

Sermon Title: "As We Wait for the Promise"

Scripture Reading: Malachi 3:1-4

So, just to offer a quick preface...as we celebrate advent and prepare for Christmas next week, I thought it would be interesting to look at Malachi, being the last book of the Old Testament, prior to the gap of time before the coming of the Messiah. If we're imagining that we're waiting for the birth of Christ, what exactly are we waiting for—the birth of a cute little baby in a manger? Perhaps.

But the birth of the Messiah is really a representation of the greater work Christ would accomplish on the cross. And as we'll see in the text, a fulfillment to two of God's greatest promises regarding the first and second coming of Christ.

Sermon Text:

4:1-6

"^[a]For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze," says the Lord of armies, "so that it will leave them neither root nor branches. ² But for you who ^[b]fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and frolic like calves from the stall. ³ And you will crush the wicked underfoot, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day ^[c]that I am preparing," says the Lord of armies.

⁴ "Remember the Law of Moses My servant, the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel.

⁵ "Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. ⁶ He will turn the hearts of the fathers back to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and strike the land with complete destruction."

Gloria Patre'

Intro

I remember a study done with some toddlers that tested their patience or ability to wait. The kids are sat down with a piece of candy or a cookie and instructed to wait until the adult gets back before eating it. After they leave the kid gets antsy as each minute goes by and they eventually give in and eat it. But in other cases, they instruct them that whoever can wait until the adult gets back to eat the one, they can have two. And it's no surprise that in the cases where the kid knows there's a greater reward on the other side, he is prone to wait much longer, and seemingly with much more patience.

Now, although we see human tendency best through these young kids, the same is true for adults. And whether we're talking about people thousands of years ago, or today, we want our

reward *right now*. Everything's about how we can get satisfaction and gratification quicker. Drive-through fast food and coffee, drive-through banking and package stores. A device in our pockets that's a phone, a tv, a computer, a camera. But we have a greater ability to wait when we know something greater is on the other side. In fact, many adult studies show that we're willing to delay gratification when we have a clearer vision of a future reward.

We become more patient to wait for future reward rather than immediate satisfaction or instant gratification. If we have a hope that there's something worth waiting for, we wait with patience, endurance, even perseverance. On the other hand, when we have no hope for a future reward, we're only going to do what's best for now.

To no surprise, the Bible conveyed a similar, but even more powerful principle, thousands of years ago in Proverbs 29:18 saying, "Where there is no vision, the people perish..." (Prov. 29:18). I like how another version translates it, ¹⁸ Where there is no *prophetic* vision the people cast off restraint, but blessed is he who keeps the law (ESV). I think this speaks directly to what we see with the children of Israel in Malachi. We'll see that God gave them a promise they didn't want to wait for, because they lacked vision. And it caused them to grow impatient and disobedient. And God addresses them through Malachi in an interesting but powerful way.

Background

So, for some quick background. How many of you are pretty familiar with the book of Malachi? How many of you know that Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament? It's actually the last prophetic Word from God before 400 years of silence between the OT and the NT. Sometimes we look at a book like Malachi, being the last of the "minor prophets," and only a few chapters long, as less important than some of the other books.

But Malachi doesn't just happen to be the last book of the OT. And despite the gap, there's a seamless connection between the two, which we'll see in a moment.

Context

But it's important to note for some context that Malachi was written about a hundred years after Israel's positive response to Zechariah and Haggai's call to repentance and faithfulness to God, as they urged the completion of the temple. But as some time passed, the people grew cold, not seeing the covenant blessings restored, upset still experiencing injustice at the hands of the wicked.

They wanted to see *at that point* the Messiah's total victory, perfect justice, and peace on earth. The promises of the coming Messiah, who would bring final deliverance and age-long blessings, obviously didn't come when they expected. So, like in times past, they lack faith in the promise, and they fall back into disobedience. Within the first three chapters, Malachi calls them to repentance in regard to a corrupt priesthood, their routine worship, widespread divorce, social injustice, and neglected tithing.

But this isn't just a rebuke but a reassurance of the coming Messiah. And proclaiming a double-advent prophecy—that is, he predicts the first and second coming of the Messiah—he provides a final warning but also a *final promise* of hope. A warning that one day, there will be a final judgment for those who don't repent. But a promise in that, the righteous and the wicked will be clearly distinguished once and for all. God will right all wrongs, and no more will evil triumph.

Exposition

Chapter 3

Looking back at chapter 3, the Lord Himself speaks in verse 1 saying, “Behold, I am sending My messenger.” This aligns with Isaiah 40:3—one who would “clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness.” This messenger, being John the Baptist, is confirmed in Matthew 11:10, Mark 1:2, and Luke 7:27.

He then says, “and he will clear a way before *Me*.” This is an explicit claim to Christ's divinity in predicting His own incarnation. The Lord doesn't merely promise another new and great prophet but the Lord Himself. The second part of the verse says, “And the Lord, whom you are seeking...*He* is coming,” says the Lord of armies.” These are all references to Christ and Himself at the same time.

Verse 2-5

Then, in the next verse, He quickly shifts to the second coming of the Messiah, saying, “who can endure the day of His coming? Or stand when He appears? Like a refiner's fire, which burns out all impurities.

It's not ironic that it was John the Baptist who said in Matthew 3:12, that the Lord will burn out the chaff as He gathers the wheat (vs. 2). And the metaphor of launderer's soap gives us another picture of the Lord cleansing the bride of Christ, making their sins as white as snow, as written in Isaiah 1.

It might seem strange how some of the prophets, like Malachi, sort of intermingle both advents as if they're one event. In fact, if you don't pay close attention, you might confuse details from one on to the other. But several passages found in books like Zechariah, Amos, Jeremiah, and Psalms express the second coming of Christ as quite distinct from the first. We know they're talking about two different events because they describe the Messiah differently.

For example, Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 speak about the Messiah as the suffering servant who will be crushed for our iniquities. He was afflicted yet didn't open his mouth, like a lamb led to slaughter. Yet we see the Messiah referenced in Isaiah 9 and Psalm 2, as One who will conquer and crush his enemies. One advent He is “the Suffering Servant,” and in the other He's “the Conquering King.” But the first must take place first before the second.

4:1

So, we get to chapter 4. Here in the very last prophetic word from God for four hundred years until the appearance of John the Baptist. And instead of ending with the promise of the first coming of the Messiah, the Lord foretells the second coming—that “great and terrible day of the Lord.” Some translations say that great and awesome or great and dreadful day of the Lord (v 5).

If Israel was waiting so impatiently for the appearance Messiah, you would think He would end with the next event to come—the Messiah’s first advent. But no! Remember, the context of this book began with the Israelites waiting for their conquering king. This is the underscoring theme in the beginning and the end of the book.

It’s as if Malachi threw in the *first* advent to remind them that we can’t get to that final day of the Lord until the Messiah’s first work as the suffering servant. If the Lord doesn’t make a way of redemption, then you’re doomed along with all your enemies. So, in these last few verses, as the final Word from the Lord, there’s a pretty clear focus only on the second coming...Saying, *this* is the point when you’ll see the conquering king. There won’t be a time of pure peace and perfect justice until *this* day—when the Lord comes to gather His people to Himself and make a clear separation between the wicked and the righteous, righting all wrongs and making all things new as they ought to be.

I think He’s hinting to those who might have had the misconception that the Messiah would reign as a political figure and as an earthly conquering king. And in verse one, addressing their concern with injustice and the rule of the wicked, He says, “The day is coming when all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff...so that it will leave them neither root nor branches.” He’s assuring them, that on that day, the wicked will have no chance of sprouting up again because God’s eternal judgment will be final. We see the same confirmed in both Psalm 21:9 and in Isaiah 10:17-18.

Verse 2-3.

On the other hand, in verses two and three, those who *fear* His name will be set free by the sun of righteousness with total healing, joy, and the warmth of His light. He expresses that *then* and only then; will they be conquerors and finally *and entirely* reign victorious.

Verse 4

We get to the concluding words of the Old Testament in verse 4, where the Lord warns Israel to remember the Law of “Moses My servant.” And there’s a couple reasons why this is important.

First, as He’s been reassuring them that He’s going to keep His covenant promise, He’s calling them to keep *their* faithfulness and obedience to the covenant. They had the idea that, if God were to have fulfilled His great promise, *then* we would be faithful. But God is saying, repentance must come first, and if you remain faithful, you will receive the blessing of the promise.

Second, by referencing Moses as “My servant,” they should recall the faithfulness of Moses during the Exodus. They’re reminded that they were brought out of Egypt, given the 10

Commandments, and Moses having never seen the promised land himself, remained faithful to the Lord. On the other hand, after being delivered from the Egyptians, and seeing the miracles and power of God,

Israel grew impatient and worried, waiting for Moses to come down from the mountain and decide to make a golden calf to worship. Subsequently, they wandered for 40 years waiting for the promised land due to their rebellion and unfaithfulness. So, while at the same time reminding them of the consequences of faithless disobedience, He's reminding them that He's always kept His promises.

Verse 5-6

Finally (verse 5-6), He says, "I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the day of Lord (5a). And we know that it was John the Baptist who came in the spirit and power of Elijah as the messenger of Christ's first coming (Matt. 11:14; Mark 9:11-13; Luke 1:17), but *this* Elijah comes specifically before the second coming. This is confirmed in a few passages including when Jesus confirms John as one who came first in the spirit and power of Elijah but also references a future Elijah who "comes and will restore all things" (Matt. 17:11; Rev. 11:3-12). It's passages like these that help us distinguish one event from the other. And we know the first one to be confirmed, not only because of the historical evidence that validates the life of Christ but also, the sheer amount of Old Testament prophecies that were fulfilled in the life and death of Jesus.

The text in Malachi is only *one* of over a hundred messianic prophecies in the Old Testament. Keep in mind that these predictions were verified to have been written by numerous authors, over a span of about a thousand years. And these were written hundreds and some thousands of years before Christ was even born. And these weren't vague and obscure predictions like we see in Nostradamus and others. These were detailed and specific predictions written about this one figure. Some of these include that He would be...

- born of a virgin – Isaiah 7:14
- born in Bethlehem – Micah 5:2
- Enter Jerusalem on a donkey Zech. 9:9
- Would be rejected by Israel and the nations – Isaiah 49:7; 53:1-3
- Hands and feet would be pierced – Psalm 22:16
- That He would be resurrected after 3 days – Ps. 16:10; Hos. 6:1-3 ¹

There are *numerous* prophecies fulfilled in Christ's first advent. It's clear to scholars that Jesus fulfilled at least 48 OT prophecies, which were out of the control of any man and impossible to be coincidences. In fact, when I upload this sermon to the website, I'll include a link to a part of Pastor Dan's book which documents the probability of a single individual fulfilling 48 Messianic prophecies isn't just one out of a million. But the probability is 10 to the 157th power. That's the

¹ Cote, Daniel R. *Earth to Eternity*. (Instapublisher.com, 2010.) 39

number one followed by 157 zeros. Let's just say it's virtually impossible that Christ could have fulfilled these by coincidence.²

Conclusion

So, we have a good idea of what this meant for the Israelites. And I think the same message can be applied to the rest of the world who wait for that great and final day. After 400 years the first thing we see from the returning prophet of the Lord is John the Baptist preaching, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2; Mark 3:4; Luke 3:3).

If there's any encouragement to the people of God, the Lord is reassuring His people to look forward to that great hope in the promise of the Messiah's return. Remember, Israel grew discontent and complacent in their walk because they didn't see God's promise fulfilled when and how they expected.

Even after Jesus came, He didn't accomplish right away what they imagined would be fitting for the Messiah. Jesus wasn't the political king they expected to free them from the oppression of Rome and give them victory over their enemies. But as we know, that wasn't the purpose of the Messiah's first coming. Christ needed to provide Himself as the perfect sacrifice, "the spotless lamb" (Is. 53:7; 1 Pet. 1:19). And as Isaiah prophesied, He would be "pierced for our transgressions," so that we may have redemption and atonement for sins. It was at that point when He triumphed over sin and death (Rom. 5:17; 1 Cor. 15:54-57). His resurrection gives us hope in *our* resurrection. Without this, we can't be reconciled to God and join Him at His second coming, enjoying the benefits of the new heaven and earth, of perfect justice, perfect peace and love, and Him reigning victorious for all eternity.

But human tendency, as we saw thousands of years ago in Israel, and we still see today, is that we don't like to wait. Sometimes, when our suffering doesn't end now, when our healing doesn't come now, when our blessing or victory doesn't take place now, we get discouraged and lose faith.

But Psalm 27:14 says, "Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!" Galatians 6:9 says, "And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up."

Although the last chapter of Malachi should be a message of hope, I believe our advent theme of joy today is tangled in just as much. In Nehemiah 8:10, he said to Israel, "do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength." After exhorting his disciples to abide in Him, Jesus said, "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11). God cares most about our eternal state, but He also cares about our present joy.

It's the joy of the Lord, the joy in His presence, the joy in the hope of eternal glory, which enables God's children to wait upon Him. As we near Christmas time, we should be reminded

² Cote, Daniel. *Jesus Is God and Savior*. (Multimedia Apologetics, Inc. 2022.) 79-83.

that God already fulfilled His first promise of the Messiah, who accomplished on the cross what we could never pay on our own. And as we allow that truth to permeate our hearts, we can wait upon the Lord to fulfill His other great promise, that if we accept His offer of redemption then we can join Him when He comes back to gather His church. As Revelation 21 tells us,

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.”

When we look forward to the birth of Christ, we ultimately look forward to this! Amen.