



“Preparing the Way for the Lord” (Malachi 4)

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Read the text

The people of Israel in Malachi’s day were complaining that God was blessing the wicked and ignoring them (2:17). What they failed to realize was that the wicked would one day be judged, and the temporary pleasures of sin they had enjoyed in this life would not be worth the terrible destiny they will face (see Psalm 73, noting verses 16-20).

These people were also willingly ignorant of sin that *they* needed to repent of, which is the reason Malachi was sent to speak to them. It is a gracious thing to be confronted with our sin. God is not willing that any should perish, and He is also a faithful Father to those who know Him personally.

* II Kings 17:13-14a The Lord warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets and seers: “Turn from your evil ways. Observe my commands and decrees, in accordance with the entire Law that I commanded your fathers to obey and that I delivered to you through my servants the prophets.” But they would not listen and were as stiff-necked as their fathers...

* Jeremiah 7:25-26 From the time your forefathers left Egypt until now, day after day, again and again I sent you my servants the prophets. But they did not listen to me or pay attention. They were stiff-necked and did more evil than their forefathers.

* Jeremiah 29:19 For they have not listened to my words, declares the Lord, words that I sent to them again and again by my servants the prophets...

* Jeremiah 35:15 Again and again I sent all my servants the prophets to you. They said, “Each of you must turn from your wicked ways and reform your actions...But you have not paid attention or listened to me.”

* Jeremiah 44:4 Again and again I sent my servants the prophets...But they did not listen or pay attention.

God always sends warning before judgment. He is not willing that any should perish. It is fascinating to me that during the final seven years of human history before Jesus comes again, God will have an angel go around the globe proclaiming the gospel and warning mankind in hopes that they might be saved (Rev.14:6-7).

It's hard for me to wrap my mind around how awful the Day of the Lord is going to be. Revelation prophesies that 50% of the world's population will die during this time (Rev.6:8; 9:15). Evil will flourish in this day, and one known as the antichrist will attain worldwide domination (see Rev.13:5-10); It will be a terrible time for the nation of Israel, yet it will produce a purged remnant that will be saved out of it (see Zech.13:8-9; Matt.24:21-22; Rom.11:25-27).

It is during these days that the Lord will send the prophet Elijah, and it is through his ministry that many will turn to the Lord. At the same time, many will rebel, and their fate will be like those who rebelled against Elijah of old (see II Kings 1:9-15; Rev.11:1-12) I have no doubt that this is literally the prophet Elijah who will return to earth during this time. Elijah never died (II Kings 2:1-11), but he will face death after his end times ministry is completed. The second characteristic in the ministry of this dynamic duo makes us think of Moses (the plagues of Gen.7-11, blood, frogs, gnats, flies, plague on livestock, boils, hail, locusts, darkness, firstborn). Some believe the second witness here is Enoch, because Enoch also never experienced death (Gen.5:24). Whoever these two are, their ministries are like that of Moses and Elijah. They are the two olive branches of Zech.4:12-14. This is one of those prophecies that has a double fulfillment. Historically it refers back to the Lord working supernaturally through Zerubbabel to rebuild the temple, and the future fulfillment of these last days witnesses (note Zech.4:6). Through their ministry, God is showing the world what the ultimate end is for those who oppose the truth.

These final few verses in Malachi are the last words of the Old Testament. The prophetic voice of heaven was silent for over 400 years, then a prophet arose who put an interesting twist on Malachi 4:5-6. John the Baptist came in the power and spirit of Elijah (Luke 1:5-17). Jesus said that John was the Elijah who was to come for those who could receive him as such (Matthew 17:10-13; 11:14). In the ministry of John the Baptist, many people in Israel repented, and for those who did, the prophetic ministry of Elijah was fulfilled in their lives. When Elijah comes in the last days, the ultimate fruit of his ministry will be the salvation of the nation of Israel (Rom.11:25-27).

There are two overall points in these final verses of Malachi:

- THE AWFUL THE FATE OF THOSE WHO DO NOT REPENT – CURSED FOREVER!
- DIVINE DELIGHT OF THOSE WHO REPENT
 - Thief on the cross, "Today you will be with me in Paradise." It's never too late until it's too late. But be careful, because time may produce spiritual calluses...
 - Daniel 7, noting vv.25-27
 - Rom.8:18-25

See Luke 1:16-17. Whether in repentance for salvation, or in repentance from a backslidden state as a Christian, the ministry of John the Baptist/Elijah is for the purpose of making ready a people prepared for the Lord. The people asked John the Baptist who he was, and he replied from Isa.40:3-4. Illus: When the president of the United States comes to town, this is exactly what happens.

So here is the question to consider in closing: Is there anything that is preventing or hindering the Lord from moving in my life?

- Any valleys need to be filled in? The valley life is the “low-life.” One definition of a low life is a person with low moral character.
- Mountains and hills made low; pride to humility
- Crooked roads made straight; dishonesty to honesty
- Rough ways made smooth; rebellion to submission

As we look at the record of the ministry of John the Baptist, we learn some essential points to help us in removing anything that would hinder the Lord from having His way in our lives: Luke 3:7-9 Don't depend on a religious heritage or practice, but produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

3:10-11 See Matthew 25:31-46.

3:12-14 Stop your dishonest ways, and don't let money be your god any longer (Luke 16:13) What would repentance look like in your life?

- Repentance unto salvation
 - Sin in general (Rom.3:23), but perhaps a particular sin that if not repented of would keep you from being saved.
 - Rich young ruler; it was money and material possessions.
 - Pilate; it was the pressure of the crowd.
 - Heros; it was the glory of this present world.
- Repentance unto restoration
 - David; joy of his salvation (Psalm 51:12); health (Psalm 32:3; 38:3-7); witness (Psalm 51:13)
 - Ephesus; a return to their first love (Rev.2:4-5)
 - Pergamum; compromise, sexual sin, teaching of the Nicolaitans (Rev.2:14-16)
 - Thyatira; compromise, sexual sin (Rev.2:20)
 - Sardis; reputation was not reality (Rev.3:1-3)
 - Laodicea; lukewarm (Rev.3:14-20)

CONCLUSION

Would anyone like to repent tonight?

Closing song