

Hail the sun of righteousness!

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[0 : 00] Okay, well, thank you very much, Brian, and it is a privilege and an honor to be here. I wish I could have met all of you in person, but still, it's good to be virtually with you as well.

Let's turn to God's Word. I hope you've got your Bible with you, and we're going to go to Malachi chapter 3, reading from verse 13 down to the end of the book to 4 verse 6.

So Malachi chapter 3, verse 13. You have spoken arrogantly against me, says the Lord. Yet you ask, 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 evil doers 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.

[1 : 03] A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored his name. On the day when I act, says the Lord Almighty, they will be my treasured possession.

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

Chapter 4, verse 1. Surely the day is coming. It will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble.

And the day that is coming will set them on fire, says the Lord Almighty. Not a root or a branch will be left to them. But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays.

And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves. Then you will trample on the wicked. They will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act, says the Lord Almighty.

[2 : 09] Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws 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.

Well, this is God's word and we're thankful for it. And let's commit this time to the Lord. Father, we thank you so much for speaking to us through the prophet Malachi.

And we pray this morning that your word would come to us afresh, even where we are right now, wherever we might be. That you would speak to us and speak to our hearts the things that we need to hear.

We ask and pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, as your pastor Brian said, these are unprecedented times. I didn't expect to be preaching to an empty room this morning.

[3 : 13] But I can imagine on a typical Sunday, this place would be bustling. And I know that your church has many activities and many ministries. And this would be a difficult time having to suspend many of those ministries for a period.

But in that busyness of serving, I wonder if this question ever crosses your mind. Is it really worth it to serve God?

Is the price that we pay worth it? Are the rewards that we get worth it? Well, what is the price that we pay? Of course, that would be different for everyone.

But there would be time and energy that is sacrificed in order to serve the Lord. Time and energy that could be used for many other things. For some, the cost comes in rejection by family.

In my church, we have a wonderful Christian lady who is also a tuition teacher. And she brings many young people, teenagers, to our church's evangelistic events.

[4 : 19] And praise the Lord. One of them, who's now in college, has actually put her trust in Jesus Christ just in the last year. But her parents, and many of the parents of these young people, have now said that they are not allowed to go to church anymore.

Now, that's a hard price to pay. For some, it comes with ridicule from their friends. For others, it's that feeling of, Why should I give up all my favorite activities in order to serve in church when everyone else is doing their own thing?

Why do I get up early on a Sunday morning while others have a lie-in? Or maybe get to go to the mall and have a relaxing time on a Sunday morning? And maybe my children have to turn down birthday party invitations on a Sunday morning?

So many things that we might consider. Is it really worth it to serve God? Is it really worth the price that we have to pay?

And I haven't talked about the rewards yet. Are the rewards that come with serving the Lord worth it? Well, that depends on what we think the rewards are.

[5 : 29] When you hear some preachers, you could be forgiven for thinking that your rewards will include financial freedom, success in business, a happy family, good health, and not to mention a long, long life.

Well, maybe we don't expect all of those, but I think often we do tend to expect some of them, don't we? So what about those times when the rewards aren't so forthcoming?

When life doesn't go your way, when your church is closed because of coronavirus, or you fail your exams, you lose a loved one in an accident, or your doctor tells you that you're terminally ill?

You might ask yourself, is it really worth it to serve God? Was it worth the price? Is it worth it for these rewards? My prayer is that God's word would speak to each of us this morning, and that in our own hearts and minds, as we sometimes wrestle with these questions, that the sun of righteousness would rise with healing in its rays.

Well, let's turn now to God's word in Malachi, and you've been following a series through this book, and today is the last sermon in that series. The book started with the word of the Lord through Malachi in chapter 1, verse 1, and it's coming to a close with a final word from the Lord.

[6 : 56] And as you know, in this book, all along, the people have been disputing with God, but how gracious of God that he continues to address his people. And even as we come to the sixth and final disputation with God, again, he addresses his people here.

And as ever, it's God who speaks first. And in chapter 3, verse 13, God speaks to reveal the attitude of his people. He says, you've spoken arrogantly against me.

Literally, they've spoken with hard or harsh words. They've spoken criticisms against their God. And then, as we've come to expect in Malachi, there is the pushback from the people against God's accusation.

And they say, what have we said against you, God? Now, we don't know if they said anything critical to God himself. Maybe they were still going through the motions of their worship as usual, but maybe among themselves, the tone of their conversation was a bit different.

Or maybe silently in their hearts, they'd spoken against God. However, it was said, in verses 14 and 15, God exposes those harsh words.

[8 : 20] And what are they? It's futile to serve God. What do we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the Lord Almighty?

Don't we recognize some of those words? Why should I bother serving God in church? Why bother obeying God? Why bother with the seriousness of living the Christian life instead of just enjoying ourselves?

What do we get from God anyway? If we do recognize those words and those thoughts that might come to our mind, what should we do about them?

Should we express them? Should we suppress them? Should we just be careful who we whisper them to? Well, let's be clear about a couple of things.

Firstly, before a word is even formed on our lips, the Lord knows what we're going to say. In fact, the Lord sees into our hearts. So merely suppressing the words is not really going to solve the problem, is it?

[9 : 32] More positively, we could say that God appreciates honesty. In fact, just this morning, we've heard Pastor Brian reading from the Psalms. And we see that David and other psalmists time and again express honesty to God about their feelings and about their situation as they pray to him.

But there is a difference between being honest and humble as we ask these questions and on the other hand, talking harshly about God with pride, with anger, with bitterness.

Well, in the case of the people in Malachi's time, it seems they've actually gone even beyond asking questions, that they've reached a settled conviction.

They've made up their minds about God, actually. It is futile to serve him. It isn't worth the price.

And the rewards aren't worth it either. And if we want to understand their logic, then I think we look at verse 15.

Because now they think that the arrogant and the proud, well, they're the ones who are really blessed. And the evil doers are the ones who get to live the good life. And, well, even if you put God to the test, you get away with it.

[10 : 46] Now, of course, by that logic, I think many of us would be bound to have second thoughts about God. And even today, we know that the richest people in Malaysia are not Christians.

And many who do evil seem to get away with it time and time again. And we, like the people in Malachi's time, are tempted to look at the world around us and to come to these conclusions, that it doesn't make any difference if you're righteous or wicked.

It makes no difference if you go to church or you don't go to church. We aren't better off by calling ourselves Christians. In fact, we might just be worse off. So why should we bother?

Well, there's mention of testing in verse 15. And there's irony here, actually, because maybe they thought that was a legitimate thing to do, to test God, simply because God mentioned that back in chapter 3, verse 10.

You might recall that from a previous sermon. God invited the people to test him by bringing in the whole tithe instead of robbing him and then seeing how he would bless them.

[11 : 55] And, of course, that is how it was supposed to work under the covenant with Israel. If the people truly loved God, if they obeyed him wholeheartedly, he would bless them. If they disobeyed, he would curse them.

So God said, test me in this. See if I won't keep my word and bless you when you return to me. Yes, it's a test, but it's a test in the kind of taste and see that the Lord is good way.

It's a gracious invitation to sample God's goodness once again. Did anyone take up that offer of a test? Actually, I doubt that many did.

But anyway, in chapter 3, verse 15, it's a different kind of test being proposed by the people. This is testing God in the way that God himself said the people should never do.

Do not put the Lord your God to the test, says Deuteronomy 6, 16. And in the context, Moses reminds the people of how they tested God's grace and patience in the wilderness.

[12 : 59] They grumbled. They complained. They were not thankful to God. And they thought that God would never punish them for their sinfulness. Now, in Malachi's day, the people again want to test God.

And they want to stretch God's grace as far as they possibly can. They assume that God won't punish them. And that is a dangerous game to play. Now, like I said earlier, God appreciates honesty.

And by all means, we are to pour out our hearts to God in prayer as we struggle with anything, including the cost of serving him. But if, like the people in Malachi's day, we come to these fixed conclusions about God, that it's not worth it, the price is too high, the rewards aren't enough, then God's word from Malachi for us this morning is actually a warning.

Verse 13, you're speaking arrogantly, harshly against God. You're putting him to the test in a way that he commanded his people never to do.

And if you worry that you might be going down that path, then I urge you to keep listening because God has words of hope for us this morning as well.

[14 : 15] And we will come to them shortly. But before we get to those words, let's consider another group of people because there were some people who did bother about God.

And we see them in verse 16. Malachi tells us about a gathering of God's people, God's people within God's people, a faithful remnant.

And they meet to talk with each other. And we learn two things from the brief description. We learn that they feared the Lord and they honored his name.

Now, we don't know much more about them than that. They were talking, but we don't know what they were talking about. And we don't know what else they were doing. But I think we know the most important thing. We know the attitude of their hearts.

And in God's eyes, that makes all the difference. So unlike the first group who spoke arrogantly, this group fears God. They care about God's honor.

[15:10] And God himself has said, fear is the beginning of wisdom. And he will honor those who honor him. Now, what could they be doing in verse 16?

If we were to speculate, well, maybe they were gathering for mutual encouragement. Maybe they were gathering to hear God's word. Maybe they were gathering to pray for one another, to pray for their nation.

They could have been doing any or all of those. And we don't know exactly. But most important, rather than what they said, is the fact that God heard them. We're told, aren't we, that the Lord listened and heard.

Well, of course, it's true. The Lord heard the first group of people as well. And God hears everyone, doesn't he? But it seems to be a bit more emphatic this time. It says the Lord listened and heard. And it doesn't stop there either. Look at the second half of verse 16. It says, A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored his name.

[16:23] So those people gathered together, as few as they might have been, have been heard in heaven. And God knows each of them by name.

And he remembers them. The details have been recorded in a scroll so that they might be remembered forever. Do you remember that time long ago before Steve Jobs gave us the iPhone? Before we all ended up with a smartphone in our pockets? Do you remember a time when we actually used things like notebooks and diaries and memo pads?

And I'm not talking about apps on our devices, but things made of paper that we actually wrote on. When we wanted to remember something, you better write it down. Well, we see here that God is intent on remembering these people who bother about him.

He's writing down their names. Of course, it's not that God is prone to forget. It's not that he must write everything down, otherwise he'll forget. This is a colorful description that is really for our benefit, to reassure us that God truly remembers those who bother about him.

[17:36] And it's good to know, isn't it? Well, this fact that God remembers those who fear him is already beginning to answer another question. And that is, why should you bother?

Why should you bother about God? And that answer is more clearly shown in verses 17 onwards, right the way to verse 3 of chapter 4. And we can consider this in two parts.

Why we should bother? In two parts. Number one, because the day, a day is coming. A day is coming. And in fact, it's a day when the Lord will act. And secondly, because the Lord will make a distinction.

And it is a distinction between the righteous and the wicked. So let's start with that first point. A day is coming when the Lord will act.

Now, I don't know how patient you are. My wife is a doctor, so we often joke that she has a lot of patience. But when it comes to dealing with our three children, I think we've agreed that probably I have a little bit more patience in the sense of Boletahan, yeah?

[18:43] But God calls his people to be patient. In fact, it's one of the gifts of the Spirit, isn't it? One of the fruits of the Spirit. How patient are you when it comes to serving God when nothing seems to come of it, when we don't see results, when we don't feel the rewards?

Are we going to get discouraged, or are we going to wait and see? God calls us to patience.

However inactive you feel the Lord is in your life, or in your ministry, or in your circumstances, we need to know that there is a day when the Lord will act.

There is this definitive point in the future when God will do everything that he has promised. And it's just as God acted before, isn't it? When he definitively sent his son Jesus in the fullness of time.

At the proper time. At the right time, as the New Testament tells us. Well, likewise, God will act again on a day that he himself has set.

That day, often referred to in the Bible as the day of the Lord, is also mentioned in Acts 17. And Paul is talking to people in Athens, and he says that there is this day that is already set.

[20 : 05] And on that day, God will bring justice by the man he has appointed. And of course, that is the Lord Jesus Christ. The day of the Lord is the second coming of Christ.

And that is the next big event in God's calendar. And we can be rest assured that he has programmed all of his reminders. He has set all of his alarms.

He will not miss that day. And in fact, nobody will miss that day. Maybe for some of us this morning who wonder why we should bother serving the Lord, just need that reassurance.

That despite the fact that sometimes we feel like God isn't doing anything, there is a day when God will act. That day is right on the horizon.

The appointed time for Jesus' second coming will arrive according to God's perfect plan. But let's think about the second point now and think more specifically, because while it's good to know that God will act, actually, what will he do?

[21 : 16] And the answer to that is most clearly seen in chapter three, verse 18. The Lord will make a distinction. He will make a distinction between the righteous and the wicked. And this is really important.

In fact, this touches the pain point of the first group of people. Because when they complained about God, when they said, why should I bother? They were thinking, there is no difference between the righteous and the wicked.

They were saying, it doesn't matter if you serve God or not. But that thinking is just plain wrong. Because the day is coming when God will make a distinction, a permanent distinction between the righteous and the wicked.

And we will see it. Everyone will see it. Finally, the difference will be as clear as day. And not a single soul will dare to say, why should I bother? Here is the distinction that God is going to make. First, those who serve will be spared. Those who serve will be spared. And secondly, those who are proud will be punished. Those who are proud will be punished.

[22 : 26] If you look at the description in chapter 3, verse 17, it's quite beautiful. It is the Lord Almighty speaking about that group of people who are still bothered about serving God.

He's heard them. He's remembered them. And because he remembers them, he will act on their behalf. And that's what it means for God to remember his people.

It's not just that they pop into his mind and he happily reminisces about them. No. When God remembers, he acts. It's not like those memories that pop up on Facebook from time to time.

Do you get those on Facebook? Chris, we care about you and your Facebook memories. We thought that you'd like to look back on this post from five years ago. And there it is, that plate of Nasi Lemak that I ate five years ago.

No, I didn't really want to reminisce about that. But when God remembers, it's not to reminisce. It is to act. And let me give you an example. Because when Noah was in the ark, when he was in the flood, at the peak of it, actually, at the absolute worst of it, in the midst of massive death and destruction all around him, we find these words in Genesis 8, verse 1.

[23 : 42] But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark. And he sent a wind over the earth and the waters receded.

You see, God remembers and he does something. And because God remembers the people who bother in verse 16, he does something in verse 17. On the day he acts, God says, they will be my treasured possession.

I will spare them, just as a father has compassion and spares his son who serves him. And what does that mean? It means that on the day of the Lord, at the second coming of our Lord Jesus, when he comes to judge the living and the dead, God will spare these faithful ones.

They will be spared his punishment. He will spare them like a father has compassion on a son. And they won't just be spared. They will be his treasured possession as well. They will be loved and cherished by God for eternity.

Isn't that a reward truly worth serving the Lord for today? Isn't that eternal heavenly reward worth just momentary difficulties here on earth?

[24 : 54] And if you think of COVID-19 and how many countries are responding to that right now, we see that more and more countries have decided that maybe a couple of weeks of lockdown, with all the inconveniences that that brings, is actually worth it.

It's worth it in the long run to prevent this epidemic getting worse. Well, if that's true, then can't we say the same thing on a spiritual level as well?

Because our short time on earth serving the Lord is surely worth it in view of an eternity of being spared by God and being made his treasured possession.

Now, I don't want to move on to the next point until we consider one more thing here. And that is, just how is it that we can be spared? I mean, how is it that God can spare anyone on that day, even the so-called faithful?

Because even if we dare to call ourselves faithful, we know that we aren't perfect. We know that some days we also don't feel bothered about God or serving him.

[26 : 11] We know we still question God from time to time. We know we even speak harsh words against him. Why should God spare us like a father who has compassion on his son?

I'll tell you why. God can spare us because he did not spare his own son. And that is the gospel.

That is the good news of Jesus Christ. God can spare us because he did not spare his own son.

And we think of a passage like Romans 8.32.

And in fact, Romans 8.32 goes even further than that. It's maybe one of the most astonishing verses in the Bible. Let me read it to you. He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also along with him graciously give us all things?

And if you're wondering what some of those all things might look like, well, we could look at Malachi 4.2. Another wonderful description. But for you who revere my name, the son of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays and you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves.

[27 : 29] It's a colorful description and picture of the eternal joy and satisfaction that we will experience on that day when we see the Lord face to face, when we experience the son of righteousness for ourselves.

It's ours. But it's only ours because God did not spare his own son in order that he might spare us. Praise the Lord. Well, we've said that the Lord is making a distinction. And so while it's true that he will spare those who serve him, it's also true that those who are proud towards the Lord will be punished.

And I don't know if that makes you feel uncomfortable this morning, but Malachi does not run away from this. The Bible never runs away from this and never should we either.

In fact, if we understand it correctly, this will be another reason to praise the Lord. The description of the proud being punished, it comes in chapter 4, verse 1.

[28 : 38] There is burning. There is fire. There is total destruction from root to branch. Yes, maybe God won't punish every sin in this life, but he will punish every sin one day, on that final day.

Because if he didn't, he would be an unjust God. And I believe that we do care about justice. In fact, I know that Malaysians care about justice and I know there are court cases where people are waiting for justice to be done.

So shouldn't we also be glad that God will see that ultimate justice will be done? It will be done right on the final day of judgment. Malachi expects God's people to be so concerned for justice, so glad to see it being done that they're even pictured celebrating, trampling on the wicked in verse 3.

Now, please, don't take verse 3 as license this week to take joyful revenge on your enemies, to trample on the wicked.

I hope Pastor Brian doesn't get any reports of that happening this week. In this life, we know we are to love our enemies. We are to pray for them. We are to urge them to be reconciled with God through the gospel while there is still time.

[30 : 09] But finally, when God does make this distinction among the people, his verdict will be perfectly right.

We will agree with it. We will celebrate God's justice. And if we are the ones who have bothered about God, who have bothered to serve him, then it will be a day when we are wonderfully vindicated and the Son of Righteousness will rise upon us and we will praise the Lord for that.

Well, let's try to summarize what we've learned so far this morning. We've seen that there are many who cannot be bothered with God. We've seen there are some who are bothered, the faithful ones. We've seen that God hears them. We've seen that he remembers them. And there is a day coming, a day when God will act decisively and he will make this permanent distinction between the righteous and the wicked.

So now what? How should you live? That is what Malachi addresses in his own conclusion in verses four to six.

[31 : 16] For the people of Malachi's time, it's a matter of both looking backwards and looking forwards. They were to look back to the law of Moses.

They were to look forward to the prophet Elijah and to the day of the Lord. Now to look back to the law was to remember what God had already done for his people through Moses, through the Exodus, giving his covenant to the people and they were to obey him in response.

Looking forward to another prophet and to the day of the Lord was a call to trust God to do what was right in the future. So looking back and obeying, looking forward and trusting, that is how the people should live and the same thing can be said for us today.

We are to look back to what God has done in the past. We are to obey what he has commanded. We are to look forward to the future, holding on to and trusting in his promises.

Reminds me of that classic Christian hymn, doesn't it? Trust and obey. Trust and obey for there is no other way to be happy in Jesus than to trust and obey.

[32 : 28] Now of course there are some differences between us and the people in Malachi's time. While they were told to look forward to the prophet Elijah and the day of the Lord, they didn't know exactly what that was going to look like.

Little did they know that the prophet Elijah would come in the form of John the Baptist. Little did they know that the day of the Lord would involve a first coming and a second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And all of that is to say that we have many advantages over the people of God in Malachi's time and we have less excuses than them as well.

We look back with clarity to what they were looking forward to with uncertainty. We now understand that John the Baptist came in the spirit of Elijah, that he came to prepare the way of the Lord and that Jesus Christ himself came to be with his people and bring the good news.

But we also look forward with clarity as well because we understand that Christ himself will return and he will rescue his people and he will judge the world.

[33 : 35] So then, how should you live? Continue to obey the Lord whom you serve faithfully. Continue to trust him knowing that your future is secure in Christ.

And maybe I can add this thought as well because maybe it's not just about how we should live but also about how we should die. And I'm sorry that that sounds so morbid this morning but let me explain what I mean.

Now, I mentioned earlier that my wife is a doctor. In fact, she works in a palliative care ward in a government hospital and she does wonderful work in terms of giving quality of life to people who in some cases just have weeks left to live.

Now, of course, she also has sad stories to share as well but I find the saddest stories that she shares are those that involve Christian patients.

Christians who are terminally ill and some of them more than any other patients cannot accept what they are now facing. They refuse to accept that God would let them get a serious illness in the first place and even more so that God would allow them to die now and not later and some complain loudly and bitterly why has God let me down?

[34 : 56] I've served God all my life is this how he rewards me? Friends, don't look backwards with a sense of entitlement saying this is what I have done for the Lord and don't look at the rewards in this life which is so fleeting and so uncertain.

We are just unworthy servants. We are called to look back to what God has done for us in Christ and we're called to look forward to that day when he will reward his people for their faithfulness to him.

Look forward with joyful hope to the day soon coming when the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays and look forward to seeing the light and feeling the warmth on our resurrection bodies that will come when we're in the presence of our Lord when we are eternally rewarded.

Surely that is how the Lord would have us die as well as live. Well friends we've come to the end of Malachi chapter 4. You've come to the end of this book you've come to the end of your sermon series.

I am confident that the Lord has been speaking to each of you through this series. I know I've been blessed by listening to some of the sermons on your church website as well. Maybe some of the

things that God has said through this book have been challenging.

[36 : 27] Maybe you've been corrected. Maybe you've been rebuked. And if so you are called to repent to return to the Lord. But I am sure that you've been encouraged as well.

And I pray that God's word would encourage you this morning that yes serving the Lord may come at a high cost for some and the rewards in this life may be few for some but may we not be those who live or die saying why should I bother?

instead looking back to Christ's first coming and looking forward to his second coming may we be those who say confidently yes it is worth it and we will serve the Lord.

Hail the heaven born prince of peace hail the son of righteousness light and life to all he brings risen with healing in his wings.

shall we pray? Heavenly Father thank you for your word to your people again and again through the prophet Malachi and thank you for this final word that you spoke and may it encourage us this morning Lord to not look at the cost of serving you and to not look for our rewards in this life.

[37 : 55] but to look with eyes of faith and hope and trust looking back to what you have done for us in Christ the son you did not spare for our sakes and looking forward to his glorious return when everything will be put right and we will enjoy that eternal heavenly reward.

Lord give us faith in these things we pray in Jesus name Amen Thank you very much .