and know you as Lord and Savior so we pray that the reality of this great and dreadful day would hit home to each of us today and that we would ask how our lives must change in the light of it may each of us do that today and have the time to do that today and we do ask for your blessing and your favor and your presence with us this whole day and this evening as we gather again tonight for Jesus's sake