

“MAJOR THEMES FROM THE MINOR PROPHETS: MALACHI.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Sermon Texts: Malachi 4:1-6

Introduction.

As we come to the last words of the last book of the OT, I got to thinking about last words. We usually think of last words as being especially important or poignant. We think a person's last words should somehow be especially worth listening to, worth sitting up and taking notice of.

Kim Ahlers was telling me about how her family was all able to gather by the bedside of her grandmother in her last hours and how her grandmother made a point of speaking good words to all of them.

I got to thinking about what *famous last words* have been spoken in history so I went on-line and looked up famous last words. I read literally hundreds of them from all through history.

Some were humorous because they probably didn't realize they were speaking their last words. Like the last words of a redneck, “Hey, everybody watch this!”

Groucho Marx said, “Die, my dear? Why, that's the last thing I'll do!”

Another notorious sinner said, “Either that wallpaper goes, or I do” (Oscar Wilde, d. November 30, 1900).

A couple to more sober words from famous people:

President Woodrow Wilson simply said, “I am ready.”

And then there is Nathan Hale's famous line, “I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country” (American spy, hanged in 1776).

Of course I was drawn to those whose final words reflect a sense eternal life in Christ.

Edgar Allen Poe: “Lord, help my poor soul.”

Mother Teresa: “Jesus, I love you. Jesus, I love you” (Sept 5, 1997).

John Wesley: “The best of all is: God is with us.”

John Newton: “I am in the land of the dying, and I am soon going to the land of the living” (Anglican preacher, abolitionist, and writer of "Amazing Grace.").

You know what struck me most after reading hundreds of last words? How few of them where noteworthy, how few of them seem thought out, how few of them where really wise words for those being left behind. I was dismayed at how trivial or petty or insignificant most of them were.

It's became painfully obvious to me that a lot of people have never given it much thought. And it also became painfully obvious to me that most of us don't really know when the last moment will be so we may be caught off guard and not even have a chance to leave some good last words.

We need to think about our last words and we need to think about what we want them to be while we are still of sound mind. Why not plan your last words and leave them with your will. Let them be about eternal things, things that matter the most.

Michelangelo did that in one sentence, "I give my soul to God, my body to the earth, and my worldly possessions to my nearest of kin, charging them to remember the sufferings of Jesus Christ."

Phama and I decided a couple of years ago when we had our wills redone to attach a letter which would be our last words to our five sons. At the risk of being a bit personal I want to share some of the letter as an encouragement to you to take some time to write down some well thought out last words for your loved ones.

[Read from letter to our boys.]

That's our attempt to leave some lasting last words and to say what is really most important. By writing it hopefully they will return to it again and remember it. What will your last words be?

Malachi 4:1-6, the last words of the OT.

As we turn to the last words in the book of last words in the OT, what does God want to say before 400 years of silence until He sends His Son?

The first words of this last word began, "I have loved you," says the Lord (Malachi 1:2).

The last words of this last word begin, "For behold, the day is coming ... the great and awesome day of the Lord" (Malachi 4:1, 5).

How do these last words fit with the first words? How can a God of love bring down such a terrible judgment on people? How can a loving God send people to eternal hell?

The first last words remind us that everything God does come from a truly loving God who only and always does what is good, best and right.

The steadfast love of the Lord endures forever. It's absolutely unchanging. God has made a covenantal commitment to love His people and to be their God.

God shows His love for us by telling us the truth. He shows us His love for us by warning us of dangers ahead and what He will do if we don't listen and obey. He shows His love by coming and telling us in plain words what He will do. And truly God shows us His great love for us by providing a solution and a deliverance from the judgment to come.

Jesus is the message of warning and the deliverer from the judgment He warns of.

The Great and Awesome Day of the Lord, Malachi 4:1-3.

This day is coming. Behold announces it with certainty. Though it has been postponed, it will surely come. It has been postponed but not forgotten.

Not only is the day set, but the destinies of all peoples on that day are set. Those in Judah who had complained that God is unjust and that He doesn't do anything about evil are answered.

On that day there will only be two kinds of people.

Malachi 4:1, First, there will be the arrogant and evil doers. Those who despise God. They will be consumed in an eternal, unquenchable fire.

This is a very strong and forceful verse, exceedingly stark and blunt. This fire is different than the refining fire in Malachi 3:2. That fire purged and purified, this fire consumes and destroys.

The Lord is a consuming fire and His anger burns as a flaming fire (II Thess. 1:7). The oven is the oven or furnace of God's anger and wrath and justice. From this fire there is no escape. It will be completely effective, both the root and the branch.

Psalm 21:8-12 Your hand will find out all your enemies;
your right hand will find out those who hate you.

9 You will make them as a blazing oven when you appear.

The Lord will swallow them up in his wrath, and fire will consume them.

10 You will destroy their descendants from the earth,
and their offspring from among the children of man.

11 Though they plan evil against you, though they devise mischief, they will not succeed.

12 For you will put them to flight; you will aim at their faces with your bows.

There is no such thing as **universalism**, that all will somehow be saved and escape hell. It's wishful thinking and whistling in the dark while passing the grave yard. They try to pit God's love against His justice, they try to use one attribute to trump other attributes.

Some like to point to past great and terrible days of the Lord as the already past fulfillment of this day. But the flood, and Sodom and Gomorrah, and Babylon and Assyria, and the fall of Jerusalem, and every great tragedy or holocaust since is only a foretaste, only a reddening of the dawn, only a shadow of the day to come.

Every great loss of human life is meant to be a warning of what the great and terrible final Day of the Lord will be like. God has left every generation with a sign and a warning. The great wars, plagues, earthquakes and tsunamis.

God gives evidences along the way as proof of a coming final day. These are given to bring some to faith and to strengthen the faith of others. What does Jesus say we should do when we read about terrible news of loss of life? Repent lest you to perish.

II Thessalonians 1:7-10 ... when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels
8 in flaming fire, [He will inflict] vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who

do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, 10 when he comes on that day...

When God thunders from the heavens and announces a coming judgment, the ungodly mock and ignore as in the days of Noah. They neither fear nor tremble.

The godly on the other hand hear such judgments and they shake in their boots. They fear the Lord and take Him seriously. So God must speak to settle their anxious hearts.

Malachi 4:2. Second, there will be those who fear the name of the Lord, who fear the Lord and esteem His name. God has preserved a remnant. They shall see the sun of righteousness rise with healing in its wings.

The **sun of righteousness** is understood to be Christ, the Lord of our righteousness (Jer. 23:5-6).

Jesus is the sun, the light that shines in the darkness, that light which renders the sun worthless in heaven. Jesus is the light that shines brighter than the law, a mere shadow of God's nature and character. In the last days God made His light to shine through Christ, the radiance of His glory.

John 8:12 "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

The message of Malachi and the message of Jesus is that all who accept this message of warning and hope will go out leaping like calves from the stall. Jesus is God's last word. To ignore His last word is utter folly

Moses and Elijah, Malachi 4:4-6.

Until that day comes Malachi urges them to remember the Law of Moses and the prophecy of Elijah.

In a few weeks I will preach about the Mt. of Transfiguration in Mark's gospel. We will see Moses and Elijah there with Jesus. They are both mentioned here at the very conclusion of the OT.

Moses represents the Law of God and the books of the Law. Elijah stands at the head of the prophets and represents all the prophetic books. Sometimes in the NT we will hear Jesus or one of the Apostles refer to the OT as the Law and the Prophets, a summary of the two categories of the books of the OT.

Verse 4 sums up the Pentateuch, the first five books of Moses, or the Torah. How interesting is it that Malachi, the last writer of the OT, should make mention of the first writer of the OT.

Malachi urges them to listen to the law in this silence. The Law is like a guardian responsible for the children until the parent comes. Remember the law until the Redeemer comes.

Verse 5 looks forward to a great and awesome coming day of the Lord that all the prophets have prophesied about. He will come in the spirit and power of Elijah, as a reformer and forerunner. Malachi says there will be one more prophetic voice before the end comes.

In the NT John the Baptist is identified as this Elijah, the one ushering in the Messianic age. John the Baptist would come to turn the hearts of the people to God.

Verse 6 tells us what the future ministry of his prophet will be like.

Luke 1:16-17 And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, 17 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.”

Parents and grandparents, turn your hearts to your children and grandchildren. This is a message of repentance and reconciliation. This is a message for those who have messed up, not for those who got it right.

This is a message for fathers who have messed up, who have been absent or harsh, who have done damage with their words and actions, to go to their children and repent and ask forgiveness.

And this is a message for children even adult children who have bitterness or anger toward their parents who have messed up, to no longer hold on to those feelings but to forgive and be reconciled.

This is why Jesus comes, for the messed up people, for the sick and the sinners, for those in need of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Conclusion.

The last verse of the OT, the last verse of the Jewish Bible is a curse. For this reason when they read it they always repeat verse 5 when reading Malachi so they end with a good word.

People usually remember last words, God meant for these words to be a warning. There is a danger that never goes away for the Jews. They have rebelled against God in the wilderness. They have disobeyed and rejected the Law of God. They have stoned and killed the prophets of God.

There is one final hope coming for the Jews, the coming Redeemer. If after 400 years of prayer and expectation and anticipation they reject Him and their hearts are not turned back to their Father, then all that will remain for them is curse. There is no other hope or benefit after Christ. After the sun of righteousness rises there is no other sun.

May we be sure to profit from the Law and the Prophets, and from John and Jesus, and from His Gospel and Spirit, that we should be fully awake to the sun of righteousness so that we have His blessing and not His curse.

And may we long for and welcome the coming great and awesome Day of the Lord when Jesus comes in glory.