

Jesus says that his words will not pass away. Heaven and earth will pass away. All flesh will pass away. Everything this world thinks is so important and pressing will pass away. The sun, the moon, the stars, every war, and every petty and anxious dispute – none of these things will remain once Jesus returns in his glory. And yet, until that moment, our Lord says this generation will not pass away. Until the sun no longer gives its light, the seas roar to the point that people are fainting over what is about to happen, the stars and moon are shaken, and the Son of Man comes in a cloud and great glory, this generation will not pass away. What is this generation? Who are these people? They are those who rely on their own flesh and blood. From the Jews who refuse to listen to what Moses said about him to the heathen who keep plotting to gain authority they can only have from God – these kinds of people will continue to fight against the gospel of Christ until he finally returns. But when he returns, all those who proudly opposed him and practiced all kinds of wickedness will be stubble. What they thought was so important will pass away. All the precious gems of the earth and all their high and lofty ideas will vanish. All that will be left is the Word of the Lord.

Until then, people will always be more interested in what appears to improve their lives or help them get ahead. This dying generation still fails to see how practical God's Word is to their lives. They might enjoy listening to a pastor they think is personable enough, and they might attend a church they deem relevant enough. But what they consider most important is not what God's Word offers. To be sure, the Bible gives a lot of practical advice. The prophet Malachi rebuked the people of his time for cheating each other, especially for divorcing their wives and breaking the covenant they made. This is extremely relevant for today when marriage is looked at as merely a social contract, which can be broken for almost any reason. The Scriptures are filled with practical wisdom, and those who put it to good use will often find that it goes well for them. And yet, what makes the Word of God relevant and practical is more than the fine morals and good order it teaches. Much more, it reveals Christ, who is our light, our righteousness, and our salvation.

This is why every word of Scripture is so pressing and relevant. They are the words of him who came in the flesh, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered and died for our salvation, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and will come again to judge the living and the dead. The Word of God points us outside of ourselves to Christ. When all the world is striving after things they imagine are so pressing, the words of our Lord lead us to lift up our heads, to stand ready, and look forward cheerfully to our redemption drawing near. It teaches us to trust what our reason can't understand and to look forward to what we can't yet see with our eyes.

Is this what people are looking for? Is this really practical to the guy who just lost his job or to the nation going into war? Singing your hymns and reviewing your Catechism is all well and good, if that's how you want to cope with life. This world feels it needs something more practical than that. But Jesus teaches us to seek first God's kingdom and righteousness, and all other things will be added unto us. St. Paul tells us that if God didn't spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, then he will certainly with him give to us all good things. The gospel, the good news that God has made peace with sinners by the blood of his Son, is more relevant even than your rocky marriage, your bad economy, your cloudy day, or whatever distressing situation is

bothering your heart. Of course your marriage matters. Of course God cares about your livelihood. And he causes the clouds to rain and the sun to shine upon the righteous and the unrighteous alike. But if all you care about is that your life is running smoothly, then you are no different from those who find no use for the gospel. The moment you can convince yourself that everything is going well you will forget how pressing these enduring words of your Savior are. Before you know it, you will get bored, forgetting the warning of your Lord, getting weighted down in your heart with drunkenness, nausea, and the worries of this life. And that day will come upon you like a trap.

What is pressing to you? What is relevant to you? What do you fear? This will determine what you believe to be practical. Whatever helps you get these things, cope with these things, or overcome these things, that is what's practical. That is what's relevant. At worst, it's drugs or alcohol. For others it is popular teachers of morality or fitness gurus. But what about those who are crushed by the judgment of the law and struggle with doubts and fears about their eternal doom? What is relevant to them? Listen to the hymn we sing:

When sinners see their lost condition
And feel the pressing load of sin,
And Jesus cometh on His mission
To heal the sin-sick heart within,
All grief must flee before His grace,
And joy divine will take its place.

What does God's Word have to do with war, the economy, drug addiction, homelessness, how to get in shape, or how to make friends and influence people? Of course, the Bible says more than you can handle on these things. There is no shortage of military and political tactics in the chronicles of David and the kings of Israel. It teaches you not to make your neighbor pay you back more than he owes you, to forgive debts and be hospitable. It teaches that the Holy Spirit gives us self-control. It teaches us to discipline our bodies and even to fast. It teaches confidence and boldness as well as humility and kindness. There is no good practical wisdom you will find in a book, no matter how many letters are behind or in front of the author's name, that is not taught with more clarity in the Bible. No one can honestly accuse the words of the Bible of being impractical or irrelevant. But again, what makes the Bible practical is not merely that it has a lot of good nuggets of practical wisdom. It is that it bears witness to Christ who overthrew the devil's tyranny, gave up his life to give you his eternal inheritance, frees your conscience from the bondage of sin, welcomes you into his church, lays crosses on you to prove your faith, and gives you Christian friends knit together in the unity of his own body by his own Spirit. The Bible is practical, not because it gives us what we already thought was so important, but because it gives to us what God himself prepared before the foundations of the world. And his own Son came into the flesh to give it.

Malachi spoke to those who needed healing. He told them to remember the words God gave to Moses, because Moses spoke of the Lord who was to come. What he and all the prophets had to say was more relevant and practical than anything this world could offer. To those who fear God's name the Sun of Righteousness will arise with healing in his wings. This is Jesus coming

on his mission to heal the sin-sick heart within. When does this happen? When can your broken heart be healed? Malachi speaks of this day as the last day of judgment. The wicked will be like ashes under your feet. You won't even notice them. Their big to-dos, which seemed so important, won't even cross your mind as you walk freely and joyfully like cattle grazing the fields in the spring. What a wonderful day that will be! All your regrets, all your doubts, all your fears, all your scars and wounds and sicknesses and worries – gone, healed, and replaced with the bright beams of Christ's righteousness.

We look forward to that coming of the Sun of Righteousness. But Malachi is not only speaking of his final coming. He is speaking of his coming in the flesh 2,000 years ago. John the Baptist came in the spirit of Elijah to prepare his way, calling fathers and children to repentance to prepare for the coming of the Lord. He came, born in Bethlehem, raised in Nazareth, and nailed to the cross outside the city of Jerusalem. He has already risen as the Sun of Righteousness with healing in his wings.

And so he comes today to give this same healing in his precious gospel, in his baptism, in his absolution, in his body and blood, giving you his own life and his own assurance that your sins have been atoned for, that your guilt is covered, and that your warfare is already over. You have peace with God. What can be more relevant for you than that? What can occupy your heart and mind more than that? His precious gospel and his holy sacraments are more relevant and practical for you than anything that gets you down or occupies your mind in this dying world. Consider how practical this gospel is. Consider the healing power it has on the heart that is struck with guilt, resentment, regret, and despair. It turns the hearts of flawed fathers to their children and the hearts of rebellious children to their fathers. Jesus enters meek and lowly to fill the home with sweetest peace. When hearts have felt his blessing holy and found from sin complete release, then light and calm within shall reign and hearts divided love again.

When people think the gospel isn't practical, they are being cynical. My cruel husband will never change. My brother will remain hardened in his heart. This impure feeling that keeps flaring up in my heart won't ever go away. You don't know that! You don't know what sins God will free you from or what hearts he won't soften. In the meantime, you have the gospel, the words of him who was and is and is to come. He does not count your sins against you. He gives you faith, hope, and love, causing you to know his mercy toward you more and more throughout your life. This is what his gospel does. This is what his words do for you. And his words will never pass away.

When Jesus comes, – O blessed story! –
He works a change in heart and life;
God's kingdom comes with pow'r and glory
To young and old, to man and wife;
Thro' Sacrament and living Word,
Faith, love, and hope are now conferred.

This is the healing power of his gospel. You sing about it. You confess it. You believe it. You tremble before his Word, because you know the secrets it exposes in your heart. You fear

Christ's name, because you know that there is forgiveness in no one else. Do you realize how relevant and how practical this is? God's Word isn't practical because it is in your control. God tells you to use it, but this doesn't mean that you can micromanage or manipulate it. No, the gospel works where and when it pleases God. The Spirit breathes where he wills, and no one knows where he comes or where he goes. But if you believe the gospel, if you are baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ, then you are not of this old generation that is passing away. You know that there is something much more important than land, bank accounts, and egos. You are of the new generation, born of water and the Spirit, heirs of an eternal inheritance. And even though you know that this world is evil and that this wicked generation is passing away, you can always have hope in the healing wings of Christ. So lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near.

Oh, may He soon to every nation
Find entrance where He is unknown,
With life and light and full salvation,
That heathendom may be o'erthrown
And healing to the hearts may come
In heathen land and Christian home! Amen.