

The Question of Judgement

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[0 : 00] Thank you, Sarah, for reading God's word for us and thanks to Kirsty and to Melissa for leading us in praise! It's great to have Kirsty back post surgery leading again.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

I'm going to begin with a quotation and it is, Yes, lady, God himself could not sink the ship. That was reportedly said by a deckhand on the Titanic to one of the passengers who was slightly concerned about the ship's safety and security.

But as we know, the Titanic did sink and tragically, so many lives were lost. Now, all of my children have at some point done a project on the Titanic in primary school.

It seems to be one of the projects that teachers like to get their children to work on. And each of the children made different discoveries on their Titanic project. And the one that fascinates me most is how so many of the passengers seem to be blind to the danger that they were actually in.

[1 : 34] They were having the time of their lives, even whilst the Titanic was sinking at an angle into the cold icy sea. Of course, the passengers didn't know what the shipbuilder knew.

The shipbuilder knew, of course, that the ship would sink. And he also knew that there weren't enough lifeboats on the ship for the people on board. And apparently, a factor in the high death toll was that so many passengers were reluctant to board the lifeboats.

They didn't think they needed them. And so lifeboats were launched off the Titanic with far less people than they could hold. Apparently, lifeboat number one had a capacity of 65 people.

And it was launched with only 12 people on board. And so the people were in danger. And there was some hope of rescue. And yet so many refused to heed the warning.

And it was tragic. And yet the story of the Titanic helps illustrate what we see at the end of Malachi chapter 3 and 4. Because in this final dispute between God and his people Israel, the danger is judgment.

[2 : 49] But there is the hope of rescue. And so the issue was whether the people would heed the warning and they would do something about it by turning back to God.

Because these verses remind us that we are basically all moving towards the day of judgment. And that day, you'll notice, was mentioned five times in these verses.

Just look down. The day means the day of judgment. It's there, chapter 3, verse 17. It's there in chapter 4, verse 1. Twice, the day, that day.

Then chapter 4, verse 3, the day. And in chapter 4, verse 5, that great and dreadful day of the Lord. We're talking here about the day of judgment. And it's a day when Malachi says God will make the distinction between those who serve him and those who don't. So all the arrogant and the wicked, we're told, will be punished.

[3 : 47] Chapter 4, verse 1, verse 3. But those who fear the Lord and those who revere his name will be saved. Chapter 3, verse 16. Chapter 4, verse 2.

And so we can't be like some of the passengers on the Titanic who ignore the warning and are oblivious to the danger. Malachi's message urges us to fear God, to turn to him, and to be rescued or to be saved, to find safety.

And this is a message that we all need to hear, whether we would call ourselves a Christian, one of God's people, or maybe if we're not even sure, what we believe. What Malachi teaches us here is the reality of what we all must face in the future.

And that is the day of judgment. Because that day will be a day that divides all humanity into two groups. And it all depends on your response, my response to God and to his son, Jesus Christ.

And so this afternoon we're going to think about two groups of people and two destinies, but one hope. Two groups, two destinies, one hope. First of all, two groups, chapter 3, verse 13 to 18.

[5 : 04] We've been here long enough to know that Malachi's message is primarily addressed to God's people, the people of Israel. And they're divided into two groups here, depending on their response to the Lord.

So verse 13 to 15, one group speaks arrogantly against God. And then verse 16 to 17, one group fears God.

So let's just listen to what the first group were saying. Look down at verse 13. You have spoken arrogantly against me, says the Lord. Yet you ask, what have we said against you?

So the Lord accuses them of speaking harsh words against him. But they challenge God by effectively saying, who? Us? What have we said against you?

And so what does God do? Well, God responds to them with the evidence, which is there in verse 14 and 15. 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?

[6 : 12] But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly, evildoers prosper. And even when they put God to the test, they get away with it.

Here where the people are saying, they're basically saying, it is a waste of time serving God. What? Because it's the arrogant who seem to be blessed.

They seem to be the ones who prosper. They're evil. But God doesn't seem to do anything about it. It isn't fair. And so as God's people saw evil people getting well, getting on well in life, they wondered how it was worth serving God.

What was the point? But notice their words in verse 14. On the one hand, they say, it is futile to serve God. But on the other hand, they also say, what do we gain by carrying out his requirements? Now, serve and gain don't really go together, do they? If you serve in order to gain, then you're not actually serving, are you? And so it seems that the people were only in it for what they could get out of it.

[7 : 27] They were wanting the benefit. They were grudging the effort. They were seeking the reward. And so as they looked on at all the evildoers and they saw them prospering, they were asking, why serve God?

Why are we making all of these sacrifices when it doesn't really do anything for me? What a waste of time. And yet the attitude amongst God's people in Malachi is often the attitude of any human heart or even sometimes every human heart towards God.

Where the expectation is that, well, I'm such a nice person. And if there is a God, then he's obviously going to be happy with me. He is obviously going to want to bless me.

And if he doesn't, then there's something wrong with him. Surely I should be rewarded with a good life. After all, look at how well I've lived.

And if God doesn't give us what we reckon we deserve, then we complain. We may be tempted to think that serving God means God owes me great results in my exams or a great degree at university.

[8 : 42] God rewards me with a good job, with a high income. God should reward me with a beautiful spouse. God should reward me with a nice home, etc., etc.

And what makes it worse is not just that I don't get all of those things I think I deserve and should be rewarded with. I don't get the gain. It's more than that. It's we see other people who get all of these things.

And they're evil. They're unjust. They're not as good as I think I am. And yet they are the ones who seem to prosper. And that's what's happening here in Malachi.

And so rather than rest secure in God's covenant love, the people think they're the poor victims. Serving God just isn't worth it.

And sadly, that is how many people view a relationship with God today. The gain doesn't seem to be enough to justify any kind of pain or even any kind of effort.

[9 : 46] And so perhaps we're tempted to see it this way ourselves sometimes. And yet it's clear from Malachi that God rebukes this sinful attitude because it is a failure to really know and understand God's great love for his people.

So that's the first group. But Malachi speaks of a second group of people who rather than arrogantly speak against God, this group fear God and want to serve him. Look at verse 16.

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.

So the fear of the Lord here points to those people who were faithful to their covenant relationship with God. So they had heard God's accusations, and they took seriously everything that God had said, and they wanted to obey him.

And the Lord listened and heard them. Of course, God heard the complaining cynics who spoke against them, but he also listened to the committed people who feared him and who honored his name.

[11:05] Verse 16. And it's a reminder to us that God takes note of everything that happens in this world. He sees and he hears.

And that's why we've got this scroll of remembrance that's mentioned there in verse 16. And it's written before God. It's written in his presence. Now, these scrolls were important documents in the ancient world.

And what they were were scrolls that contained a catalog of names of different people. And what was recorded in the scroll was all of their different deeds, all the things that people did.

And so this writing of a scroll here in God's presence indicates basically that God sees and hears everything. God keeps a record of every word and every act.

And that's how he can be a good and just judge. He's able to punish evil and reward good because he sees and hears everything. Which is daunting, isn't it, for all people.

[12:11] And yet it's also comforting for God's people. Because it means that God doesn't miss a single thing that his people do for him. Which means, contrary to what some in Malachi's day thought, it is never futile to serve God.

It is never a waste of time serving God. Because it's clear that the Lord pays attention to, well, to how we live.

He pays attention to what we give. He pays attention to how we serve. He pays attention to what we say. He notices the sacrifices that we make.

It is all recorded by God. He sees. He knows. Even if nobody else ever does. And that's why standing up for God at school or at university or at work is worth it.

God sees. Speaking up for God or for Jesus Christ is worth it. God hears. Resisting temptation might be hard.

[13:24] But it's always the best way. And God knows when we do. Obeying God when nobody else is. Is worth it.

Because God is honored. And so nothing is ever missed. Which means serving God is never futile. Investing your life in him and his kingdom work.

Is never a waste of time. It's all significant. And it's all significant because we are all hurtling towards this day of judgment that Malachi speaks of.

So verse 17. On that 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. So it's worth it. Because God will take his people as his treasured possession. And his treasured possession.

[14:23] Because it's his. It will be his forever. Now when God entered into a covenant relationship with his people. Back in Exodus. He said then that they would be his treasured possession.

And those words treasured possession. Are often repeated in the Old Testament. And then even into the New. To speak of God's people. God loves his people.

God wants his people to be with him forever. And so God says here. He will have compassion on them. He'll protect them as a father who loves his son who serves him.

So no harm will come the way of his people. On the day of judgment. Because when that day comes. God will separate humanity in two.

And so verse 18 says. And you will again see the distinction between the righteous. And the wicked. Between those who serve God. And those who do not. And so that's God's answer.

[15:22] To all the people in Malachi. Who are complaining. About the evildoers prospering. Saying it's futile serving God. Because God does nothing about these people. God's response is.

Justice will come. And it will be seen by all. And it will be seen in this distinction. Between the righteous and the wicked. Because the future day of judgment. Is the answer.

To all evil. And all wickedness. In this world. And that day is coming. And it is a great thing. That that day is coming. Because nobody.

But nobody wants to live in a world. Where evil goes unchecked. And unpunished. We want evil to be punished. We want it to be taken note of.

Instead of being forgotten. And swept under the carpet. And this day of judgment. Promises. Well. God. Has got it sorted. He has got it.

[16:19] In hand. He knows. He sees. Nothing is missed. By him. And so justice. Perfect justice. Will come. And so the day.

That's spoken of here. In Malachi. And repeated all through the Bible. Is the day. When Jesus Christ. Will return. As judge. To sort.

This world out. And Jesus. Is the one. Who will distinguish. Between the righteous. And the wicked. But just notice this. In verse 18. Did you notice.

The definitions. Of righteous. And wicked here. It says the righteous. Are those. Who serve God. And who are the wicked. It says the wicked.

Are those. Who do not. And so in God's eyes. To be wicked. Isn't just to be. A murderer. Or a rapist. Or a paedophile. Or a terrorist. Or a really.

[17:14] Really nasty. Mean. Person. No. To be wicked. Describes somebody. Who doesn't. Serve God. So wickedness. Is a failure. To treat God.

As God. To acknowledge God. As God. And to serve him. That's wickedness. Because. Well. We can't live. In this world. That God has made.

As his creatures. And arrogantly. Reject him. And then expect. Somehow. To get away with it. That wouldn't happen. And so the question.

For us all. Is well. Do you serve. This God. Because one day. It will be clear. For all. To see. If we have.

Served this God. On that day. The day of judgment. Everybody will know. Who has served God. And who hasn't. So we can't bluff God.

[18:10] In this world. We can't mess around. Pretending. Because the day will come. When all will be revealed. To all. By the Lord Jesus Christ. And so we've got.

These two groups here. And there are. Two destinies. But there is. One hope. The one hope is coming. But let's look at. These two destinies. Verse.

One to three. Of chapter four. Because these two destinies. Could not be. Any more different. And so that's why. We need to flag up. The hope. Before we get to. The destinies.

Verse one and two. Surely the day is coming. When 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. But for you. Who revere my name. The son of righteousness.

[19:05] Will rise. With healing. In its rays. And you will go out. And frolic. Like well-fed calves. So first. There's the destiny. Of the evildoer.

In verse one. And then secondly. There's the destiny. Of the God-fearer. In verse two. And so the day of judgment. Will be terrible. For those who arrogantly.

Reject God. It will be a destroying fire. We read. That will set the wicked ablaze. And they're compared to a tree. That's consumed. Right down to the roots.

And is utterly destroyed. I chopped down my neighbor's. Big tree. In her garden. And I got right down. To the very bottom.

But I couldn't get to the roots. They were so stubborn. There's a stump. In the corner of her garden. That's still there. It's not fully complete. It's hard.

[20:02] To burn right down. Into the roots. And so this verse. Is simply emphasizing. The severity. Of God's judgment. He will get rid.

Of all wickedness. And sin. And evil. It will be destroyed. Because God is just. And it's described. So graphically.

For us. Because. Well God's judgment. Is inescapable. Nobody who has ever lived. Will be able. To avoid it. And so in verse 50.

The people in Malachi's day. Who said. The evildoers. Get away with it. Well they don't. And they won't. It's rain.

And people ask today. Don't they. When it comes to evil. They say. Why doesn't God do something. About all the evil. And all the pain. In this world. But the Bible's teaching.

[21 : 01] On judgment. And on hell. And on eternal. Destruction. Is God doing something. About all the evil. In this world. That question.

Does have. An answer. And of course. We don't like to think. Of God's judgment. Being so harsh. And some can't believe. That a loving God.

Could condemn anyone. To this kind. Of destruction. And of course. God is. A loving God. He is. A God of love.

But he is also. A just God. He is a God. Of justice. And so his love. And his justice. Aren't in opposition. To one another. They establish.

Each other. It is out of God's love. That his justice. Needs to be. Enacted. Who of us. If we really do.

[21 : 57] Love someone. Would stand back. And watch. Injustice. Happen. To them. And so God's justice. Is always. A loving justice.

And his love. Is always. A just love. And we need. God. To be. Both. And of all. Books. In the Bible. Malachi. Malachi. Explicitly. Declares. Both of these things. God's. Electing. Faithful. Covenant.

Love. For his people. And at the same time.

It explicitly. Declares. God's justice. Because both. Come together. Perfectly. In the God. Who does. Not. Change. Who is. Perfect. In every. Way.

And this is not some kind of. Old Testament view of God. Which people sometimes think. Oh the God of the Old Testament. Is the God of judgment. God of the New Testament. Is God of love. But just listen to Jesus.

[22 : 54] The most loving person. Who has ever walked this earth. When he speaks about the day of judgment. In Matthew 13. He says this. This is how we will be. At the end of the age.

The angels will come. And separate the wicked. From the righteous. And throw them into the blazing. Furnace. Where there will be. Weeping. And gnashing. Of teeth.

Again. It is such a powerful. Image. Isn't it? But it is meant. To wake us up. To the reality. That the day of judgment. Is coming. And wake us up.

To the reality. That. This will be the destiny. Of every person. Judgment. And then heaven. Or hell. And on that day of judgment. Nobody will be able.

To complain. That God. Has somehow. Got it wrong. Or that God. Didn't warn. The world. Enough. And so.

[23 : 49] There's a sense. In which. The way we decide. To live. In this world. On this earth. And the choices. That we make. Well. There'll be rubber stamped. By God.

On the day of judgment. And yet. God takes no pleasure. In punishing people. His justice. Demands it. Because we. We don't realize. How heinous.

Our sin. And rebellion. Against God. Is. It's no small thing. So that's one destiny. And it's dreadful. But there's another destiny.

And it's delightful. Verse 2. Again. 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. So this is. Malachi. The Lord. Through Malachi. By addressing those. Who revere. His name. And this is a description.

[24 : 44] Of what the day. Will be like. For them. Because for God's own people. That day. Will be like. A beautiful. Sunrise. So just as the sun. Comes up.

And it drives away. The dark clouds. And brings this. Bright light. So we read. The son of righteousness. Will rise. With healing. In its wings. It's a unique expression.

For God. Whose righteousness. Will bring. Healing. This is a description. Of the end. Of sin. And evil. And injustice. Because the judgment.

Of God. Will both destroy. And also heal. And that's why. We've got this great picture. Of leaping calves. Imagine. Calves being cramped up.

In their pen. And then the door. Being flung open. And they skip. All over the open pasture. Reveling in their freedom. Without a care. In the world. And that's what it's saying.

[25 : 39] It will be like. When God's people. Enjoy their great liberation. From this sin sick world. It will be perfection. And we'll experience.

This fullness of joy. As we dwell. In God's presence. With no evil pain. Or suffering. In his new creation. Because when Jesus returns.

To judge. Everything. In this broken. Fallen. Fractured. Sin sick world. Will be sorted out. And that is brilliant.

From the words of J.R.R. Tolkien. In the Lord of the Rings. Everything sad. Is going to come untrue. And that's when the tables will be turned.

That's when everything will be sorted out. So verse 3. Then you will trample on the wicked. They will be ashes under the soles of your feet. And on the day when I act. Says the Lord Almighty.

[26 : 36] So the fortunes of the prosperous evildoers. And the faithful God-fearers. Will be switched. And reversed. So it won't be God's people.

Who are walked on. Anymore. As is often the case. In this world. Especially in certain parts of this world. No. It will be flipped round. And instead. It will be the wicked.

Who will be trampled underfoot. And they'll be like ash. That is just blown away. So can you see these two clear destinies set out here. Which means these words should be an encouragement for God's people.

But also a warning for any who aren't. Because while the day of judgment is coming. There is still the opportunity to be saved. And that's why these words are supposed to be a loud wake-up call to anyone who would still resist God.

Urging them to return to Him. And this is what makes the mission of the church of Jesus Christ so urgent. Because our job as the church is not to behave like comfortable passengers on a cruise ship.

[27 : 46] Just sailing our way to heaven. No. Instead we're to be like the committed crew of a lifeboat. Seeking to save people from hell.

So two groups. Two destinies. And finally. One hope. One hope. This one hope here. In chapter 4 verse 4 to 6. Is the one hope for all people.

Because Malachi here is not simply an Old Testament prophet who warns people of God's judgment. He's also a pastor who is calling people to repentance.

And that's why the prophecy of Malachi ends with such hopeful words. Because these final words of Malachi. Which are also the final words of the Old Testament. Look backwards.

But they also look forwards. Let's just read them again. 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 the great and dreadful day of the Lord comes.

[28 : 50] 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.

So the message here concludes with a two-fold application. And it centers around two important figures in Israel's history. Moses and Elijah.

Who represent the two parts of God's revelation in the scriptures. Moses representing the law. Elijah representing the prophets. The law and the prophets. Basically the Old Testament.

And so Moses represents the law. So firstly the people are urged to remember all that God said in the law through Moses. That's not just to recall what God said.

As to have it in your head. In your memory. But it is to do it. God wants his people not just to know his law. But to live it out.

[29 : 47] To action it in their lives. But as well as remembering the law given in the past. And obeying it here in the present. Secondly the people are also to look forward to the future with Elijah.

Where God promises to send Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. And so while there's a warning that the day of judgment is coming.

There is also the possibility of deliverance and restoration. Through this announcement about Elijah. Elijah. So Elijah the prophet called people to turn back to God in 1 Kings.

To repent of their sin and to serve God. And now this Elijah in Malachi would fulfill the same role. Because when the New Testament opens there's a new Elijah.

And he comes in the person of John the Baptist. And so Jesus referred to John the Baptist. His forerunner as Elijah. Because John prepared people for Jesus.

[30 : 54] He announced the coming of the Lord. And he called people to repentance. And then Jesus came. And the time has come. Jesus said. The kingdom of God has come near.

Repent and believe the good news. The good news is the good news about Jesus. And so basically Moses and Elijah and John the Baptist and Malachi.

They're all proclaiming the same message. And so Jesus Christ came not only to fulfill the promises of Malachi. But to fulfill all God's promises.

From all of God's messengers. From all of God's scriptures. That's why Jesus Christ is the one hope for humanity as the day of judgment approaches.

Jesus alone enables people to have their sins forgiven. And declared righteous before God. And able to stand the coming judgment.

[31 : 57] Because when Jesus first came. He came to bear God's judgment. When Jesus died on the cross. The justice of God was fully satisfied.

And the wrath of God that we deserve. Was absorbed by Jesus. So that we don't get what we deserve. Which is justice.

For our sin. Instead we get what we don't deserve. Which is mercy and grace. But when Jesus comes again. So Jesus first coming was to bear. God's judgment.

When Jesus comes again. He will bring God's judgment. And so on that day. We will either feel the fierce heat of God's condemnation.

Or the warm heat of God's salvation. And that's why Malachi concludes with what basically is a gospel invitation. Which fits within the Bible story.

[32 : 55] Of our loving God's salvation. Of our loving God. Calling rebellious people to turn back to him. To be forgiven by him. And accepted by him.

And welcomed into his family. So Jesus is the one we need. Jesus is our righteousness. When we put our trust in him.

Jesus is the son of righteousness. Who brings healing in his wings. And we will see the fullness of this healing. When Jesus returns in glory.

To judge all people. To save his own. And to restore all things. And so did you notice the words or else. In this last phrase of Malachi.

Malachi ends with this gracious invitation from God. That offers us a choice. Will you turn back to God? Or will you go your own way?

[33 : 57] Because our destiny depends on our response to Jesus Christ. So don't presume upon God's patience forever. The day of judgment is coming.

And so we are urged to trust Jesus for rescue. Before it's too late. Let's pray. Thank you.