

Messenger!

A Journey Through the Burden of Malachi

Malachi 4:1-3

13- The Sun of Righteousness Will Rise With Healing in Its Wings

November 24, 2019

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1 "For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze," says the Lord of hosts, "so that it will leave them neither root nor branch."

2 "But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall."

3 "You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing," says the Lord of hosts.

To the Glory of God

Sometimes it would be beneficial if we would all just slow down and ponder what is right in front of us. Sometimes the biggest and the most important things in the world just pass before our eyes, and we don't really see them, or pay any attention to them. And so, they don't really have the impact on our thoughts and our emotions the way they *could*, if we just stopped and pondered them for a while.

And this is *especially* true of the significance of the "Coming" of Jesus, the Christ to this earth, 2,000 year ago. There are undisputed historical effects of the Reality that Jesus actually came to this earth that are *so* huge, *so* monumental, *so* earthshaking, and *so* important that, if we are not careful, we miss them in the same way that we miss actually seeing the sky, or pondering the air we breathe, or the ground under our feet. We usually never give these things a thought. But when we do slow down enough to actually ponder them, they're absolutely breathtaking.

So, please allow me to mention just three. And the reason I begin this way is simply to show you that the amazing Impact that Jesus Christ has had on this world has been *so* immense, *so* all-consuming, *so* utterly amazing, that even *before* we turn to the Bible we are confronted with a staggering choice this morning in relation to this Man that the angel named "Jesus".

First: Because Jesus came, and did what He did, and said what He said, over one third of the entire population of the world today calls itself "Christian". That is, 2.3 billion people of the world's 7 billion have come "under the sway" of a single Man who lived and died and rose again 2,000 years ago. That is amazing! Now I'm not foolish enough to believe that all of those people are actually saved, but, to one degree or the other, most of the people alive today, and who have *ever* been alive over the last 2,000 years, have been influenced, *to some extent*, by this one Man, Who said He was God Almighty in human flesh.

Not only that, but "Christianity" itself, the "body of Teaching" that makes up what Jude called the "once for all delivered to the saints, Faith", is the most *extensive* and *universal* Religion in the history of the world. Nothing else even comes close to the *impact* that Christianity has had on this planet. There are "followers of Jesus", and there are "bodies who assembly regularly" to worship this God/Man in every inhabited country of the world! And in two-thirds of the world's 223 countries, the population is over 50% "Christian"!

So, the first *indisputable* Significance of the "Coming" of Jesus is that the Life of this one Man has influenced more people over the course of human history than any other single man. Buddha, Confucius, Mohammed, and even Moses pale by comparison.

Second: Virtually every person in the modern Western world (as well as most of the non-Western world) uses a number to describe the year we are living in. People call this year "2019". Now some say "Twenty-nineteen". But, why a number? And what does that number actually mean? The only reason that everyone from international financiers to local butchers, From Presidents to car salesmen, From doctors to teachers, From attorneys and to computer programmers, and From scientists to housewives, all use the number "2019" to describe this year is because approximately 2,019 years ago, a Baby was born in a manger over in Bethlehem.

No other Human in all of history has been accorded the almost *universal* Honor of dividing the existence of Mankind into two halves: “*Time before the Christ*” (B.C.), and the “*Year of the Lord*” (*Latin: Anno Domini, A.D.*). And this Honor is attributed to the fact of what the Apostle Paul wrote down, as God the Holy Spirit “moved him along” in **Philippians 2:9-11**:

For this reason also, God highly exalted Him [Jesus], and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus *EVERY KNEE WILL BOW*, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

There is coming a day when every adherent to every other Man-made religion and human philosophy, along with every atheist, and every agnostic, and every rebel, who refused to bow, every soul, who had a complaint against Jesus, along with every tormented soul in hell, will be *forced* to bow down. And their tongues will be loosed in their mouths and they will be *forced* to cry aloud, “*Jesus Christ is Lord!*” And they will glorify God on that day.

But those who, by God’s Grace, have *ended* their rebellion against this single Man have the *incredible* Privilege and Delight to bow down NOW, to cry out NOW, and to worship Jesus, NOW! But, one day, *everyone* will bow, and *everyone* will cry out.

But, even now, hundreds of millions of people who have not yet bowed, and who have not yet cried out, are *forced* to “bear witness” every single day of their lives to the indisputable and on-going Importance in the world of this one, single Man, named “Jesus” by the number used to designate what year it is.

Third: All over the “Western world”, and in a large part of the “non-Western world”, businesses close, people get off from work, commerce ceases, and lives are at “rest” because one day of every week is considered to be a “mini-holiday”. Now, granted, this is *waning* in our day (to our great shame and destruction), as “Western Civilization”¹ is being *systematically* dismantled before our eyes. Yet, even now,

¹ The term, “Western Civilization” (as used by this writer) refers to a Civilization that is based on the premise that all of life should be understood and lived through the lens of both the Old and New Testaments.

"Sunday" is *seen* differently and *lived* differently, by more people, than any other day of the week.

Even pagan Cultures recognize a distinction between "Saturday" and "Sunday". And just thirty-one days from now, almost the entire population of this country will be off from work, and home with their families, to celebrate the Birth of a Baby, Who was conceived by a miracle and a scared young virgin.

In other words, the religious, historical, and cultural Significance of the Birth of Jesus Christ is *so huge, so monumental, and so vast*, that, periodically, the entire world stops to notice. And that fact, in and of itself, before we ever turn to the Bible, confronts you and me with a profound Choice:

1. Will we ignore this Man and take Him lightly in spite of Him being the most influential Man who ever lived?
2. Will we inquire earnestly into just *Who* this Man was, and *what* He said, and *what* He did, and *why* He has changed the world so profoundly?

... in other words, *why* has the Coming of this one Man had this kind of effect on the entire world? Let's listen first to three Witnesses who lived back in the First Century, and who either knew Jesus *personally*, or spoke often with those who did.

Witness #1: Dr. Luke (1:30–38)

This Gentile medical professional wrote an amazing two-volume masterpiece about the Life of Jesus and the diary of the first 30 years of the Christian Church. (**The Gospel according to Luke**, and **The Acts of the Apostles**). Dr. Luke was commissioned by the Apostle Paul to write down this Gospel around AD 60 or 61, some 32 years *after* the Resurrection.² Now by the time that **Luke** wrote this Gospel account, 10 of the 21 New Testament Epistles and 2 Gospel accounts had already been written. **James, Galatians, 1&2 Thessalonians, 1&2 Corinthians, Romans, Philemon, Colossians, and Ephesians** had been recorded, and were in wide

² My own calculations show me that Jesus was probably born about 4BC. If He was 33 when He died- His Crucifixion would have been around the year of AD29. If Luke wrote his Gospel Record in the years of AD60- 61 that would have been approximately 32 years after the Resurrection.

circulation as far away to the West as Britain, and as far away to the East as India when the **Gospel of Luke** was completed.

The Epistle to the Romans, which alone contains almost 65% of all Christian Doctrine, had been completed and was being taught in all the Christian Churches and in the early Theological Schools for over 5 years *prior* to **Luke** being written. And both Gospel accounts of **Matthew** and **Mark** had already been written. And Luke *began* his Gospel Record by writing to a Roman dignitary and saying:

Luke 1:1-4

Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.

Luke personally interviewed the mother of Jesus, and others who knew Jesus, and who had actually seen what Jesus did, and who had talked with the Lord. And in a day of widespread "Journalistic Malpractice", it's important to note that Dr. Luke actually checked his sources, and *verified* the information *before* he wrote it down. And he tells us that an Angel from Heaven (Gabriel) came to Mary before Jesus was born and . . .

... said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. For nothing will be impossible with God." And Mary said, "Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her.

So, Dr. Luke's Answer to the Question of "*Why Jesus has had such awesome influence in History*" is:

- ✓ Jesus' Birth was a miracle
- ✓ He was conceived by the Holy Spirit of the Most High God
- ✓ His mother as a virgin
- ✓ He will be "Great"
- ✓ He is therefore the "one and only" Son of God
- ✓ He is a King Whose Kingdom will never end

Witness #2: Matthew (Levi) (1:20–24)

Matthew was a wicked tax collector who was instantly born again, and became a disciple of Jesus, an Apostle, and, later on, a writer of another Gospel Record. Matthew was *personally* with Jesus for about three years. And this man writes about the agony that Joseph went through in going ahead and marrying Mary, because she had suddenly become pregnant, and said that an Angel had appeared to her and told her a fantastic Story:

But when he [Joseph] had considered this, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet [Isaiah]: *BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL,*" which translated means, "*GOD WITH US.*" And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took *Mary* as his wife,

So, Matthew's Answer to the Question, "Why has Jesus had such an Impact on world history?", is that Jesus' Birth was:

- ✓ The Result of a supernatural Conception by the Holy Spirit
- ✓ That Jesus is a Savior from Sin
- ✓ That He is "God with us."

Witness #3: John (1:1–4, 14)

Like Matthew, John was one of the 12 Apostles. But he was evidently the closest of all, and so, he became responsible for Jesus' mother after Jesus ascended into Heaven. And John begins his Gospel Record by identifying Jesus as the "Eternal Word of God":

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men. And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

So, John's Answer to the Question, "Why has Jesus had such a profound Influence on the world?" is that:

- ✓ Jesus is the Eternal Word of God
- ✓ Jesus is God
- ✓ Jesus became flesh
- ✓ Jesus revealed the Glory of God
- ✓ Jesus is the only Source of all spiritual Life and Light

Now the upshot of all this is that the Choice we are confronted with today is not only whether the amazing, historical Influence of Jesus will move you to search out a satisfying explanation, but also whether you will agree with the Explanation given by the Biblical Witnesses. So, will you agree:

- ✓ That there is a God Who created and sustains and rules the Universe?
- ✓ That this God has a Purpose for all of history?
- ✓ That this God is "three in one": One in His Essence (Substance) and yet three individual and distinct Persons of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit?
- ✓ That the Father sent the Son into the world?
- ✓ That the Son was conceived of a virgin by the Holy Spirit?
- ✓ That this Son/Word was both God and Man?

- ✓ That this God-Man, Jesus Christ, was a King Whose Reign will never end?
- ✓ That by His sinless Life, Vicarious Death, and Bodily Resurrection, He alone will save God's people from all their Sin?
- ✓ That He alone revealed the Glory of God and taught the Truth?
- ✓ That He fulfilled the Old Testament Promises of a Messiah?
- ✓ That He is, therefore, the Key to understanding all of History and all of Life, including your own?
- ✓ That He *deserves* and is *entitled* to our Love, and our Devotion, and our Glad Obedience?

Now there are many reasons why people don't give whole-hearted agreement to the Biblical Witness about Jesus Christ. There are many excuses as to why people hold back from full-bore, white hot commitment to what the Birth of Jesus and His Life and His Death and His Resurrection really means; many reasons why they watch the "Drama of Redemption" unfold throughout all of History and yet remain nothing but a spectator instead of a participant.

And sometimes, it isn't because they see logical or historical Obstacles. Instead, it's often because they don't see that it really makes any difference. The whole thing seems irrelevant to our modern American life. It just doesn't connect with many of the things that we have deemed to be important today.

With the advent of Capitalism and the unbelievable Freedoms that we are guaranteed by the Constitution, rank blasphemers and pagans can become prosperous, and live good and long lives in the United States. And so, fantastic claims from an ancient Book become like some esoteric scientific claim about a molecule. It may well be true, but the likelihood of it making any difference to my immediate life is so remote that I hardly need to make any commitment to the "truth" of the "molecular theory". Leave that for the scientists. And so, the reasoning becomes *"All this 'Jesus talk' is best left to the theologians"*, because I've got my own life to live.

And so, about 400 years before Jesus was born, God the Holy Spirit "moved along" the Prophet Malachi to give him five very distinct Images of the Coming of Jesus Christ to the earth. And if God will help us this morning to "step into Malachi's shoes", so we can "see" the Lord's Coming in the way that the last Prophet of the Old Testament

saw it, we will see its relevance for our lives which will heal us from ever being indifferent to it.

What Malachi wrote is full of excitement and expectation that the Messiah was coming. Back In 3:1b, he said:

... 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.

... and then, in 3:2, he said:

... He is like a refiner's fire...

And this very same excitement and expectation is described again in 4:2, when he wrote:

But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall.

Now, in 4:1, Malachi has already warned that those who proudly resist God will be consumed with fire on the coming Day of Judgment. But then he has a different word to say to those who "fear the Lord":

... the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall.

When John the Baptist's father prophesied in **Luke 1:78**, he referenced this very Statement by Malachi and said that with the Coming of Jesus "**the Sunrise from on high will visit us**". 450 years before the father of the predicted Forerunner prophesied this- Malachi was used by God to say, "**the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings**". And Jesus has been "rising" all over this world ever since. And one day His Rise will reach its noonday brightness- and King Jesus will appear in Glory and the final Division between the "believing" and "unbelieving" will be made.

Now from this- we can conclude that the Account of **Luke 1** covers the last final hours of "spiritual Darkness" that permeated the entire world before that glorious Sunrise came with the arrival of the long-awaited Messiah.

Throughout all of Israel's history- we see a great "Drama of Redemption" that began with Abraham; a history of exile from 400 years of slavery; of wandering forty years in the wilderness; of the brutal and violent conquest of the land of Canaan; of the occupation of the land of Canaan; of seasons of captivity; the Northern Kingdom taken captive in 722 B.C., the Southern Kingdom taken into Babylon in 586 B.C.; the Northern Kingdom never returning; the Southern Kingdom returning seventy years later. Israel's long history of coming back out of Captivity and trying to rebuild; and then only to be oppressed again as Greeks invaded and controlled the land; and then Romans came and further oppressed them; the long night of Israel's History of both Blessings and Curses; the long night of Israel's history of faithfulness and then horrific apostasy.

And what sustained those who really looked toward God through all those long, long years of spiritual Darkness was the unshakable Hope that one day- the Sun would rise and would break through and change everything.

The last Book of the Old Testament was written by a Prophet. And Malachi infallibly promises here in the last Chapter of the last Old Testament Book that the Sun of Righteousness would rise with healing in its Wings. And Malachi was saying exactly what Zacharias said in **Luke 1:78**, "*Sunrise is coming! The Darkness is not permanent!*" Yet the Darkness is truly the *worst*- just before the Dawn.

There was nothing going on in the life of the average Jew of Malachi's Day that would ever give anyone the notion that the Messiah was soon to come. The Jews had become complacent and apathetic and bored with God. They were just going through the motions in their Worship. Nothing was real- nothing holy. They cheated each other as well as offering God animals in sacrifice that not even pagans would have accepted. They lied to God; and to their wives; and to each other. They robbed God or what they owed Him; and they were in the worst spiritual condition that anyone could possibly be in.

And yet all this terrible, deep, pervasive, spiritual Darkness was actually nothing more than a prelude to the brightest Day they could imagine. And this teaches us about the Absolute Sovereignty of God in our day as well. We look around and we see great weakness and compromise all around us. We see venerable Christian Denominations and groups, that have a history of exciting and glorious Victories in the

Gospel- crumbling right before our eyes. We see those who stand and proclaim outright heresy- applauded and elevated; while those who seek to remain faithful and pure- condemned and castigated. And we are tempted to despair. We are tempted to “circle the wagons” and do nothing more than try to “hold on” until Jesus can rescue us.

But based on what Malachi says here- we should resist those temptations- and be excited! And, like Malachi, we should loudly herald, “*Our God reigns!*” Because The concept of the Absolute Sovereignty of God means that the Will and the Word of the Owner and Creator of the Universe is not altered or changed because of the weakness of human flesh. The Promises of God are not diminished because of the lack of moral resolve. And the Plan of God to build His Church and sustain that Church against the very gates of Hades itself has not been removed from us- simply because weak and effeminate men act like weak and effeminate men.

Malachi said, “**the sun of righteousness will rise**”. And there was an *excitement* to this Statement. But there was also an *immediacy* to it. And yet, 100; and then 200; and then 300 and then 400 years went by and there was no Sun; and no rising. And things looked like they were getting worse. As one brutal Empire gave way to another- subjugating the people of God; insulting them- mocking their God and their Worship- the heavens were silent. Four long centuries went by. 146,000 days; 3,504,000 hours and there was no Voice; no Prophet; no Sign; no Miracle; no Angel; and no Sun of Righteousness.

Where was God? What about what Malachi said? Is God dead? Have the Promises of God failed? Is the Word of God not reliable? The Darkness continued and it got even darker. For four long centuries- Heaven was like brass. Prayers went up- but there was no Answer. It seemed as though their cries hit a ceiling and just bounced right back. And Israel sunk deeper and deeper into spiritual Depression- oppressed by the Greeks, whose ruler Antiochus Epiphanes actually had the unmitigated gall to step into the sacred Holy of Holies, the most holy place of the Temple, and desecrate those places, even sacrificing a pig on the altar. It was a time when the Gentile Greeks came in and brought their pagan gods; and their pagan theology; and mingled it in that sacred land with the people of Israel.

And the Greeks were followed by the brutal Romans- and the Roman idolatries. And this just made the spiritual Darkness all the

worse. And as much as the Jewish people cried out to God- God didn't speak and no Prophet appeared; and no Sun rose.

So, where was the Sun of Righteousness? No one dreamed it would be 400 years from the time the Prophecy was given to its fulfillment. Where was the Day of which Malachi also said,

You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing," says the Lord of hosts.

Where was the Day when Righteousness would finally triumph over Evil? It certainly looked like God had failed them and that Malachi was simply speaking nonsense into the wind. And yet God preserved a remnant. All through this bleak and horrible time- God had a faithful and believing people. He always does. This world has *never* been without a faithful and believing witness- and it never will. And so, they encouraged one another, *"The Prophet said it will come. The Light will break. The Dawn will come. The Sun will rise. It cannot fail. It is the Word of God. God cannot lie. God will never fail. He has promised. And He will perform."* And yet the Darkness got darker and darker.

So, at the worst and darkest and bleakest of times- at a time of great apostasy and sin; a time of horrific blasphemy and a time when it seemed as though everything was coming apart- God raised up this man- this one single man- to stand and proclaim what surely sounded like silly gibberish to many. But *loudly*; and *clearly*; and without any hesitation; and without the slightest degree of doubt- Malachi stood on his feet and said,

For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will 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 will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall. You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing," says the Lord of hosts.

... and if that wasn't impossible enough, he also said,

Malachi 3:1

Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear 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.

... and that's how the Old Testament ends. It ends with the Promise of Light; the Promise of the Sun of Righteousness coming; the Sunrise "on high"; the Light of the world; the Messiah; the Lord and Savior will come; and He will shatter all the Darkness!

And we can read all this in just a few seconds. But 400 long years went by before it happened. And that speaks to us- to believe and wait patiently for God. And during all that time- Israel not only sunk deeper into spiritual Depression because of oppressing nations occupying her land- but she sank deeper into Sin and Apostasy until by the time the **Gospel of Luke** begins- any Redemption seems utterly impossible. Because Judaism as it existed in the land of Israel was completely apostate. It had utterly abandoned the true message of the Old Testament and had fully and energetically embraced a false one. And it had traded the simple Command to love the Lord God with all their heart and with all their soul and with all their mind and with all their strength for a religion based on human effort and human works- that could not forgive a single sin or save a single soul. And Judaism remains completely corrupted to this very day.

It's important to realize there is a critical element of the Predictions that Malachi made that can't be overlooked. Yes, he said the Sun of Righteousness was Coming. But he also said that, *before* He comes- *before* the Sun Rises- *before* the Messiah, the Lord and Savior comes- there will come a Prophet to *announce* His Arrival; a herald, an Announcer. And he's often called a "Forerunner". But Malachi said he would simply be "My messenger". So, yes! There is coming the Sun of Righteousness. But before that- God's Messenger will come to announce the Arrival of the Sun of Righteousness- to announce the Dawn that will eviscerate the Darkness.

In fact, Isaiah spoke of him. Isaiah said he will be a "**voice in the wilderness**", crying out to, "clear the Way for the Lord". And this man will make smooth a highway for God. So, both Isaiah and Malachi said that *before* the Sun rises; *before* the Messiah comes- a Prophet will

come- who will point to God. And when the Messiah's Forerunner arrives- when that Prophet comes- the Silence of Heaven will be broken with the Voice of God; and the Darkness of the earth will be shattered with the Light of the Savior and Redeemer!

So, how will the world know when the Prophecy of Malachi is fulfilled? Because the Messiah will be preceded by His Forerunner. So, *before* the Sun of Righteousness; *before* the Sun rising from "on high" will come- this Prophet, this Forerunner will come. And he will announce the arrival of the Messiah! And when he comes- He will destroy the Wicked and He will vanquish the Evil ones.

But for those who fear the Lord; for those who are blessed by God to be gifted with the ability to wake up from their indifference and to escape their rebellion against the Lord- those who have been empowered to honor God and trust Him and strive to obey Him with Joy and Gladness- what does the "Coming of the Lord" mean? Malachi gives us five clear and amazing pictures:

1. A rising Sun
2. Beams of Righteousness
3. Wings of Healing
4. Go Forth
5. Worshippers leaping like calves

1. A Rising Sun

Malachi saw Jesus as a "Rising Sun." And that means at least two things:

1. Giving Light where there is Darkness
2. Giving Security where there is Danger

The Sun of Righteousness brings Light where there is Darkness. Because only when you have Light can you see. Jesus helps us see things like they really are. He makes sense out of confusing things. And in **John 18:37**- He said to Pilate,

You say *correctly* that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

... but Pilate mocked Him and said,

What is truth?

And that is the tragic and cynical cry of our Age: *"What is Truth?"* And people say this- *not* because they have a great Passion for Truth and want to get away from all the mindless dribble so they can possess nothing but Truth. No, people say this- because there is so much skepticism that any such thing as Truth could exist. And the effect of this skepticism and relativism is moral and intellectual and personal and family *bankruptcy!* Why do many families fall apart? Because they have no Anchor of Truth. The Husband and Father have no clear vision of why he or his children exist. And so, the best he can do- is to pass on a few tips on how to make more money or stay healthy. And the darkness and emptiness get deeper and deeper with each unbelieving generation. But Jesus is the Sun of Righteousness. He is the Light of the world. And He alone brings sense and meaning out of absurdity.

The second thing implied by Jesus being a "Rising Sun" is that He brings Security where there is Danger. When it is dark, there is always more Danger because you can't see the path in front of you. You might fall off a cliff; or trip over a log; or bang your head against a branch. But when the Sun rises- you can move with Security. And that's the way it is with Jesus. He points the Way. He reveals the Danger and the foolishness of our Thoughts and Actions- *before* we make them. He guards us from evil forces that only have power in the Dark.

So, when Jesus comes into the world- He comes as the Sun: He is both Light in the Darkness of Confusion; and He is Security in the Danger. He gives a fixed point of Truth in a world where every Standard seems to be coming unglued. And in doing this- He guards us from destroying our lives and He keeps us safe.

2. Beams of Righteousness

The Sun is a Sun with Beams of Righteousness. Which means that Jesus makes things "Right". He makes Man right with God through Reconciliation. But he also makes Man right with Man through Grace and Humility and Patience and Kindness and Love. And in the end, He

will make Right all the Wrongs that His people have suffered- so that we don't have to carry the burden of Indignation or Revenge.

If you look at the incredible Injustices in the world today, and see people suffering when they seem innocent; and when you see the wicked prospering- it troubles us. But Jesus gives an Answer: where He is trusted- He can reconcile and restore. But where He's not- He will have the last Word in the Judgment.

3. Wings of Healing

This Sun of Righteousness rises with Healing in its Wings. I can remember back in 1986 when I was in Jackson, MS because my daughter was in the University Medical Center dying with Leukemia. And early one morning I was driving East on I-20 to pray and try to get some clarity about all the confusing whirlwind that Rhonda and I were in.

And as the Darkness gave way to the morning Light- a thin line of orange and red appeared along the horizon. And it intensified and got brighter and brighter, and I could see the brightness focusing more and more on the center of the line, until the flaming ball surged up out of the ground. And I'll never forget that morning as I watched it rise up, and in a sense- it brought the entire red line on the rim of the horizon up into the air as though the Sun itself had wings. And I remember squinting at it. I couldn't look full bore into it- because it was so bright- it would literally burn out my retina.

And when Malachi saw this- God told him: *"The Coming of the Messiah will be like the Sun of Righteousness rising!"* And the effect of His breathtaking Glory- a Glory so bright you can't look at it with natural eyes- will be a *permanent* Healing from *all* wounds; and *all* hurts; and *all* suffering; and *all* pain.

And even though Jesus does not heal every disease in this life every time we get sick; and even though it seems that this life can be very hard and unmerciful and very distressing- Jesus *will* heal every disease in the Resurrection. And that will be a Good thing. But even now- Jesus completely meets the tremendous need we all feel for Hope that all our Sins can be forgiven. And over there- all Sickness; and all Pain; and all Sorrow; and all Crying; and all Trouble will be gone forever!

4. A Going Forth

One effect of all this for those who fear the Lord is a "Going Forth". And the context in which Malachi spoke this in the original Hebrew- has to do with calves "going forth" from their stalls. So, the "rising" of the Sun of Righteousness- which is the Coming of Jesus to the earth- means "Freedom" *not* "Bondage".

But the word, "Freedom" has danger in it- *especially* in our Day. Because, to many, "Freedom" means: *Autonomy*. It means having the Right and the Ability to do *whatever* you want to; *whenever* you want to; and *however* you want to. And, while that might *seem* attractive- it isn't Good; and it isn't what Christianity promises.

Autonomy means: "Self-ruled" and the concept of "Self-rule" is the gleaming crown jewel of the heresy of Humanism. It elevates the "Self-centered" life. It looks inward to the "Self". It magnifies the "glory of Man", and, *ultimately*, *Autonomy destroys* people. We need to remember that Humanism has caused more wars; more deaths; more human misery than any other Philosophy in the history of Mankind.

But Christianity promises *Theonomy*- which is "God-ruled". And being "God ruled" requires that we become slaves of Jesus Christ. And Theonomy is the very epitome of "Selflessness". It elevates Jesus Christ and it looks *outward* toward the Bible; toward Heaven; and toward the Cross. So, the "Freedom" that Malachi prophesied is a "Freedom" *from* Sin; a "Freedom" *from* the Wrath of God *because* of our Sin. But it is also a "Freedom from "Selfishness". It is a "Freedom" from being hindered in "Joyful Obedience"; and a "Freedom" to serve the Lord Christ with abandon and to delight to do His Will.

The Ability and the Desire to worship God throughout all Eternity is simply not possible in this life and on this earth. Our flesh provides us with neither the Ability to do this nor the Desire. Nothing on this earth equips us for that. So, if we plan on worshipping God- 24/7 forever- we need to be given a Power and a Love and a Joy- that is hard to even imagine. And the Jesus promises to give us that.

But until He comes back- we may have "moments" and "seasons" and "periods" where we sense a real and deep and profound "Closeness" and a "Presence"; and we may experience short glimpses of this Love and Joy that knows no limits- but they are few and far between. And that is because- even though we have been made "free" in Christ

through Salvation- we are still trapped and bound in the “stall” of this earthly existence and the limitations of our fallen flesh.

So, about 2400 years ago- Malachi vaguely saw a glimpse of this “Ultimate Freedom” where Joy and Love empowers eternal Worship with no limits. And he likened it to energetic young calves “going forth” out of their stalls.

5. Leaping Like Calves

The fifth Image from verse 2 is that when the Sun of Righteousness rises with Healing in its Wings and we are set free from the stall of this earthly bondage- we will not merely walk, or even run- no, the Prophet says we will “leap like calves”.

In other words, the “Freedom” of Theonomy; the absolute Freedom that is promised to the bond-slaves of Jesus is the necessary condition of this kind of “leaping Joy”. And yet- it comes by way of what you might not expect. In **Luke 6:22& 23**- Jesus said

Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and insult you, and scorn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man. Be glad in that day and leap *for joy*, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets.

... so this “Leaping Joy” comes by way of Suffering and Persecution. And that has been the collective Testimony of all believers throughout the 2,000 year history of the Church. Now we might be tempted to think that some people are greatly hindered in this regard because of inherited personalities. We might think that reserved people could no more leap like a calf than speak Russian. But this is the Beauty of Salvation. God allows the weakest and the most ungifted among us- to be used the best.

Because what Malachi is talking about is “unhindered Joy”; “unfettered Delight”; and “unimaginable Happiness”. And when Jesus comes back- that is what He brings with Him. So, I truly believe that there is a “leaping calf” in every genuine believer in this room. And given the right setting- you will leap. And so, we would do well to give this kind of “leaping Joy” some room. Otherwise we will look very out of character in Heaven when Jesus takes us running through the fields.

But what Malachi saw in vagueness- we will experience is absolute Perfection. And that is the meaning of the Coming of the Lord:

- ✓ He will give Light and Truth where there is Darkness and Confusion
- ✓ He will set things Right where they are Wrong
- ✓ He will give Healing where there is Sickness and Brokenness
- ✓ He will give Freedom of Theonomy where there is the Bondage of Autonomy
- ✓ He will give calf-leaping Joy where there is Suffering and Persecution

Come Lord Jesus, Come!

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.

