

# The Lasting Security of Ultimate Peace - He comes to bring us real victory

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Date: 25 December 2016

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, we're going to turn to our Bibles for our first reading this morning, and you'll find that in the very last prophet of the Old Testament, the very last page of the Old Testament, indeed, in Malachi chapter 4, which I think is page 802, if you have our blue Bibles there on your chairs.

We've been looking at the promise of Christmas according to this very last of the Old Testament prophets. And so for the final time this morning, we're going to be focusing very particularly on chapter 4, verses 2, and particularly verse 3.

But let's read from the beginning of the section at chapter 3, verse 16. Malachi 3, verse 16, then those who feared the Lord spoke with one another.

The Lord paid attention and heard them. And a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed his name.

They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him.

[ 1 : 10 ] Then, once more, you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between the one who serves God and one who does not serve him.

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 sun 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 they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts.

Remember the instruction of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded 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 fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.

Amen. May God bless to us this his word. Well, do have a seat. If you'd like to pick up your Bibles again and turn to Malachi chapter 4, we're going to think about that a little this morning in between our carols.

[ 2 : 51 ] Christmas is all about peace. It's the time of peace and goodwill. We all know that. Of course, it's in all the carols and the cards. But really, it's often as though we have to play let's pretend, isn't it, at Christmas.

Because the world is not at peace. Just read the news. Listen to the news today. And even families are rarely at peace for very long at Christmas. Isn't that true?

In fact, it's rather sad. We're told that there's more family strife, there's more family breakup at Christmas than at any other time of year. And that's because Christmas, in many ways, is actually a time of high stress.

I remember a couple of years ago, I was just coming into the church, and there were a couple of ladies standing outside speaking on the pavement. I couldn't help but overhear what they were saying. It was just a couple of days before Christmas. And one of them said to the other, it's just stress, stress, stress.

Added stress at work, and when you get home, it's just more stress there. And I suspect many of us probably sympathize with that, especially wives and mothers, with all the school shows and concerts and Christmas shopping and cooking and in-laws and all of the other good things that Christmas tend to bring.

[ 4 : 10 ] Peace. Well, it's a bit of a joke. It's anything but peace at Christmas. That's fantasy. But actually, you know, Christmas isn't just an exercise in let's pretend.

It is about a message of peace, real peace, true peace, ultimate peace. And that actually is what the prophet Malachi is speaking about, more than 400 years before the first Christmas came. He painted these wonderful pictures of what the coming of the Lord into this world would bring to his people and to the world. Look again at chapter 4, verse 2 there.

For you who fear my name, he says, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.

And real peace. Listen to verse 3. You shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts.

[ 5 : 18 ] Now, that verse, friends, is all about peace. It's all about ultimate peace. Now, you might say, well, how is that? Because it sounds like the opposite. It sounds like war, doesn't it?

It's treading down the wicked. But no, there's no confusion because, of course, real peace, real peace can only possibly come after there has been total victory over those who are destroying the peace.

I need to look as far as Syria and Iraq today to know that's true, don't we? There's no peace. And there can't be peace when there are destroyers of peace and of people roaming all around the place with guns and suicide bombs.

There can't be peace when destroyers of peace hold the sway. Real peace must be about a story of ultimate victory over all destroyers of peace in our world and in our human lives.

Now, I want to think about that first. I want to think about the destroyers of true peace. Who are these wicked that verse 3 here talks about and promises that we will tread down because of God's coming to earth?

[ 6 : 36 ] Well, the answer is, obviously, here, they are the enemies of God and, therefore, the enemies of God's people, those who are opposed to God and opposed to them and who are intent on harming them because they hate God and they hate God's people.

You only have to read through the Bible, through some of the Psalms, for example, to see that the wicked are the opposite of the righteous, that is, those who delight in the Lord and in the Lord's ways.

Psalms 32, many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord. So the wicked are the opposite of those who trust in the Lord.

Or Psalm 34, affliction will slay the wicked and those who hate the righteous will be condemned. The wicked are the haters of the righteous, the haters of those who love God.

Or Psalm 71, that makes plain to us the real character of these enemies. Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of unjust and cruel men.

[ 7 : 45 ] And that's why the cry of the faithful all down the ages is the cry we hear so often in the Psalms, like Psalm 64. Hear my voice, O God, preserve my life from the dread of the enemy.

Or in the words that Jesus himself taught his followers to pray. Deliver us from evil. Because peace, real peace, can only come when there is victory over enemies, over the destroyers of peace.

And ultimate peace can only possibly come when there is ultimate victory over those destroyers.

But that was God's promise right from the very beginning for his people.

Safety, peace from all enemies. Listen to God's word from Moses way, way back near the beginning of the Bible in that much maligned book today, the book of Leviticus.

God says, I will give peace in the land and you shall lie down and none shall make you afraid. Now remove the harmful beasts from the land and they shall not go through them.

[ 8 : 56 ] And the sword shall not go through your land. And you shall chase your enemies and they shall fall before you by the sword. That was God's promise to his people.

Ultimate victory over all evil, all destroyers of peace. If you read on in the Bible through the book of Judges, you'll see that there were many glimpses of that that came early on.

There was rest, there was peace in the land for 40 years during this judge or that judge. There was peace for 40 years during the life of this judge. But it never lasted.

But then came at last the great king, David, the warrior king, and his son Solomon who had a great reign of peace. And God's people had safety from their enemies. But it never lasted.

Indeed, it turned, didn't it, to total disaster, to captivity. They were sent away to live under the yoke of enemies in a foreign land. But all the prophets continued to promise that God's peace would

come at last for his precious people.

[10:04] But, of course, hundreds of years rolled on. And by Malachi's day, many, many people doubted. They'd become very cynical. It's vain to serve God, they said.

Where is this peace? What's the point? Not only do the enemies prosper, but God seems powerless to stop it. They put God to the test and they escape.

But God promised, you shall tread down the wicked. The destroyers of your peace, they shall be destroyed one day.

Of course, there's a deep sense in which those who fear God and who long for God, they know that it's not just deliverance from enemies out there that they need and that they long for.

They know that it's peace through deliverance from the great enemy within that perhaps they need most of all. The psalmists knew that as well, only too well.

[11:09] O Lord, rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath because of my sin. Turn, O Lord, and deliver my life.

Save me for the sake of your steadfast love. You see, he knows that the greatest destroyer of true peace is not actually enemies without.

For every one of us human beings, it's the enemy within, isn't it? Deep within our own hearts. And we know that just as well as the psalmist.

Maybe you're very conscious of that this Christmas. Maybe you're particularly conscious of great battles within, struggles with your temper or with your tongue.

Or struggles for temperance and self-control in the face of great urges, great powerful pulls, the addictions that have held you in the past.

[12:06] But you see, peace from that was also what the prophets promised for that great day of the Lord. A true liberation, a deep liberation.

Through at last a great, great victory over all enemies, without and within. On the day that God would make the sun rise and bring light in the darkness.

Bring restoration and healing and true righteousness in the place of sin. To those longing for that coming day. To those who were longing because they were conscious of their need for victory.

To those people, the Lord had these wonderful, wonderful words of reassurance. They shall be mine, he says in verse 17. On the day when I make up my treasured possession.

And I will spare them. And that is a promise, isn't it? A promise of victory. And therefore a promise of ultimate peace. For those who long for the Lord's coming.

[13:09] God will spare them because he will destroy all the destroyers of true peace. He comes to cleanse the human mind from thickest scales of sin.

He comes, the prisoners to release in Satan's bondage held. And that's why the Christmas message is such a glad sound for all who are conscious of their need for the Prince of Peace. Of their need for the one who comes. Who alone can give us that peace. Well, pick up your Bible once more.

And let's resume. From the destroyers of true peace. Both enemies without and enemies within. We need a deliverer into true peace.

Now many, many in Malachi's day. Doubted, frankly, that that would ever happen. That he would ever come. Just as today. Many people refuse to believe that they need such deliverance.

[14:17] Or that, even if they feel they do, that such deliverance is really possible for them. Pie in the sky. That's what many skeptics would say today.

They were saying it in 450 BC. They've been saying it ever since. And they're saying it today in 2016. But God promised. Verse 18.

You shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked. Between the one who serves God. And the one who does not serve him. Now notice again, very carefully there.

Notice what God counts as righteousness and wickedness. Notice that it's not primarily what we tend to think of in terms of our own innate moral qualities.

God does not have a sort of righteousness league. That's the way we tend to think about it. Mother Teresa, you know, right up at the top there. Isis, right down at the bottom. And most of us think of ourselves as somewhere in between, don't we?

[15:22] Probably a bit below Mary Berry, perhaps. And definitely above Donald Trump. But somewhere there in the mid-zone. And we're okay. But look at that verse.

That's not at all what God is talking about when he means righteous and wicked. It's very simple. Look. It's the distinction between those who serve God and those who don't serve him. Who refuse him. But those who do serve him. Those who trust him. Those who look to him. To save them. To give them ultimate victory over their own sins and faults and failings. And many, many things that they know about themselves. Rightly separate them from God. They have the promise of his ultimate peace. Of ultimate victory over all enemies. The promise of what God will do on the great day of his coming. When he comes himself to win that victory. [16:28] To bring that victory. To give that victory. To those who will serve him. Who will trust him. And in Jesus' coming, friends, that victory is theirs.

That's why Jesus' birth was surrounded by so much joy. Turn over a few pages with me to Luke's Gospel, chapter 1, page 856, I think. In the church Bible.

And look at Zechariah's song of joy, beginning there at verse 67. Zechariah, remember, the father of John the Baptist. Who at first hadn't believed what the angel had told him about the glorious things God was to do.

And he was struck dumb. But at last, when he believed and trusted, the Lord loosed his tongue. And he spoke a song of great joy. And in this song of joy, he quotes from Malachi's prophecy. And he tells us that now, at last, it's being fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ into the world. Verse 68. Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people. [17:34] He's done it. Verse 70 there. As he spoke by the prophets of old. He has delivered us from our enemies. From the hand of all who hate us.

And being delivered, he says in verse 74. We can serve him now in holiness and in righteousness before him all our days.

How can that be? Look at verse 77. Because we have real and ultimate salvation at last. In the forgiveness of sins. The enemy within.

At last, Jesus has come to bring victory over every enemy. Including the great destroyer of peace in our lives, in our relationships, and in this whole world.

The sin that separates us from God. And because he came to bring that forgiveness, we can have peace with God.

[18:33] And all because Malachi's prophecy is fulfilled in the coming of a glorious savior. Look at verse 78 there in Zechariah's song. Because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise has visited us from on high.

To give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death. And to guide our feet into the way of peace. The sunrise of peace.

In the forgiveness that Jesus Christ came to bring at last. Victory over the deepest, darkest enemies of our souls. Jesus Christ is the and the only deliverer into true peace.

Because Jesus Christ alone can bring victory over every destroyer of true peace in our human lives and in this world. Because he was the child who inherits all our transgressions.

Because all our demerits on him fall. And therefore we can see him as a glorious, mighty redeemer.

[19:49] Victorious over each and every foe. Let's sing those words in the carol together. Before we conclude by what this means for us in 2016.

Child in the manger. Infant of Mary. Outcast and stranger. But Lord of all. Well, pick up your Bibles, would you, for one last time.

What does all this mean for those who do love and serve the living God? What does it mean that Christ was born in Bethlehem at the first Christmas?

Well, it means, as I've said, that we have deliverance over every destroyer of peace in our human lives.

And it means that we're, therefore, people who wait eagerly and with great certainty. We await the denouement of true peace.

[20:46] We await with certainty the final consummation of that peace that follows the great victory of our Savior over every enemy against peace and rest.

What it means is that for those who truly understand the message of Christmas, we know that the best is yet to come. But it is the promise of God.

And it's a promise for us even more sure than the promise that Malachi had. The promise that all of the prophets gave. Because we know that already now in the past is the fact of Jesus' birth, of

God's coming into the world in the human flesh.

And not only the fact of his birth, but of his life and of his death. And above all, of his resurrection and ascension to glory. He rose victorious.

And that means he was shown to be victorious. Having destroyed every enemy on our behalf. Robbing every enemy over their power against us.

[ 21 : 56 ] And so Christ's apostle, the apostle Paul, tells us that Jesus reigns. And even now he is putting every enemy under his feet. Trampling them like ashes, as Malachi said.

Until the very last enemy, death itself, is destroyed forever. And then these mortal bodies of ours, the apostle says, they will put on immortality forever like Jesus.

And death itself and every dark shadow it casts will be swallowed up in victory. It will be destroyed, put away, banished forever and ever. And that, friends, that is the real victory that will bring us ultimate peace, lasting peace.

But that victory is ours forever through the Lord Jesus Christ. Already, says the apostle Paul, because he came. Do you see what that means?

It means, for example, for hard-pressed, for persecuted Christian believers around the world today, of whom there are many, perhaps the majority of all Christians. Think of Syria.

[ 23 : 06 ] Think of Iraq. Think of Pakistan. Think of Iran. So many countries. But it means the day is surely coming when every enemy, every outward enemy to the lives and the health and the peace of God's people, every enemy will be ashes under their feet.

Because Jesus Christ came. And it means for struggling believers who are battling, as we all are, with enemies within, with our sinful nature that is at war with our Christian mind.

Battling against desires, against addictions, against all sorts of thoughts and deeds that destroy your peace. It means Christmas promises peace, ultimately, from all of these things.

The God of peace, says the apostle Paul, will soon crush Satan under your feet. Because the Lord Jesus came that first Christmas time.

And it means that for those who, even today, feel their lives are engulfed by the darkness of that shadow of death. For whom death hovers over them, creating misery, dis-ease, destroying peace.

[ 24 : 29 ] Christmas time accentuates those shadows so much, doesn't it, in our lives. The dark shadows of grief we feel so acutely at this time of year.

But there's a wonderful promise. He came to guide our feet into the way of peace. That's the promise of Christmas, according to the scriptures.

For all who fear his name. For all who long for his appearing. The full zenith of that glorious sunlight of his coming to reign.

That still awaits us. The best part of Christmas has yet to happen yet. But it has begun. The daybreak has come, according to the prophets.

And we look back and see that it is already here in the coming of Jesus. You can't see it with your visible eyes. But, of course, that's the very nature of daybreak, isn't it?

[ 25 : 27 ] Day begins just with the faintest streak of light across the eastern horizon. The blackest darkness just, just beginning to glimmer with gray.

But when you see that, it's begun. And that is what Christmas means. It's like the beginning of that great thaw in the land of Narnia.

In C.S. Lewis' story, The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe. Aslan is on the move. And it's seen in the thawing of the land. Winter is ended.

A new day has dawned in the coming of Jesus. And it means, friends, spring is coming. And summer, the full zenith of the light and the warmth of the resurrection life of summer, is certain and will never disappoint us.

And what that means, of course, for us right here today in 2016, this Christmas, is that it means that a new day can dawn in every one of our lives now.

[ 26 : 33 ] A sunrise of righteousness. The healing in its wings. A sunrise that promises liberating joy.

Release. The victory. The peace. Peace over every possible enemy in your life. Even death itself. Zechariah puts it so beautifully.

To give light to those who sit in darkness, in the shadow of death. To guide our feet into the path of peace. Someone has put it very poignantly.

There is the sound of many voices in these words. The sob of the widow. The agony of the sufferer on the sick bed. The restlessness of the unsatisfied heart.

The burden of the guilty soul. The loneliness of the old and the unwanted. The desolation of the orphan. Many different circumstances.

[ 27 : 35 ] The same need. In each case, the way of peace. And that, friends, is what the coming of the Lord Jesus into our world promises. And guarantees for every single one who will come to him.

He is the Prince of Peace. The great denouement. The great climax of ultimate peace for this world. For our own lives. It's still to come. We await a Savior from heaven. That is the hope in which we're saved. But the day of peace. Well, it's begun because we have daybreak already.

And that's what Christmas Day reminds us every single year. Every year it tells us. That the way of peace can be entered into right now.

And can be known for real in our lives. To transform all of our life. From now until the day Jesus comes. And if you know, if you haven't yet.

[ 28 : 41 ] Yourself. Embarked upon that way of peace with the Lord Jesus Christ. Then just as silently as that first Christmas Day dawned on this world. That peace with all its present joy.

With all its future promise. That peace can dawn for you personally. This Christmas time. As the carol says. Where meek souls will receive him still.

Still the dear Christ enters in. So will you hail the heaven born Prince of Peace. In a new and personal way this Christmas.

I hope you will. I pray you will. Because I can tell you. He longs to bring peace. And light. And the healing wings of his glorious peace.

He longs to bring that. Wherever he has called on. To whomever. Calls upon him and comes to him. And he does so. And he will do so. And he will go on doing so.

[ 29 : 41 ] Abundantly and forever. For everyone. Who will name the name of Jesus. And serve God. And honor him.

Through trusting in the one who came to be our savior. Amen. Amen.