

Malachi 4:1-2 'God's Line Of Distinction'

Last time we looked at Malachi we looked at chapter 3:16-18 and at how the people responded to the prophet's preaching. V16: "Those who feared the Lord talked with each other." So it had affected them. It was not like water off of a duck's back. It had cut them to the heart and had led them to meet together. To discuss those truths and what implications those things had for them, first individually, and then as a people! And I said that that is how God's Word should affect us. It should have an effect. It must bring about change in our lives. Remember James 1:22: "Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." This Godly fear had stirred their hearts and they had met together and "the Lord listened and heard." The loving father listening to the door of his rebellious children, ready with forgiveness and mercy, if they would but come back to Him with changed hearts. And this is what they did. Well, a select few at least.

Yes God listens, and when we meet together He is not way out in the universe, He is in our midst! So: "A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honoured his name." Yes those who were affected by Malachi's preaching would be known, they would stand up and be counted. They would declare who they were. They would not be ashamed of the gospel. Their signatures would hold them to be accountable to one another in the weeks, the months, and the years ahead!

And those wonderful words in v17: "They will be mine", says the Lord Almighty, "When I make up my treasured possession." Matthew 25:34: "Come you who are blessed by my Father, take your inheritance the Kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world." We are the "treasured possession of God." It is for us that Christ died. For us that He was given by His Father, we are the chosen of God! Yes "they will be mine says the Lord Almighty." Aren't they wonderful words!

Then v18: "And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked. Between those who serve God and those who do not." If you remember, I said the implications are that there are times when there is no distinction between the church and the world, which is disastrous for the perishing world. Because if the "light of the world and the salt of the earth," (those things by which the world perceives the God of creation, and flavours lost mankind with the truth of God cease to be) then what hope is there for lost sinners? None at all! Brothers and sisters, if we are for Christ, yes if we call ourselves Christian, there must be that sense to which we are distinguishable from the rest of the world. Yes there must be a distinction between the saved and the unsaved. We are either for Christ or against Him, there is no middle ground!

Well so to today's text, Malachi 4:1-2 'God's Line Of Distinction.' Isaiah 54:1: "Listen to me my people, hear me my nation; the law will go out from me; my justice will become a light to the nations." And from of John Chapter 1:4: "In him was life and that life was the light of men." V5: "The light shines in the darkness." 6:27: "There came a man who was sent from God his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe." V9: "The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world." Chapter 8:12: "He said, "I am the light of the world." And chapter 9:5: "While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

So it is clear then that the concept of darkness and light 2000 years ago was something which was not just an abstract idea, but something which the Jewish nation knew full well! Yes, it is clear that the warfare between good and evil was not some fairy story or myth, but reality. And so it had to be. Because the whole history of Israel was based upon God choosing for Himself a particular people,

out of the whole world of sin-ridden mankind. A people which He would choose and save. Not because of their inherent goodness or more suitability or that they would respond to Him, but simply because it pleased him to do so!

Yes the celestial battle between God and Satan was very real in biblical times. Paul himself writes in Ephesians 6:10-12: "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For 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 spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." No, "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 spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." Yes it was real, and is still real. And yet do we actually believe and live as people who hold to these truths? That is the question.

Well on the back of Malachi 3:18: "And you will again see a distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not," we read in chapter 4:1: "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 if you remember, chapter 3:14b-15: "What did we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the Lord Almighty? But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly the evil doers prosper and even those who challenge God escape." So the complaint then, is that we may as well be like all the rest. Because we get no benefit from following the Lord. The wicked and evil finish up in front anyway. Remember, they say: "It is futile to serve the Lord." Because if indeed He does exist, He treats all people the same whether they follow Him or not! Yes this was their accusation, this was their assessment of Him.

But now God replies in v1 and 2, proclaiming this was all a lie! And He declares that as there will indeed be a day when the distinction between His people and the world would again be clearly seen, there would also be a difference, even a distinction, between the way He would deal with His children, and the way in which He would deal with the rest of the world! "Surely the day is coming it will burn like a furnace." So this would not be some backyard campfire. In Isaiah 66:22-24 and Jeremiah 7:30-34, we find where the Jews got their idea of hell. It was in the valley of Ben Hinnom. And we read: "As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me, declares the Lord, so will your name and descendants endure. From one new moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me", says the Lord. "And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind."

And from Jeremiah 7: "The people of Judah have done evil in my eyes," declares the Lord. "They have set up their detestable idols in the house that bears my Name and have defiled it. They have built the high places of Topheth in the valley of Ben Hinnom to burn their sons and daughters in the fire, something I did not command, nor did it enter my mind. So beware, the days are coming", declares the Lord, "When people will no longer call it Topheth or the valley of Ben Hinnom, but the valley of slaughter, for they will bury the dead in Topheth until there is no more room. Then the carcasses of this people will become food for the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten them away. I will bring an end to the sounds of joy and gladness and to the voices of bride and bridegroom in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem, for the land will become desolate."

The imagery is of untold and unimaginable misery. Giant piles of dead, rotting corpses, where mankind has become the feasting grounds for both birds and beasts. And did you notice that in Isaiah it is said "where their worm will not die and nor their fire be quenched?" So it does seem that there is a personalised hell, for all of those who have rebelled against God! No it will not be the Aussie idea of hell where all the boys will be drinking with their mates. This valley was where even child sacrifice took place. The Israelites had even bowed down to the idol Molech and had burned their sons and daughters in the fires to it. And God says: "It didn't even enter His mind."

Listen to Matthew 25:41: as Jesus speaks of this furnace from Malachi 4:1: "Then he will say to those on his left depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels." So the Seventh day Adventist's idea of dead, buried and that's all, holds no truth at all in the scriptures. It is a judgement that will burn for all of eternity! Yes: "It will burn like a furnace and all the arrogant, and every evil doer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire", says the Lord Almighty. "All the arrogant."

And friends these are not arrogant by human standards, they are arrogant by the standards of God. Every man, woman, and child who have not bowed the knee and submitted the heart to Him, through Jesus. So simply all people who do not recognise Him as God. Rightful Creator and Ruler of the entire universe and everything in it! To deny His existence, is "arrogant." To reject His Sovereignty, is "arrogant." And to worship any other one or thing than Him, is "arrogant" in the sight of God! Yes and "every evildoer." And again, we need to understand that this is not just speaking about murderers and rapists and paedophiles and terrorists etc, it is simply those who have not submitted their lives to Almighty God.

And notice what it says: "They will be stubble." Now stubble were the short stalks of corn which were left after the harvest. They would be the dregs leftover, and the day which was coming "would set them on fire." Matthew 13:40-42: "As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his Kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." And v49 and 50: "This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth." Yes the fires of judgement would burn so hot, that there was nothing left of what formerly was.

Have you ever seen the aftermath of a fire like that? My friend Laurie Baxter and I went riding through the Snowy mountains many years ago after just such a fire, and it really is mind blowing. Being in a place where no green at all can be seen. No sign of life, only ashes and smouldering's. And this is the terrifying way which God chooses to describe the outcome, of all of mankind who are left behind as it were, come the last day of the world! Revelation 6:15-17: "Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb. For the great day of their wrath has come. And who can stand?"

Brothers and sisters, the day of God's judgement is burned into His Eternal Sovereign Plan for mankind. There will be no turning it aside, or turning aside from it. So there will be no choice in the matter. When the prisoner stands before the judge, he does not dictate the terms. His hands are bound and he simply waits for the sentence to be pronounced! John 3:19: "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men love darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil." Now again, in chapter 3:14 and 15, the people said: "It is futile to serve God." So there was nothing to gain

by following Him indeed, they were better off without Him. They should have been simply eating and drinking like the rest of the world, because *when you die, there is nothing anyway.*

Well, Beloved, as we can see from this text, that there is indeed something. There is the eternal wrath, or the eternal peace of God! So is it “futile to serve the Lord” Brothers and Sisters? No, it isn't, because here is where that all important, yes that eternal distinction really matters. When the whole of humanity stands before Christ's eternal throne of judgement, and He “separates the sheep from the goats.”

Peter writes in 2 Peter 1:10: “Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure.” Or in other words, do all that you can to live out your faith. Sure it up by your zeal in your study of the scriptures, and through prayer and fellowship! And in v2, that distinction which God mentioned earlier, between the righteous and the wicked begins to blast through. And it begins with the word “But.” And there is the separation. Yes there is the line which God draws between His people, (even His “treasured possession”) and the rest of mankind: “But for you who revere my Name.” So that Godly fear called reverence here is precious to the Lord's true people. Yes, “But for you who revere my Name the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.” In v1 “stubble and a fiery furnace” of God's eternal wrath, but in v2: “The sun of righteousness with healing in its wings.”

But what do we make of this? A sun, and with wings? What does it mean? I started off this morning by talking about darkness and light, and that there is an ongoing warfare between evil and good, and that in biblical times, these things were accepted as a given to be true. Well, as we have just seen how God will deal with the darkness, (with rebellion and evil) now we are seeing how God will deal with His Own people, and it's all about light and healing!

So we just need to understand the imagery don't we. When you think of a sunrise, or the sun rising, what pictures does it create in your mind? For me, there have been so many thousands of sunrises on my surfboard or fishing. To see the day wake up. There really is something magical about seeing that first glimmer of light. About seeing the first glint of that silver lining in the clouds and those first rays of light, burst up over the horizon as they herald a new day. Even a new gift from God. And that is the idea which is being painted for us here! The sun is as a great bird, with its rays portrayed as wings, reaching into the whole world. Exodus 19:4: “For you yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, when I carried you on Eagle's wings and brought you to myself.” Psalm 17:8: “Keep me as the apple of your eye, hide me in the shadow of your wings.” Psalm 91:4: “He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge.”

Jesus Himself takes up the same kind of imagery in Matthew 23:37: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who killed the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.” So we can begin to see now that this “sun of righteousness with healing in its wings” is of course pointing us to Jesus!

Friends, we need to understand that the prophet speaks this way from God because in Malachi's time, the days were dark indeed. And they would continue to be so for over 400 years. Yes over 400 years before God would again speak to His people. In a real sense, darkness reigned! Through the darkness with which the Scribes and Pharisees kept the people enslaved by their false teachings, even their hundreds of laws which they had devised. But then Jesus comes into their, and indeed into our dark world. Yes the people were looking for the “Sun of righteousness,” that great light who was to come into their dark world, and then Jesus comes, as the “light of men!” “The light that shines in the darkness.” “The light through whom all men might believe.” “The true light that gives light to

every man." Yes he said: "While I am in the world, I am the light of the world." And without doubt, this "sun of righteousness" is Jesus!

Matthew 4:15-16: "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the gentiles, the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned." And how did Jesus bring that healing? Of course it was through His Cross of suffering. And of course the healing which Jesus brings is the healing of that broken relationship with God. Yes He restores, he heals that which was broken by our parents Adam and Eve. He repaired that which could not be repaired by ourselves. No amount of money, no amount of effort good deeds could purchase that which Jesus has bought for us!

And as he hung upon that Cross crying, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do," and "Father why has thou forsaken me" and finally "It is finished." Then after three days, He burst forth from death's grip because death could not hold the Lord of all life and glory! Yes He burst forth from the grave and rose as the sun in all its morning glory. And this Son, this Son of God, "has risen with healing in His wings!" Even as the song that we sing: 'And as he stands in victory, sin`s curse has lost its grip on me! Yes He rose in victory. And the battle which He won bought us entry into heaven. Not the eternal fires of hell, but the eternal peace with God in heaven! Yes here is that line of distinction, and that line is Jesus! Praise God. Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

Let's pray.