

# Is There Any Gain in Godliness?

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 26 February 2023

Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[ 0 : 00 ] Morning everyone, lovely to see you. Let me tell you about two people who've been, I've been reading about this week. Ready for these? Two people I've been reading about this week. Here's the first man.

His name is Darren Brown. Okay, if you've not heard of him, he is, and there's a wee Wikipedia quote up there about him. He's one of the world's top illusionists.

And I never knew this about this man before. I've heard lots about him living in the UK. But I never knew he was actually a Christian by his own admission in his teens. But as life went on, and he got more and more into magic and more into tricks, and he began to understand that he was really good at it, he began to see how easily people can be duped into believing next to anything.

And so what happened in his mind is that the resurrection of Jesus, which is the centre point of the Christian faith, slid into that category of things that people can easily believe, but cannot be proved to be right.

So in his mind, the resurrection of Jesus becomes just like that. And so today, not only is he openly sceptical about the Christian faith, but he's worth a reported \$7.5 million.

[ 1 : 22 ] So this is the first guy I was reading about this week. Darren Brown. Here's the second person. Kate Forbes. I think you can say this week. She has been the cat among the political pigeons, hasn't she?

And we've watched as she's unashamedly nailed her Christian convictions to the mast. And I don't know about you, but as I've watched the flack that she has been prepared to take this week because of those things, I have been greatly challenged and emboldened in terms of my own witness to the risen Lord Jesus.

And we stand with her, don't we, on the things that she believes and that she's standing for. But what are people saying about her? You read the political commentators who are on Twitter and different social media things this week.

What are they saying to her? Kate, you can believe whatever you want. Okay? Believe whatever you want. But please just don't share what you believe. Because if you did that, Kate, you would be an absolute shoo-in for the biggest job in our country.

But to quote another famous lady from British politics, this lady is not for turning. So here's the thing. I have witnessed these two people this week, read about them this week.

[ 2 : 39 ] And you have to say that one of them has turned their back on the Christian faith, has moved on in their own mind from God and has gone up.

And the other is sticking to her guns about what she believes about the gospel and the Christian faith. And in the eyes of the world, she's gone down. And so my heart has watched and read about both of those individuals this week.

And here's the question that I've asked myself. Is it really worth it following Jesus? You ever asked that question? You've been there.

Is it worth it? Or here's the question, put it another way for this morning. Is there any gain in godliness? You see, that's where many in Malachi's generation are at.

If you come with me to the text here's verse 14. What are they saying to themselves? They are saying, it is vain to serve the Lord. Do you see that? It is vain to serve the Lord.

[ 3 : 43 ] Verse 15, not only do evildoers prosper, but they put God to the test and they escape. So God, you don't do anything.

You don't make any distinction between the people of God and the peoples of the world right now. And so they're beginning to think to themselves, it's not worth it. It's like that slogan that some of you might remember that the atheist bus campaign, way back in 2008, that it was doing the rounds

in London on the sides of buses.

The slogan read, there's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life. Does your heart wonder if they're right? Is it worth it?

Following Jesus in our world today. You know, I bought our kids this week. I bought them a Where's Wally book. All right, big Where's Wally fans in our house.

Except this one, when it popped up on Amazon, I bought it because we got the collection, but we didn't have this one. This one is a Spot the Difference edition. Okay, we've had great fun this week, but do you know what the kids keep saying?

[ 4 : 52 ] The line from their mouths, the line is, Daddy, we don't see any differences. We just don't see them. Are there any differences? So often what our hearts say as we look at the world around us and the people, our friends, how they're living their lives.

Is there any difference? Is Christianity like a bounty in a box of celebrations? Some people like it. Some people hate it. But don't worry because there's other chocolate that you can choose from according to your taste.

Is there a difference? difference? That is what my heart has been asking this week. But this is what my God has been saying to me this week. Verse 18.

And to this generation, he says, you will see again the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.

So in the eyes of the Lord, there is a difference. And if you are here and you wouldn't call yourself a believer, a follower of Jesus, I love that you are here.

[ 6 : 04 ] You are so, so welcome. Can I just say for you to hang around just for 20 or so minutes as we go through this, there is sobering and there's stunning truth for you in this passage today.

And the invitation I make to you is to come and enter and explore explore the Christian story. And can I just say it is a story that might well resonate with you and where you're at way more than you think it will.

As you get to know who the God of the Bible is, the God in whose image you are made. And if you are here and you are weary and you're tired and you're struggling, tired as you slog on in the bog of life in your Christian faith, weighed down by worries and concerns about what tomorrow might hold, so much so that tomorrow morning seems like a burdensome thought to you.

If you are struggling physically today, then there is wonderful strength to be found in God's word today.

And that's why I want you to listen to what this is saying because it's beautiful. It is stunning. It is sobering. But as we take in the word of the Lord today, I pray that we will be greatly strengthened.

[ 7 : 38 ] Now here are just two takeaways from this passage today. You up for it? Here's number one. God sees the difference. Okay, he sees the difference in this day.

Now if you come with me to the text, you see that while there is a group of people in Israel who, verses 13 to 15, are set on leaving God behind, right?

They've concluded it is vain to serve the Lord. And just notice in the description there that they've turned the scales in terms of deciding what is right and wrong.

And they've gone hard against the Lord with their words. Okay, this is one group. But, wonderfully, there is another group that we read about from verse 16.

And it's hard to tell whether this group have responded to what Malachi's been saying or whether they've just been there the whole time. But whatever it is, they come at this point in the book and it's marvellous because if one group are marked by doubt, this group are marked by faith.

[ 8 : 50 ] Do you see? They're marked by faith. Now, can we just do a little bit of work on that word for a second? Because it's been trending this week if you've been following it.

One article I read in the BBC this week read, the perils of mixing politics and faith. Clearly, the whole point of the article was they're like oil and water, don't mix, okay?

Can I chuck out to you a radical thought on this Sunday morning? Particularly if you are here and you would not call yourself a Christian, if we are defining that word faith as truth and values which we believe, that which we are trusting in, and that which shape our lives, then we, every single human being, has faith.

An alternative heading to that article, and I tweeted it this week, should be something like this.

Every human being has a world through which they see the world, understand themselves, others, and by which they live.

Let's have a loving discussion as to what yours is and why. We all have ways of understanding the world. All have ways of understanding the world.

[ 9 : 58 ] This group have faith. Faith in what is the question. Faith in, and you see it's wrapped up in that word fear. So this group have faith.

They fear the Lord. And what that word means is that their eyes have been drawn to magnetically this God of blazing holiness and compelling beauty.

A fear that doesn't cause us to run away and hide. It's a fear that magnetically draws us into delight. This is who this God is. And like the earth's relationship to the sun, when we understand that, our lives begin to orbit around him.

Trusting what he says is true. Longing what Gary was saying right at the start in our opening worship. Longing to know him more. Obeying what he says is right.

And what are this group doing? I love this. What are they doing? They're speaking with one another. Do you see that? Is that not wonderfully and beautifully and profoundly simple?

[ 11 : 11 ] They're just nattering. Right? I'd love to have been getting Amazon all or nothing fly-in-the-wall documentary about those conversations, would you not, at this time? I'd love to know what they're saying.

I'd love to know what they were saying. Tantalizingly, we're not told. But I wonder if it resembled much of what we're kind of doing today.

Right? Saying to one another, do you remember who the Lord is? Remember who he is? Do you remember what he did in the past?

Do you remember that this God has a track record of delivering on his promises? Do you remember how this God promised that he was taking us somewhere?

That our story, because it's wrapped up in him, is going somewhere? Do you remember how this God promised that he would bring us back out of exile? And he did. And what did the Lord do?

[ 12 : 13 ] They spoke to one another. What did he do? And this ties into what Florence was saying there at the start as well. What did this God do? He paid attention. Do you see? He heard.

And I hope that greatly encourages all of us this morning, corporately, personally, in our prayer lives, that this God hears. And get this, a book of remembrance was written before him.

The names of every single person of faith, it's almost as like it was right before his eyes, written in a book. This is not like when you order a drink at Starbucks, right, and they write your name on the side of the cup, trying to give you the impression that they know you.

I've heard some weird and wonderful spellings of Graham over the years, let me tell you. My favorite was G-R-I-M. Leave that with you. But this is not what's going on here.

Do you see how this God intimately and personally and fully knows his people? Do you see it in the text?

[ 13 : 17 ] Do you see what God calls them? He says they are mine. And what does he say they'll be on that day? This is the day when Jesus Christ returns. That we'll come to in a minute.

They are my treasured possession. And we've got to take in the language here. Take in every word. There's a reason that this has been preserved. God in his sovereignty has allowed this book to be in our language at this time.

So we need to take in what he's saying. God says they are my treasured possession. It's what we used to do as children, isn't it? I remember Grace when I took her to school the other day.

One of her friends came and just brought out of her pocket all these shells that she collected on the beach as she walked with her mum and dad during half term. She's all bringing them in. Bringing them in for show and tell.

These are mine. My precious. And that's what God is saying here. My people. And don't miss God's affection for and his commitment to his people.

[ 14 : 21 ] And his declaration that in a day when many question whether there is a difference, God says there is. And I see it.

And God says, do you notice here once more I will show it. That's at verse 18. Which makes you ask, doesn't it, as you read that through, when has he done it before?

And the answer you'll find in the book of Exodus, the second book in the Bible, chapter nine, during the plagues that God sent on the Egyptians to convince Pharaoh to let his people go.

To let his people out of slavery that they might go into the desert and do what? Worship the Lord. It's always the way salvation works. Not just save to wander aimlessly.

saved with a purpose that we might live for Yahweh, live for Jesus. In chapter nine, we get those plagues, and it's during the fifth plague that this same word comes up.

[ 15 : 26 ] As a plague comes on the Egyptian livestock, and yet it doesn't come on God's people's livestock. God's saying, I'm making a distinction between the Egyptians and my people, and not one of the livestock of God's people dies.

And yet that is but a warm-up act for the ultimate distinction that God makes in that scene in Egypt. As God tells his people to take the blood of a slain lamb and put it above their doorposts, and when the destroyer comes, God almost will stand in that doorway and say, no, they are mine.

And he will not kill the firstborn of the family. And there's an outcry. There's a great mourning in Egypt the next day as this happens.

But the blood of the lamb is the thing that saves God's people. Park that for where we're ending this. You can be surprised, okay? It's the blood that stands in the way.

It's the blood that makes a distinction between God's people and the peoples of the world. Just as he did then, God is saying to this generation, remember pre-Jesus, that on that day, God will make a distinction once again.

[ 16 : 52 ] And God would say to his people, I see the difference in this day. I see it. And secondly, he wants them to know that he will make the difference on that day.

And that's the phrase that comes to the fore. Just as we enter chapter 4, and God is talking about that day when he will deal decisively with all that is evil in the world.

And he will deal with all those who have not, and take the language from verse 18, between those who have served them and those who have not served him.

the day that will reveal this God's settled opposition as the three times holy God to all that is unholy in this world.

Because if God didn't, he would be compromising on his character. He cannot do one without the other. There cannot be liberation for his people without judgment on the world.

[ 17 : 59 ] This is the day when the God of light will overcome and decisively banish the darkness. I think it's something that we intuitively know as human beings.

Can I just say, I think it's, you see that because it's reflected in the best love stories that our culture tells. Because Aslan, if he's going to bring the fullness of his kingdom, there's going to be peace, if there's going to be life, then the white witch must be banished.

She can't still be wandering around. Sauron must be defeated if there's to be peace on Middle Earth. All evil will be judged.

It will be judged as this God makes every wrong right. It's why our culture's desire for justice, if you've noticed that, justice is right.

It is right and it's there because we are made in God's image. But if a perfectly holy God is to judge human sin, then every single one of us falls short of his glory.

[ 19 : 12 ] And every single one of us will have to answer to him as to how we've lived and as to how we've responded to Jesus on that day.

And it's to the risen Jesus, I take it he's the one of whom this Elijah figure at the end, who is John the Baptist as we come to the New Testament, has come to get us ready for. How have we responded to him?

And we have to feel the strength and the severity of the picture language that God gives this generation. I take it just to wake them up. the arrogant and evildoers will be stubble.

That day shall set them ablaze. And we've got to feel the strength of that language. And it's a stark warning for all of us here today, particularly if you are here today and you would not say that you have accepted this Jesus as your Savior.

Friends, this day is real. It is coming. But here's the good news of the gospel. The good news of the gospel is that just like there was at Passover, that first one, another lamb who was slain, another lamb has come, whose blood sprinkled above the door of our lives as we take God at his word, saves us.

[ 20 : 40 ] We are not saved because we are good people. We are not saved because we've made decent decisions in life. That is not the case. We are saved simply because of the blood that's above the door of our lives and through nothing else.

Jesus, he lived that perfect life that we could never live. He died on the cross the death that you and I deserve to die. And while for one group his return, having risen and ascended, one day his return,

for one group it will be devastation.

For another group it will be liberation. Of all the prophecies about God's new creation, and get those ideas of clouds and harps out your mind, okay?

God's new creation, his physical world, this is the one that stirs my heart the most. And God doesn't just want his people to know what that will be like as they're struggling on in their Christian lives. I'd imagine this first group are laughing at them. You're wasting your time. Why not just go and join the peoples of the world? God wants them not just to know it intellectually, he wants them to feel it emotionally.

[ 22 : 02 ] And again, as we've done justice to the picture language that's there, we've got to do justice to the picture language that is here as well.

And on that note, we need to grasp the difference between emotionalism, which I take it is just cheap and short-lasting affections.

and God in the gospel, by his word and by his spirit, awakening in us deep emotions, affections, and love as we respond to Jesus as we see and hear the gospel.

Do you see if there's a difference? We should be marked by moved emotions as we consider what God has done for us in sending Jesus, that is ours in him. As we gaze upon his beauty, we cannot help but be moved.

There's a difference between emotionalism and gospel-fueled emotions. And we've got to feel it as we think about what's going on here. As we think about where this finds its ultimate climax in Jesus.

[ 23 : 08 ] And this is where we tap back into Christmas and that carol that we love to sing. Hark the Herald Angels sing, Isaac Watts got it bang on. You rightly identified the son of righteousness.

risen with healing in his wings. He rightly identified him with the risen Jesus. Friends, as we contemplate his return, feel the language there.

It will be like the kind of joy that a bird feels at dawn. Have you not loved just hearing the bird sing again? Is what is felt just like a brutal and long and cold and expensive winter?

You've just heard the bird sing again. What does it say? It says something's changing. It's why so many people use it as white noise on their phone, isn't it? Birds singing. Why? Because it's just one of the most beautiful sounds we'll ever hope to hear.

It's like the kind of joy that a photographer feels as he captures a sunrise. Right? I love to hear about a group of students, trying not to look at them here, who got up early a month or so ago and climbed Blackford Hill to watch the sunrise because there is no more beautiful sight in our world than watching a sun come up.

[ 24 : 25 ] On this day, God is saying it will feel like the whole earth is being healed by the sun's light. It will be like snow as it thaws when the sun warms it.

Friends, are you feeling that? As you read it here, living in our world where it so often feels like what C.S. Lewis captures so poignantly when one of his characters described in Narnia as a place where it's always winter, but never Christmas.

You know, I often find as I meet people who are going through the mill. Honestly, all you've got sometimes is a pastor. And not just a pastor, sometimes as a loving friend.

All you've got sometimes is that phrase that the other Christians used to use frequently. And you find at the end of 1 Corinthians chapter 16, Maranatha. Do you know what it means?

It just means come, Lord Jesus, and make it right. Sometimes that's all you've got. Come, Lord Jesus, and make it right. Friends, if you're struggling with your physical health, if you just wake up in the morning and you just think, I cannot bear another day of this, I want you to be greatly heartened by what this says.

[ 25 : 48 ] That because of your faith in Jesus, hear me right, you will one day be fully healed of your hardships. You will be fully healed. It might not be in this life, but 100% sure it will be in this new creation.

We will have new bodies. I thought about that, making that a conversation for church lunch upstairs. What are you most looking forward to be free of? You know, for me, I've just my eczema in my hands for months.

I just cannot get rid of it. Cannot wash the dishes. Cannot change a nappy. Cannot do anything.

And it just drains me of energy. What are you most looking forward to being rid of? Physical bodies that God gives us.

The hope of the Christian life is not that life might get better and easier for us here. The hope of the Christian life is that Jesus loves us and has given himself for us.

And one day he is coming back to make all things new. It's why I love that scene that we get in Acts chapter 3.

[ 26 : 59 ] And you can read it in your own time if you want. You can look it up if you want. As Peter and John meet that lame man. His ankles are gone.

He's been lame for birth. All these details that were told about in Acts chapter 3. And he says to them, what have you got? Can I have alms? Right?

Can you give me something? He's begging. And what did he say? And it goes with that kid's song that some of you might have grown up singing. Silver and gold we have none, but what we have we give you.

In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk. Two things were told as he does.

Number one, what does he do connecting with this passage?

What does he do? Doesn't give them a high five and go on his way. He's leaping. He's walking and he's leaping and he's praising God.

[ 27 : 53 ] God's kingdom arriving in the person of Jesus. What else does he do? He goes to the temple. Into the temple. He goes into God's presence.

And it's almost as if we read that. And here is God glorifying the name of Jesus in the eyes of the watching world in that moment in Acts chapter 3. But it's a picture for everyone watching and everyone reading now of the glorious foretaste of life that what it'll be like for every single one of us when he comes to bring in his kingdom fully and finally when he returns.

That's what it will be like. Be leaping like calves from the stall, right? Living in the city. I'll be honest, I don't get that one. But that's what God is saying to his people.

Who would have got that one? That's what it's like. Friends, in the words of New Testament scholar and an older man who's feeling his aches and joints called Don Carson.

And please hear this reverently, okay? He says this when people ask him how do you keep on going? He says, listen, I'm not suffering from anything now that a good resurrection won't fix. And so what does God say as we begin to wrap this up to the people of faith in this generation?

[ 29 : 13 ] Paraphrasing verse 4. What's the call on God's faithful remnant in Malachi's day? They're watching all this stuff going on in amongst their community.

He says to them, keep waiting. Be faithful. I love you. I know you. And one day I'm coming back. I will act to make it all new.

I think that's where we've got to leave it, isn't it? The application then is exactly the same application now. Got to keep obediently, faithfully waiting and loving and knowing the return of King Jesus.

You know, as we close, I began by telling you about two people that I read about this week. Can I just tell you about two people who I met this week? Two ladies who sat at the table beside me in Cosa on Thursday.

And after I'd finished my meeting, I met Mike. I was just sitting there doing some emails, but I couldn't help but overhear their conversation, which is always a better way than saying you were eavesdropping, isn't it?

[ 30 : 24 ] That's what I was doing on Wednesday. And every so often I would just pick up an odd word that they were saying to one another. Like Jesus. And forgiveness.

And peace. And sin. And grace. And God's love. And obedience. And telling others it was like a royal flush.

And my pastor's senses began to tingle. And they prayed together. And they stopped praying and they looked up and I was smiling at them, which I think freaked them out slightly.

But I reassured them who I was and that I followed Jesus as well. And they begin to tell me how they go to another church somewhere in the city. And that they're doing an alpha course together, exploring the things of the Christian faith.

And that life's hard. Being in the circles that they're in, different circles. And so what they do is they just meet up now and again to encourage one another in the faith. And I think that's exactly where we need to land with this series as we've gone through it in Malachi.

[ 31 : 31 ] Wouldn't that be a brilliant legacy and such wonderful fruit from our time together in this series? As God has challenged us on a number of levels as we've gone through it together, that the lasting impression this book would make on us, to nab a phrase from Hebrews, that we would

encourage one another more and daily as we see that day drawing close.

That day that is the wonderful return of Lord Jesus, encouraging one another about how great he is, about how wonderful the gospel is, and about how wonderful the future is, because he died, he rose, he ascended, and one day he's coming back to make it all new.

So just think about who can you meet up with this week? Who can you encourage? Who's going through a really hard time? Who needs the words of Malachi? Who needs the words of any chapter, any word in the Bible?

Who can you come alongside this week to encourage with that single goal? To bring the grace of Jesus to bear in each other's lives. Got a great chance to do that over lunch.

You can think about it. But this is what we need. Let's pray together, will we? Father, we think of the words of the Apostle Paul, writing in Galatians, who would marvel at the Jesus who loved him and who gave himself for him, and who now he is committed to following with his whole life.

[ 33 : 10 ] And so, Lord, that is our one prayer off the back of this morning. And Lord, we trust that as your spirit has been moving in our hearts, there have been things come into mind that we need to consider.

There are truths that we need to take in. There are ways that we're living that we need to change. But most of all, Father, that we would know this Jesus better.

Father, thank you that you have not left us on your own, that you have given us your precious Holy Spirit. And so we pray that he would be moving in our lives this week, just shining the spotlight on Christ and his glory.

So we pray all of these things in his name. Amen. Amen. Thank you.