

What have we said against you?

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

Date: 10 December 2017

Preacher: Martin Ayers

[0 : 0 0] from Malachi 3, starting at verse 13 to 4, verse 6. 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 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 honored his name. On the day when I act, says the Lord Almighty, there 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.

[1 : 0 3] Surely the day is coming. It will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble. And that day that is coming will set them on fire, says the Lord Almighty. Not a root or branch will be left to them.

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. 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 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. Thanks, Tom, for reading.

[2 : 0 1] Let's pray as we turn to God's word. Let's pray together. Father God, we thank you so much that you have spoken your word by your spirit as the prophets and Malachi were guided by him.

And we thank you that your spirit brings that word afresh to us today as your people. So we pray this evening that you will open your word to our hearts and open our hearts to your word.

For Jesus' name's sake. Amen. So this is our last week in this series we've had in Malachi. And I hope by the end that we're feeling a bit more familiar with the book. Sometimes as you come to a book like Malachi, you spend time, it's as though Malachi is like a house and we're just looking in the windows how Malachi views things, inspecting it.

And I hope that by the end of our series, we feel much more that we're inside the book. We understand it and almost like we're looking at the world from the perspective of Malachi.

Looking out of the windows rather than looking in. It was written about 500 years before Jesus came. It's the last book in the Old Testament. And the people were giving God second best because they'd forgotten that God loves them.

[3 : 17] And one of the key characteristics of the book is that the people keep questioning whatever God says. We've seen that, that he says, I've loved you. And they say, how have you loved us?

And he says, you have robbed me. And they say, how have we robbed you? And so on, right through the book. And to help us get a feel for what's happened so far and just the structure of it, I've just put inside the notice sheets a little list of the key sections.

So you can have a look at that if you find that helpful. We saw at the beginning, the love of the Lord not to be questioned. Then it was the honor of the Lord not to be despised.

Then in chapter two, we looked at marriage and saw the faithfulness of the Lord not to be undermined. In chapter three, the generosity of the Lord not to be missed. And now in these last words, it's the coming of the Lord not to be forgotten.

The book looks ahead to what God has promised for the future. And we're going to look at it with three headings. The first is it's a future that's certainly coming. A future that's certainly coming. Just have a look with me at chapter four, verse one.

[4 : 27] Surely the day is coming. It will burn like a furnace. And that's partly an answer to the people's final complaint in the book. It's in chapter three, verse 14. If you just read again from 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. The problem that people have with God is that following him doesn't seem to be worth it. It makes them miserable.

Did you see that? They describe it as being, what are we going about like mourners? Because clearly they think of religion as arduous and unpleasant and a bit dull. And after all that, they look around them and the people who have nothing to do with God seem to be doing really well and be happy.

[5 : 31] And don't you ever think a little bit like this? That sometimes perhaps your religious life, your Christian life feels a little bit arduous. And then you look at the people around us.

Perhaps you look at the lives of famous people, of celebrities and footballers, seem to be having a great time. Or maybe just looking at the people closer to you. Maybe the colleagues at work or fellow students who just seem to be effortlessly successful, climbing the ranks, getting promoted, passing their exams.

Or at this time of year, maybe we look at the crowds going out for their Christmas parties on Ashton Lane or up Byers Road, not having to worry about how much they drink or who they end up in bed with.

Or the friends in your street who, because church doesn't get in the way on a Sunday, they seem to be able to have a much better time on their weekends. Sometimes, life not being a Christian looks a lot less complicated.

And so we can end up asking, well, if God is really God, why doesn't he do something about that and make it a bit more obvious that not living for him is a bad thing and living for him is a good thing?

[6 : 44] But just think for a moment about the question that they ask in verse 14. They say, what do we gain by carrying out his requirements? Do you see how self-centered that is as a question?

We are little creatures in a vast universe made by God, the uncreated creator. And we should never really be asking, what do I gain from serving God?

We should be thinking, what does he gain, if anything, from having any interest in my service of him? So often, our spirituality is all about me and is it worth it for me?

Instead of remembering who God is and bowing before him. So already that question has with it this essence of sin about it, self-centeredness.

But that's not the only answer to the objection. The answer comes from God about how his great day of justice is on its way. In verse 17, he says, on the day when I act.

[7 : 50] We've seen already in chapter 4, verse 1, he says, surely the day is coming. What's he talking about? This is the day of the Lord. The day that will bring an end to the world as we know it.

I find it impossible to imagine quite what it's going to be like. But God raising Jesus from the dead demonstrates for us in history that this day will come.

In Acts 17, we read that God has set a day when he will judge the world with justice through the man he has appointed. And he has given proof of this to all people by raising him from the dead.

So all around us, people have different views, don't they, about the future, about how it's all going to pan out. Some people think that the way things are going, humanity will eventually just wipe ourselves out in nuclear war.

Other people have a more optimistic view about humanity, but maybe are worried that a bit like with the dinosaurs, some massive asteroid will just hit the world one day and wipe us out or we'll all have to go and live in space.

[8 : 50] Brian Cox was doing a series about the universe on TV and he wrote a book about the universe and he was advertising it on Spotify. So I kept hearing this advert again and again and again and he kept saying and it ends, as all books should, with the apocalypse.

So I had a little look at how does an atheist physicist say the apocalypse will happen? How does the universe end? And he explains it. What happens is that all the stars, eventually in the life cycle of a star, they eventually become these black dwarves where they lose their kind of energy and they become a bit like a rusty ship on the shore that just gradually its rust is ebbing away into the ocean.

That the final mass and energy from these dwarf stars just gets taken away across the ocean until eventually it all just evens out into this desolate, silent, vast, unchanging, very cold universe.

That's the apocalypse. But God says that before any of that would ever happen there is a day coming that will radically change everything because our world is broken and so God will act to put it right.

He'll act to vindicate his name because it's his world and he will demonstrate that he is righteous by bringing justice for the ways that people have treated him and his word and treated one another.

[10 : 19] But that means that the day that's coming will be a dreadful day, a terrifying day. Let's just read on from the beginning of chapter 4. Surely the day is coming.

It will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer 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. So it's symbolic language. God's judgment isn't literally a fire in the way that it's sometimes suggested by sort of medieval artwork.

But the picture nonetheless is one that God has chosen that shockingly shows us what we hear in Hebrews 10 that it is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

He is holy and this is what happens to sin in the presence of a holy God. I don't know whether you saw on the news last week about these wildfires that are going on in California.

[11 : 20] Absolutely extraordinary footage of these fires as the ground is just erupting in flames and the winds are sweeping these flames. 200,000 people had to be evacuated and lots of them very, very quickly in the middle of the night just woken up and taken because the buildings are just being destroyed so quickly by this fire.

And that's the picture of devastation that God gives of his day of reckoning. So that we need to be ready for that day.

And we need to do our best to ensure other people are ready. That's why, you know, we run the carol service next Sunday evening at half seven. We're giving out flyers.

We know that our friends, if they come, most of the time they're just coming because they want something Christmassy to feel festive. But that's not why we're inviting them. We're inviting them because prayerfully we long that they would have their eyes opened to this day that is coming and would be ready for it.

It's like those yellow box junctions, you know, when you're driving the car and when you have a yellow box junction, you're not allowed to enter until your exit is clear. And so it is with the day of the Lord, whether it's through us dying or Jesus returning, whichever is first, don't enter until you know where you're going.

[12 : 39] Your exit is clear. So that's our first point, a future that's surely coming. Secondly, it's a future that's full of glory. All through Malachi, we've been hearing the people complaining against God.

But in chapter 3, verse 16, we suddenly get this great moment, this burst of light, a positive response from a faithful people to God's word. Chapter 3, verse 16, Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other and the Lord listened and heard.

Striking, isn't it? They fear God and they talk with each other. Fearing God is not an individual thing. Faith is not a private thing, an individual thing. We are to encourage each other by meeting as God's people and talking with each other to spur each other on to respond rightly to God.

That's what these people did. And for them, then, the future could not be more different. We see the contrast in verse 17. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored his name.

So, friends, what a thought that is. If you picture that throne room in heaven where the living God is on his throne and having made 100,000 million galaxies with 100,000 million stars each in them and having all his glory shining around him and angels covering their eyes from the holiness and wonder of God, in the midst of it, he has a notebook and he gets one of those angels in his presence to write down the names of every person who fears him.

[14 : 32] Is your name in that book? If you fear God, if you have turned back to God through Jesus, your name is in that book. And that should be of indescribable comfort.

You might not feel like you mean very much to the people around you day by day. There might even be people that you can think of who you wish you meant more to them than you do. But you mean something to God.

He's got your name down on his scroll of remembrance and he has plans for everyone on that scroll. That's what we read next. Verse 17.

On the day when I act, says the Lord Almighty, they will be my treasured possession. And what a thought that is as well. Do you have a treasured possession?

I was asking a couple of guys this week. I asked Craig, who's leading the service tonight, as a man of culture, you know, and class. And I asked Alistair Savage from our church family, who, if you don't know him, Alistair plays the violin for the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra.

[15 : 42] So you're probably thinking, treasured possession, he's probably got a great violin, hasn't he? Alistair tells me his treasured possession is his first ever Kilmarnock football scarf.

Craig, in contrast, it's his first ever Livingston scarf, Livingston football club. And with both of them, these now moth-eaten, slightly worn out scarves, they were probably too small, given to them as boys, are of no value to any of the rest of us, let's face it.

No one's going to steal Craig's scarf. But if there was a fire in his flat, he's grabbing that scarf before he gets out. It's his most valuable thing. If he tried to sell it on eBay, no one would be interested.

But to him, nothing is more valuable. And if you're a believer, that's how God sees you, as irreplaceable to him.

He will accept no substitute for you. He doesn't care what other people think of us. We will be his, and he will value us above everything else.

[16 : 49] He will rejoice in us and who he makes us to be. He goes on to say that we will be like a son to him and him a father. I will spare them just as a father has compassion and spares his son who serves him.

But of course, five centuries later, he expressed his love for us in not sparing his son. Such is our value to him. He gave up his son who served him so that he could take us to be his.

In chapter 4, verse 2, it's a new dawn and there's no more sin anymore. Chapter 4, verse 2, 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.

Normally, when you see cows, they look quite sluggish and docile, don't they? I think that's partly through selective breeding. But also, I mean, that's often what cows look like. But you can see, when you see calves in the spring having been well-fed, they skip around.

They look a bit odd, actually. They look crazy because they kind of skip as though with delight. And we will leap like that because there'll be such relief on that day of Jesus' return.

[18 : 05] It will be a day of vindication. It talks in verse 4 about God's people trampling on the wicked. And we're called to pray for those even who persecute us. So this isn't a relishing in the judgment of others.

But the wicked who stand against us most of all are the evil spiritual realm. And when God fully and finally defeats Satan and he's exposed for all that he has done to ravage the world and tear people from God, we will rejoice when he's reduced to ashes.

We'll rejoice that justice has been done. It's a day of restoration. That sun of righteousness rising. Such a great picture, isn't it? Just as the sun rises and the darkness is cast away, this sun of righteousness rises and sin is taken away from the world, never to be here anymore.

Just think there'll be no more terrorism, no more fear, no more fear of crime, no more unfriendliness, no more slander, no more malice or nastiness, no more environmental damage, no more selfishness, no more human trafficking, no more unkindness.

No one will ever be unkind to you again. And the sun, as it comes, has healing in its rays. So it's a day when not just looking ahead, nothing bad will happen anymore, but we will be healed, you will be healed of everything anyone has ever done badly to you.

[19 : 34] It will be put right. There'll be no more pain looking back, no more disease, no more depression. And Malachi is looking at all of this from 500 BC and it's this spectacular vision, but from his perspective, looking at, looking across time, he can only see it as one day.

And when Jesus arrives and walks on the earth and carries out his ministry, one of the key discoveries for the disciples is that he pulls apart these events to explain that it's not just one day we're looking for, he's come once so that he can bring salvation and then this coming in glory will come later so that now we live in this time that's the last days where to understand the times we live in we have to get that the next big thing that's going to happen is Jesus coming in glory to judge the living and the dead.

And the reason it hasn't happened yet is because of God's patience that he is waiting so that more people have the opportunity to fear him and share the hope that we have.

And I'm so glad he waited until 2001 when I became a Christian that I could share that hope as well. But that means that as well as looking ahead for us at Jesus coming in glory and how wonderful that will be, we can look back at Jesus' first coming and see that for just a few years as he walked the streets of Nazareth, people got a glimpse of this world that's coming.

Jairus saw it as he came to Jesus desperate, his daughter dead and Jesus went and it was as though he just woke her up from bed as he raised her.

[21 : 19] The widow at Nain glimpsed it as the funeral procession was stopped for her only son and Jesus just put his hand on the boy and told the boy to get up and raised him from death.

It was just a foretaste of what it will be like when he comes in glory. So we live in this peculiar time, don't we, this overlap of the ages.

We know Jesus has come once. We live in the kingdom now. We live in the kingdom of grace but we're waiting for the kingdom of glory. So how do we wait? How do we wait for that glorious future?

That's our third point. It's a future that shapes the present. we've heard about the faithful remnant in chapter 3 verse 16 that they feared the Lord and then Malachi signs off with these two commands for them and for us that we remember and we watch.

So in chapter 4 verse 4 we remember. Remember the law of my servant Moses the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel. So for them then the law that they remember is the law of Moses.

[22 : 27] It's the Old Testament law and for us it's the law as it's fulfilled in Jesus that in his coming he upholds the law but fulfills it in his example and teaching.

And so for us mindful that he will return any day now to judge the living and the dead we look to know God's will in the scriptures and to do God's will. And we've seen examples of that in our little series in Malachi that perhaps we could reflect on.

That we're not to despise the name of the Lord but rather we're to offer our whole selves as sacrifices to him. That we're not to miss the generosity of the Lord but rather we're to give generously financially to gospel work.

That we're not to undermine the faithfulness of the Lord in our relationships but rather we're to be faithful ourselves and especially in the marriage relationship in having marriages that go the distance.

So they're called to remember the law. Not so that they can become God's treasured possession but because they have been called God's treasured possession. It's not I obey to become accepted.

[23 : 35] It's I'm accepted therefore I obey. And then we see the last command that as well as remembering they watch for the prophet. Verse 5 C I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day the Lord comes.

Then it describes his ministry of turning the hearts of the people back to God and back to one another. We watch as well as remembering. They were to watch for Elijah and Jesus explains to his disciples in Mark chapter 9 that that Elijah ministry was fulfilled by John the Baptist coming before him to prepare the way.

So for us today our watching is for that day of Jesus coming in glory. It's a great way to think about the Christian life isn't it? That way we're a watching people.

It's almost the opposite of FOMO of fear of missing out. As Christians we shouldn't have that fear because even if we missed out radically on what's going on in life today our glorious future is coming imminently.

So why do I spend my time anxious that I'm missing out? I was in London on Thursday for a meeting and it was with three guys who I've been friends with for years and years I don't see them very often anymore so I was really excited about this meeting but because of the storm on Thursday morning and the wind there was a delay on my flight so flight arrives at Gatwick which is never a good place to be and then by the time I got on the tube I was basically hopping mad because I was an hour late for this meeting and I was thinking to myself that my three mates I was meeting they were already there and I was thinking they're probably having a brilliant time catching up and I'm on this tube carriage because of that plane.

[25 : 29] It's fear of missing out but I shouldn't think like that because as Christians our lives are not in any way defined by what we're missing out on today they're defined by the fact we're watching every day for what's to come and when it comes we won't be thinking oh I wish I wish I'd made more of life and that will mean that we look different won't it and that should be a real encouragement to us I know there are plenty of us at St. Silas plenty of you guys who spend your energy and your time and your money and your skills and gifts in ways that to the outside world to non-Christians looks totally bonkers and sometimes that can make us think am I bonkers but that's good because if you're living for a day that's coming and they don't think it's coming and you know it is if you look the same as them there'd be something wrong wouldn't there we haven't forgotten the day of the Lord so we will look different like Noah when he was building the ark he's obeying God's word to build the ark everyone around him thinks he's a nutter but he was right and if you know a day is coming that the whole cosmos is waiting for it will shape your life in a way that makes it look different we're watching for this day of great separation a day when the flames of God's justice will sweep the world one of my friends in Glasgow was she's Australian and she was a firefighter in Australia she used to fly in on helicopters with a team when there's these wildfires and I'm told that one of the first bits of kit that a firefighter is given in New South Wales is a box of matches so that if you're in a situation where a wildfire is sweeping towards you and you can't control it you can light a fire where you are because if you can light a fire and control it and put it out then as the fire sweeps towards you you stand on the scorched earth and you're protected the fire won't burn the same place twice and as Christians we wait for a day when the fire of God's judgment will sweep across the world but we stand on scorched earth we stand on safe ground and we know we're safe because on Jesus Christ the flames of God's judgment fell that we ought to have felt because Jesus came first time to bear God's judgment so that he can come again bringing God's judgment and yet have a people who are God's treasured possession so we yearn for that day knowing for us it will be a day of redemption if our names are written in that scroll of remembrance let's pray together we praise you gracious and loving heavenly father for the day of justice you have set for our world thank you for that scroll of remembrance written in your presence filled with the names of everyone who fears you thank you for these precious promises and we yearn for a day when we as your treasure possession will skip like calves with joy and relief please send

Jesus soon come soon Lord Jesus and we pray heavenly father that when he comes he will find us at St Silas today and every day remembering and watching remembering your word and putting it into practice and watching in hope living today in light of eternity for Jesus name's sake Amen we're gonna sing again we're gonna sing Thank you.