

Date: 20.6.21

Text: Malachi 3:13-4:6

Title: Compare the Pair.

Place: Swansea/Charlestown AM

File: Malachi 4

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Compare the pair. Do you remember those industry super ads that ran for over a decade on the TV? Same age. Same income. Same starting balance. But if she had switched to an industry super fund 15 years ago she would \$39,000 better off. And the ad ends with one person going up the escalator, getting ahead for the rest of their life while the other heads down the escalator, getting further and further behind.

The point being that these two women look the same but there is one thing where they are radically different. And that difference will show itself massively in the days to come. And that is the message at the heart of this last chapter or so from the book of Malachi. As we look around our world today it is hard to see a distinction between people. We often look the same. Do the same jobs. Live in the same sorts of houses.

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But there is a day coming where we really will be able to compare the pair. Because when the heat is on and we appear before the Lord on the final day of judgement. Some will end up in the furnace while others will feel the warmth of the sun. And you and I will be there on that day as well. So let us hear God's final warning in the OT. And let us make sure we know what is the one thing that will make the difference. Which will mean we are heading up the escalators of life rather than down them! And it all starts with

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1. The Futility (verses 13-15)

¹³ *"You have spoken arrogantly against me," says the LORD. "Yet you ask, 'What have we said against you?'"* ¹⁴ *"You have said, 'It is **futile** to serve God. What do we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the Lord Almighty?"*

Malachi starts by identifying a group of people who are asking one another, What's in it for me? All this talk about serving God. Worshipping God. Giving our tithes to God. What good is this? Its useless. There seems to be no benefit for us. It has no cash value. Why is that?

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¹⁵ *"But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly, evildoers prosper, and even when they put God to the test, they get away with it."* It's a waste of time because if you look out in the real-world people are getting away with pure murder. Look at all those rich people who are making a killing at the expense of

the little man. Look at all those who are using their power to avoid justice being done. And look at me. I have always tried to do my best and to care for those around me and it has got me nowhere. Absolutely nowhere.

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When you compare the pair, the good are not the ones getting ahead but the evil ones are. Those who serve God do not get any special treatment, instead often it feels like we are at the back of the pack, the end of the queue. And so some of the people of God say to God, serving you is just isn't worth it.

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Have you ever said that to yourself? It is just not worth it anymore. I have been on the Church cleaning roster for years and no one ever seems to appreciate it. They just think a fairy makes things spick and span every Sunday! I teach Kids Church or SRE and the kids and their parents don't seem to be thankful at all. I have given money to the church for years, generously and yet the Church wasn't there for me when I needed them. Its futile to serve God. Its just not worth it!

But do you notice where the emphasis lies in those comments? On me. Its self-centred not God-centred and being self-centred is one of the curses of our age. Today it is hard for two self-centred people to sustain a marriage. It is hard for self-centred parents to deal with self-centred children. It is hard for self-centred children to cope with self-centred parents. It is hard living in a world where self-centred people try and get what they can out of their workplaces and communities and government. It is hard when self-centred people try and belong to a Church which is filled with other self-centred people. And self-centred people always find it hard to cope with a God who will not serve them as they want to be served.

That's what we find happening amongst God's people in the time of Malachi. When you compare the pair between the people who served God and those who didn't serve God, outwardly there didn't seem to be much difference. For some it was futile but others still

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2. (Had) The Fear (verses 16-18)

¹⁶ *"Then those who **feared** the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who **feared** the LORD and honoured his name."*

You see not everyone was self-centred. Which is quite surprising because this is the first time in the whole of the book of Malachi where anything positive is said about the people of Israel. Yes, there were many who offered lame sacrifices. Many who questioned God. Many who didn't give their tithes to the Lord but there were still some who feared God. Maybe they were always there

but only God knew their names. Or maybe they had listened to the preaching of God's word and had responded to the prophet Malachi and now feared God?

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But this verse shows there is always a remnant, a fraction of people who are real believers. There were some true Jews. They trembled at God's word. They were keen to worship him in awe and wonder. They realised that the eternal destinies of the righteous and wicked were totally different places and so feared God and put him first in all that they did.

And those who feared the Lord talked with each other. They had fellowship with each other. They encouraged and strengthened one another. I am sure they also knew that the wicked seemed to be prospering. They understood that serving God didn't always bring about immediate returns for them and their family so they talked with each other & God heard.

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God listened and he heard. And they are not the same thing, are they? I can listen to you when you come to me with a complaint but I have only heard that complaint when I understand what has happened and then see if I can do anything about it. And God listens to these people and God hears them. He really hears them.

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Imagine God not just hearing our prayers given to him in Jesus' name but God also

eavesdropping on all our conversations as well? Imagine him knowing about everything we say and hearing everything we say. Really hearing it. That's pretty special, isn't it? And that is because we are God's special possession.

¹⁷ "On the day when I act," says the Lord Almighty, "they will be my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as a father has compassion and spares his son who serves him. ¹⁸ And you will again see the distinction between the righteous & the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not."

Those who fear God are his treasured possession. He writes our names and our concerns in a scroll of remembrance. He wants to treat us as a son or a daughter not a slave and so as a father he desires to give us compassion. He promises there will be a distinction between the righteous and the wicked.

So, who of us are righteous and who of us are wicked? Well God answers that in the very next phrase. The righteous are the ones who serve God and the wicked are the ones who serve themselves. The righteous are the ones who fear God and the wicked are the ones who fear everyone else but God. The righteous are the ones who have fellowship with other believers and the wicked are the ones who can't see anything in it for themselves.

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You see we might look around and try and compare the pair, compare the wicked with the righteous and outwardly they may look pretty similar. But the day is coming when God will reveal his treasures. And that is the day where the distinction will be clearly seen. It may not be seen today. But one day some of us will take the escalator upwards and others will take the escalator downwards. One day the investments that we have made in this life will bring us massive returns that are clear to everyone. Which means that we need to be ready for that day, today. The day when God sends

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3. The Furnace (4:1-3)

And that day seems to dominate our passage this morning. Malachi 3:17, “They shall be mine in **the day** when I make up my treasured possession.” Malachi 4:1, “For behold, **the day** is coming... **The day** that is coming shall set them ablaze.” Malachi 4:3, “They will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on **the day** when I act.” Malachi 4:5, “Behold, I send you Elijah the prophet before **the great and awesome day** of the LORD comes.”

Martin Luther once famously said, “there are only two days on my calendar: today and the day of judgement.” Today and the last day. That is how important that day is! So, is it on your calendar? Is it in your diary? Is it on your phone? Now I know that no-one knows when that day is coming so it is hard to put it into your phone. But you could put a reminder that the day is coming? What if every year we logged a day to remember that day? Or every month or every week or what about us doing it today?

4 *“Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the LORD Almighty. “Not a root or a branch will be left to them.”*

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I was invited around to a friend's place a couple of Saturday nights ago and they had a fire pit, it seems to be the trend at the moment, doesn't it? And they put in the logs and they burned and at the end of the night there was nothing left. Just a few ashes. And God is not saying I am having a party with a fire pit come along and warm yourself from the cold. He is saying that one day you will be invited to my place and there will be a furnace there & let us see what will remain from everything that you have done in this world.

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I wonder what's going to be left from our lives here on earth? A day is coming when God will turn the heat up! A bushfire is coming to your house and we will see whether you have your bush fire plan up to date. At the moment you are trying to compare the pair & everyone looks pretty similar at least on the outside. But a day is coming when all we have produced will be tested by fire; & if what we have done is just hay and stubble then it will be burned up.

So our careers will disappear before our very eyes. Our homes might go up in an instant. Our wealth, our possessions, our hopes and dreams might be burned completely. You know when you turn on the TV and you see the results of a bushfire that is a warning to us all. One day we might be in that position. So get ready for that day. That is what is coming our way on the day of judgement. A day when not a root or a branch will left on many people's trees.

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But for others it is not the heat of a bushfire that is coming their way but the warmth of the sun. ² *"But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays."* That heat doesn't just destroy, it grows. That heat doesn't mean your investments go down to ashes, it means the return on your investments multiply, 10, 100, even 1000 times.

The sun of righteousness will bring you healing. The sun of righteousness will lift you with its wings. The sun will not burn you it will awaken you. The night is now over and the day has begun. The old era has finished and the new one is about to start. The world around us will be transformed like the earth is transformed by the first light of the new day. This day God will flood the earth with righteousness. He will set everything right. He will restore everything back to the right order.

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Don't you love it when you are on the beach facing east and the sun rises? Now you can see everything clearly. Before that we are fumbling around in the dark. If we were to try and compare the pair, see the fate of the people around us we just couldn't do it. But now the sun makes everything clear. Now the sun has risen and spreads it light to the whole earth.

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And the result? *"And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves."* ³ *Then you will trample on the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act," says the LORD Almighty.* When I let my dog outside in the morning Cuddles jumps for joy! And when the Israelites would release their cattle after the winter in their barns, they would almost dance. They are free, finally free. And they get to enjoy all the good stuff they had missed out over the wintertime.

And that is what is going to happen to God's people on the day of judgement. They will jump for joy. For they are finally free. Released from a body that was ravaged by sin. Freed from all temptations to sin. Not controlled by self interest anymore. And that is true of our loved one when they have passed away. They trade in this earthly tent for a heavenly mansion. And so when they get to heaven all believers are truly jumping for joy.

Is that how you feel today as you reflect that day? Are you so excited and in love with your

Saviour that you act like a new calf just released from the stall? What have we been released from? The chains of sin! What have we now avoided? The penalty of death! How can you not want to leap and dance for joy? Thank you, Jesus! What a blessing! One of my old ministers used to end his prayers not just with an Amen. But with Amen and Amen!

So, if you think it is not worth it today to serve the Lord, think again. If you are wondering what is in it for me, then ponder this day. The dawn will come. God's blessing will arrive in all their fulness. But maybe when we compare the pair today, we should be able to work out the follower of God by their dance moves, by the smiles on their faces. By their joy!

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And maybe, just maybe God has sent this message today via the prophet Malachi to remind us that this is real. The sun is going to rise. The heat is going to come and God wants you and I to get ready. To be prepared. Yes that day has yet to come but it hasn't come yet because God is patient. He wants all to turn to Him. He is giving us time to repent.

But that is a risky strategy. Because we might say to ourselves, "Malachi spoke about this 2400 years ago and nothing is happened. And in the meantime the arrogant are getting ahead and the evil doers are still prospering. It is just not worth serving God. There is nothing really in it for me". But God is giving us another chance today. And it might be our last chance today. Turn from your sins. Come to Jesus Christ. Be ready for the day. That day. And as if God hasn't done enough for us yet He ends the book of Malachi by pointing to

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4. The Forerunner (Mal 4:4-6)

For God is calling his people back to Him urgently. He has already sent his people Moses who has given them God's law and decrees. So, they need to remember that. They need to keep listening to God's word through Moses and Joshua and David. All they need is there. Don't forget what I have told you, God says to his people. But before God goes offline he is going to send one more prophet. *"I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. ⁶ He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with chaos."*

I will give you one last chance. Before I come. Before the day of the Lord suddenly appears, I will send you the guy who turned the nation of Israel around in the past. Elijah. He was then a catalyst of change. He changed the destiny of God's people. And because he never died and went straight to heaven, I am

going to send him back down to you. And he will change your hearts and turn them away from yourself and onto others and onto God Himself.

For the hearts of many a father is on their careers, on their financial security or their own happiness and it shouldn't be on these things. It should be on their family. And the hearts of many of children is on getting their own way and it should be on our father, our heavenly father. And so, God is sending the prophet Elijah to change all of that.

But if there is no change, a curse will remain. **The curse.** They are the last words of the OT. Actually, curse is the very last word of God for over 400 years. And for the Jew who doesn't believe in the NT it is still God's last word. Curse. So the people of God lived under the curse

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5. (until) The Fulfilment.

For almost the next page of our Bibles is the book of Matthew, where we hear of a guy who dresses a bit like Elijah, in camel hair and eats what Elijah used to eat locusts and wild honey and he spoke like Elijah used to speak "Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand... Prepare the way for the Lord."

Here is the voice of Malachi calling, here is the voice of Elijah calling, calling people to get their hearts right with God. This one like Elijah says in Matthew 3:11 *"I baptise you with water for repentance but the one coming after me will baptise with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."*

You get it? The fire is coming. The day of the Lord is coming. Jesus is coming. He is the one who is either going to set your heart on fire and bring you back to God or set your life and eternity on fire, where nothing will survive. Jesus is the one who came and brought healing to the leper & the blind man and those who were consumed by their sin. Jesus was the son of God who gives us the Holy Spirit which means our lives can be filled with righteousness.

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But not our righteousness but His righteousness. And Jesus was the one who one day met with both Moses & Elijah on the Mount of transfiguration. Moses the one who represented the law and Elijah the one who represented the prophets speaks with Jesus. And then they hear God say "this is my Son, my beloved, with him I am well pleased. Listen to Him."

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And this Jesus, according to the apostle Paul, bears God's curse when he takes the sins of the world on his body and dies on the cross. This Jesus yells out in pain, in torture "God, my God why have you forsaken me" because as he hangs

there, he bears the full brunt of the curse from God. Destined for the Jews. Destined for the Gentiles. Destined for you and me.

Listen to what Paul says in Galatians 3, ¹³ *Christ redeemed us from **the curse** of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole."* ¹⁴ *He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit."*

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The curse is turned into a blessing because of Jesus' work on the cross. And that means when we turn to Revelation 22, the last book of the Bible we read in verse 3 that in heaven there will no longer be any curse. And the last verse of the Bible doesn't end with a curse but with grace. Verses 20-21, *"He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon."* Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. ²¹ ***The grace of the Lord Jesus** be with God's people. Amen."*

You get it? The day of the Lord holds no fear for the Christian, just grace. No curses just Christ. Yes, judgement is still coming but Jesus has backburned a place where we can be safe. Why has he done that? Well the book of Malachi started off by saying you are loved by God. And it ends by saying we are his treasured possession. How special is that?

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Why don't we put that in our phone and our diaries as well? We are loved by God. We are God's treasured possession. As well as we need to be ready for that day. Those three things should be enough to make us want to trust in Christ. Follow Christ and live for Christ all day, everyday, including today.