

A Life-Saving Message

“I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me . . . ,” says the LORD Almighty (Malachi 3:1).

Scripture: Malachi 3:1-6

Song: “The King Is Coming”

A carrier pigeon named President Wilson played an important role during World War I. The bird was tasked with delivering messages between frontline troops and commanders. In the autumn of 1918, he took flight with an urgent message from his unit. They were under attack and desperately needed artillery support. The pigeon carried that message for 25 miles, delivering it in just 25 minutes despite losing a leg and being wounded in the chest by enemy fire along the way!

Malachi prophesied the coming of John the Baptist, who declared the greatest life-or-death message of all: repent and prepare for God’s promised Messiah, who was coming to bring salvation to a world lost in sin. Not everyone liked this message, and John died at the hands of those who rejected it. Yet he faithfully fulfilled his calling.

Today we are God’s messengers, sent to urge others to prepare their hearts for Christ’s second coming. The message isn’t always welcome, and relaying it may come at great cost to us. But we can press forward, knowing that the gospel has the power to save countless lives.

Father, You will one day judge the world. In Your mercy, You have provided a way of escape from the wrath our sin deserves and have given us time to embrace Your salvation. Grant me courage to faithfully carry the gospel message to others. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Time to Stop Running

“Return to me, and I will return to you,” says the LORD Almighty (Malachi 3:7).

Scripture: Malachi 3:7-18

Song: “We Are Returning”

At 16 years old, Frank Abagnale Jr. ran away from home. He began to live a life of crime—committing forgery and impersonating a doctor, lawyer, and even an airplane pilot. He was eventually caught and served time in French and Swiss prisons. He was later released to American authorities, from whom he escaped, but he was captured again and spent another five years behind bars. Amazingly, this young man, who had become famous for running from the law, later worked with the FBI to help them fight check fraud. Today Abagnale is a security consultant.

For a time we may enjoy going our own way. We may feel a sense of freedom and excitement. But like the prodigal son realized, lavish lifestyles and earthly affections eventually leave us wanting (Luke 15). The path of selfishness, pride, and misplaced devotion does not lead to peace. Instead, we end up chasing a happiness that always eludes us.

The good news is that when we recognize our bad choices and humbly return to God, He meets us with compassion and forgiveness. In His presence we discover that His plan for us is so much better than we could ever have envisioned. In Him we have protection, provision, freedom, and rest. We no longer have to run, because within His care we find everything we need and more.

Father, thank You for Your mercy that calls us out of the trappings of this world and into Your incomparable blessings. In Jesus’ name, amen.

The Same Sun

Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings (Malachi 4:2, *KJV*).

Scripture: Malachi 4:1-6

Song: “Safety in Divine Protection”

When I was dating my now-husband, I was invited to go with him on his family’s annual beach vacation. I was never a beachgoer growing up, so I wasn’t fully aware of how harmful prolonged direct sun exposure could be. And I did the worst thing possible: I fell asleep underneath the afternoon rays. For the remainder of my time there, I suffered from terrible sunburn. If only I had respected the power of the sun! I could have simply enjoyed its warmth rather than being scorched. I quickly learned that how I experience the sun depends on how I go about in relation to it.

Malachi prophesied of a coming day—symbolized by fire and a furnace—when those who disregarded the Lord would suffer complete destruction. But in almost the same breath, he announced great hope in that day for those who fear (or revere) the Lord. Healing and not destruction is being prepared for them, and they will experience great freedom and joy.

God has never failed to warn of coming judgment against the wicked. But He has also never failed to offer grace to those who come before Him in humble faith, full of awe and gratitude. May our hearts revere Him always so that we may experience His protection in the Day of Judgment.

Father, we bow before You in awe and gratitude. We want to revere You daily as we prepare for eternity with You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Lifted to Life

You will do well to pay attention to [the prophetic message], as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts (2 Peter 1:19).

Scripture: 2 Peter 1:16-21

Song: “Light of Life”

Late at night on July 24, 2002, miners in Somerset County, Pennsylvania, broke through a thin wall of earth that separated their mineshaft from an abandoned older shaft (the location of which was poorly documented). The breach released more than 70 million gallons of water, trapping all nine men 240 feet below the earth’s surface. Imagine the relief these miners felt at the sound of rescuers working to help them. First an air shaft was drilled so they could breathe. Then in the early morning hours of July 28, they were finally raised to the surface through a larger rescue shaft. They would all live to see the light of day!

Our sin has plunged us into a darkness from which we are helpless to escape. But in His grace, God established a rescue plan and announced it through the Old Testament prophets. The New Testament apostles then carried the gospel message of Christ’s fulfillment of God’s promises.

Today, through God’s written Word, we have the most complete revelation ever of God’s rescue plan for humanity. Through faith in Christ—receiving salvation through His death, burial, and resurrection—anyone can be lifted out of darkness and into the light of assurance of eternal life.

Father, thank You for not leaving us in the depths of darkness. We rejoice in the light of hope that comes from You alone. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Strong by Association

The clans of Judah will say in their hearts, “The people of Jerusalem are strong, because the LORD Almighty is their God” (Zechariah 12:5).

Scripture: Zechariah 12:1-10

Song: “Be Strong in the Lord”

As a young teen, Daryl struggled with self-esteem and became the target of a group of bullies at school. He was changing clothes after gym class one day, when they began picking on him. When one bully punched him, Daryl tried to defend himself; but when the rest began closing in around him, he prepared for the worst. Then something amazing happened. Daryl’s big brother arrived and stood behind him. His brother’s presence was enough to scatter Daryl’s enemies.

God chose Israel as the nation of people through whom He would declare His redemptive plan to the whole world. Though His people often failed to trust Him and tried to face their enemies alone, the Lord remained faithful to His promise to protect and preserve them. In fact, Zechariah prophesied of a future day when any nation that came against Jerusalem would only hurt itself, because the Lord would faithfully protect His people.

We live in a fallen world and certainly will face opposition as we walk with Christ. But we know that our strength comes not from our own feeble efforts to defend ourselves but from our Lord, who promised He would remain with us to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20). In His compassionate and powerful presence, we find ultimate strength and protection.

Father, thank You for Your faithful presence and for Your promise to be our strength and refuge from those who would seek to harm us.

Created for a Purpose

Everyone who heard this [news about Zechariah's experience] wondered about it, asking, "What then is this child going to be?" For the Lord's hand was with him (Luke 1:66).

Scripture: Luke 1:57-66

Song: "For the Music of Creation"

It was clear there was something special about Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart when he began playing the harpsichord at age 3. His first composition was published when he was 5, and by his teen years he had written several concertos, sonatas, operas, and symphonies. He performed in concerts and royal courts throughout Europe. When he died at age 35, he left behind more than 600 pieces of music and is still known as one of the world's greatest musical geniuses.

John the Baptist was still in the womb when it was clear he would be someone special. Born to Elizabeth and Zechariah in their old age, John was a miracle child. An angel announced that his purpose was "to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17). Even the people in the surrounding region recognized the events pertaining to his birth as divinely unique. The Lord was going to use John in a big way.

While most of us won't make the kind of historical impact that Mozart or John the Baptist did, we have been made to uniquely glorify God. What a privilege to bring glory to His great name in the special way He has made us to do just that!

Father, You have specially prepared each of us to glorify You. By Your Spirit we will serve You in such a way that Your goodness and greatness will be made known. In Jesus' name, amen.

The Light of Mercy

Zechariah . . . prophesied: . . . “You will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him, . . . because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven” (Luke 1:67, 76, 78).

Scripture: Luke 1:67-80

Song: “I Will Sing of the Mercies”

A man recounted his story of growing up with abuse, addiction, and violence. He hated his life and longed for a way out. A turning point came when he survived a severe accident that sent his vehicle over an embankment. Recognizing the mercy of God toward his *physical* life, he decided to turn to God for *spiritual* life as well. Today that man leads a ministry that reaches out with the light of Christ to those who are hopeless and hurting as he once was.

Jesus’ coming to earth was tangible proof of God’s faithfulness to His rescue plan. Despite our sin, God did not leave us in darkness. He showed us how good and forgiving He is by going so far as to die in our place so we could know eternal joy.

We face all kinds of pain in this life, but into such darkness the light of Christ continues to shine. His work of atonement—His death, burial, and resurrection—that defeated the sting of death is complete. Now the light of mercy and grace is set to shine on all who turn to Him.

Father, thank You for Your light of mercy that defeats the darkness of my sin. I worship and praise You for saving me! In Jesus’ name, amen.