



Date: 12-21-2025

Text: Malachi 4:4-6, Luke 1:5-25 NLT

Sermon Title: The Last Word Before the First Christmas

Our question is often the same as Israel's:

"God, when will You speak again? When will You move?"

1. The Last _____ Before the Silence

Malachi 4:4 NLT

4 "Remember to obey the Law of Moses, my servant--all the decrees and regulations that I gave him on Mount Sinai for all Israel.

Notes:

2. The Last _____ Before the Messiah

Malachi 4:5 NLT

5 "Look, I am sending you the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the LORD arrives.

Notes:

3. The Last _____ Before Four Hundred Years of Silence

Malachi 4:6 NLT

6 His preaching will turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers. Otherwise I will come and strike the land with a curse."

Notes:

The _____ That Breaks the Silence

Luke 1:17 NLT

17 He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah. He will prepare the people for the coming of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and he will cause those who are rebellious to accept the wisdom of the godly."

Notes:

NEXT STEPS

So, what does Malachi & John the Baptist have to do with us today?

1. God often _____ us before He moves in us.

John came to prepare the way for Christ.

Where is God preparing you?

2. God _____ hearts before He restores circumstances.

Malachi's final promise is about hearts turning. Maybe the work God wants to do in us this Christmas is:

3. Advent is not about _____ it's about preparing.

Not rushing to Christmas... but readying ourselves to meet the Christ who came, who comes, and who will come again.

Malachi, Book of

Author. The name Malachi means “my messenger” or “messenger of the Lord.” Since the word appears in 3:1, some scholars think that it is not a proper name at all and does not provide the name of the author of the book. According to one ancient tradition, the “messenger” was Ezra, the priest responsible for the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. Yet it would be most unusual for the Jews to preserve a prophetic book without explicitly attaching to it the name of the author. All of the other major and minor prophets—including Obadiah—are named after a particular prophet. Moreover, “messenger of the Lord” would be a most appropriate name for a prophet (cf. 2 Chr 36:15, 16; Hg 1:13).

Historical Background. During the 5th century BC. the struggling Jewish community in Judah was greatly assisted by the return of Ezra and Nehemiah. In 458 BC. Ezra was encouraged by King Artaxerxes of Persia to lead a group of exiles back to Jerusalem and to institute religious reform. About 13 years later in 445 BC. a high-ranking government official named Nehemiah was allowed to go to Jerusalem to rebuild the city walls, a task he accomplished in 52 days (Neh 6:15). As governor, Nehemiah led the people

in a financial reform that provided for the poor and encouraged tithing to support the priests and Levites (5:2–13; 10:35–39). Like Ezra, Nehemiah urged the people to keep the sabbath and avoid intermarrying with pagan neighbors. After a 12-year term, Nehemiah returned to Persia and the spiritual condition of Judah deteriorated. Perhaps discouraged by their lack of political power, tithing became sporadic, the sabbath was not kept, intermarriage was common, and even the priests could not be trusted. When Nehemiah came back to Jerusalem some time later, he had to take firm action to straighten out the situation (13:6–31).

Date. Since Malachi had to deal with the same sins mentioned in Nehemiah 13 (see Mal 1:6–14; 2:14–16; 3:8–11), it is likely that the prophet ministered either during Nehemiah’s second term as governor or the years just before his return. The reference to “the governor” in Malachi 1:8 implies that someone other than Nehemiah was in office, so it may be best to place Malachi just after 433 BC, the year Nehemiah had returned to Persia.

Purpose and Theology. Malachi was written to shake the people of Judah from their spiritual lethargy and to warn them that judgment was coming unless they repented. The people doubted God’s love (1:2) and justice (2:17) and did not take his commands seriously (1:6; 3:14–18). Yet God was “a great King” (1:14) with a great name that was to be feared even “beyond the border of Israel” (1:5, 11). Malachi repeatedly urged both the priests and the people to revere God and give him the honor he deserved. God was Israel’s father and creator (2:10), but the nation showed contempt for his name (1:6; 3:5). In response to this contempt, God would send his messenger to announce the day of the Lord (3:1). John the Baptist did call the nation to repentance, and Christ came to cleanse the temple (Jn 2:14, 15) and establish the covenant (Mal 3:1, 2). Most of the work of refining and purifying will take place at the second coming, however, when Christ returns to purify his people (cf. 3:2–4) and judge the wicked (4:1).

Content

God’s Great Love for Israel (1:1–5). To introduce the book, Malachi presents a contrast between God’s love for Israel and his hatred for Edom. Yet the assertion of God’s love is greeted with a strange question: “How have you loved us?” God loved Israel by entering into a covenant with the nation at Mt Sinai, just after he had freed them from the prison of Egypt. He had chosen them as his special people (cf. Gn 12:1–3; Ex 19:5, 6), whereas the descendants of Esau were not chosen (cf. Rom 9:10–13). Both Israel and

Edom endured invasion and destruction, but only Israel was restored and rebuilt after the exile. The people of Edom were driven from their homeland by the Nabataeans between 550 and 400 BC, and they never regained their territory. Through the judgment of Edom, God demonstrated that he is the great ruler over the nations (1:5) and that he will not forget Israel.

The Unacceptable Sacrifices of the Priests (1:6–14). Although God deserved the honor and reverence of the Israelites, both the people and the priests openly disdained his laws and regulations. Strangely, it was the priests who led the way into disobedience. Sacrifices and offerings were supposed to atone for sin, but the animals offered by the priests only served to pollute or defile the altar (1:7, 12). According to Leviticus, animals with defects were unacceptable as sacrifices, but Malachi mentions that the priests were offering “injured, crippled or diseased animals” to the Lord (1:13; cf. 1:8). To emphasize their contempt, the Lord challenges the priests to bring comparable presents to the governor (v 8). Would they dare to insult him in this fashion and face sure rejection? Rather than having the priests continue to bring unfit sacrifices to the altar, the Lord asks them to close the temple doors entirely (v 10). Going through the motions never pleased God, either in ancient times (cf. Is 1:12, 13) or modern. By calling the altar and its sacrifices “contemptible” (vv 7, 12), the priests were no better than the wicked sons of Eli, whose disregard of the rules for sacrifices sent them to a premature death (cf. 1 Sm 2:15–17).

In sharp contrast to the attitude of the priests stands the emphasis upon God’s greatness in verses 11 and 14. God is more powerful than the gods of other nations, and even if Israel’s priests and people dishonor the Lord, eventually pure offerings will be brought to God by believing Gentiles. Perhaps these offerings refer to prayer and praise (cf. Ps 19:14; Heb 13:15; Rv 5:8), but others interpret the reference more literally (cf. Is 56:7; 60:7). Peter may be alluding to this verse in connection with the conversion of Cornelius (Acts 10:35).

The Punishment of the Priests (2:1–9). One of the functions of the priests was to pronounce blessings upon the people in the name of God, but their disgraceful behavior turned the blessings into curses (v 2). Because of the priests’ sinfulness and the poor condition of the animals, their sacrifices were also worthless, and the entrails of the animals will be spread on their faces as a sign that God holds them in contempt. The disgrace heaped upon the priests differs sharply from the honor enjoyed by Aaron and his descendants. Malachi refers to a “covenant of life and peace” (v 5) made with Levi and more particularly with Aaron’s grandson Phinehas, who courageously took

action against Jews involved in idolatry and immorality (Nm 25:10–13). In those days the priests revered the Lord “and turned many from sin” (Mal 2:6).

Another responsibility of the priests was to teach the nation the Law handed down by Moses (cf. Lv 10:11). Like prophets, they were messengers of the Lord (Mal 2:7) who were supposed to walk close to the Lord, but now the priests disregarded the Law and were dishonest in handing down judicial decisions (v 9; cf. Lv 19:15).

The Unfaithfulness of the People (2:10–16). In light of the attitude of the priests it is not surprising to discover that the people at large were unfaithful to the Lord. God had formed Israel to be his special people, but the people had broken faith with him. A major factor in their unfaithfulness was intermarriage with foreigners, a sin mentioned in Ezra 9:1, 2 and Nehemiah 13:23–29. By marrying pagan women the men of Israel invariably began to worship pagan gods and turn from the Lord. When such intermarriage occurred, it sometimes followed the divorce of an Israelite wife. In verses 14, 15 God underscores the sacred commitment that he himself witnesses when two people marry. If that marriage covenant is shattered by divorce, God is deeply displeased (v 16), and it is even more tragic if divorce becomes an excuse to marry a more attractive or appealing foreigner.

The Coming of the Messenger of the Covenant (2:17–3:5). The sins of the priests and the people did not go unnoticed, even though the nation doubted that God would take action (2:17). But the third chapter opens with the announcement that the messenger of the covenant will indeed come to his temple. His way will be prepared by another messenger, a prophecy of John the Baptist, who “cleared the way” for the ministry of Christ (cf. Mt 11:10; Mk 1:2, 3). When Christ came, he did reveal his anger when he cleansed the temple (cf. Jn 2:13–17) and denounced the scribes and Pharisees (cf. Jn 9:39), but most of his purifying and refining work awaits the second coming. Some day the priests and Levites will bring acceptable sacrifices, as they did in the days of Moses and Phinehas (cf. vv 3, 4 and 4, 5). Verse 5 broadens the scope of the judgment to include the whole nation, as sorcerers, adulterers, and those who oppress the poor are condemned.

The Benefits of Faithful Tithing (3:6–12). Another specific weakness of postexilic Judah was the failure of the people to bring their tithes to the Lord. Encouraged by Nehemiah, the nation did promise to tithe faithfully (cf. Neh 10:37–39), but apparently their good intentions were short-lived (cf. Neh 13:10, 11). According to Malachi 3:8, 9, the giving pattern of the nation was so dismal that the people were in effect robbing God and were therefore

under a curse. In verses 10–12 Malachi challenges the nation to bring their tithes and then God would pour out his blessing upon them. Just as the opening of the “windows in heaven” meant the end of a famine in 2 Kings 7:2, 19, so God promises that their crops will be so abundant that they will run out of storage space. Likewise, Paul challenges believers to give generously to the work of the Lord and discover the overwhelming blessing of God upon their lives (2 Cor 9:6–12). For Israel, renewed prosperity would bring the recognition of the nations that God has blessed them in accord with the promise made to Abraham (Gn 12:2, 3; Mal 3:12). The hope of “blessing” in verses 10 and 12 provides welcome relief from the curses mentioned in 1:14; 2:2; 3:9; and 4:6.

The Day of the Lord (3:13–4:6). Faced with the challenge of verses 10–12, the people of Israel responded in two different ways. One group denied that serving God brought any benefit (vv 13–15) while another segment of the nation bowed low before him with deep reverence (vv 16–18). The unbelievers argued that obeying the Lord was useless and that arrogant and evil people were the ones who prospered. In response to their charge Malachi noted that God would remember who the righteous were in the day of judgment. Although all of Israel was included in the promise made to Abraham, only those who genuinely believed would be God’s “treasured possession” (3:17; cf. Ex 19:5) and their names will be written in the book of life (cf. 3:16). As for the arrogant and evildoers, the day of the Lord will consume them and they will have no survivors (4:1). Those who revere the Lord will enjoy spiritual and physical health under the blessing and protection of God, who is called the “sun of righteousness” (4:2). Like calves just released from confinement, the righteous will “trample down the wicked” and triumph over them (v 3).

In view of the judgment associated with the day of the Lord, as he concluded the book Malachi urged the people to repent. To do this they needed to heed the Law of Moses and take seriously the decrees and commands given at Mt Sinai (v 4; cf. 3:7). Just as Elijah called on Israel to turn back to God, so a new “Elijah” will preach repentance to a rebellious nation. When John the Baptist prepared the way for Christ (cf. Mal 3:1), he ministered “in the spirit and power of Elijah” and begged the Jews to turn from their sin and humble themselves before God (Lk 1:17). If they refused to listen, the nation faced the prospect of total destruction, the curse placed

upon the people of Canaan (cf. Jos 6:17–19) and upon the nation of Edom, whose collapse was described in Malachi 1:2–5.¹

¹ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, [“Malachi, Book Of,”](#) in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1380–1382.