

Getting ready to meet Him: 2. The Lord of the Day

3. The Day of the Lord

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Preacher: Bob Fyall

[0 : 00] Now, as you know, one of the most remarkable things about Christmas, about the coming of the Saviour, is that he was prophesied for centuries, many centuries, before he came.

And our earlier readings told us about just before he came. But we're now going to read in the prophet Malachi on page 802. We're going to have two short readings.

And what I say is going to be divided into two parts. And we're first of all going to read Malachi 3, verses 1 to 3. The prophets prophesied over a long period of time, but Malachi comes at the very end of that period, just as the Old Testament prophets fall silent.

Malachi speaks. And this is what he says. Malachi chapter 3, verse 1. Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me.

And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. And the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.

[1 : 04] But who can endure the day of his coming? And who can stand when he appears? For he is like refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap.

He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and purify the sons of Levi, and refine them like gold and silver. And they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord.

Amen. That is the word of God once again to us. And what I'm going to say, you'll notice the title, Getting Ready to Meet Him. I wonder how many people here know famous people.

Some of you may think you are famous people, but that's another story. Some of you may well be. Some of the youngsters here may be household names before their lives are over. But one of the things that often happens when famous people are born, naturally enough, no one except their proud parents think they are going to be famous.

And that's why sometimes when you find the record of somebody's life who was, say, born hundreds and hundreds of years ago, you find the date of their death, and then the probable date of their birth.

[2 : 16] Because no one, of course, knew when they were born that they were going to achieve what they did. And you know, often people get it terribly, terribly wrong. Many years ago, there was a music critic who said of a new musician, This man's work will never last.

He has no ear for music. He has no sense of harmony. His melodies are harsh. Unfortunately for the critic, the musician was called Beethoven.

We don't know the name of the critic. Sometime later, a schoolmaster in an Austrian village said to a rather awkward and gangling youth, You'd better go out and have a walk in the hills, because you'll certainly never be any use in the educational world.

The boy's name was Albert Einstein. History has not preserved for us the name of the teacher. You see, it's easy to get it wrong. And when the Lord Jesus Christ came, many, many people did.

There were no cheering crowds. There were no headlines. There was no excitement at all in the great ones of the world. And that's why it's important that we are ready to meet him when he comes.

[3 : 40] Now, this time of year, many of us will have friends and family to stay. Perhaps the next few days, many of us are going to visit friends and family. And when that happens, we get ready, don't we?

You don't normally, when your friends come in, say, Oh, by the way, there's the dirty dishes. You might like to wash them for us. And beside that, you'll find a pile of dirty washing, which you can put in the washing machine.

Oh, and by the way, we haven't had time to buy anything. So if you go out and buy us a meal and then cook it for us. That would not be very welcoming. And yet, that is exactly what happened to the Prince of Life when he came into the world.

We've sung about it already. There was no room in Bethlehem. Incidentally, I've always felt that one character who is terribly maligned in the Christmas story is the innkeeper.

You read Luke 2 when you go home and tell me, if you can, where the innkeeper is mentioned. He's not mentioned at all. And yet, he's been vilified throughout the centuries.

[4 : 44] It may well not have been the innkeeper at all who was responsible. But in any case, he wasn't welcomed. And so, long before he came, God is preparing for him coming.

And Malachi is speaking some 400 years before the event. He's speaking to a people whose faith has burned low. That their religious life is ticking over.

The routines are going on. People are attending the services. The kind of thing that so often happens at Christmas, isn't it? People attend. People go through the routines. But their hearts are not engaged.

Their wills are not challenged. Their minds are not stretched. A hundred years before Malachi's time, people had returned from exile in Babylon. The temple had been rebuilt.

And everything seemed to be normal. And yet, there was no sense of expectation. No sense of looking forward. No sense that the Lord would come to his temple.

[5 : 43] That's what chapter 3 verse 1 says. The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. So there are two things here I want to say.

First of all, that when the Lord comes, we will know to expect him. Who is the messenger?

Now the messenger is, first of all, Malachi himself. That's what the name Malachi means, in fact. My messenger. Malachi is the last of a long line of prophets who throughout several centuries had prophesied, had spoken of the coming of the Messiah.

Last Sunday evening, we looked at Micah's words that the Messiah, the prince, would come from Bethlehem. There are Isaiah's words at the beginning of the prophetic period, that unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, a child who is to be God Almighty.

But it goes back long, long before that. Long before the prophets spoke. Right back at the beginning of human history. In the great dawn of human history, when human beings fell in the Garden of Eden.

[6 : 59] The Lord God said, in Genesis 3.15, The descendant of the woman will crush the head of the serpent. That's where the story begins. It doesn't begin at the end of the Old Testament.

It begins at the beginning of the Old Testament. The serpent has won a battle. The devil has won a victory. But he's not going to win the war. Because there is someone who is going to come who will destroy him.

And then, throughout the Old Testament period, as the prophets spoke, as the other writers spoke, and right on up till the time when the messenger would come. Now we read, of course, about the messenger in the passages we heard before.

The messenger was, in fact, John the Baptist. The last of the prophets. And the first of the New Age. He would be the one who would point to Jesus and say, See, he's here. He's arrived.

Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And Jesus describes him as the greatest of the prophets. The greatest, indeed, of anyone born to woman.

[8 : 08] Because he had the honor of pointing and saying, Look, he's arrived. We're not waiting any longer. He's come. Look, he's here. In other words, if we are going to welcome Jesus as he comes, we need to listen to his messengers.

Which means we need to listen to the word of God. Which means we need to respond to the gospel. Which tells us who he is. It tells us we will know to expect him.

But secondly, it tells us we will know who to expect. The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. Now we know that that Lord did come to his temple, first of all, as a baby.

He was brought there as a baby. You read about this later in Luke. And then you get a glimpse of how when he was 12, which for a Jewish boy would be on the brink of adulthood, he's brought to the temple.

And over and over again we find him in the temple. Until at the end of Luke we find him turning his back on the temple. Because they have turned their back on him.

[9 : 16] We need to be ready to welcome him. We need to know who to expect. Because you see, when the early church started celebrating what they called Advent.

The season we are in. It wasn't just looking forward to Christmas. So when we say getting ready to meet him. That doesn't primarily mean have you sent your cards? Have you got your presents? Have you bought your turkey? And so on. What it primarily means, are we ready to meet him as he comes again on the last day? That is the point the prophets are making.

That is the point that the Baptist was making as well. Because when he comes, things are going to be drastic. Verse 2. Who can endure the day of his coming?

And who can stand when he appears? And there are two pictures used. First of all, it is going to be like refining. It is going to be like a blazing fire.

[10 : 14] It is going to remove all that is sinful. All that is unholy. All that is evil. All that is not fit for him. All that is not fit for his presence. And it is going to refine people.

To make them like gold and silver. Who can be presented to him. Remember when the wise men came to him later, they were going to present to him gifts. And there were people waiting for him when he came.

We read about some of them this morning. This little remnant who were waiting for him. People like Elizabeth and Mary. People like Anna and Simeon.

Because it was Simeon who said, My eyes have seen your salvation. So we are getting ready to meet him. First of all, we are getting ready to meet the Lord of the day.

And look again at verse 3. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver. And he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver. And they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord.

[11 : 20] Now Malachi criticized the people of his time for bringing diseased offerings. Offerings that cost them nothing. Offerings that did not reflect God's grace or their faith.

And that's a message to us today as well, isn't it? What does God want from us? You remember the carol, What can I give him? Poor as I am.

If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb. But what is it that he wants? What I have, I give him.

Give my heart. And my heart is not just the organ that pumps blood in my body.

My heart is me. So when the king comes, he is asking for a welcome. He's asking that we open our hearts, our lives, everything to receive him.

So the question that these verses in Malachi 3 verses 1 to 3 faces with, Are we getting ready to meet him? Are we ready to meet him as we're in his presence today, listening to his word, listening to the voice of his messengers?

[12 : 28] Because that voice of the messenger continues today as the Christ comes to us. Now we're going to sing another carol, and it's the one immediately after this, What child is this who laid to rest on Mary's lap is sleeping?

See, that's asking the same question that we've asked. Who is he? Who is the Lord of the day? And the chorus answers, This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing.

Haste, haste to bring him law, to bring him praise, to bring him ourselves, the babe, the son of Mary. Jermyn██atk Jerm██ Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

[15 : 25] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Now, just over the page, Malachi 4, when we turn from the Lord of the day to the day of the Lord, it says here verses 1 to 3, but I think I'll just simply read the other three verses as well, because it's a very short chapter.

Malachi writes, chapter 4, For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble.

The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name, the Son of Righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.

You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall, and you shall tread down the wicked, for there will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts.

[16 : 36] Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commended him at Horeb for all Israel. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes, and he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the

children to their fathers, lest they come and strike the land with a decree of utter desolation.

Amen. The day. The day is coming, says Malachi. Now throughout the prophets, this phrase, the day, or in those days, and sometimes in the last days, or the latter days, point forward to the day when God will decisively intervene in the affairs of the world, when he will institute his kingdom and put an end to the kingdom of darkness, when he will crush the serpent.

Now, when we read the Old Testament, however, the prophets don't always see that this day is going to be a long period of time, although sometimes they have glimpses of it.

In those days, the Lord will act. They don't know what we know now, as we look back to Christmas, as we look back to Bethlehem, that the coming of Christ was going to be in two stages, so to speak. First of all, when he came to Bethlehem, when he died, when he rose again, and then when he will return in power and great glory, an event which is still future to us.

[18:09] And that's one of the reasons why so many people today find Christmas rather flat, and an anticlimax. When I was a small child, I used to love Christmas morning.

I used to anticipate keenly opening of presents, and of course, like all children, I had discovered where my mother hid the presents, and I would go and fill the parcels and so on. There was nothing quite like the excitement of opening them on Christmas morning.

And yet, year after year, it happened. The day fell flat once the presents were opened, once the meal was eaten.

And surely that is not simply because children keep on wanting to do new things and change their activities. Surely it's because Christmas Day is not an end in itself.

It points forward to a much greater and much fuller day. R.L. Stephenson, the Scottish writer, said, to travel, hopefully, is a better thing than to arrive.

[19:12] And we all know that feeling. Sometimes you anticipate something for months, and then it never quite lives up to expectation. That's what we would expect, because there is a day coming that's not only going to live up to expectation, but is so far going to exceed them, so far going to go beyond them, that everything else will be swallowed up in the joy of that day.

And that's what the prophets are speaking about. There is a day coming, and there's never been a day like this. Indeed, the prophet Zechariah, just before Malachi, says it is a unique day, a day that belongs to the Lord, the day when Jesus will come again, when he will put an end to sin and evil, and when he'll usher in a glorious new creation.

Now, two things will happen on that day, so let me mention both of them briefly. And first of all, there will be judgment. Once again, Malachi uses the picture of fire, when all the arrogant and the evildoers will be stubble.

The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts. Very often we hear people saying, why doesn't God do something?

Why doesn't he intervene? Why doesn't he intervene in the war areas of the earth? Why doesn't he intervene in Zimbabwe, in the Congo, and so on?

[20:38] Why doesn't he intervene to put an end to the drug barons, and to the violence, and to the evil of the world? It's a question that people ask. But when God does intervene, when God did intervene, he did intervene like that once, and you can read about it in Genesis in the flood.

When he intervened, the results were drastic. The results were completely turned over, everything that had ever been experienced. And that's what he will do when he comes again.

The day which will finally and decisively end everything that's evil. If that's not going to happen, then obviously we're just going to continue the way we are at the moment.

And that's this times of good, followed by times of suffering, times of rejoicing, followed by times of sorrow, and the threat of death hanging over everything.

But one day, there is going to be no more violence. One day there is going to be no more hunger.

One day there is going to be no more greed. One day there is going to be none of any of these things, because death itself, sin and death, will be gone.

[21:51] Burned up like stubble. This word stubble is interesting. It's often used throughout Scripture as the destiny of those who have not built their lives on God.

In Psalm 1, those who do not follow the law of the Lord, those who do not open their lives to the Lord when he comes, they are described as like chaff, that the wind blows away.

We need to respond. We need to, because we are all going to meet him. Because the story of Christmas, as I said, doesn't, didn't begin in Bethlehem.

Began far back in the Garden of Eden, when the Lord promised. Indeed, we could say, we could go beyond it, and say it began in eternity, before the worlds were made. But it doesn't end at Christmas either.

It goes on to the cross, where sin was given its death blow, where the devil was defeated, but he's still terribly active. And one day, when he comes again, there is going to be a glorious new creation. [22 : 54] But in order for that to happen, all that is evil, must be purged away. Because you cannot have a good creation, where these things still exist.

And that's why, the prophet says, all the arrogant and all evil doers, will be stubble. Behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven.

That's what John the Baptist said about Jesus, when he pointed him out. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire. So that's the first element. The element of judgment.

And right through the prophets, and right through the Bible, there's always these two elements. But secondly, there will be great joy, there will be great blessing. Verse 2, Wesley uses these words, he uses so many words from Scripture.

So it will be like the sun rising, or on a dark and desolate landscape. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.

[24 : 10] Calves confined long in a dark stable, during the winter, bound out into the sunlit meadows, their hearts leaping with joy. So it will be great joy.

But notice the beginning of verse 2. For those who fear my name. This is not a kind of general sentimental, everything will be alright, everyone's going to be alright.

Those who fear my name. What does it mean to fear the name of the Lord? That's really why I read verses 4 to 6 as well. So, what Malachi is saying, as he comes to the end of the Old Testament, is God has spoken.

God spoke to his servant Moses. The authority of God in the Old Testament, which is the foundation of everything else, everyone says, all the prophets look back to Moses, all the wisdom writers, all the historians, they build what they have to say on Moses.

So, Moses gave the word of God, and those who believe it, those who fear God's name, are preparing themselves for the day of the Lord. Notice verse 5.

[25 : 20] Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. Now, what does that mean? Does that mean Elijah is going to be reincarnated?

Of course not. Although, during the so-called hype about the millennium in 2000, Elijah turned up on the Mount Zion Hotel in Jerusalem, waiting for Moses to join him.

They knew he was Elijah, because it said that on his briefcase. We, unfortunately, this is one of those stories, you never know what happened after that, when Elijah, when Elijah discovered, or was discovered, to be the hoax he was.

No, that's not what the prophet is saying. The prophet is saying, I'm going to send you a great prophet, who will remind you of Elijah, who will speak in the voice, and in the authority of Elijah. And that, of course, as Jesus himself tells in the New Testament, that is none other than John the Baptist. In other words, write, what Malachi is saying, look, look back at the Old Testament scriptures.

[26 : 24] Now, he wouldn't know, he wouldn't know the details of the coming of the Messiah. He wouldn't know the details of John the Baptist. But by the Spirit, he prophesies, that the scriptures to come, the New Testament, represented here by the Baptist, are going to be authoritative, along with the Old Testament.

So, what I'm saying is this. If we're going to welcome the Lord, if we're going to welcome the Lord of the day, if we're going to prepare for the day of the Lord, then we need to stand in the tradition of Moses and Elijah, and the Baptist, when I say stand in the tradition, I don't mean trying to imitate or trying to repeat.

What I mean is listening to the voice of the Lord, sharing that voice of the Lord, and responding to it. So, as we finish, what I'm saying is this.

I'm not, I'm not Scrooge. I'm not saying to you, don't enjoy your Christmas days, don't enjoy your Christmas dinners, and so on. I'm not saying that at all. What I'm saying is, that's not the main point. That's not what it's about. As you know, in a few days' time, everything will be cleared away, and the problems, the difficulties, the ordinary issues of everyday life, will be facing us.

[27 : 43] What I'm saying is this. Let's be ready to greet the Lord, to greet Him, as He meets us in His Word, as He meets us, as we gather with His people, as we sing His praise.

And above all, let's be ready to greet Him, when He comes again, in power and great glory. Amen. Let's pray. Almighty God, give us grace, to cast off the works of darkness, and to put on the armor of light, here in the time of this mortal life, when our Savior came to visit us, in great humility, so that on the last day, when He shall come again, in His glorious majesty, to judge the living and the dead, we be made like Him, in His eternal kingdom, where He lives and reigns with you, and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen. Thank you, Bob. Well, we're just about at the end of our service. We're going to sing our last hymn in just a second.

But just before we do that, can I turn your attention to the back of the sheet? You'll see there that we have some more Christmas services still to come. We'll be back here tonight. It's 6.30 for our traditional service of Lessons and Carols by Candlelight.

And similarly, also on Christmas Eve. And we'd love to see you at these services. Great ones, particularly, to bring friends and neighbors to. And then on Christmas morning at 11 o'clock as well.

[29 : 16] And then you'll see these other notices at the bottom. If you've been here today for the first time, perhaps you've just been wondering what all this message of Christianity really is all about, you want to find out what's behind the tinsel and the turkey, and you want to find a bit more, well, we've got a course designed especially for you.

It's called Christianity Explored. And you'll see that the next one begins there towards the end of January. We have a lunchtime one and an evening one to suit different people. And we'd love you to come to that.

It'd be good if you could just ring one of the telephone numbers there and tell us about it so we can know the right numbers. Or you can speak to myself or to Alex Bedford. One of our staff will be around at the end of the service if you'd like to find out more.

But we're going to end by singing this lovely carol about the great mystery of Christmas, but a mystery that is full of light.

And the last verse of this carol is just a marvelous one. Because of Christmas, because of Jesus, no more then as a child of earth must I my lifetime spend his history, Christ's destiny, our mind to apprehend.

[30 : 28] What a saviour, what a lord, oh master, brother, friend, what miracle has joined me to this life that never ends. It's a great song.

And you'll see that when you get to that very last line of that last verse, we string it out very long. We always get it wrong, so make sure we get it right this time. It's much longer. This life that never ends.

All right? There we are. This life that never ends. This life that never ends.

If the Lord has never done it, but the Holy Christ is not mine. Thank you very much. All right?

There we are. We all need a grain of YE lùm, and our danny is not mine! Let all your love and love go to the Lord, God, and we pray this hour.

[31 : 32] Let all our care and love go to the Lord, God, and we pray this hour. Let all your love and love be with you, God, and we pray this hour.

We pray this hour in all the love and love. We pray this hour, God, and we pray this hour, God, and we pray this hour.

Let all our love and love go to the Lord, God, and we pray this hour. Amen. Eto'o with the sky, he thought in fact on good.

And the hope of the society is oneCómo to see our tenemos again. Dolby us hold on to ajan, God's wean, God's wean.

Let me do it and center me when I but where the heck The heart is filled, and I'm going to go Your mother's head And you've got nothing with me What I am coming Let's pray as we close.

[33 : 44] Lord, we thank you for the great promise of the prophets, now made real to us in Jesus' coming. Help us to hear that great message this Christmas, that for you who fear my name, the Son of Righteousness shall rise with healing in his wings, and you shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.

Lord, we long for that great day, and may every one of us here this morning be ready to meet it when it comes, and to meet you, the Lord of that great day. And to that end, may the grace of our

Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God our Father, and the fellowship of his Holy Spirit, be with you all, now and forever.
Amen.