

36. Jesus in Malachi

April 13, 2017

We all know what our parents used to tell us when we goofed up too much, "This is your final warning. Knock it off. And it is not a threat, it is a promise." Some of us finally got it, but some of us who had thick heads didn't.

Malachi prophesied in about 445-432 B.C. during the time mentioned in the Books of Nehemiah and Ezra. After the return from 70 years of Babylonian captivity, the Jews rigorously guarded against pagan idol worship in their land. But over time, they gradually gave into their sins again. In the process, they also began to lose sight of God's purposes for them. It was during this period that Malachi was sent to instruct and guide God's people toward a more pure life.

Calling that which is evil "good" is nothing new to our generation. Prophet Isaiah prophesied to his generation as well. It seems that nowadays the more immoral, the more raunchy, the more godless the contents of movies, books, TV series, and whatever they put in TV, radio, or internet, the more people like it. This kind of mindset is permeating even through the Christian community. They easily wink at the things that should blush us and turn our heads.

We are in the last two chapters of the OT, we are going to see what the Lord told the Jews about their ungodly behaviors and the future events.

A. JESUS IN THE MESSENGER OF THE COVENANT

Malachi 3:1-7 "Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple. Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," Says the Lord of hosts. 2 "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire And like launderer's soap. 3 He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the Lord An offering in righteousness. 4 "Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem Will be pleasant to the Lord, As in the days of old, As in former years. 5 And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness Against sorcerers, Against adulterers, Against perjurers, Against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, And against those who turn away an alien— Because they do not fear Me," Says the Lord of hosts. 6 "For I am the Lord, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob. 7 Yet from the days of your fathers You have gone away from My ordinances And have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you," Says the Lord of hosts. "But you said, 'In what way shall we return?'"

At the end of Malachi 2, Israel complained that God seemed to reward the wicked and did not extend His justice in the world. Are we not like them? We want God's justice on the wicked NOW, because we actually want to see them suffer.

It is a very good thing that the Lord doesn't dish out His justice every time a human commits a sin. There would not be one single human alive on the earth. He is full of mercy and abounding in love. But His holiness demands judgment and His patience knows its limit.

In an ancient royal procession the messenger went before the King to announce his arrival, to indicate the route, and to remove any obstacles in the road. John the Baptist fulfilled this exact ministry for Jesus. The same idea is indicated in Isaiah 40:3-5.

Isaiah 40:3-5 The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be exalted And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight And the rough places smooth; 5 The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, And all flesh shall see it together; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken."

The promise of God for His return is found in v1 "before Me". It is not merely a new and improved prophet, but the Lord Himself. When the Lord came to the temple "suddenly," it was not without announcement. His forerunner John the Baptist declared it faithfully.

The Lord Jesus was also described as the "Messenger of the Covenant." It fits beautifully in the description of the Messiah who brought the "Covenant of Promise."

Hebrews 8:10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

The word "suddenly" reminds me of the two temple cleansings by the Lord Jesus – once at the beginning of His three year ministry and the other at the end of it. The money changers, the merchants, and especially the Pharisees who were making money hand over fist out of that scheme were taken off guard completely. The Second Coming of Christ as the Judge will be also suddenly to the unbelievers of this earth as well.

B. JESUS IN PURIFICATION

Malachi 3:3-7 He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the Lord An offering in righteousness.

According to the law of Moses, the Lord provided three ways for people and things to be cleansed and made acceptable to God: water, fire, and blood. Once the nation is cleansed, and the priests are purified, then they can become an acceptable sacrifice to the Lord and He will be pleased with them. But the priests in Malachi's time were offering blind and lame sacrifices that were unacceptable according to chapter 1:7-8.

One of the reasons Jesus so strongly rebuked the Jewish religious leaders of His day was because they were so corrupt. Their motives were self-serving and their attitudes toward others contemptible. God's Law was never meant to be used the way the Pharisees were using it. Jesus sternly urged the people to "clean up their act."

C. JESUS IN A BOOK OF REMEMBRANCE

Malachi 3:16-18 Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, And the Lord listened and heard them; So a book of remembrance was written before Him For those who fear the Lord And who meditate on His name. 17 "They shall be Mine," says the Lord of hosts, "On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them As a man spares his own son who serves him." 18 Then you shall again discern Between the righteous and the wicked, Between one who serves God And one who does not serve Him.

I love that, especially v16. The Lord hears us and writes down how we trust Him and praise Him from our hearts.

Let's face it. Living in this carnal world ain't easy, where every possible quick-fix for our ungodly desires is available at our fingertips. The problem with those quick-fixes have long lasting consequences which absolutely ain't worth all the troubles we are going to go through if we choose to.

While we seek the Lord with all of our hearts, others would laugh at us. While Noah and his family were building the ark, others laughed at them. While Moses was faithfully following the Lord's commands, the mixed multitude laughed at him. While Joshua and the Israelites were marching around the wall of Jericho according to what the Lord told them, the people inside laughed at them. While the Son of God was dying on the cross, the Pharisees and the Roman soldiers laughed and jeered at Him. But the Lord remembers His faithful children.

I don't know what is ahead of us if the Lord chooses to tarry. The world will go from bad to worse; there will be more persecutions and attacks against us and other Christians around the world. But the Lord remembers His followers.

Several places in Scripture refer to God's "book" (Exodus 32; Psalm 56, 69; Daniel 7, 12; Revelation 13, 20). In His infinite knowledge, God does not need a written record in order to keep track of human deeds. The book of remembrance is simply a concept God used to encourage His faithful ones that their love and service for Him was appreciated. It is His promise that, when His judgment comes against those who reject Him, He knows His own and will preserve them. Jesus encouraged His followers to "rejoice that your names are written in heaven" in Luke 10:20. Knowing that their names were written in God's book helped the disciples persevere to the end.

D. JESUS IN THE GREAT DAY OF THE LORD

Malachi 4:1-6 "For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven, And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up," Says the Lord of hosts, "That will leave them neither root nor branch. 2 But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings; And you shall go out And grow fat like stall-fed calves. 3 You shall trample the wicked, For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet On the day that I do this," Says the Lord of hosts. 4 "Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, With the statutes and judgments. 5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. 6 And he will turn The hearts of the fathers to the children, And the hearts of the children to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse."

Once again, Malachi returns to the theme of the coming Day of the Lord, when God will punish all evildoers. Sinners will be burning up the way fire eats up the stubble. But the true believers will see the dawning of a new day as the Sun of righteousness rises.

By the way, from the time of the early Christians like Justin Martyr to today, Christians have regarded the Sun of Righteousness as a reference to Jesus.

Malachi has been faithful as God's messenger, and he closes his Book by reminding the people of two other faithful prophets, Moses and Elijah. The law of Moses was

still God's rule of life for the Jews, and if they obeyed, God would bless them. Of course, believers today aren't under the law, but they still practice the righteousness of the law through the power of the indwelling Spirit of God.

Who is this Elijah whom the Lord will send? The Jewish religious leaders of Jesus' time asked John the Baptist about his identity in John 1. But when they asked him if he was Elijah, John the Baptist answered, "No." He did come in the spirit and power of Elijah. While John the Baptist performed the work of Elijah in the people's lives and he prepared them to meet the Lord.

But in v5, the Lord promised us that He would send Elijah himself. When? I believe that he would come as one of the two witnesses during the time of the Tribulation period that was mentioned in Revelation 11. I used to think that the other person was Enoch. I believe that I was wrong on that. I think it will be Moses. But then again, they might be someone whom we don't know anything about.

After their ministry of the witness, the Lord will pour out His wrath upon the earth and the Day of the Lord will burst upon the world in its fury. When the Sun of righteousness arises, it will mean either burning or blessing – blessing to those who have trusted Him, burning to those who have rejected Him.