

## **Prepare the Way of the Lord**

### **Text: Malachi 4:4–6**

Final words can carry an unusual weight.

*Sometime in December of 2013, my mom asked me to do her a favor. She was having a medical procedure, and she wanted me to sit with my dad at the hospital while she was having it done. I was very busy at the time, but I told her that I would be happy to spend some time with my dad.*

*They were leaving for their annual trip to Florida for the winter. The procedure was on December 30<sup>th</sup> and they were leaving for Florida on January 4<sup>th</sup>.*

*December 30<sup>th</sup> came and went. I totally forgot about the whole thing. I mean it completely fell out of my head. It wasn't until the next day my mom called me and rebuked me for not coming to the hospital. Of course, I was grieved and I apologized profusely but I couldn't get that time back with my dad.*

*They left for Florida on the 4<sup>th</sup>, just as planned. When they finally arrived to their destination of Holiday Florida, my dad got out of their motor home and within minutes had a massive, bleeding stroke. In one hour, he was unconscious. They flew him to Tampa via aero med. His oldest grandson, Jayson, was the last person that he talked with over the phone. My dad told him to make sure to take care of his grandma.*

*I lost out on the last opportunity to talk with my dad. I can never get that back and I live with that regret every day.*

*My nephew, Jayson, took his grandpa's last words to heart. And he did make sure his grandmas was well cared for.*

Last words are powerful.

Last words linger

Last word can and should motivate.

Malachi records the final words of the Old Testament era before four hundred years of prophetic silence.

That alone should make us lean in and listen carefully.

These verses are God's final instructions before the arrival of the Messiah.

These verses are the last verses in the Old Testament.

And what are those instructions?

Remember My Word.

Watch for My messenger.

Prepare your heart.

Malachi has confronted spiritually apathetic people throughout this book.

The priests had dishonored worship.

The people had treated marriage carelessly.

Many had questioned whether serving God was worthwhile.

Some openly accused God of injustice.

Others grew cynical because the wicked seemed to prosper.

But in the midst of all that spiritual decline, God repeatedly called His people back to covenant faithfulness.

And now the book closes by looking forward.

Forward to a coming messenger.

Forward to the coming Day of the Lord.

Forward to the coming Messiah.

It is important to remember that after Malachi, the prophetic voice goes silent for approximately four hundred years until the arrival of John the Baptist in the wilderness.

The Old Testament closes with anticipation.

The New Testament opens with fulfillment.

God waited silently for 400 years for his people to turn their hearts back to him.

We know they did not prepare for the Lord, even after ample prophetic warning.

We should not fall into the same trap! We must be prepared, because, as we said last week, He is coming back!

And this leads to the main idea for this morning...

**Main Idea: We Prepare for the Lord by Remembering His Word and Turning our Hearts Back to Him.**

Malachi leaves God's people with three final instructions.

**1. Remember the Word God Has Given — v. 4**

**Malachi 4:4 ESV**

*“Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel...”*

The first command is simple:

“Remember.”

This is not merely intellectual recall. In Scripture, remembering means:

- holding firmly,
- obeying faithfully,
- living responsively,
- and refusing to neglect what God has said.

God specifically points them back to “the law of Moses.”

The people were not **lacking** revelation.

They were **neglecting** revelation.

That has been the problem throughout Malachi.

God had spoken clearly about worship.

Clearly about holiness.

Clearly about covenant faithfulness.

Clearly about justice.

Clearly about marriage.

Clearly about giving.

Clearly about fearing the Lord.

But the people had become spiritually careless with the Word of God.

The reference to Horeb reminds them of Mount Sinai, the place where God established covenant relationship with Israel and gave His commandments to His people.

The issue was never whether God had spoken.

The issue was whether the people would listen.

This theme runs throughout the Bible.

**Joshua 1:8 ESV**

*This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.*

### **Psalm 1 ESV**

*Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers;<sup>2</sup> but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.<sup>3</sup> He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.<sup>4</sup> The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away.<sup>5</sup> Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;<sup>6</sup> for the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.*

Jesus said in

### **John 14:15 ESV**

*“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”*

And in [James 1:22](#)

### **James 1:22 ESV**

*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*

Listen carefully, spiritual decline begins with neglecting God’s Word.

People stop reading carefully.

Stop listening humbly.

Stop obeying quickly.

Stop applying personally.

And eventually the heart begins drifting from God.

That is why revival and renewal throughout Scripture are always tied to rediscovering and responding to the Word of God.

*During the reign of King Josiah in 2 Kings 22, something shocking happened in Judah. While repairs were being made to the temple, Hilkiah the high priest discovered the Book of the Law buried and neglected inside the house of God.*

*Think about how tragic that is.*

*The very Word of God had been forgotten among God’s own people. Worship rituals continued. Religious activity continued. The temple still stood. But the voice of God had been neglected and buried beneath years of spiritual compromise and indifference.*

*When the scroll was finally brought to King Josiah and read aloud, everything changed.*

*The king did not respond casually. He did not shrug his shoulders or say, “Well, that was interesting.” The Bible says he tore his clothes in grief and humility because he suddenly realized how far the nation had wandered from the commands of God. Hearing the Word exposed their sin, awakened conviction, and produced repentance.*

*And from that moment, renewal began spreading throughout the nation. Idols were removed. False worship was destroyed. Covenant renewal took place because the people encountered the Word of God again.*

*Listen carefully, Judah did not need new philosophies or better marketing strategies. They needed to hear the voice of God again.*

*And the same is true for us today. Spiritual renewal does not begin when people become more entertained, more comfortable, or more distracted.*

*Renewal begins when hearts are confronted, softened, and shaped by the living Word of God.*

*When the Law was finally read aloud, Josiah tore his clothes in grief because he realized how far the nation had wandered from God.*

What changed the nation?

Not new ideas.

Not cultural strategies.

Not political power.

The people encountered the **Word of God** again.

That is still how God awakens hearts today.

### **Romans 1:16 (ESV)**

*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*

Church, never become casual with Scripture.

Do not let the Bible become decorative.

Do not let familiarity produce indifference.

Do not assume knowledge automatically produces obedience.

We live in a culture drowning in opinions, outrage, entertainment, distraction, and noise.

But God still speaks through His Word.

If you want to prepare your heart for the Lord, then:

Read the Word.

Study the Word.

Meditate on the Word.

Obey the Word.

Treasure the Word.

But Malachi not only points backward to the Word God had given. He also points forward to a messenger God would send.

## **2. Anticipate the Messenger God Will Send — v. 5**

### **Malachi 4:5 ESV**

*“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes...”*

Again Malachi says, “Behold.”

Pay attention.

Watch carefully.

God is about to act.

God promises to send *“Elijah the prophet.”*

This creates an important prophetic question because Elijah had already been taken to heaven centuries earlier.

So, what does this mean?

The New Testament helps us understand that John the Baptist came *“in the spirit and power of Elijah”* ([Luke 1:17](#)).

### **Luke 1:17 ESV**

*...and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”*

He fulfilled this prophecy in a preparatory sense by calling people to repentance and preparing the way for the first coming of Christ.

Jesus Himself connected John to this Elijah-like ministry in [Matthew 11](#).

### **Matthew 11:11–15 ESV**

*Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. <sup>12</sup> From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. <sup>13</sup> For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, <sup>14</sup> and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. <sup>15</sup> He who has ears to hear, let him hear.*

But again, as we have talked about with prophecy, often times their are multiple fulfillments that take place in a single prophecy.

John the Baptist came, fulfilling Malachi's prophecy here in verse 5. The reinstated Elijah, is revealed in the New Testament at John the Baptist.

Many scholars understand Malachi's prophecy to anticipate an additional future fulfillment connected to the coming Day of the Lord before Christ's second coming.

God sends messengers before judgment comes.

God warns before He judges.

God calls people to repent before wrath falls.

That is the mercy of God.

And this is exactly what God did with John's message. Do you remember what John's message was? Listen to the message he preaches in [Matthew 3...](#)

### **Matthew 3:1-12 ESV**

*In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, <sup>2</sup> "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." <sup>3</sup> For this is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.' " <sup>4</sup> Now John wore a garment of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. <sup>5</sup> Then Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan were going out to him, <sup>6</sup> and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>7</sup> But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? <sup>8</sup> Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. <sup>9</sup> And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. <sup>10</sup> Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>11</sup> "I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and*

*fire. <sup>12</sup> His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”*

Wow! This guy, just like his prophetic namesake, Elijah, did not mince words. He spoke truth reminiscent of the prophets of old.

John preached repentance. He told the Jews to turn back to the God of their fathers.

His baptism was not affiliated with the salvation that the Messiah would provide. That is called believer's baptism.

No, John's baptism was specifically for the Jews demonstrating that they were cleansed and ready for the Messiah's arrival.

If you have ever had doubts of the connection between the Old Testaments message and the New Testament, they should be done away with because of the prophet Malachi's work.

The Lord's first coming is not considered “the great and awesome day of the Lord.”

His first coming is the incarnation that resulted in His sacrificial death, burial and resurrection.

Simply stated, He came as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

However, and this is what I believe Malachi is referring when he says, *“the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.”*

We talked about this extensively in the last sermon. The Day of the LORD is coming.

Remember verse 1?

#### **Malachi 4:1 ESV**

*“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.*

A future day of Judgment is coming and the Judge will be Jesus. Not as a lamb, but as a LION!

So, what we see in this passage is that a messenger will come before that great and terrible day. This messenger will talk about Jesus. And he will warn of the future judgment. John did all of this and more.

**Isaiah 40:3**

*“A voice is calling,  
‘Clear the way for the LORD in the wilderness.’”*

All four Gospels connect that prophecy to John the Baptist.

John came preaching repentance because the King was coming.

His message was not:

“Improve your life.”

“Discover your potential.”

“Follow your dreams.”

His message was:

***“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”***

John understood that preparation for the coming King begins with heart-level repentance.

*In the ancient world, when a king planned to visit a city, his arrival changed everything long before he actually appeared.*

*Messengers would travel ahead announcing that the king was coming. Their job was not merely to share information, but to prepare the people for the arrival of royalty.*

*Roads would be repaired so the king’s procession could travel smoothly.*

*Debris and obstacles would be removed. In some places, rough paths would literally be straightened and leveled.*

*City leaders would organize preparations carefully because no one wanted to dishonor the king through neglect or indifference.*

*The atmosphere of the city would change completely once word spread that the king was coming.*

*People paid attention. They prepared themselves. Priorities shifted because the arrival of the king mattered more than ordinary life.*

That imagery helps us understand the ministry of John the Baptist.

God sent John ahead of Christ like a royal messenger announcing the arrival of the King.

John came preaching in the wilderness, calling people to repentance because the Messiah was near.

Spiritually speaking, he was calling people to clear away the debris of sin, pride, hypocrisy, and unbelief that filled their hearts.

The problem was not that the King was unworthy to enter. The problem was that the people's hearts were unprepared to receive Him.

And listen carefully, the same preparation is still necessary today.

Jesus Christ is King whether people acknowledge Him or not.

One day every knee will bow before Him.

The question is whether our hearts are prepared for His coming now.

Are we removing the obstacles of sin? Are we responding to His warnings?

Are we humbly repenting and making room in our lives for the rule and reign of Christ?

The King is coming.

And wise people prepare for His arrival.

Nobody shrugged their shoulders at the arrival of the king.

Everything changed in preparation for his coming.

That is exactly what John the Baptist did spiritually.

He came announcing:

“The King is coming.

Prepare yourselves.”

God still mercifully warns people today.

Every sermon preached faithfully,  
every gospel conversation,  
every Scripture read,  
every conviction of the Holy Spirit,  
every call to repentance,  
is a mercy from God preparing hearts before final judgment comes.

Do not ignore the warnings of God.

Do not harden your heart.

Do not assume there will always be more time.

The King is coming.

He came the first time meek and mild. A sheep who went to slaughter for the payment of your sins.

The second time He will come is yet in the future. He will not be meek and mild. He will come as the King to reclaim all that is His! And He will, like any King, destroy what is against Him!

### **Revelation 19:13–16 ESV**

*He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. <sup>14</sup> And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. <sup>15</sup> From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. <sup>16</sup> On his robe and on his thigh, he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.*

This is the Jesus we must prepare for!

And that leads Malachi to his final instruction.

### **3. Prepare Your Heart Before the Lord Comes — v. 6**

#### **Malachi 4:6 ESV**

*And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”*

Malachi closes with the issue of the **heart**.

That is fitting because the entire book has ultimately been about heart-level rebellion and heart-level restoration.

The language here points to repentance, reconciliation, and spiritual renewal flowing through families and communities.

The issue is not merely family therapy.

It is covenant restoration.

When people truly repent and turn back to God, relationships begin changing.

Pride softens.

Bitterness loosens.

Selfishness weakens.

Forgiveness grows.

Love returns.

But notice the warning:

*“so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.”*

The Old Testament ends with the word “curse.”

That is intentional.

Sin brings judgment.

Rebellion brings separation.

A hard heart invites divine discipline.

And the Old Testament leaves us longing for Someone who can finally remove the curse.

That Someone is Jesus Christ.

[Luke 1:16–17](#) directly connects John the Baptist’s ministry to [Malachi 4:6](#).

#### **Luke 1:16–17 ESV**

*And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God,<sup>17</sup> and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”*

John came calling people back to God in preparation for Christ.

And ultimately, Christ came to do what no prophet could fully accomplish:  
to bear the curse of sin Himself.

#### **Galatians 3:13 ESV**

*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—*

That is the glory of the gospel.

The Old Testament ends with the **curse**.

#### **Malachi 4:6 ESV**

*...lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”*

The New Testament reveals the Savior who bears the **curse** for His people.

#### **Matthew 1:21–25 ESV**

*She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.”<sup>22</sup> All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet:<sup>23</sup> “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which*

means, God with us). <sup>24</sup> When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, <sup>25</sup> but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.

Imagine receiving advance notice that the King of England was coming to your home?

You would not ignore the mess.

You would not leave things in chaos.

You would prepare carefully because the arrival matters.

You would even do things the King would never see - like paint your closets or something.

*“I say, I’ve noticed that you missed a spot in the upper left-hand corner of your pantry.”*

*“How disappointing!”*

In the same way, Malachi is telling us:

The Lord is coming.

Prepare your heart.

Remove what dishonors Him.

Turn from sin.

Be reconciled.

Respond to His Word.

Walk in repentance and faith.

Is your heart prepared for the Lord?

Not merely your church attendance.

Not merely your theology.

Not merely your outward behavior.

Your heart.

Are you tender toward God?

Responsive to His Word?

Quick to repent?

Growing in holiness?

Longing for Christ?

Listen, preparation for the Lord is not panic.

It is faith and repentance.

**Faith** is believing what God has said is true!

**Repentance** is a change of mind that leads to a change of action.

It is agreeing with God and then doing what He has revealed in His Word.

It is turning from sin and turning toward Christ.

## **Conclusion**

We Prepare for the Lord by Remembering His Word and Turning our Hearts Back to Him.

The final verses of the Old Testament remind us that every person must eventually respond to God.

No one remains neutral forever.

Either our hearts harden toward Him or soften before Him.

Prepare your heart for the coming of the Lord today.

Return to His Word.

Respond to His warnings.

Repent of your sin.

Trust fully in Jesus Christ.

Do not wait for a better time.

Do not assume tomorrow is guaranteed.

The King is coming.

As we close our series, *Return to Me: A Call to Renewed Faithfulness*, we are reminded that this has been God's loving invitation to His people all throughout the book of Malachi.

Again and again, the Lord confronted His people because He loved them too much to leave them in spiritual apathy and unfaithfulness.

He called them back from polluted worship.

Back from careless obedience.

Back from cynical unbelief.

Back from empty religion.

Back from dishonoring Him with their words, their marriages, their giving, and their hearts.

Throughout this series, God has repeatedly spoken the same gracious invitation:

**“Return to Me.”**

And now the book closes by reminding us how that return happens.

Remember His Word.  
Watch for His messenger.  
Prepare your heart.  
The King is coming.

It is remarkable that the Old Testament ends this way.

The story feels unfinished.  
The silence begins.  
Four hundred years pass without a prophetic voice.

Then suddenly, in the wilderness, a prophet appears.

And his message sounds very familiar:

**“Prepare the way of the Lord.”**

Then the Messiah arrives.

Jesus Christ came the first-time offering salvation through His death and resurrection. He bore the curse of sin for all who would repent and believe in Him.

But Malachi also reminds us that Christ is coming again.

And when He comes, every heart will be revealed, every wrong will be judged, every promise will be fulfilled, and every knee will bow before the King of kings.

**So church, as we leave the book of Malachi, do not leave unchanged.**

Return to the Lord.  
Return to His Word.  
Return to wholehearted worship.  
Return to faithful obedience.  
Return to reverent fear of His name.

**And prepare the way of the Lord.**