

Text: Malachi 4:1-6

Title: The Sun which is Righteousness

Truth: The remnant will be delivered from evil and judgment.

Date/Location: Sunday June 30, 2019 at FBC

Introduction

Last time we saw a stark contrast between two groups:

1. On the one hand, there were those who complained harshly against God, who were wicked, and who did not serve God.
2. On the other hand, there were those who feared God, who were righteous, and who served God.

In due time, the LORD promises, there will be a new circumstance in which there will be absolutely no confusion between who is right and who is wrong. The claim of the Israelites that the wicked prosper will no longer be a tenable belief.

When will that finally come about? We have already seen some of the arrangement of future events from Malachi's perspective. The Lord is coming (3:1-2) and He will bring judgment upon some and restoration for others. A few more details:

1. A messenger will come before the Lord, announcing His arrival.
2. The Lord will come with judgment and blessing. This is not the first coming of Christ, but instead it is the second coming.
3. There will be a kingdom in which Christ reigns visibly on the earth. During that time, discernment between the righteous and the wicked will be clear.

We should also look at a couple of informational points to help us understand this passage. Horeb (verse 4) is another name for Mt. Sinai. It is the place where the people of Israel received the Law of God by the hand of Moses (Exodus 19:1-3, 11).

The word *curse* mentioned in 6c, is the very last word in the book. It is a notable word because it means to put something under the "ban" or "devote it to destruction." See for example Exodus 22:19, Leviticus 27:29, Numbers 21:2-3, Deut. 2:3-4, Joshua 2:10, 6:17-18 (and all of chapter 7). This is a very strong word for utter and total destruction.

Note three sections in this sixth message from Malachi:

I. The Future Role of the Lord: Judgment and Blessing, v. 1-3

First we read of the judgment portion of the Day of the Lord in verse 1.

- A. At the beginning of His kingdom, there will be a devastating judgment in which the evil ones will be burned up. They will be extinguished from the earth. This does not refer to their final punishment in the lake of fire, but rather to their expungement from the kingdom.
- B. The judgment is thorough. This we know because **all the proud** will be stubble and there will be left **neither root nor branch**. Normally a forest fire would burn what is above the ground and maybe singe the surface of the roots; but this fiery judgment will be so hot that if it were a literal forest fire burning trees, it would destroy the roots well into the depth of the earth. But it is not a forest fire, *per se*. It is a fire on the wicked and proud. Earlier in chapter 3 (v. 1) we read of a fire that would purify the people of Israel. That purifying type of fire is a bit different than this destructive type of fire. The result will be the incineration into ashes of those who are proud and wicked.
- C. Now, pause for a second and reaffirm your understanding of final judgment. Many have gone astray at this point. They say, "Look, God is telling us that He will reduce the wicked to ashes. Therefore, we should conclude that they will be annihilated." Annihilationism is the belief that unbelievers will simply cease to exist. This "eliminates" the supposed problem of eternal punishment. But that line of thinking ignores something very important: the ashes are the results of God's judgment on the *bodies* of the proud. It says nothing about what happens to their *souls*. When they are killed during the Tribulation, their souls will go where the souls of unbelievers go today, to await final resurrection and judgment at the Great White Throne. So even though their bodies are destroyed, their souls live on forever in judgment.
- D. The judgment of God is certain. It is delayed, but not eliminated.

Then we read about the blessing portion of the Day of the Lord in v. 2.

- E. "But" is a wonderful contrasting word. Instead of destruction, God promises blessing. The blessing is described as "the sun of righteousness." What is the sun of righteousness? We should start by saying what it is not. It is not the same as Matthew 13:43 where Jesus says, "then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father." It is also not a misspelling of the word "Son." Nor because "Sun" accidentally sounds like "Son" in the English language should we read this as a *direct* reference to Jesus the Messiah. (In Hebrew, "sun" is

“shemesh” and “sun” is “ben.”) The sun is a figure of speech that relies upon the universal understanding of brightness and warmth of the sun in our solar system. Instead of referring to a bright and warm light, the promise is that something will arise upon the people that will shine a splendid righteousness upon them. It will bring righteousness and healing—references to complete spiritual and physical wellness.

- F. It is this reference to righteousness and healing that makes us understand that Malachi is *indirectly* referring to the Messiah. God our righteousness will reign over Israel (Jer. 23:6 and 33:16; Psalm 84:11). He will take away spiritual and physical disease, all a result of sin, and heal His people. The righteousness that will shine and permeate the land is that righteousness provided and produced by Christ in His people. So the verse is really more about the effects of the work of Messiah than Messiah *per se*.
- G. With righteousness will come enormous blessing. Instead of living in fear for their lives, believing people will go out openly and boldly. They will run and walk with great confidence and joy. They will not be weak and emaciated from tribulation; rather they will be fattened up like the most well-cared for animals on a farm. Picture the joy and energy of a young horse that has been in its barn stall for a while and is let out to pasture.
- H. Judgment is not all negative or bad. It has happy results for those who trust in God and tire of evil in their world. Notice in verse 3 that the righteous will trample underfoot the wicked, who have been cremated into ashes. This is a literal happening, and it also reflects the figure of absolute and utter victory for believers in God. No matter how the wicked triumph at present or during any period in world history, they will be utterly destroyed in God’s future earth. See Isaiah 26:5-7.

II. The Present Role of Israel: Obedience, v. 4.

- A. This verse is very simple: in view of coming judgment on the wicked and blessing for the righteous, the remnant of God’s people is exhorted to “remember” the Law of Moses. This means more than keeping the Law in mind by memorization. It means to “keep” the Law. This Law was given at Mount Sinai, aka Horeb. It had lots of components, including statutes and judgments.
- B. No religious evolution had occurred in 1,000 years of Jewish life. The standard under Malachi was exactly the same as it was under Moses in 1440 B.C. There was absolutely nothing new about that. Now, what would change that is the coming of the Messiah the first time. But even that does not erase the Law as an expression of God’s holy character. We

still use the Law today as a general guide as to what pleases God. The situation and application we find ourselves in today is different, but there is much by way of principle and practice that is relevant.

III. The Future Role of Elijah: Preaching Repentance, v. 5-6

- A. The promise is that God will send Elijah. This is one person who did not die, but was taken up in whirlwind associated with a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:11). He will return before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. Review his career in 1 Kings 17-19, 21, and 2 Kings 1-2. Remember the famine that he prophesied (and “caused”); the way God provided for him and the widow of Zarephath; the resurrection of the widow’s son; the challenge to the prophets of Baal and Asherah and how Elijah was victorious over them, thus showing the superiority of the God of Israel to the useless idols of the nations; the restart of rain in the land; his escape from Jezebel; his complaint to God about being the only believer left; God’s message to him in a small voice; his training of Elisha; his condemnation of Ahab; and his declaration to Ahaziah that he would die.
- B. We understand that time to be the Great Tribulation, or the second half of the Tribulation of Revelation 6–19. This is why many believe that he is one of the two witnesses (Rev. 11:3-7).
- C. His message will be a call to repentance. The message—which will be essentially the same as the gospel we preach today—will turn the society around. Fathers and children will be reconciled because of the gospel. Sinners will be confronted by the truth of Christ and be changed.
- D. In terms of *timing*, John the Baptist doesn’t fit here. Why? Because the dreadful Day of the Lord did not happen during or just after his lifetime. In terms of *message*, this is just like what John the Baptist did in the third decade of the first century and into the early part of the fourth decade, where he cried out “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” People could easily have mistaken him for Elijah (Matt 3:1-2, Luke 1:17), but he was not. The curse mentioned in verse 6c will not in be carried out in the full. We understand it as the Tribulation judgments at the end of our present age, which if not cut short, no flesh would have been saved.
- E. Note this: if there was not a repentant spirit among the people, God would strike the earth with “the ban.” God would wipe it out entirely. But He will spare for the sake of believers. If there is no repentance, there is no reason for God *not* to thoroughly purge the earth with fire.

Conclusion

God will do His part; Elijah will do His. The people of Israel were supposed to do theirs. How about you? Your corresponding part is to remember the Word of God and do it. Know it and live it. MAP

Note

It is interesting to note that in the Hebrew Bible, Malachi 4:1-6 are numbered as Malachi 3:19-24. Also, Malachi is in the middle of the Hebrew Bible. 2 Chronicles is the last book in the Hebrew arrangement of the text. The order is law first, then the prophets, and finally the writings.