

Malachi: Great Expectations

Malachi 3:13-4:6

Preached by Rev. Craig T. Smith on March 3, 2024.

Old Timers

At a previous church, I was meeting with our song leader to go over what we would be singing that day. Someone happened by and requested for us to sing “We Will Work Til Jesus Comes.” The song leader replied, “Sorry, brother, no. That song’s not as fun as Jesus’s return should be.”

It is interesting to consider Jesus coming back and what that means for us. It will certainly be a day of rejoicing. However, did you know that, in Malachi of all places, we see great prophecies about what that day truly means for Christians. I invite you to Malachi 3:13-4:6 as we finish the book this morning. (read text)

Prepare the Way

Malachi writes this 450 years before Jesus’s birth. Throughout the book, we can see the expectation of that Messiah several times. In 3:1 he says, “Then the Lord you seek will suddenly come to his temple, the Messenger of the covenant you delight in – see, he is coming,” says the Lord of Armies. And in 3:2, “For he will be like a refiner’s fire.”

This expectation is echoed again in 4:2. We will spend our time this morning as we conclude this book focusing on this particular verse. Malachi has warned that the arrogant people who resist and reject God will be consumed by fire on the coming day of judgment. However, he moves on to give an encouraging word of hope to all of those people who fear the Lord. For people who know and fear the Lord, there will be a very different future awaiting them.

“But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings, and you will go out and playfully jump like calves from the stall.” In Luke, we read about Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, and his prophecy recalls this verse in Malachi. Zechariah said that the in the coming of Jesus, the day was dawning from on high. This reminds us of Malachi’s understanding that the sun of righteousness would be rising. Since Christ first came, his righteousness has been dawning on the entire world ever since, as new people each day surrender to Jesus and take on his righteousness.

It is also a reminder of the second coming of Jesus – one day the sun of righteousness will reach its noonday brightness and Jesus will then appear in glory and the final division Malachi writes about in chapter four will take place separating believers and unbelievers.

Malachi teaches that day will be catastrophic for those who reject Jesus. However, he paints a different picture – several pictures – of what Jesus's second coming will be like.

Several Snapshots of the Day of the Lord

Those who fear the Lord, who have made the specific decision to trust in Jesus as Savior, who choose deliberately, purposefully, for themselves, to make Jesus the boss of their lives, the second coming means something different entirely from those who reject him.

People who reject Jesus reject him either out of indifference – they are just not really wanting to bother with it – or out of rebellion. They flat out refuse to believe, rejecting the gospel for some specific reason or reasons. Some are antagonistic against the idea of Jesus as Savior. While others are just not stirred, really. They just have a sense of not caring about it. However, for a person who has been delivered from either that rebellion or indifference, the Lord's coming means something wonderful.

If you are a believer, or if you are considering making that decision, Malachi paints a few snapshots of what his second coming means.

The snapshots are of a rising sun; beams of righteousness; wings of healing; breaking out of a stall; leaping like calves.

A Sun Rises

The first image is a sunrise. Sunrises mean so much to people – they hold significance. The sun comes and warms up what was cold, or the sun comes and provides growth and energy.

More significantly, the sun provides light where there was once darkness. Light makes sight possible. Jesus helps people see things as they truly are. The Apostle John says that He was the Light that broke the darkness, and the darkness could not overcome it. Jesus is the Light that helps us see how broken we are and how much we truly need him.

He shines the light of reality into our souls so that we can finally see all of the darkness inside of us and realize how desperately we need forgiveness and redemption.

Jesus can help us make sense out of confusion. In fact, Jesus told Pilate, “For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice.” In response, the Roman governor who would condemn Jesus to death to keep the peace with Jewish leaders, mockingly said “What is truth?”

It is as if Pilate lived in the twenty-first century. Sadly, today that cynicism is pervasive. “What is truth?” People ask that question not because they have some purpose or passion in trying to discover the truth. People ask, “What is truth?” skeptically because they don’t really believe that absolute truth exists in any way. This moral relativism – we can all have our own truths – has left a tragedy in its wake. There are moral and intellectual and personal and family consequences. Families and society fracture and break because there is no truth holding it together. Fathers and mothers have no clear vision or understanding of why their families exist. So, instead of investing in eternity, they pass on investment advice or health tips. Despite a glut of competing truths out there, emptiness gets deeper by each succeeding generation.

Malachi tells us that Jesus will be like a sunrise, providing meaning for people. He will bring clarity.

The sunrise also brings security to replace danger. Dark is dangerous. You cannot see much at all. Consider all of the minor injuries and boo boos you’ve had in your life bumping into things in the dark, tripping over things in the dark.

When my daughter was very little, she confiscated from my wife a family heirloom from grandma. It was a small, pink, ceramic flower vase. She left it sitting on the floor in her bedroom. Early one morning, while it was still dark out, my wife crept in to try to start the wake-up process. While creeping, she accidentally stepped into the upright vase, breaking the ceramic craft into tiny, pointy, skin-piercing shards of terror. It sliced her foot up significantly and she bled all the way back into the kitchen. Had the lights been on and she had been tasked to step into that vase, I am not sure she could’ve done it.

We wrapped her foot up, I cleaned the trail, and we rushed her to the emergency room. On the way, my daughter, through tears, yelled at my wife for breaking the vase because it was, “precious to me.”

The dark is dangerous. Even our normal, unspectacular, ordinary, ho-hum lives can suddenly descend into chaos because of one bad step in the dark. But when the sun rises, you move with safety and securely. Because Jesus points the way. He will show you where to go again and again.

Jesus reveals the danger and the foolishness that our choices will lead us to while we are in the process of making them. He protects us from evil spiritual forces that only have power in the darkness.

What an encouragement. When Jesus returns, he will come as a sun, light in the darkness of confusion, pain, ignorance and skepticism. As the Truth, Jesus helps to keep us safe.

Sun Beams of Righteousness

The next snapshot is that the sun has beams of righteousness. The Light of Jesus makes things right. When Jesus comes back a second time, He will make everything right, just like he reconciled believers back into right standing with God. He did through grace, patience, humility, and love. When he comes back, he will make right all the wrongs Christians have suffered, meaning we can release all of those bitter feelings of revenge. We can let go of that prideful indignation when we feel someone has insulted us because we think we are extremely important.

Consider all of the injustices that we see on the news in our world today. There are seemingly innocent people suffering. There are seemingly wicked people doing great. We may struggle with bad things happening to good people and good things happening for bad people. Jesus will provide an answer for that when he returns. His righteousness will shine and for those who trust Jesus, he will reconcile and restore. A lot of bad happening to good, Christian people? Jesus will restore and reconcile all of that.

A lot of great happening for bad people? Jesus will have the last word there, too. And it will be a word of judgment that Malachi alludes to in 4:1.

Wings that Heal

The sun of righteousness rises with healing in its wings.

One of the things I miss about growing up in the northwest plains of Oklahoma are the sunrises and sunsets. Because of the flat terrain, you can see them so clearly. You look out on the horizon and that pre-dawn light gives way to a thin line of orange and red. As it rises, it grows brighter and brighter yellow. Soon, you cannot really look at it, the ball of fire raising up from the prairie.

Malachi saw the sun rise and when he did, God said the coming of the Messiah would be like that. And the result of that rising would be healing.

We're methodically working through Mark on Wednesday mornings at 10:30AM. Mark records the highlights of Jesus's ministry. The action. He is less concerned with the dialogue – the teaching. Instead, he focuses on the miracles. And Jesus was a great healer. Healing scores of people. The first two chapters of Mark are covered with Jesus's healing wave after wave of sick, disabled, and possessed people.

Jesus was a great healer and many of our petitions and intercessions center around his healing ability. Some of the healings we pray for don't happen. It is not God's plan for them. He does not heal each and every disease in this life, even for Christians. But he will when he returns. Jesus provides for our overwhelming need for hope after death. Jesus gives us that hope that all sickness, pain, sorrow and tears will be gone forever.

Breaking Free

After considering these pictures of what the sun of righteousness will provide, we see the next snapshot of the reaction of believers to this hope. Those who fear the Lord, who believe in Jesus, will experience freedom. Malachi likens it to escaping a stall. Jesus's return means freedom. Our hearts deeply crave freedom. That sense of freedom is intrinsic to feeling joy. Jesus is promised to give that freedom here. Until Jesus returns people are, in a very real sense, trapped in the stall.

True, you may rock and roll all night and party every day, but that does not mean you enjoy and experience freedom. We are made to experience that type of spiritual freedom in relationship with God. And we will never, ever know that freedom until Jesus sets us free from what we are trapped in. Jesus sets us free.

Leaping Like Calves

The final image we see is that when the sun of righteousness rises with healing in his wings and we are set free from bondage, we won't walk or run. We will playfully jump like calves.

You want to have the jumping joy of Jesus in your life? Freedom is the necessary condition. In Luke 6:22-23, Jesus said, "Bless are you when people hate you...rejoice in that day and leap for joy. Take note – your reward is great in heaven." Now, you and I may know some people that do not seem likely candidates for playfully jumping in the joy of Jesus.

I understand that. Some folks look like they've been sucking on sour persimmons for a really long time. We think that we have a better chance of being fluent in Swahili before they playfully leap like that. The Bible tells us that we don't know each other that well.

This weekend several of us took our teenagers to the Youth Evangelism Conference in Clarksburg. It was a wonderful time together and the Lord moved powerfully. If your student did not go, they missed out on dynamic worship, over 100 students making salvation decisions, and another fifty dealing with a calling to ministry. Speaking as a dad, events like this have become mandatory attendance for my children. This event is eternity changing. And on Friday night, as we were heading out, I saw two of our teenagers skipping and leaping out of the venue, arm in arm, excited and joyful in the presence of Jesus. They had some happy calf in them!

Guess what? There is a joyfully jumping calf in every Christian in the room this morning. And, in the right setting, it will leap. It will leap in a week when we experience the Glow in the Dark Easter Egg Hunt. It will most certainly leap in some lives at the women's retreat in April. It will leap again and again, so we would do well to allow it some room occasionally.

When Jesus comes, he will give light and truth where there was darkness and confusion. When Jesus comes, he will set things right where they were wrong. When Jesus comes, he will heal sickness and broken lives. When Jesus comes, he will free people from their bondage. And when Jesus comes, Christians will jump for joy instead of mope in weariness or shiver in fear.

Doesn't that sound amazing? Receive Jesus today and find out for yourself.