

November 30, 2025
“Return: A Final Word”
Malachi 4:1-6
Vernon Advent Christian Church

Introduction... Back in ch1, God reminded his people that he had sovereignly elected them to be His and that He loved them. They had returned from exile about 100 years before and, even though the Temple had been rebuilt, their land had been reduced to a mere fraction of its former glory. As a result, they had forgotten God’s love, because their sinfulness had caused them to experience God’s judgment.

So, God called them to give him their best to Him in their worship, for He alone is worthy. But instead, they brought God their worst, offering sacrifices that were blind, lame, and sick. And so, God cursed the priests in ch. 2, for allowing this and called them out for their failure to give honor to God. For as the priests had gone, so had gone the people. One unfaithfulness led to another.

An unfaithfulness to God which manifested itself, at the end of ch 2, in their unfaithfulness in marriage. Now the inevitability of this happening was no wonder, for God’s messengers had failed to honor God and lead the people in the way they should go. So, God promised to send his own messenger in ch. 3 to both purify and vindicate his people through the judgment of their sinfulness.

Also in ch 3, God addressed another practical outworking of their covenant unfaithfulness. Not only had they demonstrated unfaithfulness in what they offered God, and in their marriages, but also in terms of how they both viewed and used their finances, they were not bringing their full tithe, but keeping some back for themselves, and thus robbing God. So God, once again, cursed the self-indulgence of his people.

Then in final verses of ch 3, where we left off last week, we saw where all this unfaithfulness ultimately originated, in a lack of reverence for God. But those who feared God, who revered His name, would be spared the coming judgment for their names were written in the “book of remembrance,” and “they shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession.” Which brings us to the final words of the prophet Malachi.

Not only does our passage this morning contain the final words of Malachi’s message, but it also contains the final words that the LORD spoke to the nation of Israel before the promised Messiah would come, some 400 years later.

Now, of course, God knew that these would be the final words for the people of Israel to hear before this long period of silence. And He made sure that He communicated the most important things for the people of Israel to hear. They were not to forget these words.

Like the people living in the last days of the OT, we live in a world that often feels like a long, dark night don't we? We see injustice flourish, human pride celebrated, and people hurting. The question that echoes through our hearts is one that the people in Malachi’s time knew well: “Where is the God of justice?”

Malachi 4 opens with a reminder that this "long night" has an expiration date. It promises a coming "day" when the darkness will be purged by fire. But this passage isn't just about judgment; it is fundamentally a message about hope. It's about the unshakable certainty that a dawn is coming, a dawn where the source of all light, the "Sun of Righteousness," will rise and banish every shadow of darkness. And it's a fitting way to enter into the Advent season as we celebrate the birth of Christ.

Today, we will see how this passage offers us the only hope that can sustain us in our present trials and that hope is fully realized in the advent of God's Messiah, Jesus, as we transition from God's message to return to Him in the Minor Prophets to the anticipation and preparation for how we are to return to him in the coming of the Messiah. If you are able, please stand with me in honor of God's word this morning as I read Malachi 4:1-6. [Read Passage]

The world can be incredibly discouraging, can't it? We see the "arrogant and all evildoers," as described in vs. 1, seeming to get away with everything, while the righteous suffer. It's easy to lose hope that true justice will ever prevail.

But in the midst of the gloominess, vs. 1 describes a "day coming, burning like an oven." The coming day is described as a time of intense, fiery judgment. The oven represents the thorough and consuming nature of God's wrath against the wicked.

Now, this is different than the refiner's fire mentioned for God's people in ch. 2, which is meant to purify God's people and make them fit to truly worship Him once again. This is a necessary judgment.

But this fire described here completely destroys what's thrown into it, consuming it entirely like stubble. The stubble mentioned here is the unusable part of the grain stock that was left in the field after the harvest. We see this all the time around us, after the farmers harvest their corn. Farmers now a days just till what's left into the soil, but back in Malachi's day, it was considered useless and was burned up.

The phrase "leave them neither root nor branch" further points to the complete eradication and destruction of the wicked. It signifies that there will be no lasting remnant or future for those who oppose God. In this way, this provides hope, not in a sadistic way, but because it reminds us that the evil we struggle against is not eternal. God will deal with it completely and will destroy it.

Now, the true center of our hope is found in vs. 2. [Read] This is a beautiful, powerful image of our hope fulfilled. The "Sun of Righteousness" is a clear messianic prophecy pointing directly to Jesus.

Malachi compares the appearance of the coming Messiah with the rising of the sun. The picture we get is of a cold, dark night, where danger can most easily lurk, replaced by the warmth, light, and security of the rising sun that reveals a new day dawning.

When we think of the rising sun we certainly think of its beauty, but we also think of what it typically brings, again, its warmth, and light, and even safety. I am particularly appreciative of each of these we enter into these winter months when we often get less of each. But notice what this new dawn brings here. What does it say? Sun of what? Righteousness. The sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings, bringing light, warmth, and safety, spiritually speaking.

Now, in one sense, that dawning has already begun in the hearts of God's people at the first advent of Christ. Yet, in another sense, we await the day when the sun of righteousness will arise completely, when Jesus comes again and we will be healed completely of all that plagues us and sin and death will be no more.

Each Christmas we sing the message of this verse here in Malachi in the lyrics of the Christmas Hymn, "Hark the Harold Angels Sing." The second verse reads like this, "Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace! Hail the Sun of Righteousness! Light and life to all He brings. Risen with healing in His wings. Mild He lays His glory by, born that man no more may die. Born to raise the sons of earth, born to give them second birth. Hark! The herald angels sing, Glory to the new-born king." The "sun of righteousness" was born to die, so that we may truly live. May that truth bring us hope today.

Well, what is the result of this healing? Pure joy. "You shall go out and leap like calves from the stall." Pure joy and freedom unlike anything we have ever experienced in the cold, dark night before the dawn of our salvation. Before Christ, we once laid bound to our sin as much as a calf stood constrained in its stall over a long winter. But, now we are free! And this freedom from Christ's healing wings results in the same kind of boundless joy a calf would experience after being pent up for an extended period in a stall. This makes me think of when the Miller's let their cows go out into the fields after the long winter and how they go running and leaping and prancing around, happy to be free from the confines of the barn.

And so I ask you, if you are a believer, are you someone who knows the excitement, gratitude, and joyful freedom your salvation has brought? Do we realize we have much for which to be joyful? Do we realize scripture commands joy for those who fear God? It's not optional. It's essential. It's this joy of the LORD that the people of God had lost that was part of what led them down the road of unfaithfulness. May we be a people of joy as we think on the things that God has done for us, namely in the person of Jesus.

Now, vs. 3 is a bit disturbing if we think about it simply in the abstract. But I didn't want to leave it hanging, so I'll take a few moments to unpack it. [Read]

What this verse is communicating is that God will certainly bring his justice. Not us. Vengeance is his, not ours. The sins of the wicked are ultimately sins against God. This verse teaches that we simply participate in God's victory over sin, as surely as we participate in the suffering itself, trampling the ashy remains of the wicked in a reversal of roles. Just as when the wicked seemingly prospered in this life while the people of God suffered, so too, when God's justice comes, will believers experience the goodness and mercy of God, while the wicked experience his everlasting judgment.

And so, the point here is that our hope is anchored not in the immediate circumstances of this world, but in the certain future where God Himself rights every wrong and brings complete healing to those who trust Him.

But, how do we hold onto that hope and joyful spirit when the darkness feels overwhelming today? Malachi gives us some instruction in vs. 4, by putting our hope in God's unchanging word. [Read]

Now it would seem that it would go without saying that God's people need to remember God's word. But God called Malachi to prophesy in the first place precisely because they had forgotten God's word. Malachi speaks here of remembrance of the law

of Moses through repetition, not calling to mind some scrap of scripture you read a week ago, hoping it will somehow spiritually sustain you, but of a constant and consistent longing for daily bread. Repeatedly going back to the word. That's how we remember.

We are to consume spiritual food with the same regularity that we eat physical food. Have any of us ever gone a whole week eating? Probably not. But do we go a whole week without the spiritually nourishing food of God's word, spiritually starving from Sunday to Sunday waiting for others to feed us? That can only lead to spiritual malnourishment, anxiety, depression, temptation, and a host of other challenges. That can only lead to forgetfulness of God's word and God's ways. This was another way in which the people had lost their way.

Our hope is sustained by God's unchanging promises. In a world where truth is relative and promises are broken constantly, God's Word is an anchor for our souls. When we feel hopeless or lost, remembering and dwelling in God's word reminds us who God is, what He has done, and what He has promised to do.

The Bible is not just some ancient text. It is the living and active Word of God that fuels our faith and sustains our hope. It assures us that God is faithful to His covenant promises. We find hope in the reliability of God's Word. When everything else shifts, His truth remains firm, giving us an assurance that our hope is not in vain.

In the last few verses of Malachi, we find the final hopeful promise, that is the hope of reconciliation in vs. 5-6. Here we see God promise to "send Elijah the prophet" before the great and awesome day of the LORD. Why Elijah? Elijah was known for his zeal, his confrontational style against idolatry, and his powerful ministry of calling the nation back to covenant loyalty. He came suddenly and unannounced, bringing a word of judgment against God's people for abandoning the commandments of the LORD, sound familiar? Elijah came in the power of the Spirit as the first in a series of Old Testament prophets, calling the nation to repentance, culminating in the ministry of John the Baptist, the last of the prophets. In Malachi 3:1, Malachi had prophesied that God would send his messenger to prepare the way before him.

And the sign of John's coming is that "he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers." The point here is that the ministry John the Baptist, preparing the way for the LORD, would set the stage for a new age of reconciliation, both to God and to one another.

This is a profound statement about the nature of true repentance. When our hearts turn toward God, our relationships with people are mended. The breakdown of the family unit is a symptom of a breakdown in our relationship with God. Idolatry and disobedience breed division, arrogance, and coldness in families.

The messenger's goal is reconciliation, vertically with God, which immediately impacts our horizontal relationships with each other. A healed heart leads to a healed home.

What a beautiful and unexpected ending to the Old Testament, an ending, mind you, followed by 400 years of silence from God. He calls us to remember his word. And if we truly want to see that fulfilled, we need to remember the word made flesh, Jesus himself, and be reconciled to him. Also, he calls us to be reconciled to one another. In essence,

Malachi ends the Old Testament with the first and greatest commandment, and the second like it: loving God and loving neighbor.

In Malachi's day, a day characterized by priestly unfaithfulness, which led to marital unfaithfulness and the breakdown of the family, a day would come when a restored and right relationship with God would lead to a restored and right relationship with one another, particularly in the family. And so, it's fitting that Malachi ends here. God has given us the hope of a restored relationship with him by sending his Messiah, Jesus, to pay the redemption price for our sins, because we, like Israel, have repeatedly forgotten God, nor proved in any way obedient to God's word. But also reconciliations with each other.

The chapter, and indeed the entire Old Testament, ends on a very serious warning in vs. 6. If hearts are not turned, the result is utter destruction, a "curse." This is the stakes of the Gospel message: reconciliation or destruction.

Malachi 4 closes the Old Testament with a sense of hopeful expectation. It calls us out of the darkness of despair and into the light of God's certain promises. The Day of the Lord is coming. The Sun of Righteousness will rise. The choice before us today is how we will live until that dawn breaks.

Will we live as those consumed by the darkness, or as those who fear His name, anticipating the morning? Let us anchor our hope in God's guaranteed justice, rely daily on His unchanging Word, and actively participate in His mission of reconciliation. The dawn is coming, and in the "wings" of our Savior, there is everlasting healing and joy. Let's pray.

Benediction: "May our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who loved us and by His grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your heart and strengthen you in every good deed and word." – 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17