

The Sun of Righteousness

(Malachi 4 NIV) "Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire," says the LORD Almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them. {2} But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. {3} Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things," says the LORD Almighty. {4} "Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel. {5} "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. {6} He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."

- ▶ ☛ God's plan for judgement.
- ▶ ☛ God's plan for healing
- ▶ ☛ God's plan for ethical restoration

There are only two fates for mankind, two races of people, two possible life paths. The first fate is the fate of the wicked, the fate of those who live for themselves and use others. "There is no shalom for the wicked - says the Lord, there is no healing, no right relationship, no long lasting blessing. The wicked are like a splash in a bucket that a few minutes later show no sign of their existence. They are described as "stubble", not shaving stubble but grass left over from the mowing that is set on fire. They are at best temporary and their end is total destruction. God's plan for these people is total destruction and humiliation. Those who belong to God will "trample down the wicked". The meek will inherit the earth.

The second group of people are those who once were wicked but are being healed and restored. For them the sun of righteousness will arise with healing in His wings. Have you seen those pictures of a winged sun like the "wings" a pilot wears? The sun and the "dawn" in particular was popularly portrayed as having wings. I used to go sailing just offshore in Moreton Bay for a week or more at a time and you would wake up at dawn and the rising sun would come over the horizon with the sea all pink like wings on either side of it. Jesus came to us like that full of hope and beauty and full of healing. He has come to bring spiritual, emotional and physical healing to all who wish to follow Him.

He has come that we might have life and have it more abundantly. He has demonstrated this during His earthly ministry where He restored value to people by healing their bodies, driving out demons that oppressed them, publicly honouring those that society rejected such as Zaccheus, and converting those like Nicodemus who came perplexed but seeking Him. He always left those who sought Him out better and more highly valued, than when He found them. He also often gave people value and dignity at the precise point where it had been most damaged. He allowed a prostitute to touch Him - so that she could find new value from touching a man - the precise activity that had brought her to ruin. He called Matthew when he was in his tax collectors office doing the thing that made him so despised. He called Zaccheus when he was up a tree compensating for his short stature that had embarrassed him and he went to lunch with a man that most would have refused to eat with. The sun of righteousness came with healing in His wings for all who would seek Him out.

The passage in Malachi which we read indicates two key requirements of the righteous. Firstly the keeping of the Ten Commandments which God gave Moses at Horeb. Secondly right relationships in the home -particularly between father and son. The New Testament replaces the Old and the ten

commandments are slightly changed. Nine of them are retained and the command about the Sabbath is made a matter of conscience. A Sabbath can only be realistically kept if the whole society around you keeps it and with the spread of Christianity to the Roman Empire this had become impossible for many of the new converts who were slaves. Those who wish to keep the Sabbath can do so, those who do not want one special day can also do so - as long as they do so "unto the Lord". We are still expected to honour God in our use of time.

The ethical requirements for being among those being healed are thus substantially the same as when Malachi wrote. You may, quite rightly say, that since none of us keep the Ten Commandments then we are all condemned to perish like chaff and stubble on the day of judgement and that healing should be far from us. Who has not lied, or stolen or been disrespectful to parents, or used God's name in vain or plotted greedy scheme sin their heart ?Just one of these things is a breach of His law. Just one breach of the law is enough to separate us from God and His healing. But Malachi is full of hope . He vividly portrays the righteous as happy, blessed and triumphant and he expects them to make it. He expects that there will be those who reverence the Lord and who remember His commandments. God, in His grace, grants forgiveness to those who genuinely strive to follow Him, who want, deeply to obey Him , who have His laws written on their hearts and who respect Him and fear to displease Him.

Malachi specifically mentions a time when family relationships will be restored particularly the relationship between children and their fathers. Never has this been more needed than it is today. The trust between parents and children, particularly fathers and their children is at an all time low. Not in recent memory has there been so much distrust and disrespect in families. Never has there been so much longing for reliable father figures. Men are pilloried and despised by the feminist movement, and are still legally disadvantaged in family law. Adult males are seen as the dastardly perpetrators while women and children are the innocent victims. Men have recoiled from these accusations and withdrawn from their family responsibilities. Unable to disprove the taunts we feel from society and hurt by the distrust that is all around us we have silently walked away from hearth and home and pursued our own pleasures. More and more men are refusing to get married or if married they are refusing to have children. Its just too risky. Humanism, feminism and the government have created an aching hurting society that can only be turned back by God. Unless this happens God will come and "smite the land with a curse". This curse is the opposite of the promise. - God has promised that if we honour our father and our mother we will "live in the land a long time". In lands such as China and Japan where parents have been honoured they have remained in the land for a long time. I believe that Australia is bringing itself steadily under God's curse and we will become a restless nation emotionally and eventually if we persist we will be ejected from this land. Our disrespect has destroyed our families and cursed us.

Malachi indicates that shortly before "the great and terrible day of the Lord" that Elijah will return. This will be a confrontational prophetic figure in the mould of Elijah, Elisha and John the Baptist who were all figures "in the spirit and power of Elijah". God will raise up a particular prophet who will confront the deteriorating family relationships. If we listen to him we will be blessed. If we don't God will finally and utterly curse us. I believe that with movements such as Focus On The Family, Australian federation For The Family and Promisekeepers we are starting to see a tidal wave of Christian restoration of family values. The book Father Heart of God by Floyd McLung came out about 15 years ago and started a wave of books on restoring children's love of their fathers. Even on the Internet it is one of the most discussed Christian issues this week. It is a deep chord in the human heart. As hopeless as we may feel our family relationships are, and even though they may have fallen a long way below God's ideal and been badly damaged we can at least fix up our side of the fence. My parents and I have never seen eye to eye. They are respectable, formal, demanding and very afraid of any expression of emotion either positive or negative. I on the other hand have always been idealistic, passionate ,anarchic and fairly unafraid to say how I am feeling.

At 16 I was a communist at 20 a Zen Buddhist and at 21 a Christian. We have almost come to terms with our massive differences but not quite and you can't wave a magic wand and fix up forty years of misunderstanding. But I can mend my side of things and be more tolerant of their chosen lifestyle and not expect them to be demonstrative in their affection for me. They in turn have learned not to scorn my multitudinous crusades and tilting at windmills and various other eccentricities. It will never be perfect, but it is better. If we are to see emotional healing of families I believe the following six things need to occur:

- (a) We need to value our children, teach them, invest in them and not see them as nuisances.
- (b) We need to financially support our aged parents and honour them with our love.
- (c) We need to see marital faithfulness as fulfilling and forget the "greener grass" syndrome.
- (d) We need to marry Christians out of obedience to God and build Spirit-filled homes.
- (e) We need to stop resenting the time and self-giving that families need.
- (f) We need to stop seeking our main source of emotional fulfillment outside of the home - even in church activities. It may sound harsh but what is the difference between going to parties or down the pub five days a week or being involved in church activities five days a week?. One is more constructive/respectable than the other but both take big chunks of time away from the family. Our family should be where we are happy and they should know that. They should know that they are precious, that we delight in them, that we love being with them and that they are our main source of emotional fulfillment next to God.

After we have undergone God's healing of body, mind and spirit we will "skip about like young calves". Now a young calf is not a particularly philosophical animal. This is not some abstract delight in finally figuring out the Trinity. This is the delight of a young strong animal in being a young strong animal. It's the delight of being all that we are meant to be. It's the joy of functioning as we know we should function, unimpaired, strong whole and full of life and joy. It's an abandonment and a delight in what God has made you to be. It is not selfish narcissistic behaviour in fact self is almost forgotten in the delight in being able to run, jump and carry on. It's the delight of a child on a swing or a young girl with a skipping rope. The restoration of the righteous is never partial or half-hearted and it carries no sorrow with it.

FINALE

So we see that God's people are being healed by the sun of righteousness with healing in His wings.

We also see that God's people in the community of healing are participating in this healing by obeying God's commandments and restoring their family relationships.

We also acknowledge that God's healing of body, mind, and spirit is needed if we as broken people are ever to "skip about like young calves.." The joy of the redeemed is the joy of wholeness.

There is a sombre note as well. The wicked will not be healed but destroyed. They will be trodden down as they trod others down for a while. It will not be good for them, they will come to nothing, be burned up as valueless and be trodden underfoot by the very ones they hurt. The healing of the righteous also means victory over evil. Victory over Satan, over demons and over all who are wicked. In Romans we have another picture of evil being trodden underfoot by God's people when Paul writes (Romans 16:19-20 NIV) Everyone has heard about your obedience, so I am full of joy over you; but I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil. {20} The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.

So let's build a victorious, healing community of believers who revere God, obey His commandments and restore their family relationships in response to God's call through His

prophets. As we do so the sun of righteousness will arise with healing in His wings, heal us and restore us and make us so whole that we leap for joy at what God has made us to be and the wholeness, strength and power that are ours. God's plan for us is to be a healed, strong and victorious people with happy families and whole bodies, minds and spirits. If you want to be part of this plan for your life - enlist now and come forward for prayer!