

## Advent: The Promise of Day in the Darkest of Night

**Intro:** Malachi spoke to a disillusioned, discouraged, and doubting people. They seemed unable to harmonize their life experiences with the prophetic promises of God. Rather than enjoying a glorious Messianic age, they were impoverished, oppressed, and cynical about God and His promises. Malachi's words confront these skeptical people who are living out their skepticism. Bad thinking and believing has turned into bad acting and living. This confrontation and encouragement is applicable in our day as well. One might well argue that American Christianity has become quite similar to the people of God to whom Malachi spoke.

### Malachi 3:17-4:6

#### Background and Historical context:

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- God's people during the time Malachi wrote/spoke these words could be described in the following ways.
  - They were familiar with the promises of God.
    - God promised a peaceful and united kingdom
    - God promised a good, benevolent, and righteous King
    - God promised prosperity for and His presence with all who dwelt in the kingdom
  - They were experiencing oppression and difficulty.
    - Their kingdom had been decimated, and they were exiles
    - The king who ruled them was a foreign king with the same interests as all other earthly kings (i.e. not good, not benevolent, and not righteous)
    - Their temple-city was rebuilt, but it was a downgrade (aesthetically speaking) from the first Temple
  - Because of these circumstances, they were skeptical of God's promises and lived compromisingly with the world around them.
    - They neglected the law of God (they withheld their best offerings, divorced their faithful wives, and intermarried with idolatrous wives)
    - They doubted that the promised Messianic age would ever come (*"It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the Lord of hosts?"* –Mal. 3:14).

## **Outline:**

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- (1) There are significant parallels between Malachi's audience and us today.
- (2) Christ has come, both initiating and confirming the "*Day of the Lord.*"
- (3) In light of this reality, we should be compelled to think, speak, and act.

## **Message Body:**

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### **1. There are significant parallels between Malachi's audience and us today.**

*"It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the Lord of hosts?"* (Mal. 3:14)

- A. Today, we live in a world dominated by suffering, dysfunction, and pain of all sorts (emotional, physical, relational, mental, social, political, economic, etc.).
  - i. We may find it hard sometimes to see how a good, benevolent, and righteous king could be in charge of all this.
- B. The visible Church (Christians who identify as such in some public way) does not seem united, prosperous, or at peace.
  - i. Between 6,000 and 10,000 evangelical churches in America close or dissolve each year.
  - ii. American Evangelicals are experiencing a tremendous decrease in social influence, political power, and public respect.
  - iii. Somewhere between 71% and 83% of all Americans identify themselves as "Christian."

#### **AND YET:**

- a. More than half of all Americans believe that the Bible is not the written word of God, that the Bible is not accurate in all that it teaches, and that the Bible is full of myths.
- b. About 40% of Americans believe that God does not have any authority over people.
- c. Less than half of all Americans believe that the Bible has authority to tell us what we must do.
- d. Only 10%-17% attend church "regularly" (defined as 3 out of 8 Sundays).

- C. The visible Church in America does seem skeptical about God's promises and lives compromisingly with the world.
- i. Many Christians are quite at home in the world, and actually lament that they will exchange this world for the next.
  - ii. Many Christians are much more concerned about being "relevant" than they are about being faithful, obedient, or accurate.
  - iii. Many American churchgoers expect God to help them achieve the American dream, and have no interest in a biblical worldview.

## 2. Christ has come, both initiating and confirming the "Day of the Lord."

*"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..." (Mal. 4:1)*

- A. Christ will ultimately judge sin and sinners everywhere.
- i. Romans 2:12-16 – "12 For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. 13 For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. 14 For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. 15 They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them 16 **on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.**"
- B. Christ confirms the certainty of God's eschatological judgment at the cross.
- i. Romans 3:23-26 – "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. **This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. 26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.**"

*“But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.” (Mal. 4:2)*

A. Malachi combines two distinct ideas about God/God’s Messiah.

- i. Psalm 84:11 – “**For the LORD God is a sun** and shield; the LORD bestows favor and honor. No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly.”
- ii. Speaking of the ‘Davidic king,’ the prophet Isaiah said, “**Behold, a king will reign in righteousness...**” (Isaiah 32:1); and Jeremiah said that the “**righteous king**” will “**execute justice and righteousness**” (Jer. 23:5-6).

B. The New Testament confirms both of these ideas are fulfilled in Christ.

- i. Zechariah said of his son (John the Baptist), “**And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace**” (Luke 1:76-79).
- ii. Christ is called “righteous” on numerous occasions (1 Jn. 2:29, 3:7), but we are specifically told that Christ is our “righteous advocate” with the Father.
  1. 1 John 2:1 – “**My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous ...**”

**3. In light of this reality, we should be compelled to think, speak, and act.**

*“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes” (Mal. 4:5).*

A. Thinking about the “Day of the Lord”

- i. Peace and Joy in spite of our circumstances
  - a. Though the circumstances we face may be fearful, difficult, and disheartening, we should be compelled to remember that God has appointed a day when He will bring perfect judgment (including blessing and cursing) upon all people everywhere.

## B. Speaking about the “Day of the Lord”

### i. Conviction and Courage to proclaim the Gospel

- a. Though our friends and family may take the ultimate judgment of God lightly, we should be compelled to speak all the more (both boldly and lovingly) about the reality and nearness of such a day.

## C. Acting like we believe the “Day of the Lord” is really coming

### i. Walking in holiness and genuine love

- a. Though everyone in the world may make temporal pleasure their goal, we should be compelled to act according to God’s commands and in light of His precepts.

## **Application**

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- What is God commanding us to BELIEVE here?
  - God is still the sovereign ruler of time and history
  - God has not grown weary or become forgetful
  - The “Day of the Lord” will be both more dreadful and more joyful than we have ever imagined
  
- What is God commanding us to DO here?
  - Marvel at and trust in the sovereignty of God
  - Trust and believe in God’s promise to judge and bless the world
  - Think, speak, and act in light of the coming judgment and blessing

## **My Prayers**

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- May God comfort us with His presence as we remember His promise.
- May God help us to find joy, peace, and rest in Him this Christmas season.
- May God make us the witnesses we ought to be of His grace and power.