

Roy's sermon for Sunday 13 September, 2020

Malachi 4:2b-6 'Set Fee; Remember; Or Else!'

Last week from Malachi chapter 4:1-2a we looked at one plain but simple truth: the difference between darkness and light, (according to the Bible) and the way by which God deals with His people and the rest of the world. I called the sermon 'God's Line Of Distinction; Jesus The Sun Of Righteousness'. Yes, the line of distinction is Jesus Christ!

We also saw how the concept of darkness and light, or good and evil, in Biblical times, was not some abstract idea or some myth or fairy story, but reality. There was no doubt in those days that the devil and evil existed. Ephesians 6:12 "our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the forces of evil in the heavenly realms." So, according to the scriptures, there is this ongoing warfare which is taking place between God and His subjects (meaning His angels and His people), and Satan and his legions of darkness. And in Malachi's day, Israel as a whole were a bunch of sacrificing rebellious hypocrites, with nothing but contempt for God! They lay the accusation at His feet that "it is futile to serve the Lord"; they may as well be like the rest of the world because there was no benefit in following God anyway.

So He responded: "Surely the day is coming, it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble. And that day that is coming will set them on fire," says the Lord Almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left." And I said last week that here is where that eternal distinction between the saved and the unsaved is most important: when we stand before the judgement throne of God, as Jesus separates the sheep from the goats!

No, hell is not the place where men will be drinking with all their mates. Isaiah 66:24 "where their worm does not die nor their fire be quenched." So there is a personalised hell and wrath which awaits all those who have rebelled against God. Yes, judgement is coming, of this there is no doubt! So an eternal fiery furnace for all rebels, but for the faithful of God, "the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings." That wonderful imagery of the sun pictured as a great bird, and as it rises the rays of that sun are described as its wings, are bursting forth into the whole world, bringing light and healing to the four corners of the earth. And again, of course that "sun of righteousness" is Jesus, because as He burst forth from the grave and death, He rose, having defeated sin's curse, even turning away God's wrath and the fires of hell.

Yet He did far more than that this "sun of righteousness" because not only did He defeat sin's curse of judgement, He also brought that "healing", that restoration of man's broken relationship with God. So, not only are we *not* destined for Hell's fires, we are now included in God's "treasured possession": that people who were personally handpicked before the creation of the world. Yes, it is for the sins of His people did Jesus die. And that "sun of righteousness" has risen, so there is only one more dawn which we now await, His return!!

Well so to our final look at the book of Malachi. Chapter 4:2b-6 which I have entitled 'Set Fee; Remember; Or Else!!' Malachi 4:2a "and you shall go out and leap like calves released from a stall." Now I've not seen many "calves released from stalls", but I have seen horses that have been penned in a paddock for some time, and then when they are let out or set free, they go running and bucking,

throwing their legs to the side and into the air. It's a real picture of having been held captive, and then set free. Which of course is what Jesus does for us! Psalm 146:7 "He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets prisoners free." John 8:38 "if the son sets you free you will be free indeed." Romans 6:18 "you have been set free from sin." And Romans 8:1-2 "therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Because through Christ Jesus the law of the spirit of life, set me free from the law of sin and death."

So it's true then that until Jesus comes into our life we are like those "calves", like those horses. We've been penned up; we've been held captive by our sin and rebellion, when "the sun of righteousness" rises and shines upon our life, bringing healing between ourselves and God, by His own poured out blood. He sets us free. Yes dear friends, Jesus sets us free.

We also need to remember that these things were spoken when the idea of being a slave was not merely a literary concept, but the life experience of many people. If your parents were slaves you yourselves would be even born into slavery, and there you would remain, unless somebody purchased your freedom or your master set you free. Slavery was real. And to be a slave of sin is also real!

Verse 3 of Malachi 4 "Then you will trample down the wicked. They will be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day when I do these things", says the Lord Almighty." Is God saying here through the Prophet Malachi, that His people, (Christians today), would literally pound their enemies into the dust? If we look at places like Syria, Russia, Turkey, Iraq, China, and many other places around the world, that is not their experience, and actually the reverse is true. So what does it mean? Well remember, he is speaking to people who complain that "It is futile to serve the Lord." And also "certainly the evil doers prosper and even those who challenge God escape." Again, is he advocating violence? Well *no*; "Vengeance is mine" says the Lord, "I will repay." And from Jesus "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

So *what is he saying*? Well, may I suggest, he is pointing us to Psalm 37:7-10: "Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their evil schemes. Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret, it leads only to evil. For evil men will be cut off but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land. A little while and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found." So no, God is not saying to get a bazooka and exterminate your enemies. He is saying to His people that they will certainly, that yes they will indeed triumph in the end. But they must be patient. So do not be dismayed or dejected within your circumstances, or what you see happening around you and in the world, because they can even seem to take your confidence in God away!

Beloved surely now, oftentimes it seems as though the evil one is reigning in this world, and yet it is just not the case. Yes all those things which perhaps have us think that God is not in control, are all simply part of His plan. He's at work through all of those things, we need simply to trust in Him by faith, that His hand is in it all. Psalm 110:1 "The Lord says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." We've looked this scripture many times before, and if you remember, we need to read it like this: "The Lord"(meaning God) "says to my Lord" (meaning Jesus). Yes, David writes 'God says to Jesus, "sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet". In the same way, in this Psalm in which, in a sense, Jesus is told to sit and wait for that day, waiting till the time has come, we too must be willing and prepared to be patient, and not be discouraged. Or to lose faith and hope, when what we see going on around us seems to make no sense at all. Even seeming to be out of control as wickedness and sin abound. We as the people of God will be victorious, of this there is no doubt, because we know that Christ has gone to

the cross, He has paid the price, He has defeated death, by bursting forth from the grave and rising "with healing in his wings". Hallelujah what a Saviour!!

Hang in there, be patient, persevere, don't lose heart, because the destination to which we are going is eternally worth it! Malachi 4: 4 "Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for Israel". So this is the key to the chapter: "Remember", and may I suggest that this may well be the key to the whole book! We might say today 'stay in it. Hang in there'.

The scriptures are saying to keep your mind and heart busy, even digging and searching in the things of the heart and mind of God, as they are revealed in the scriptures. Psalm 119:9-16: "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word. I seek you with all my heart, do not let me stray from your commands. I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you. Praise be to you, O Lord, teach me your decrees. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth. I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways . I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word." Yes "I've hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." The Psalmist speaks as someone who has found something which is of the greatest value to him, even his most treasured possession.

Listen to Jesus` very own words about such things in Matthew 13:44-46: "the Kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went out and sold everything he had and bought that field . Again the Kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it." So we are not to have a passing glance or a fleeting interest in God's word, no. The Word of God for the Christian is of the greatest of importance. It is of the highest value.

So I guess the question is: of what value do you place upon the Word of God dear friends? Is it simply on a purely surface level? Maybe it's only on an intellectual basis? Perhaps it's like an itch which needs to be scratched now and then. You know, a simple curiosity. Or worse still, you've heard it all before, so you know it all. Brothers and sisters, if we fall into any of these categories then we need to revisit what it means to be Christian. Matthew 16:24 "if anyone would come after me he must deny himself take up his cross and follow me." Yes it's all or nothing! Years ago I had the great pleasure and blessing of hearing a young man professes his deepest heartfelt desire to follow Jesus, as he gave his testimony before being baptised at Burrill Pines. And it was moving and it was real, as his tears flowed and our tears also flowed, as he pleaded with us all to not give our 20 or our 40 or our 50 or even our 90% to Jesus, but to give our all, and friends, he was right. And I've no doubt that another preacher for Jesus was born that day.

The key is to "remember". Jeremiah 31:33: "this is the covenant I will make with the House of Israel after that time", declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it upon their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people." Psalm 69:19a: "for zeal for your house consumes me". Now of course, this was prophetically spoken of Jesus, but I do feel that this is the essence of Psalm 119:11: "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." And where it says "remember the law", I have no doubt that for us today the application is simply, to *remember*, or to be saturated with all of the word of God. Beloved, the one who digs and digs, being committed to the search, strikes the riches. That's who we need to be according to the Bible.

Verse 5: "see, I will send you the Prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes." We can see that that day is both "great and dreadful", yet again we can see that two edged sword of Jesus. As in verse one we saw that that day would bring a "fire which would burn like a

furnace”, and all the unsaved world would be “stubble” which will be set on fire. Yes as I've said many times, God's wrath, His judgement, and hell are not fairy stories or the scary parts of the Bible used by preachers to scare people into the Kingdom of Jesus. They are reality. If you believe in heaven you must believe in hell. Because the same God has spoken on both. Yes that day would indeed be both “dreadful and great.” Again, the end of sins curse, which is death. The end of sins consequences which is eternal separation from God in hell. And the end of separation from God, even reconciliation to the Father through the Son. Yes no more condemnation, only jubilation with all who have followed the Saviour. Praise the Lord we cry.

But we mustn't miss the first part of this verse: “see I will send you the Prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day”. Luke 1:17: “And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” And Matthew 17:11-13: “Jesus replied, to be sure, Elijah comes and will restore all things. But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognise him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the son of man is going to suffer at their hands.” Then the disciples understood that He was talking to them about John the Baptist.” So by Christ's Own Words, in John the Baptist Elijah has come. Isaiah 40:3 “A voice of one calling: “In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.”

So prior to this “great and dreadful day”, Elijah (meaning John the Baptist) had come. Clearly then, that “great and dreadful day” which Malachi foretold, was the day when Jesus went to the cross. Because here is the reality: that by that one act, that one moment in history, all of mankind will be judged. “No one comes to the Father except by me” Jesus said. What did He mean? That only through His sinless life, and selfless act of obedience upon that cross of suffering and shame could anyone come to the Father.

John 10:7: Jesus said, “I tell you the truth: I am the gate.” From Romans 6:3-4 “Don't you know that all of us who were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death? We were therefore buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of His father, we too may live in your life.”

So what is baptism? Simply put, it's the idea of being washed clean, isn't it? And how does this take place for the sinner? Of course, through the blood of Jesus. We are washed clean of sin. He sends the spirit of God to enter our lives and it's at that point are we washed clean, Jesus` blood has us clean. Yes, now we are living in the day of the Lord. That era when sin was dealt with once and for all, and it began, and continues to be measured by the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. These days are both “great and dreadful” brothers and sisters, and the day of that final dawn draws ever near!

So to our final verse in the book of Malachi, chapter 4:6: “He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.” Brothers and sisters, notice that the last word in the Old Testament part of the Bible holds in it a deep foreboding. Yes there is a dark warning, even a threatening tone to this part of the prophecy. Look at the words “or else”; so if the heart of both the parents and their children are not moved by the fiery preaching of the Prophets, yes the fiery preparation of Jesus` road, (even by His bulldozer preachers John the Baptist and Malachi); if there be no response, there would be a terrible price to pay! And friends may I suggest, that like today, disharmony and disrespect among families was a problem. The scriptures say, “Honour your father and your mother so you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you” and it also says “parents don't exasperate your children” so

obviously these things are an ongoing problem in families. Certainly this problem of family brokenness, with regard to respect and values, has never been more relevant than it is today. It does seem that people are lost with regard to their fit into this world, and also in their own family. Parents want to be their children's friends, casting aside their role of headship while at the same time, children cast off their parents' God given authority. So the result is chaos, even the complete breakdown of the family unit.

So what's the answer? Simple, according to Malachi. The power in the preaching of the gospel! As father and son, mother and daughter, come under the transforming authority of the Word of God through the Spirit of God, (whether it be through the parents to the children or the children to their parents), lives will be changed. That brokenness of families can be healed and made whole again. And it happens as that family, (God willing), comes under the preaching, the teaching, and the power of His Word!

So let us not lose heart. Let us not be dismayed by the darkness of these days, because God has not lost control: Jesus Reigns on high now. He has conquered the grave our victory is assured. We need to endure in patient obedience. We need to "Remember" to be in the world but not all of the world." We need to remember all that God has done for us in the past. We need to be in the Word of God as we look to that final dawn of the King's return, and He takes us home either in death, or as the skies peel back. And the prayer of our hearts, as we seek to live it out within our lives, must continue to be, as it has been throughout the ages since Christ first came: Come Lord Jesus Come.

Amen!!

Let's pray.