

# Dawning Light –The Dawning Light of Ultimate Meaning

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[ 0 : 00 ] The prophet said to the people, You have wearied the Lord with your words, but you say, How have we wearied him?

By saying, Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them. Or by asking, Where is the God of justice?

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. But who can endure the day of his coming?

And who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire, and like a fueller's soap.

[ 1 : 12 ] 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. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in the former years.

John the Baptist's father, Zechariah, was filled with the Holy Spirit, and prophesied, saying, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all who hate us, to show the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant.

The oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will be called before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people, in the forgiveness of their sins, 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.

[ 3 : 23 ] Well, the Christmas story begins long, long before the birth of Jesus Christ. We heard earlier in words and in song, in Handel's version, some of the words of the prophet Malachi.

Now, his name means my messenger. He's the last prophet of the Old Testament. And God sent him to announce the message of a coming day, a great and awesome day, when God himself would come to this earth.

And Malachi was to explain to the people all that that great promise would mean. And he did so in a society that, to a large extent, had, well, jettisoned old-fashioned beliefs about God, become very cynical, very skeptical, very unbelieving.

Where is the God of justice? Was one of their watchwords. How can there be a loving God if manifest crooks are always the ones that prosper?

Good people are always exploited. Sounds very contemporary, doesn't it? Lots of people still say very similar things today. But Malachi spoke a very clear message from God to that skeptical people.

[ 4 : 38 ] A day is coming, he said, when the Lord himself will come to confront all of those things. A messenger will prepare the way, like another Elijah, one of the famous prophets of old.

And that is exactly what John the Baptist was to do. That's what the angel said to Zechariah, his father, when he was announcing the birth of John to come.

And then, after that, he said, the Lord himself has promised will come. And that day will be a day to change this world forever.

The justice that you desire will certainly come. That was the promise. But he also said, be careful what you wish for, because who can stand when that justice appears?

It's going to be a day of fire. It's going to be a fire, actually, that divides the whole world, destroying root and branch, those who oppose God and oppose his people.

[ 5 : 48 ] And that, actually, is a very sobering message, isn't it? But at the same time as that, Malachi also had a wonderful word for those who do fear God, who honor his name, who revere him.

For them, he said, it will be a wonderfully different experience altogether. A truly wonderful picture that we heard. But for you who fear my name, the son of righteousness will rise with healing in his wings.

And you shall go out like calves from the stall, leaping, leaping. I want to look at these lovely pictures that describe the coming of Jesus.

We're going to do that over our various Christmas events this year. But that first picture tonight I want to look at is the one of the beautiful sunrise. And it's an image that was picked up in the reading we heard earlier in Zechariah's song.

Because when he sang for joy after the birth of his son John, and about Jesus' coming birth, he said, the sunrise has visited us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

[ 6 : 56 ] Jesus' coming, the coming of the Lord himself to his world will be like a beautiful sunrise, says the prophet. And it will be, without question, the dawning light of ultimate meaning for the whole of humanity.

Because he'll come to reveal all truth. All truth about this world and our lives and everything. That's what Malachi, the last prophet of the Old Testament, promises.

And that is exactly how Jesus himself describes his own coming into the world. And I want to focus on two aspects of that tonight. But before we do that, let's listen again to Joel singing some words from another of the prophets, Isaiah, about the wonderful brightness of this sunrise in the coming of Jesus Christ.

Why don't you wish you could sing like that? The coming of Jesus, said all the prophets, and said the apostles, and said Jesus himself, the coming of Jesus is the sunrise, that lights up the whole purpose of life in all its fullness.

His coming is the dawn of a new day in human history. In his light is the explanation of life, is the truth about life in all its fullness.

[ 8 : 27 ] Listen to what Jesus himself said of himself. For this purpose, he said, I was born, and for this purpose, I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth.

There is meaning, he says, in a world of confusion and ignorance and skepticism and cynicism. And Jesus Christ came to open our eyes to that ultimate meaning.

Jesus said those words to Pontius Pilate, and Pilate famously replied, what is truth? truth. Sounds very postmodern. It just goes to show, doesn't it, that there's nothing new under the sun.

So-called postmodern philosophy is just one more version of avoiding truth, avoiding its implications, which human beings have been doing since the very beginning. At least that's the claim of the Bible.

And St. Paul claims that God's truth has been abundantly evident in the very fabric of creation right since the beginning. But, he says, human beings have suppressed that truth and ignored that truth.

[ 9 : 35 ] And our ignorance, our agnosticism, he says, isn't an intellectual problem. It's a moral problem. Because if we want to believe something strongly enough, we can always manage to massage the data to fit our own prejudice, to fit our own profit.

And certainly, our generation today, I think it has to be said, tends to reject ideas about absolute truth, especially absolute moral truth. Because it seems, doesn't it, to curtail our desire for freedom. And that's what we want. We want freedom. We want autonomy. We want self-determination. But just for a minute, friend, would you consider the Bible's view on that?

The view of the Christian faith. Because it contends that this rejection of the ultimate truth in Jesus brings not liberty, but it brings slavery.

It brings not fulfillment, not joy that we seek, but it brings emptiness and confusion. And ultimately, it just brings despair. See, if you reject the Creator and His whole purpose for His creation, then the result will be confusion.

[ 10 : 55 ] It'll mean, won't it, that we don't know why we're here. We don't know who we really are. We don't know what we're really doing in our own lives. I can't imagine anybody wanting to be a referee, especially a football referee.

It seems that many players and many managers would rather there were no referees at all because they seem to complain so often and resent it so much whenever they blow their whistle. But just imagine, just imagine a football pitch with 22 players on it, but no one has a clue why they're there or how to play the game or what any of the rules should be.

Now, I know some folks in Glasgow think that sounds like an Edinburgh Derby at Easter Road, but just think about it. Imagine 22 players on a pitch but with no idea what the rules are, no idea what the boundaries of play are, and no idea what the goal is for.

There would be total confusion. There'd be no hope, would there, of a great game. There'd be no hope of any game at all if that was the case. But let me ask you, does our world, our world of humanity living on this planet, playing the game of life, does it resemble a perfectly ordered, well-drilled, synergistic teamwork of a great team, I don't know, Real Madrid or Barcelona, a team that knows and loves the game, that's working together like plot work towards a common goal and making a beautiful spectacle to behold.

Is that what human life on our planet looks like? Or does it actually look more like the chaos of everyone just out to do whatever they think is best in the game of life with no rules, with no boundaries, with everything just meaningless and purposeless?

[ 12 : 46 ] Certainly far from a beautiful thing to behold. What do our newspapers, what do our news media feeds tell us, do you think? Well, we're seeing chaos today, aren't we?

Wars. We're seeing an unprecedented backlash against governments, we're seeing huge frustration, huge anger in the populations in Europe and America and other parts of the world. And as I said, we're seeing terrible, intractable conflicts in different places in the world, not least the Middle East. You see, friends, the message of Jesus Christ is that if you reject God's truth about the meaning of life, the purpose of life, the universe, everything, including our own lives, then we will find ourselves living lives full of contradictions, full of confusion and ultimately full of absurdity. And that's never more evident, is it, than when human beings are trying to work together for whatever is perceived to be the latest great cause for the world. At the moment, I suppose it's the climate change industry.

Notwithstanding realization and growing skepticism among many, that a lot of it is just a money-making thing for scientists and governments and billionaires and so on, let's assume all of that is true and it is the great thing and it is all man-made and we have to do something about it.

[ 14 : 21 ] We still need to ask the question, don't we? Why? Why would we do that? Why would we bother to save the planet even if we can save the planet?

If we only exist by chance? If we're just an accidental collocation of atoms? We just happened to be formed into DNA and so on.

Why would we bother pressing on to do that if people like Professor Richard Dawkins is right, that we're just in existence to preserve our own DNA if we just dance to its music?

Why not just bury some pots of DNA ten miles down in the Arctic and preserve it forever and let our whole race die off? Because after all, we're no different to any other animals. Indeed, insects are amoeba.

No, no, we must preserve this planet for our grandchildren, we're told. But why should we bother even having children, never mind grandchildren?

[ 15 : 22 ] What's the point? Well, of course, we'll need somebody to look after us when we're old, of course. That seems rather selfish. But of course, why not be selfish?

Because if the selfish gene is really the truth about life, the science tells us that, why not just be selfish?

In fact, let's make selfishness part of the new national curriculum, a key subject to teach our children at schools to get better and better at it, if that's what's really important in life, the selfish gene.

It's just absurd, isn't it, when you begin to say that? And yet, here's the ironic, isn't it, because we're so desperate to preserve this planet and its future for generations yet unborn.

For the unborn of the future, when there's never been a time in history, certainly in our part of the world, when we've more systematically actually destroyed the unborn babies of this generation.

[16:27] Just think how absurd, just think how confused all of that is. People who are and yet, if somebody speaks out against that terrible devaluation and destruction of human life, they're likely to be called illiberal.

In fact, you're likely to be called a fascist, an extremist, a dangerous person. Think of the billions and billions of dollars to be spent on sending spaceships to Mars to find out if there's water there because it might prove to be crucial for the future survival of our species.

Well, we don't spend a fraction of that amount on Earth providing clean water for people who are already alive and are getting diseases all the time because of the lack of it.

Isn't that absurd? It's worse than absurd, really, isn't it? It's wicked. See, the human race actually, in reality, is like players on a pitch with no floodlights, rejecting any light, rejecting even to look at the rule book of the game, banishing the referee so that we've all got freedom to play the game of self-expression.

And the result of that is the world that we live in, the world that we see, the world that we know. No order, no purpose, no clear goal and no beauty or precious little.

[18:03] You see, into the fog of our human darkness and confusion, Jesus Christ brings light. He brings the light of ultimate meaning. Listen to the opening words from the Gospel of John.

Jesus was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made. Jesus Christ, God the Son, made this cosmos.

And therefore, he controls it all and explains it all. He gives meaning to it all. And above all, he gives meaning to our humanity, to who and what we are.

In him, says John, was life. And the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness.

The prophets foretold it, as Malachi promised. The sunrise will come. And now, in Jesus, it has come. There is light. It's the dawning of a new day in history.

[19:11] And what is indisputable is that the person of Jesus Christ changed history like no other person on this world. Jesus' coming is a sunrise that lights up the purpose of life in all its fullness.

And yet, the astonishing thing is that when he came, the earth gave him no welcome, only the welcome of a cross at Calvary.

Let's pause and sing of that before we continue. Jesus' coming is a sunrise that lights up the purpose of life in all its fullness.

But it's not only that. The coming of Jesus is the sunrise that lights up the path to that life in all its fullness. His coming really does mean the dawn of a new day in our human lives because in his light we can experience life in all its fullness.

Jesus said, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life. The light of life.

[20:31] I came, he said, that they might have life and have it abundantly. Jesus came to tell us as God in the flesh, he came to tell us what life is really all about.

He came to confirm the words of the law and the prophets all down the ages to his people Israel but also to shine his light to all the nations of the earth and to shine his light into all the lives of people in this earth.

To give his light to those whose lives and whose hearts are overshadowed and overwhelmed by the darkness of sin and of death itself. He came to give certain hope so that every such shadow will at last be destroyed.

That death itself, our great enemy, will at last be destroyed. Now that day is still to come. But it will come, the day of everlasting light, when there will no longer ever be any more night, when there will be no more sorrow, no more pain, no more suffering, when death itself will be destroyed forever.

That is what Jesus promised. He promised all of that when He returns in glory to reign. And that will be the full zenith of the sunrise, the glorious noonday of life everlasting.

[21:56] But His coming into the world at that first Christmas was the day break. It was the dawning of that light of ultimate meaning. It was the day break of life eternal for our world and for its people.

And the wonderful message of the Christian gospel, the wonderful good news of Christmas, is that that life, which is life in all its fullness, which is life eternal, that that life can be entered into now. Because Jesus coming is the sunrise that lights up the path to that life in all its fullness so that no one, no one needs fail to find it. Whoever follows me, says Jesus, will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life, even now.

Even now. Listen to these lovely words that encapsulate the significance of this great sunrise for the world in Christ's coming. It's the dawning of a new day. It's the message of a glorious possibility for every kind of need.

To the lonely and solitary, it speaks of an ineffable companionship. Emmanuel, God with us. And what a wonderful sustaining that can be.

[ 23 : 15 ] To the old and frail, it brings gentle hands and kind and the strength of the everlasting arms. To the sorrowing and the heartbroken, it pledges the oil of joy for mourning and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.

grace for the love of the love of God. And to those who have failed, who have been a disappointment to themselves and to those who love them, it means beauty for the ashes of their burnt out lives.

Even here, and they especially here, it is the promise of a new day. Friends, that is the wonderful reality in the message of Christmas.

In the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, there dawns a sunrise that lights up both the purpose of life in all its fullness, it's all about Him and about His glory, and it also lights up the path to that life in all its fullness.

Because it's all through Him and with Him and from Him. In Him, the Son of righteousness has risen with healing in His wings.

[ 24 : 24 ] peace. And yet, listen to Jesus' own verdict on the world's response to His glorious light.

The light has come into the world, He says, but men love darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.

Everyone who does evil hates the light and will not come into the light for fear His deeds will be exposed. Remember a friend of mine who works in the financial markets telling me a phrase that they use about corrupt firms in the world of finance.

Nothing disinfects like sunlight. That disinfection first comes, doesn't it, through exposing the dirt and the grime.

And that is what prevents people, many people, from coming into that light to find, to receive the eternal life in Jesus. It's the threat of that exposure that light brings.

[ 25 : 35 ] And we prefer to hide, don't we, in the darkness? But in doing so, our lives become truncated. And they just remain pale shadows of what they were meant to be, what they could be, if only, if only we hear His voice and come into the light and receive His light.

Friends, don't let that be you. Don't let that be you and the story of your life. Don't hide from the light of Jesus Christ this Christmas.

Jesus coming is the dawning of the light of ultimate meaning for this world. He came to reveal all truth and all joy and light to you.

Let me leave you with some of Jesus' last and most urgent words that He ever spoke. He said, the one who walks in darkness doesn't know where he's going.

While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light. I have come into this world as light, so that whoever believes in me, whoever believes in me, may not remain in darkness.

[ 26 : 55 ] While you have the light, believe in the light, says Jesus. For who but the Lord can give the shadows light, can break into the dark, and draw many from the night, none, none but the Lord.

But He can, and He does. Amen.