

Wake Up, Cynic!

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[0 : 0 0] Well, it's a blessing to be here with you guys. Wonderful. It's been a while. I think the last time I spoke with you, I brought the Word of God on a Sunday was over a year ago, maybe two or three years ago even.

So I'm glad I get to be here with you. It's a delight. And I bring greetings from King of Grace Church and Haverhill Mass. And we're grateful for the connection with you guys and all that God's doing here.

What I want to look at this evening is the book of Malachi. It's a book written for the people of God struggling with spiritual lethargy.

It teaches us that we wake up out of spiritual slumber by seeing God for who He really is. And that's really what the book is about. It's a call from God around many different topics.

But a call for the people of God to return to the Lord, to wake up and to see Him for who He really is. It was given to a people who had replaced God-fueled hope and vitality with myopic cynicism and slumber.

[1 : 0 1] And I think it applies to us today because we, like those who are the original audience from Malachi's prophetic word, we too can trade hope and vitality for cynicism and slumber.

Jason Dusing, in his book, *Mere Hope, Life in the Age of Cynicism*, writes the following. With instant global interconnectedness alerting us to all forms of tragedy and conflict, our society appears to have defaulted either to resigned despair or distracted indifference.

When regularly our leaders disappoint us by their actions and their human flaws are flouted and magnified due to our relentless and merciless scrutiny, it's easy to see why many have come to a collective understanding that no one can stand with a message of hope.

Once a small genre of fiction literature, dystopian-themed novels, games, and movies seem now to be the predominant world in which entertainment takes place, and increasingly in the real world as well.

Hope, rather than dystopia, is the fiction of our day. What happened? Going to quote Mohamed Farouz, he writes, The age of anxiety has given way to an age of cynicism.

[2 : 2 2] Among my generation, cynicism is no longer a bad word. It's being celebrated, and it is often mistaken for intelligence. The age of cynicism, Farouz continues, is where it is better to be wry and distrustful than to be open and trusting.

And Dusing says, Christians should take heed, for we, as those living in this world, are prone to bend toward it. Often the pull toward cynicism is easier to follow than the struggle to resist.

Sarcasm comes too easily. Complaining is default small talk, and despair can mark us more than joy. I think he's right in his assessment.

And God does not leave us alone to kind of figure this out on our own. He gives us his word. And his word has truth, and his word has power to address us in our cynicism, in our struggle with cynicism.

And this book was written for people who were struggling with cynicism. If you don't know the storyline, what had gone on with the people of God at the time, they had come back from exile, and there had been wonderful promises of restoration.

[3 : 33] There were wonderful promises for the people of God going back hundreds and hundreds of years, and God had blessed them in so many ways. They had rebelled, and after really hundreds of years of gross rebellion, God finally brought what he said he would.

He brought discipline. And exile on them. But then miraculously, he brought them back. He restored them as a people after military devastation. It really is just an amazing miracle, even just historically, what God did in bringing his people back and putting them back in the land.

But something happened along the way, and you can read it in other books of the Bible besides Malachi, and the book of Nehemiah and Ezra. They came back with wonderful promise, wonderful anticipation of what God might do, but things didn't pan out quite how they expected.

They ran into opposition. There were those opposing them around them. They were still under a foreign rule. They didn't have their own king.

Another people group there, the Edomites, had stabbed them in the back in the process, then taken over much of their territory. The governors of the surrounding territories were making life hard for them.

[4 : 45] The city was broken down. The walls were not put together. They were struggling economically, and there were some bad harvests and pest infestations. And in face of all this adversity and their heartfelt disappointment, cynicism crept in and took over.

And spiritual malaise became the M.O. of the day for the people of God. It polluted everything. And instead of believing in God and experiencing hope for the future and joy in the present, cynicism became the trait that marked them.

And that's where we'll pick up from God's Word. I encourage you to read this whole book, maybe this week even, to read through it. But I'm going to start in chapter 3, verse 13, as God addresses the people.

And this is the end of the book, and so he's in many ways bringing everything together to address them and address their hearts and call them to something besides cynicism. The title of the message is, Wake Up Cynic.

And it's a message for us as well today. So let's pray before we read God's Word that we might hear and respond. Lord, we thank you for your Word. We thank you, Lord, that you don't leave us alone.

[5 : 56] You love us enough to confront us, to speak to our thoughts and our heart, and to draw us back to yourself.

Thank you for your Word that's living and active, that works in our lives. And, Lord, we need to hear from you. We need the fresh repentance and faith and hope and joy that you intend for us.

All of us, O Father, have been affected by cynicism, and some of us are deep in it. And we pray, Lord, lift us out and make us your holy people. Draw all to yourself this evening, we pray in Christ's name.

Amen. Malachi chapter 3, verse 13. Your words have been hard against me, says the Lord. But you say, how have we spoken against you?

You have said, it's vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge of walking as in mourning before the Lord of hosts? And now we call the arrogant blessed.

[6 : 58] Evildoers not only prosper, but they put God to the test and they escape. 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.

Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between 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, 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 shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts. Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.

[8 : 16] 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 I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.

God's word from Malachi 3 and 4. What I submit to you, the central message here, is a call to not grow cynical, but to realize that God has this.

God's got this. Don't grow cynical. God's got this. So I want to first just look at this reality of cynicism in the text and in our lives. He tells the Israelites in the beginning, your words have been hard against me.

He says it earlier actually in chapter 2 as well, that their words have wearied him. The wording here is stronger. These are not words that are just slightly off, but these are words full of grumbling.

God is stepping up his rebuke and summarizing the core problem with the Israelites in Malachi's day. They've lost sight of God, and they've exchanged faith and hope and love for doubt and cynicism and compromise.

[9 : 31] And brothers and sisters, this is happening in our age as well, and it happens in our lives as well. They had lost sight of God, and they can only see themselves and their problems.

Any mention of God is to blame him. Any thought of God only brings deeper bitterness. Now they're facing difficulties that are part of God's discipline on their lives because they are wandering and God's seeking to bring them back.

But they're also facing difficulties that are just part of life. Life in this world until Christ returns and makes all things right has trials, has difficulties.

And those difficulties come in seasons on both the wicked and the good. And as they struggle with these difficulties, whatever they might be in particular, they're turning away from God, not towards him.

The Lord calls us to turn towards him. He calls us to build our houses on the rock, not on the sand. The storms and the floods come against both houses, the one on the rock and one on the sand, but the one on the rock stands, the one on the sand is washed away.

[10 : 45] And often that experience of being washed away is not so dramatic. It's often a gradual cynicism and bitterness and a loss of hope and just going through the motions that eventually leads to walking away.

Think about it, right? If you know people that are older and perhaps bitter have become cynical and walked away from the faith or walked away from hope, they weren't always like that.

Most people at some point in life have hope and are optimistic about the future. And it's how they deal with the difficulties in life that will shape and mold them and determine whether they end up fruitful and faithful or bitter and cynical.

That's what's going on here. They've faced difficulty and instead of turning to the Lord, they're turning away, they're turning to cynicism. So listen to how they talk.

It's vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the Lord of hosts? And now we call the arrogant blessed.

[11 : 55] Evildoers not only prosper, but they put God to the test and they escape. You might not say it that way. Maybe you or I would say it this way.

It's a waste of time to follow God. What do you really get for all this constant repenting and attempts at holiness? Why go to church?

Why give up a weekend day? Why go to small group? I'm too busy for this stuff. Why should I tithe? No one else does and they all seem perfectly fine without it.

Even the worst sort of people are doing well. How can it be that God cares? And if he doesn't care, why should I? Forget it.

If God doesn't keep up his end of the deal, I'm not keeping up mine. I'm done. More or less what the Israelites were saying and maybe what enters our own minds at times.

[12 : 51] The bane of the believer actually is to be walking with God or at least appearing to walk with God while you forget God. while you turn away from him. Such a person is to be pitied.

There are many better ways to live than in that place of pretending and going through the motions and yet feeling like it's not worth it. But the problem in all this, the problem with the Israelites, the problem with us, is the goal of our faith is off.

What's the expectation of someone with that orientation? I think often it's a sort of pragmatic self-realization program that we've signed up for thinking it's Christianity.

We think if we put enough effort into believing and doing good, we'll get back something in reward. And those things are often things like success in life, a good job, friends, maybe a spouse and kids, whatever else we might think constitutes the good life.

And we forget in this what it's really all about. And we set ourselves up for cynicism. Now the people of God would have been well served in the day of Malachi to turn to Psalm 73.

[14 : 11] And we as well are well served to turn to Psalm 73. For this is a psalm written by a cynic who learns the answer to the root of his cynicism. It says in Psalm 73, Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.

But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence.

For all the day long I've been stricken and rebuked every morning. Then he goes on, When my soul was embittered, when I was bricked in heart, I was brutish and ignorant. I was like a beast toward you.

Nevertheless, this is the turning point for the psalmist, Nevertheless, I am continually with you. You hold my right hand.

You guide me with your counsel. And afterward, you will receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you.

[15 : 22] My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. You see, God has something way better than a good career, stable friends, the good life.

And those things aren't bad, but God has something better and he wants us to set our heart on that thing that is better and it is the only thing that will sustain you and protect you from cynicism.

He gives us himself. himself. He gives us himself. That in him we might have true life and overcome and recognize all these other things are so much lesser that I can hold my hands open to them.

And if I have them, great. And if I don't, that's okay too. I've learned the secret of being content because I have him and he has me.

Jesus defines eternal life this way. This is eternal life that they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. Paul says, I've been crucified with Christ.

[16 : 40] It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me and the life I now live in the flesh. I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. When we are grumbling against God and tempted towards cynicism, it's likely we've lost sight of this truth that he has given himself wholly to us, bearing our sins on the cross, living the righteous life we never could, dying on that cross for us, rising again, on the third day, victorious over sin and death so that we might have his victory in us and through us.

Performing that work and then by the Spirit of God in time revealing that to us that we might have him holy and that he might have us. the cure to cynicism is to get your eyes off yourself and your circumstances and get your eyes on the Lord of mercy and glory who loves you so.

I think of this actually in ways that are analogous as a pastor who does a lot of marriage counseling. What I find in marriages often is when the spouses have their eyes on what they should be getting from that other spouse.

It usually leads to failure and what can happen is over years and years of doing that it's just all about how this person let me down, the other one let me down and you live in that place and the way that you break it, the way that they need to break it is to realize you know what?

The glorious God has given himself for me. All my sins are forgiven. I'm free, I'm forgiven in him and now I'm called in him as he's given himself to me to give myself to my spouse.

[18 : 39] So Ioint myself in this marriage not to what I can get but what I can give. Certainly there's receiving in a healthy relationship but that's not to be the primary orientation. So similarly in our walks with God when we get our eyes off of God you owe me I need this thing this is my dream you have to fulfill my dream but instead Lord you've given yourself to me holy I give myself to you holy however you want to use me when we live that way it protects us from bitterness and cynicism and you'll experience joy even in your trials.

So let me ask you what is it you've felt like God owes you? What is that thing that you're holding on to? What is that disappointment?

disappointment? Maybe there is something you were holding on to and it fell through and you're still holding on to it even though you don't have it and you never will. What is that thing? Let it go and give it to him he's given himself holy to you and find your life in loving him and worshiping others worshiping him and serving others find your life in him that will rescue you from cynicism.

don't be cynical put your eyes on the Lord that's the message of Malachi that's the message of scripture well Malachi goes on to give other things related to this the central idea here being don't be cynical God's got this and so what he talks about next is that God's got this he's paying attention this wonderful strength that we receive in this truth it says in 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 so while there were so many that were cynical there were those who feared the Lord there were those who put their eyes on the Lord and said Lord we're looking to you in our hardship in our trials we look to you and it says those who feared the Lord spoke with one another so there were ones who regard the Lord they spoke with one another isn't that interesting they spoke with one another and it says the Lord paid attention and heard them and a book of remembrance was written before him the Lord writes a book of remembrance of his people who are fearing him and looking to him they speak with one another about their situation probably about their temptations to be cynical as well this is hard

I'm disappointed my neighbors are all disappointed they've been complaining all the time this is hard but what are you doing how can we help each other they speak with one another it's likely actually where it says the Lord paid attention and heard them that actually that's a quote of what they spoke to one another because in the Hebrew the word them is not there there's no quotes in Hebrew so I think we can read it those who feared the Lord spoke with one another and said to each other the Lord's paying attention and he hears us they remind each other that God is paying attention that they are not on their own they're not lost to struggle with these things on their own but God is with them and this points to a reality that we need each other in all this we need encouragement we will always all of us will tend towards drifting away towards disappointment and towards cynicism but we need each other we need encouragement and so Hebrews 3 13 says parallel to this but encourage one another daily as long as it is called today so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness sin will deceive us and harden us and lead us towards cynicism but we need to encourage one another and remind each other that God is for us that he's given himself for us that he knows what's going on he takes note he pays attention here it says that he has a book of remembrance in Psalm 56 it says you have kept count of my tossings put my tears in your bottle are they not in your book so God himself is remembering and keeping record of your struggles of your petitions to him as you bring those things to him and say

[23 : 00] Lord help me in my disappointment help me in my loss and he brings comfort real comfort don't trade real comfort for the false comfort of cynicism but come to the Lord the God of all comfort 2 Corinthians chapter 1 it says blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ the Father of mercies and God of all comfort who comforts us in all our affliction so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with a comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God for as we share abundantly in Christ's suffering so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too God is one who's there to comfort us he knows what we're going through he's near to those who call upon him he's aware God's got this he's paying attention you're not on your own in your trials in your loneliness in your struggles you're not alone he is ever aware your tears are in a bottle as he notes what you're going through in the 1947 classic

It's a Wonderful Life and probably a lot of you have seen this more than once in the story George barely reaches the point of despair and is ready to take his life because it seems that everyone would be better off if he were dead but at that point in the movie heaven intervenes and the heavenly dialogue if you don't remember goes like this hello Joseph trouble looks like we'll have to send someone down a lot of people are asking for help for a man named George Bailey George Bailey yes tonight's his crucial night you're right little does George know that heaven has been watching all along his whole life and expecting this very moment of trial for him as the angel says tonight's his crucial night now although entirely fiction this tale this popular movie is based on a solid biblical truth that God is not surprised nor uninvolved heaven does take note of your life heaven is for you he's paying attention and he's ready to be there for you

God's got this so remember that he remembers remind each other of this speak with one another encourage one another daily remind each other that that he is for us I love the promise of Romans 8 32 it says he who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all how will he not also with him graciously give us all things if he's given his very son for you shedding his blood for your sins paying for your sins completely if he's already done that given them the most precious commodity ever for you how will he not take care of all this other stuff encourage each other with these truths be an agent of the encourager the Holy Spirit the Holy Spirit is the encourager and as you encourage each other he will be working in you to strengthen you in this let us fear the Lord and speak with one another let us remind each other that God's got this he's paying attention and then finally third point

God's got this he will make it right as it goes into chapter 4 Malachi says remember the law 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 the decree of utter destruction he calls his people to realize that he is making all things right he calls them to remember the law this lifestyle of faith and obedience that had been given to the people of Israel and then he speaks of a final day something he's going to do where he's going to make all things right and it's throughout the text here he says that he'll send this Elijah Elijah and we know from the New Testament that this Elijah actually is metaphorically

John the Baptist and he's sent before the great and awesome day of the Lord to turn the hearts of the children to their fathers and the fathers to the children actually if we look at the parallel verse in Luke chapter 1 we understand a little bit better what's being said it says and he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just to make ready for the Lord a people prepared so this isn't literal fathers and sons and fathers and children this is basically spiritual fathers and spiritual children because it says turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just so young disobedient ones to the wisdom of the word of God the wisdom of those who have been faithful before them so that's what's going on in the life of John the Baptist as he prepares

[28 : 48] God's people to receive Christ as king and so it's interesting to note as you read through it Malachi is saying there will be this great day that will come and Elijah will go ahead of me and work and the people to prepare them but when did that day of Elijah happen?

It happened in the days of Jesus and so we live in the days of fulfillment of the final days we live in the final days when Christ came those final days started and they'll be completed when he returns and so we live under the fulfillment of this promise of God making all things right he's already started in the ministry of Christ and most profoundly in his death and resurrection and he's continuing to work in our lives making things right and he will finish it when Christ comes back rewarding the faithful and bringing recompense to those who have refused to trust and follow him he says in Malachi 4 but for you who fear my name the son of righteousness will 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 as the Lord of hosts again the fullness of this comes upon his return but it has already happened in great measure the son of righteousness has risen already his name is Jesus and he has overcome our sin and overcome death and will finalize that victory and in him we have forgiveness and we have healing in him he promises that this son of righteousness shall rise with healing in the wings we have healing

Isaiah 53 teaches us he was pierced for our transgressions he was crushed for our iniquities upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace and by his wounds we are healed God's already been at work he's at work in our lives he's making things right he's rescuing us he's healing us he's restoring us he's leading us the promises to the people in Malachi's day are being realized now and we are part of that day and this truth is important because I think it adjusts us even more to recognize we live in this day that the Old Testament people the ones who feared the Lord in Malachi's day would have longed for if only I could be a part of what he's doing in Cambridge in 2021 as this work as this promise is being realized that adjusts us I think because we recognize we are so privileged in this grace that we have in Christ and privileged to be part of the mission of this going forward of him making all things right of him winning people from all tribes and tongues people and nations he is making things right and he will finalize it and he will reward those who have looked to him and feared his name those who have turned aside those who have let cynicism rule them and take them to its final the final destination it takes them they will receive judgment but those who have said

I'm going to look to the Lord I'm going to trust in the one who's given himself fully to me there will be blessing and reward he has this he's making all things right he's working now he's bringing redemption he's bringing healing and we get to be a part of that don't give up don't lose hope God's got this and he will make it all right and he is doing that now in Malachi's day we could say that they were in the first half of a football game we're definitely in the second half we might even be in overtime I don't know don't lose heart as you're called to this football game so to speak now if you're a Patriots fan you've learned it's not over until it's over four years ago they played the Falcons and I watched it with a lot of my friends we watched the game together

I don't know if you watched that Super Bowl game midway through the third quarter there were a lot of cynical people it was doom and gloom but it all changed imagine if Tom Brady during halftime had grown cynical you can imagine him in the locker room and I don't know what he would have been like in the locker room but imagine him in the locker room thinking why should I continue it always goes this way we get behind and then they expect me to do something about it I'm sick of it it's your fault I'm done I'm not going to give any try it's not it's not going to work they're so far ahead of us just forget it I give up this is just such a stupid game anyhow but he didn't and they came back we have someone much better than Tom Brady who's our captain and he's at work and you might feel in your life that it's 28 to 3 you're down right now but the king of kings is for you and with you and he's going to work in your life and through you to accomplish things that are beyond your imagination he wants to form you into the image of Christ the most wonderful thing he wants to use you to help make things right to bring the gospel to others that they might encounter him he wants to use you together corporately as a church to image who Jesus is to this area to show the glories of God he's at work we live in an amazing time

[34 : 31] God has a lot for you to do get in the game don't grow cynical put your eyes on the Lord God's got this he's paying attention he will make all things right brother or sister I plead with you to examine your heart and see where it may have grown cynical take that to God ask him to help you ask him to help you look to him ask him to help you remember he's paying attention he's making all things right let's pray Lord we thank you for your word thank you for Malachi thank you for these truths thank you for your care for us Lord we need you because we do tend to grow cynical and we want to have fresh hope and fresh strength and we want to follow you we want to remember we want to serve we want to be in what you're doing this game so to speak this wonderful plan you have so I pray work in our hearts draw us to yourself and lead us in your ways we pray in Christ's name
Amen Amen