

Reading: Malachi 4:1-6

Theme: Directions for preparation!

Malachi had to speak to a hard hearted, indifferent, self-centred people and to make the situation worse, they were contentedly religious with it all! Malachi had brought many strong messages from God against the people and in this last chapter, he has spoken around the theme of “*the day of the Lord*” - which of necessity, would include the warning of the day of judgement. As we noted last time, history is not circular, nor repeats itself, but as it had a beginning, so it will have an ending. History is **His story** and God knows when the dominion of time in this world history will end in cataclysmically awesome events.

God does not dumb down, nor change His standards or plans. He does not make light of these things, but is serious. Last time we saw 3 things God was serious about concerning the day of the Lord: **1. God is serious about it occurring** - we are not to doubt it, not to view it as an event merely spoken of as a threat to keep mankind in fear and therefore in line. It will really and truly happen. **2. God is serious about His solemn and loving warnings** - He gives such warnings not to terrify, but He, in His love, warns us to be prepared and ready for that day by going to Him. These warnings were given to those who had so many privileges of knowing of God. Some of you have had opportunity, after opportunity - please realise that God in His love warns you to hear, repent and trust the Lord Jesus as your Saviour. **3. God is serious about His precious promises** - God’s promises to those who know and love Him are secure and He will fulfil all His glorious promises and on the day of the Lord, it will be amazingly breath-taking to be the recipients of such.

Malachi then carries on with the message God gave to and through him -giving the people **directions for preparation in the light of**

the coming day of the Lord (v4-6). Again, I want us to note 3 things concerning these directions for preparation. So, we see:

1. Directed to Moses. (v4)

God had seriously and lovingly given them these unmistakable warnings. What more could He say to convince them? He could send more prophets, wondrous signs; He could send severe judgements and bolts of lightning, but He doesn't! He sends them **back** to Moses and His law given through Moses!

Here were these ones questioning, despising God, even wanting answers and God says "*Remember the law of my servant Moses...*" The book of Malachi begins with the Lord reminding the people that He loved them, but they doubted and questioned this. Here the Lord says "*Remember...*" that for some 1000 years they as a nation had known God, His ways, His dealings, His covenant promises and the covenant obligations laid on the nation.

These things were given to the nation at Mount Horeb (*another name for Mount Sinai*). For 1000 years or so they had known God's requirements and standards. He had reminded them, told them categorically in 3:6 that He had not changed and so as they were away from Him, it meant they had changed, altered, gone away from Him, His standards and ways.

They were to expect no new revelations; they were not to look to dreams, visions, voices, or enchantments. God directed them back to His God-given law and decrees. There was nothing further they needed to have and live by. In fact, all the prophets of the ages had continually, constantly called people back to God's laws and ways as revealed in the law of Moses.

Some commentators say that here the Lord was ending OT revelation and until the events of NT, God's voice through prophets and prophecy was silent. I agree that God's voice was not audible in prophecy through that time, but I feel it is too a big step to take that from what v4 says.

Yet, would this directing them to Moses, the laws and decrees revealed through Him, have prepared the people for the day of the Lord? Malachi, nor the Lord is saying "*Do your best*" or "*Live by these*" - for the Law was never given to allow mankind to earn salvation, as we can never perfectly keep God's Law. In fact, that is cruelty beyond belief to say such. If anyone listening is trying to earn salvation by good works, can I urge you to look at the Law and the decrees given through Moses, let them examine you and your life - as they will expose your failure to keep them and live as they insist on!

The Law shows us our faults and failings - not to drive us to despair, but to drive us to God and to call on Him for help, mercy and forgiveness. We will be shown through God's Law that all of us are far from perfect and we need someone to help us, to deal with our failures to keep the holy law of God and remove our guilt. In words from the NT "*the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ*" - to say to us "*You cannot do this, but He can! He can even deal with your sin breaking and guilt!*"

We are to remember Moses' law - here the people were directed to Moses, but see where else they were directed:

2. Directed to John the Baptist. (v5)

Someone may look at v5 and say "*It doesn't say that!*" Others will smugly know where I am going, but please put up with me as I work it through for us all to follow. Yes, Malachi speaks of the

prophet Elijah - even I can read that! The Jews since this prophecy, are looking for Elijah the Tishbite (1 Kings 17ff) to return, for he never died, but was taken up into heaven. Yet the Hebrew here reads "*Elijah the prophet*" and it has a different emphasis; for it was not Elijah the Tishbite who would literally come again, but one with the same ministry, manner and passion of Elijah the Tishbite. We saw back in 3:1 that God would send His Messenger to prepare the way before Him and now here in v5 this Messenger is linked to Elijah.

In the book of Luke, Gabriel the angel appeared to Zachariah in the temple, he told Zachariah of the son he and his wife Elizabeth would have - Luke 1:17 "*he will go on before the Lord, **in the spirit and power of Elijah**, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*" Elijah had a ministry of reproving, instructing, warning and even predicting the Lord's ways and coming.

In the life and ministry of John the Baptist, we learn of such things, but we are left in no doubt that this prophecy spoke of John - the Lord Jesus says so in Matthew 11:14, also His comments in Matthew 17:10-13 make it clear to His generation. Interestingly John the Baptist denied he was actually Elijah, nor was he the Prophet (*that Moses spoke c.f. John 1:19-21.*)

Malachi spoke of one who would come as an Elijah-like prophet before the day of the Lord – here called "*the great and dreadful day of the Lord.*" In NT, the people were directed to John the Baptist in preparation for the day of the Lord. So how did John the Baptist prepare them? In fact, the coming of Jesus wasn't a great and dreadful day was it?

John's ministry was a preparatory ministry. He laid into the nation and caused many to wake up to God's real demands; He called many to God through repentance. He warned of judgement - an axe laid to the root of the tree; fire ready to destroy. John laid into the smug, self-contented religionists of His day. It caused the Pharisees, Sadducees and all to wonder if he was the Christ, or Elijah, or the Prophet. John said no to all of these and said that he himself was the one to prepare the way, then he announced the Lord was coming, was even among them and that he, John, wasn't worthy of undoing his sandal straps.

That is a thunderbolt from a clear blue sky and John spoke of Jesus' final work of judgement as it would occur on the day of the Lord. Yet the Lord Jesus' ministry and work in flesh at that time does not seem to be like that. We rightly see and stress His work of grace, mercy and salvation. Yet, in fact, Jesus brought the day of judgement smack bang into real time in real history.

There on earth in Israel was the Judge living and walking among them; in the midst of a dirty sinful world and yet He was pure and sinless. Demons knew it and cried out "*What have I to do with you, do not torment me.*" People knew it and asked Jesus to "*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man.*" Charles Wesley did not write in "Hark! the Herald Angels sing" these words "*Veiled in flesh the Judgement see, hail incarnate Judgement day*" but he could have! Jesus spoke clearly and simply of this in John 3:18-21 "*Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but **whoever does not believe stands condemned** already because He has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that His deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes*

into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what He has done has been done through God.”

John the Baptist came along just before this One, he proclaimed a hard message to a hard generation and many turned back to God, the hearts of the fathers to the sons and the sons to the fathers. The ministry of John brought people to love and live as they should. The proof of a new life and heart is to love others, for this is the hallmark stamp of true faith and love for God through the Lord Jesus. It is not mere words - saying we believe, but it is the living of holy lives and loving as God loves, with a holy love.

If the people would not listen to John, their land would be cursed. In fact, the majority did not, nor did they listen to Jesus, the Son of God and a foretaste of the Day of judgement occurred in the land being cursed - Israel was destroyed as a nation in 70 A.D. and not reformed until 1948.

It is sad that Israel, with all its privileges, opportunities to hear God, has the word of God end to them - with the last words of OT being “*a curse*”. Yet, there is one more direction in preparation for the day of the Lord:

3. Directed to Our Lives Today. (v6)

We have seen and considered sad and serious matters, but these are the words of God and applicable to our lives today. Are we guilty of hearing of God, perhaps hearing often and living self-contentedly, wilfully away from Him and His ways? Would you believe if God gave you dreams, visions, or appeared here before you? God says in effect “*Wise up - you have Moses, you have the prophets, you have the Gospels. You will get no more!*” If you will not believe these, then what more can He say to you, for it seems you will not listen, as you ignore His voice,

His pleadings, His threatenings. If you want to know of God, His way of salvation, then all needed is here in the Bible.

You definitely do not have a John the Baptist here before you, in fact, you have someone greater than John the Baptist! Yes, you heard me correctly - see Matthew 11:11 where Jesus says *“I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet **he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.**”* This means that I, as someone in the kingdom of heaven as a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, am greater than John the Baptist, as are you as a believer, for we are greater in our knowledge and understanding of Jesus, His words, His salvation, in our ability to speak more comprehensively of Jesus, His life, death, resurrection, ascension, glorification and that He is going to return to this earth one day. We can speak personally of the so great salvation He has accomplished and will give, lavish freely on all who call on Jesus as their Saviour. We also have a clearer understanding of the horror of the Day of the Lord as it is revealed in NT by Jesus and His apostles.

To you who have regularly heard me preach here, I have spoken of Jesus, His love and the way of salvation. I have spoken of the way to God, spoken of hell and its horrors and that you must flee from it and go only to Jesus as your Saviour. Look at my hands, they are clear of your soul and your blood! You may ignore, despise, neglect the message from the word of God, but if you do so, one of the last words of God to you will be a curse as He will say to you *“Depart from me you cursed.”*

Malachi does not ease up does he! Pray I will never ease up - praying for you all, especially for you who will not believe; never ease up preaching faithfully God’s word. But for us all, I ask us to

examine our own lives - do we want to be cursed for ever or have the wonder and joy of eternal life for ever?

This message is directed to all of our lives, to cause us to prepare for the day of the Lord by trusting the Lord Jesus as our Saviour. What about you and the Lord Jesus? Sort that out now. I urge you to be right with Him and do so even at this time. I want to urge you to speak to someone you know or to me, do not delay in making your peace with God through the amazingly wonderful Saviour He has provided – this has been recorded due to the corona virus pandemic measures that are in place at the moment. So, give Christian friends a call, give me a call and we can talk with you and point you to Jesus so you can trust Him as your own Saviour.

Then and only then will you know the joy of the Lord, the wonder of the new life He will give you. You will then know the ongoing and on growing love and care He will lavish on you and you will become more and more like Him in your everyday life.