



BETHEL
PRESBYTERIAN

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 21 Issue 6

February 6, 2022

Servants of God in the Present Age

Malachi 4:1-6

Soon after my grandson's death, I received an email expressing the hope that in the context of Aivor's condition that we would NOT question God or struggle with the question of "Why?"

I appreciate the concern, for the testimony of Scripture regarding man facing trial is that it isn't long before we begin to struggle with God, His goodness, His rule, His justice, and His will. Habakkuk struggled with the "Why?" (Habakkuk 1:13) as did Jeremiah

(Jeremiah 12:1)! Or who could forget Job's struggle when it came to God? While initially he did NOT sin, nevertheless the majority of the book finds Job grappling with God's justice (Job 3-39)!

One of my favorite psalmists struggled on this very point, Asaph, as we read in Psalm 73.

Psalm 73:15, "If I had said, 'I will speak thus,' behold, I should have betrayed the generation of Thy children."

It truly is quite natural in the face of tragedy or disappointment as sinners to struggle with the question of "Why?"

That having been said, it is imperative that we NOT remain there, for the Bible does give an answer, which in part is found in the final chapter of Malachi.

Malachi was written for those who live in the ordinary BUT expect the extraordinary when it comes to our day-to-day living. And it was written at the beginning of the intertestamental era — that period between the Old Testament theocracy and the First Advent/Coming of Christ. Again, at this time there were no prophets, no testifying miracles, no revelations from God. The miraculous could only be imagined. The "glory days" of the theocracy, the monarchy, and the temple were over.

And God's people were left to live as an oppressed people. Accordingly, in their suffering, they began to feel abandoned by God, which in time translated to God's people envying the life of the wicked and questioning the plan and will of the Lord!

So, what would be for the last time until Christ, God raised up a prophet, Malachi to address NOT ONLY His people's questions, BUT the many struggles that arise when our hearts grow cold toward God!

With that recall that in his sixth and final address (Malachi 3:13-18) Malachi ended on an encouraging note, detailing the positive response of some amongst the people of God. The clear hope and anticipation was that God's people would stop envying the wicked AND see them as they really are...

Malachi 3:18, "So you will again distinguish between the [way of the] righteous and the [way of] wicked, between [the way of the] one who serves God and [the way of the] one who does not serve Him."

Now, lest there be confusion at this point, Malachi in chapter 4 describes what it would look like if we "discerned the way of the wicked and the way of the righteous." Hence, it contains a description of the "Glorious Privilege of Being a Servant of God in a Fallen World"! We saw the first two reasons:

- The Contrast of the Destinies of the Wicked and the Child of God, vv. 1-2.
- The Eschatological Conquest We Someday Will Enjoy over the Wicked, v. 3.

This brings us to a third privilege; however, before we consider it, I want to remind you of the metaphor referenced last time: Because of Adam’s sin, it is as if all of mankind are trapped underground in a mine — both the wicked and the righteous! And so, everyone — the wicked and the righteous — are subject to the sin and miseries of this life!

- Christians lose their jobs... and so do non-Christians.
- Christians die of cancer... and so do non-Christians.
- Christians lose their houses to fires, have cars that breakdown at the wrong moment, get swept away by floods... just like nonChristians!

Accordingly, the difference between the child of God and the unbeliever therefore is NOT what happens to them in this life (for by and large in the mine, all experience the same trials and difficulties). RATHER, the difference is that those in Christ have a Savior who loves them, walks with them, and so grants them His grace which comes in many different packages.

This brings us to the third promise/privilege given to the child of God living in a mine, as seen in the call God places upon His children.

Malachi 4:4, “Remember the law of Moses¹ My servant, *even the* statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel.”

it is interesting that with Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, God frequently reminded His people of the calling He placed on them at the time of Moses. These post exilic prophets are saturated with references and allusions to the Mosaic legislation. And the verse before us is no exception. Joyce Baldwin explains it this way:

The whole of the Pentateuch is summed up in this verse, phrased in Deuteronomic terms. The exhortation *Remember*, used thirteen times in Deuteronomy to direct attention to experiences of God’s saving acts, now calls all Israel to observe the law of Moses. This term primarily refers to the obligations undertaken at the time of entering into the covenant (Joshua 8:32; 23:6; 1 Kgs 2:3), but later it is used of the Pentateuch, more or less complete (2 Chr. 23:18; 30:16; Ezra 6:18; 7:6; Neh. 8:1). *Statutes and ordinances*; strictly the categorical law and case law, is a very common way of referring to the law of God in general (Leviticus 26:46; Deuteronomy 4:1, 5, etc.; Ezra 7:10, 11; Neh. 1:7; Psalm 147:19). The name *Horeb* as an alternative name for Sinai is often said to be Deuteronomic... (Baldwin, 1972, p. 276)

NOT ONLY by his command BUT even in the way he stated it, Malachi exhorted God’s people to “remember” the Mosaic legislation.^{2,3} Why is that? It is because during the

era of Moses, God's Redemptive program took a massive leap forward.

First, During the Mosaic Period God formalized the Prophetic Office and Ministry. Recall when God's people were at the base of Mount Sinai, we read this:

Exodus 20:18-22a: "And all the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw *it*, they trembled and stood at a distance. Then they said to Moses, 'Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, lest we die.' And Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin.' So the people stood at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God *was*. Then the Lord said to Moses..."

This is when the formal office of the prophet began. Because God's people were terrified of the Lord's presence on Mount Sinai, they requested that God send an intermediary (which we call a prophet) through which God would speak.

Exodus 20:19, "Then they said to Moses, 'Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, lest we die.'"

God in His condescending grace was pleased to grant their request such that the lightening, thunder, smoke, trumpet blast, and quaking mountain were replaced by the voice of a single man, in this case Moses!

During the Mosaic Period, God brought incredible specificity when it came to the basis upon which His People were to relate to Him. We see it in the Exodus 12 right before God's people were freed from their slavery, God commanded them this way:

Exodus 12:7, 12-13: "Moreover, they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses in which they eat it... For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments- I am the Lord. And the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy *you* when I strike the land of Egypt."

God's people were charged by Malachi to "remember" this! We see it in the ceremonial laws given at this time which detailed how God's people could enter into the presence of God and be accepted by Him. And what was that way? Through sacrifice by which the pure received the punishment of the defiled such that the impure were forgiven their sin.

Leviticus 16:21a, "Then Aaron shall lay both of his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the sons of Israel, and all their transgressions in

regard to all their sins; and he shall lay them on the head of the goat..."

How is it that this was able to cleanse man of their sin?

Leviticus 17:11, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement."

This is the principle of substitution by which the innocent (and only the innocent) may give their life in the place of the guilty!

Now we know from Hebrews that the "blood of bulls and goats" could NOT take away a man's sin (Hebrews 10:4). And why is that? Because animals are NOT bound by the Covenant Works which ultimately is that which condemns man. Well then, why did God prescribe the ceremonial law? To prepare His people for the sacrificial work of the Messiah. After detailing the ineffectiveness of the Sacrificial system to cleanse the sin of a man, God spoke of Christ,

=Hebrews 10:9-10: "[When Christ came...] He said, 'Behold, I have come to do Thy will [that is, in the context, to sacrifice Himself in our place!!].' He takes away the first [the OT sacrificial system...] in order to establish the second [the sacrificial work of Christ on the cross]. By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

During the Mosaic period, God made clear to His people that the basis upon which they would ever and always relate to Him was by His grace on account of which Jesus died in our place that we might live! Accordingly, as individuals before God they no longer were to performance driven!

In light of this, what was the call God placed upon His people? God did NOT call them to do great things, BUT simply to prove faithful to the word given them.

Deuteronomy 18:15, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him."

Accordingly, we note that the call given in Malachi to God's struggling people was simply to Covenant Faithfulness, "Remember the law of Moses..."⁴ In other words, *Be true to My word, My revelation, My grace!* And that continues to be the call God places upon His people today. Listen to the climax on the Mount of Transfiguration, God gave this exhortation to us through the disciples:

Luke 9:32, "And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him! [clearly quoting Deuteronomy 18:15!!]'"

With this verse, we recognize our solidarity with our brothers and sisters living at the time

of Malachi. The call God placed on them remains on us as we struggle under the burdens of life. And what is that call? Simple fidelity to the Lord!

That is the call that God places upon His people living in “*a Peruvian Mine.*” It is NOT for them to do great things, BUT simply that they listen and so prove faithful to the Lord, His word, and His grace!

- Great talents we may not possess!
- We may NOT be the prettiest, smartest, wealthiest, or most gifted.
- In fact, God’s providence in our lives may very well have brought us to the point of insignificance when it comes to this world.

Yet God has never called us to be significant when it comes to this world! What He calls us to is simple fidelity to the Lord!

Sadly, as Christians this is what we jettison first when things get tough! Accordingly, let us “watch over our hearts” (Proverbs 4:23), NOT giving into to despair, disbelief, or criticism! BUT ever and always living by the grace and mercy of God!

That brings us to a fourth privilege that comes with being a servant of God in the present age as seen in the confident expectation we have for the future.

Malachi 4:5, “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet⁵ before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.”

This obviously is speaking about the promise given in Scripture that “Elijah” would precede the coming of the Messiah! We’ve already talked about this when we looked at Malachi 3 and the glory of Christ’s coming.

Malachi 3:1a, “Behold, I am going to send My messenger [referencing Elijah], and he will clear the way before Me...”

This is an amazing promise which we know was realized in John the Baptist! He truly would be the forerunner of Christ as referenced in our text this morning. Recall what Luke wrote in connection with his detailing of the birth of John.

Luke 1:13-17, “But the angel said to him [Zacharias, John’s father], ‘Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and he will drink no wine or liquor; and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, while yet in his mother’s womb. [And this would be the fruit of his ministry which we’ll look at next time...] And he will turn back many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God. [this is quoting Malachi 4:6] And it is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit

and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children [once again, quoting Malachi 4:6], and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous; so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

We'll talk more about this next time when we look at the final two privileges. For now, NOTICE the point of exhortation here, though God's people lived at a difficult time in Redemptive History, nevertheless God called them to LOOK FORWARD TO THE LAST EVENT in the outworking of God's Redemptive Program, the coming of Elijah who would herald the glorious advent of Christ- which is described in verse 5.

Malachi 4:5b, “...the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord⁶.”

Here we see how from the perspective of the Old Testament prophets the coming of Christ appeared to be one event (when we know that the Bible speaks of two advents of Christ — His first and second coming)! Recall, standing on the Front Range gazing up at the Rocky Mountains, it is easy to think that the mountains we see are next to each other. While some are, many are not! Some in fact are many miles away from each other separated by valleys and other smaller mountains. Yet from our vantage point, they appear to be one and the same mountain. That is how the coming of Christ appeared to many an Old Testament prophet. Accordingly, as in the text before us, they spoke of the coming of the Messiah as one event, and so a “great and terrible day of the Lord!”

There is no doubt that the First Advent of Christ was a “GREAT... day of the Lord” in which Christ ushered in His Messianic Kingdom in which he “bound the strong man” (Matthew 12:29) and effected the salvation of His people. Yet as almost every Sign of the Time indicates today, there is yet another day coming... “a TERRIBLE day” when Christ will destroy this world with fire, cast rebellious angels and men into the Lake of Fire, and then remake this world into a paradise. And so truly, the Christ-event which now has spanned over 2,000 years most certainly is a “great and terrible day of the Lord.”

All that being said, the point of this verse is to direct the gaze of God's people at the time of Malachi to see their present world in light of the future. That they might live in anticipation of the coming day of the Lord when the Messiah/Christ would deliver His people, right all wrongs, and vindicate His name!

Such is another glorious privilege that *continues* to rest upon everyone in Christ! Unlike the nonbeliever, God's people are called to live for the future time when we NOT ONLY will be extracted from the mine, BUT it will be forever destroyed! This is a hope which God gives that we might be buoyed in our faith and so enabled to live in this state of sin and misery!

In this regard, listen to the New Testament exhortation when it comes to all in Christ —

it still is to live with a confident expectation regarding the future.

Romans 5;1-2, “Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.”

What is this hope? Peter answered it when he wrote this:

1 Peter 1:3-6a, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, [and here is the hope... that we might...] to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice...”

There is no question, the words of encouragement which Malachi gave his generation remain the glory and joy of God’s people such that Paul could describe us with.

Philippians 3:20-21a, “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory...”

And so, yes, things aren’t the way we wish they were in this age! AND the more we take our focus off of God’s Redemptive Plan the more we will want to make this world a comfortable home. Yet we must understand that, just like God’s people in exile, we remain “strangers and aliens” in this world such that “our hope and confidence” is NOT in what God might give us today by way of blessing, BUT that our good God, who loves us unto the death of His Son, is in complete control of all things!

In His sovereign control, He is working all things unto His glory and our good! The good which God is working is that we might come to a fuller and more profound understanding of Christ, His character, and His saving grace. Listen to how Peter put it.

1 Peter 1:1-2, “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered [the language is one and the same as that used of God’s people in the exile. Accordingly, our earthly identity must NOT be that of kings, queens, wealthy, rich, famous, and the like, BUT aliens and so strangers to this world- defined in Peter’s day as...] throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, [yet notice our glory and confidence] who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may [1] obey Jesus Christ and [2] be sprinkled with His blood [the order is important! God saved us that we might obey, BUT on account of our sinfulness we’ll never obey which only will

make us more and more acquainted with the glory and power of the ‘sprinkled blood of Christ’. It is only as we live here that...]: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.”

So yes, we are trapped in this state of sin and misery alongside the wicked~ the Peruvian Mine. What we experience they experience. BUT the difference between us and them is that

- We have a glorious future in which someday we will be delivered out of our imprisonment in this mine, vv. 1-2.
- At this time, all wrongs will be righted such that we will give the “Amen” to the judgment Christ renders the wicked for their sin and abuse of God and His people, v. 3.
- Until then, our call living in this darkness is NOT to do great things, BUT simply to be faithful to Christ, His word, and His grace, v. 4.
- And as we do all of this, we are to set our focus and joy NOT on the passing things of this life, BUT the Kingdom and glory that await us in Christ... for which we have been saved, v. 5.

References

- Baldwin, J. G. (1972). *Haggai Zechariah Malachi (Tyndale Old Testament Commentary)*. Downers Grove: Tyndale.
- Boice, J. M. (2006). *The Minor Prophets, Volume 2*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books.
- Duguid, L. (2010). *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi (Ep Study Commentary)*. Grand Rapids: EP Books.
- Micah Fries, S. R. (2015). *Exalting Jesus in Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary)*. Nashville: Holman Reference.

End Note(s)

¹ The Hebrew Bible, what we refer to as the OT, is composed of three sections, often collectively referred to as the Tanakh. Each of the consonants in this word represent one of the three sections. So the ‘T’ stands for the Torah, the Law. The ‘N’ stands for the Nevi’im, the Prophets. And the ‘K’ is for the Ketuvim, the Writings. This last section contains the wisdom literature and poetic books of the Old Testament. ¶ Within the Torah (Genesis through Deuteronomy), God reminds the people to hold fast to the law of God, to keep it central in their life and worship. The first books of each of the latter sections both begin with a commendation of the law for God’s people. After Moses passed the baton, God outlined for Joshua a recipe for success: *Above all, be strong and very courageous to carefully observe the whole instruction My servant Moses commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right or the left, so that you will have success wherever you go.* (Joshua 1:7) ¶ That phrase the whole instruction refers to the teaching of God in the Torah. Do you want to be effective as a leader, Joshua? Do you want to be successful in your life and ministry? Then follow the law. Notice what the Lord says next: *This book of instruction must not depart from your mouth; you are to recite it day and night so that*

you may carefully observe everything written in it. For then you will prosper and succeed in whatever you do. (Joshua 1:8) ¶ If Joshua is to be successful, he must meditate on and memorize the law. ¶ In the first book of the Ketuvim the law of God is once again essential to fruitful living before God. Psalm 1 starts by pronouncing a blessing on the man who will set his heart on the law: *How happy is the man who does not follow the advice of the wicked or take the path of sinners or join a group of mockers! Instead, his delight is in the Lord's instruction, and he meditates on it day and night.* (Psalm 1:1–2) ¶ If he does that, *He [will be] like a tree planted beside streams of water that bears its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. The wicked are not like this; instead, they are like chaff that the wind blows away.* (Psalm 1:3–4) ¶ Psalm 1 goes so far as to contrast the man who delights in the law with the wicked, foreseeing the futility of those who dismiss God's instruction. ¶ Looking at the prominence of God's law throughout the Old Testament, it should be no surprise that God turns to the people of Israel at the end of Malachi and commands them to remember Moses' instruction. This is perfectly consistent with what He has instructed the people to do from the very beginning of their existence!" (Micah Fries, Stephen Rummage, and Robby Gallaty, *Exalting Jesus in Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, Malachi 4:4)

² "Having affirmed the reality of a final distinction between righteous and wicked, the prophecy closes by pointing Malachi's hearers back to '**Moses**' and '**Elijah**', representatives of the law and the prophets. The Lord's words remind them of the '**law**' given to Moses at Mount '**Horeb**', also known as Mount Sinai. This law, with its '**statutes and judgements**', which are all of its constituent decrees, was given to all Israel on the day when they were constituted as a nation. This law was what the priests had been failing to teach to the people as a whole (2:6). (Duguid, 2010, p. 238)

³ "There are always people who want to hold forth the law apart from God's personal intervention in their lives; they become legalists. But there are others—they are more numerous and a greater danger today—who want to exalt their experience of God to the neglect of obedience. That cannot be done, simply because the God who acts is also the God who speaks. If you claim to have a relationship with God, then you must heed Malachi's warning: "Remember the law" and do it." (Boice, 2006, p. 612)

⁴ "Israel was prohibited from separating the idea of following God from the idea of following God's law. They were one and the same. Jesus affirmed this in Matthew 5:17: 'Don't assume that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.' Through His Word, particularly the OT, God has given a road map for success—not to riches and fame, but a road map to pleasing Him and living the abundant life: Meditate on My Word and do it! (see Josh 1:7–9; Ps 1:1–3)." (Micah Fries, 2015, p. Malachi 4:4)

⁵ "The choice of Elijah to typify the coming prophet may have been suggested by the mention of Horeb, for, like Moses, he had a revelation of God there (1 Kgs 19:8–18). Then again Elijah served as a moral catalyst to the nation. No other prophet so dramatically changed the attitude of his contemporaries, nor so influenced the destiny of the nation. If the messenger of 3:1–3 was in mind, Elijah had called down fire from heaven (1 Kgs 18:38), had witnessed the Lord's wind, earthquake and fire at Horeb (1 Kgs 19:11, 12) and had been taken from Elisha in a chariot of fire. The fact that he did not experience death suggested that he still lived to carry on his work (cf. 2 Chronicles 21:12)." (Baldwin, 1972, p. 276)

⁶ This is a reference to Joel 2:31.