

Lasting Security –The Lasting Security of Ultimate Peace

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[0 : 00] We've been reading together in the prophet Malachi over this Christmas season. I'm going to read a little now from chapter 3 and chapter 4. Malachi 3 verse 16 says, Then those who feared the Lord spoke with one another, and the Lord paid attention to them, and a book of remembrance was written.

Of all 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.

And then once more 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.

For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and 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. And you shall go out, leaping like calves from the soul, and you shall tread down the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts.

[1 : 32] Well, now everyone knows that Christmas is a season of peace and goodwill. But everyone also knows that we're all playing let's pretend when we say that. Because the world's not at peace, is it?

No peace in the Middle East this Christmas, no peace in Ukraine, many other places. And actually rarely there's much peace for families at Christmas either.

In fact, the truth is, there's more family strife, more family breakup at Christmas than any other time of the year. Very striking. Christmas actually is often a time of high stress.

I remember a few years ago, overhearing a couple of women in the street, just before Christmas, doing their Christmas shopping. I don't think they knew I was listening, but one said to the other, it's stress, stress, stress.

It's added stress at work, then you get home, and there's even more stress there. Well, that's what they thought of Christmas. And I suspect many sympathize with that. Probably lots of wives and mothers in particular, run ragged with school parties, and Christmas shows, and Christmas shopping, and planning the Christmas lunch, and the in-laws coming, and all the rest of it.

[2 : 38] I'm sure lots of people feel like that. Peace at Christmas? Are you kidding me? Seems like anything but peace, doesn't it, often at Christmas, and at other times in our world.

We think it's fantasy. But actually, Christmas is not an exercise in let's pretend. It is about a message of peace, about true peace. In fact, about ultimate peace.

At least that's what was promised by the prophet Malachi that we read there. He painted wonderful pictures of what the coming of the Lord that he promised would actually bring to his people.

And the pictures of wonderful light and of restoration, joyful freedom. Listen again to these words from Malachi chapter 4, verse 2. For you who fear my name, the son of righteousness, will rise with healing in his wings, and you shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.

And he does talk also very specifically about peace. Listen. And you shall tread down the wicked, and there will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act, says the Lord.

[3 : 50] That verse is about peace. It's about ultimate peace. You might say, well, it doesn't sound like that. It sounds much like war treading down the wicked. But no, there's no confusion because the truth is that real peace, real peace only comes when there is total victory over those who are destroyers of peace.

There's no peace, is there, when there's destroyers of peace roaming the land, where there are suicide bombers roaming the land, or where there are armies unleashing terrible, vast weapons of destruction upon a land.

So if Christmas really is about ultimate peace, then it must be about ultimate victory over the destroyers of peace in our world. I want to think about that first just for a few moments.

The destroyers of true peace. Who are these wicked that Malachi's talking about there, saying that we'll be trodden down because of the great day of God's coming to earth?

Well, the answer is, according to the Bible, the enemies of God, and therefore the enemies of God's people, those who oppose him, those who are intent upon harming others because they hate God and because they hate God's people.

[5 : 09] You don't have to read through some of the Psalms in the Bible to understand that. The wicked are the opposite of the righteous. And the righteous are just those who delight in the Lord and delight in his ways.

The wicked are those, by contrast, who hate the Lord and hate the Lord's ways. So Psalm 32 says, Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord.

The opposite of the wicked. The wicked are those who refuse to trust in the Lord. Psalm 34, Affliction will slay the wicked. All those who hate the righteous will be condemned.

It's the haters of the righteous. It's the haters of those who love God that the Bible calls wicked. Another Psalm 71 is very plain about the character of these enemies.

Rescue me, my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of unjust and cruel men. Unjust and cruel men. And that's why the cry of the faithful all down the ages has been that of the psalmist in Psalm 64.

[6 : 17] Hear my voice, O God, preserve my life from dread of the enemy. Or in the words, if you like, that Jesus himself taught his first followers to pray, Deliver us from evil.

Because peace, you see, real peace can only come when there is victory over enemies, over the destroyers of peace. An ultimate peace can only come when there is ultimate victory over these destroyers.

An ultimate reversal of all their evil. But that was God's promise to this world, right from the very beginning. Peace, safety from all enemies.

Listen to God's words to his people through Moses way, way back. He said, I will give peace in the land and you will lie down and none shall make you afraid. and I shall remove the harmful beasts from the land and the sword shall not go through your land.

You shall chase your enemies and they will fall before you by the sword. That was God's promise. You see, peace through victory, through reversal of all that is evil, cruel and unjust in this world.

[7 : 32] And if you read through the Bible, if you read the book of Judges, for example, you'll see that there were lots of glimpses of that. We're told again and again there was rest, there was peace in the land for 40 years under this judge and for 40 years under that judge and for many years under that judge but it never lasted.

And then came David, the great warrior king and then his son Solomon whose great empire of peace bought safety from all enemies but it didn't last.

In fact, it turned very quickly to disaster, to captivity, to enemies, destroyers of peace being in total control of God's people.

And yet all the prophets of God continued to promise, to promise that God's peace would come. It would come at last. And by Malachi's day, centuries after that, unsurprisingly, many people were doubting.

It's vain to serve God, they said. Where is this peace? Not only do the wicked, not only do enemies prosper and God seems powerless to stop it, but they just put God to the test and they escape.

[8 : 44] But you see, God promised, you shall tread down the wicked. The destroyers of your peace will be destroyed. Because there's a deep sense too in which those who know God and long for God and really do fear God, they know that it's not just deliverance from enemies out there that they need and that they long for.

The peace they really need also requires a deliverance from the enemy within. And perhaps that's the truth above all. And again, the psalmists who spoke in the old days, they knew that only too well.

O Lord, rebuke me not in your anger nor discipline me in your wrath. 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 peace in his life is not out there, it's in here. It's deep in his own heart. And we know that too, don't we?

Maybe you're very conscious of that this Christmas. Maybe you're conscious of real battles with an enemy within, struggles with your temper, with your tongue, or with temperance in the face of all kinds of powerful lures, powerful addictions perhaps.

[10 : 15] You see, that too was what the prophets promised for that great day of the Lord. A reversal, a deep liberation through lasting victory over all our enemies on the day that he would bring light and restoration and rightness in the place of sin.

And to those who are longing for that coming day and deeply conscious of their need for victory, the Lord had wonderful words of reassurance. We read them in chapter 3, verse 17. They shall be mine on the day when I make up my treasured possession.

I will spare them that is a promise of ultimate victory and therefore of ultimate peace, isn't it? For all who look to the Lord's coming, God will spare them because he will destroy all the destroyers of their peace.

He comes to cleanse the human mind from thickest scales of sin. He comes to 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 very conscious of their need for peace and the need for peace that can only come from outside of themselves, from God himself.

[11 : 34] From all these destroyers of our peace, the enemies without, but also the enemies within, we need a deliverer into true peace. And many doubted that he would ever come.

In Malachi's day, really, it was rather like today. People refused to believe that either deliverance could come or, in fact, that they really needed deliverance anymore.

It was really possible. It's pie in the sky, all that sort of thing. People thought that in 450 BC. They think it in 2024 AD. But God had promised, you shall see the distinction, the judgment between the wicked and the righteous, between those who serve God and those who don't serve him.

Notice again there that real distinction between what the Bible means by righteous and wicked. It's not primarily what we tend to think of, a distinction of moral qualities. The sort of righteousness league, you know, with Mother Teresa and people like that right at the top.

Al Capone and, you know, terrorists and people like that at the bottom. And then we're sort of in the middle somewhere, aren't we? Maybe a bit below the late Queen Elizabeth. Definitely a good few notches above Prince Harry.

[12 : 54] But, you know, not too bad. But you see how the Bible doesn't talk that way at all, does it? It's very simple. It's a distinction between those who serve the true and living God and those who don't who refuse.

But those who serve him, who trust him, who look to him to save them from the enemy, from the sin, from the failure that they know is deep within and they know makes them fall far short of what they want to be themselves, never mind what God has created them to be.

They have this promise, do you see, of great peace through ultimate victory over all these enemies on the great day of the Lord's coming when the Lord would come himself to work that great reversal.

And in Jesus' coming, you see, at last, that is the victory that is theirs. And that's why Jesus' birth was surrounded with so much joy. If you have a Bible, you might want to turn to Luke chapter 1, but I'm just going to read a few things from there.

And it's the great joy of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, when he quotes in his song from Malachi's prophecy and he says, now at last, this is being fulfilled with the coming of the Savior Jesus into the world.

[14 : 12] Blessed be the God of Israel, he says, because he has visited and redeemed his people. Luke chapter 1, verse 68. He has done it. Verse 70, as he spoke by the prophets of old, like Malachi, he has delivered us from our enemies, from the hand of all who hate us.

And being delivered, he goes on to say, we can serve him, serve God without fear in holiness and in righteousness before him all our days. Now, how can that be?

Well, he tells us. Because real and ultimate salvation has at last come. How? In the forgiveness of our sins.

At last. At last. that greatest victory over the enemy within. The great destroyer of all real peace in life because it is the thing that separates us from God who is the Prince of Peace.

And all because Malachi's prophecy of a glorious coming Savior has been fulfilled. In verse 78, Zechariah says these wonderful words.

[15 : 26] because of the tender mercy of our God whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death to guide our feet into the way of peace.

peace. It's the sunrise of peace because of the forgiveness of sins that Jesus brings. And in that he brings victory over the deepest, darkest enemies of our souls.

Jesus Christ is the deliverer into that true peace. He came to bring victory over every destroyer of peace in our human lives. Reversing the power that evil and the evil one has over us.

The hold he has over us. And all because as the story of the Bible tells us, he became the child who inherits all of our transgressions, all of our demerits on him fall.

And so we see him as a glorious, mighty redeemer, victorious over each foe. I just want to ask then, what does it mean for those who do love and serve the living God that Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem and came at that first Christmas?

[16 : 48] Well, what it means is that we have even now deliverance over every destroyer of peace in our lives. And it means that we're therefore people who await with absolute certainty the denouement of that true peace.

we await that final consummation of the peace that follows the great ultimate victory of our Savior over every single enemy. That is that we are people who live with a sure and certain hope of the future.

See, wonderful as Christmas is, undoubtedly the Bible's teaching is that the best is yet to be. But it is the promise of God and it's for us even more sure than it was for any of these prophets because of the fact not just of Jesus' birth but of his death for sins and his resurrection and ascension to glory.

He rose victorious having destroyed every enemy on our behalf robbing them of every power over us. And Paul tells us the apostle that he reigns and even now is putting every enemy under his feet treading them down like ashes as Malachi says until the last enemy death itself is destroyed forever.

And then he will come and bring us ultimate peace forever. And these mortal bodies as Christ's apostle will put on immortality.

[18 : 26] Death itself will be swallowed up in that great victory. And that victory will bring ultimate peace. Ultimate peace to his people and to his world.

And that is a victory that is forever ours in the Lord Jesus Christ says the gospel. See what that means? It means well it means today for hard pressed and persecuted believers in some part of the world like some of our friends in North India and in Pakistan and other places.

Christmas promises peace. A great reversal. The day is coming when every last enemy will be ashes under your feet because Jesus Christ has come.

Isn't that a great hope for suffering Christians today? and it means for struggling believers who are battling with many enemies within our sinful nature that's at war with us with our Christian minds.

When we're battling against desires against addictions against thoughts against deeds it's all sorts of things that destroy peace in our lives and in other people's lives. Christmas promises peace.

[19 : 37] The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet says the apostle of Christ because the Lord Jesus has come. And for those who feel that their lives are engulfed by that darkness of the shadow of death and Christmas time accentuates those dark shadows greatly doesn't it for many of us.

It's a wonderful promise. He came to guide our feet into the way of peace. And that's the promise of Christmas for all who fear his name for all who long for his appearing.

The full zenith of that glorious sunlight is still in the future isn't it? The best part of Christmas hasn't happened yet but it has begun. Daybreak has begun. It's here.

And perhaps you feel well I can't see it. I can't see it. Everything still seems so dark in this world. In my life. But that's the nature of daybreak isn't it?

It begins with just the slightest little streak of grey in the bleak darkness of the eastern horizon. But it's begun. It's like the thaw in the land of Narnia in C.S.

[20 : 58] Lewis' wonderful books. The beginning of that thought tells you Aslan is on the move. Winter's ended. A dawn has happened and summer will surely come.

Friends, that means that the real meaning of Christmas is that that new day can dawn even now. Now in your life. A sunrise of righteousness. A healing.

Healing in its wings. that promises liberating joy of great release. Promises the victory that brings peace even over every seemingly impossible enemy in your life and ultimately over the great enemy death itself.

Zechariah says so beautifully to give light to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death to guide our feet into the way of peace. There is the sound of many voices in these words.

The sob of the widow. The agony of the sufferer on the sickbed. The restlessness of the unsatisfied heart. The burden of the guilty soul.

[22 : 11] The loneliness of the old and the unwanted. The desolation of the orphan. Many differing circumstances. But the same need in each. The way of peace.

And that friends is what the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ into this world promises. And guarantees for all who will come to him.

Fear his name. Trust him. He is the prince of peace. The great denouement of ultimate peace for this world and for our lives. Yes it's still to come. We await a savior from heaven.

But he is surely coming. But the great reversal the day of his peace has begun. Daybreak is here already. And that is what Christmas reminds us of every year so wonderfully.

And you know if that daybreak hasn't dawned yet for you in your life then I want to say to you that just as silently as that first Christmas day dawned for the world that peace with all its with all its present joy and with all its future promise that peace can dawn for you personally this Christmas time right now today here in this room.

[23 : 26] Because as the carol says where meek souls will receive him still still the dear Christ enters in. So will you this Christmas hail the heaven born prince of peace in a personal way in a new way perhaps for you will you?

I hope you will and he will if you will he will surely bring you light and light in the healing wings of his glorious peace.

Wherever he's called upon he loves to he does and he will keep doing so abundantly forever for all who are his. Amen.