

WHEN GOD ARRIVES, EVERYTHING CHANGES**Malachi 4****(Read Malachi 4)**

Intro: Those were the final words from the final book of the Old Testament and this is our final message in a series entitled Malachi: God's Words Before the Great Silence. I haven't referred to that series title much, but it's not made the message any less clear. God had been speaking through his prophets for centuries but those prophecies had so often fallen on deaf ears and so he didn't send any messengers for four centuries – but when that silence was broken it was angels announcing the birth of the new born King. When he arrived – everything changed. Our text sets the stage for that. God has been very patient and even though humanity doesn't deserve it, his love that eventually sent his Son to the Cross will prevail. In the meantime – before the great silence, here are four things to hang on to. First . . .

Evil will not win

- There will be a destruction of the arrogant and evildoers. It doesn't say when but it says that it will – it's a promise.
- David Guzik points out, *Discouraged by the apparent prosperity of the wicked and uselessness of serving the LORD, God's people needed to be reminded that the day is coming. God still has eternity to right all wrongs and reward all goodness.* We still need that promise.
- Let me just point out here that as Followers of the Prince of Peace we don't rejoice in the demise of evil and arrogant people – in fact it is our calling, even as we stand against evil, to love people out of that evil. Let's not take any satisfaction in the downfall of evil people even as we rejoice in the promise that evil will be vanquished.
- Still, it WILL happen. In Malachi 3 last week we saw that God promised purification through a *refiner's fire and fuller's soap* Malachi 3:2 where God's people would have the impurities burned away and a be scrubbed squeaky clean. But here the promised fire is for the wicked and it is very different in that this is fire that burns away the unrepentant impurity that is evil. It's a fire that burns right down to the root and when the root is gone – the evil will be gone. Evil will be defeated – and that's a promise.
- The other promise is that . . .

The righteous will rise

- *The sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.* Malachi 4:2a. This is pretty much a clear promise of the arrival of Jesus. Right will win! After centuries of darkness brought on by silence from heaven there will be the arrival of pure joy. The angels told the shepherds, *I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.* Luke 2:10b. After so much silence for so long – it could only mean joy.
- Humanity kicks up its heels in joy like a calf released from its stall. The other day I was driving out County Road 1600 and as I approached Baney Road something caught my eye in the pasture to my right – in amongst the small herd of cattle there on that farm was a Hereford calf frolicking through the field with reckless abandon. I soaked up his joy and it brought to my mind's eye a picture from my childhood when my dad would leave our cow out for the first time in the Spring after a long winter where she had been cooped up in the little barn we called the "Cow Palace". Even when she was 11 or 12 years old (old for a producing milk cow), she took off like that little calf I saw on Monday, kicking her heels up. Thinking about it now, I wonder how she didn't hurt herself – I mean really, I'm 65 and that's gotta be like about 12 years old in cow years. She needed to act her age. But she didn't, she was too happy to be out of her long months of cold confinement.
- Release is like that though – it brings out exuberance. Humanity had been cut off from God for centuries – the good news of great joy was just what we needed. At my previous church I was working at the youth center in town on a Friday night in February when an on-fire for Jesus biker dude led a gangly kid who probably had tracks on his arms to faith in Christ. The biker dude was from a tradition that required immediate baptism but, it being dark, we waited until Sunday afternoon to baptize the new believer. Emily and I met the two guys on the bank of the Susquehanna River which was about a mile below our house. As we looked out over the river which had less ice on it than you see in the photo on the screen, the biker turned to me and indicated he wanted me, as "the reverend, to baptize the young guy and I said, "You

brought him to Jesus, you have the honor.” So they waded out to about three feet deep and he dunked that boy backwards in the 32° water and when they came up out of the water they both gave holler that wasn’t because the water was cold, it was a shout of pure joy at the promise new life. I’ll never forget that! It was picture of what rising with healing in his wings means: Here was a kid that was going downhill fast who had his trajectory turned because a biker dude loved Jesus enough to share him.

- That’s why we need to . . .

Stay faithful

- Our text says, *And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts.* Malachi 4:3. I just pointed out that it’s our job to help pull people out of the ashes rather than stomp them there. James Adamson rightly points out here that “*Too literal an interpretation is misleading here, for it is the Lord alone who will punish the enemies of his children. The imagery of the verse is intended to picture as simply and graphically as possible, the total triumph of the godly over the forces of evil.*” We will win, but God is the one who does the defeating.
- The truth is we need to concentrate on being right with God rather than stomping bad people. Specifically God is telling us to remember the good word for right living he sent down from the top of Mount Sinai with Moses Listen, *Remember and keep the revelation I gave through my servant Moses, the revelation I commanded at Horeb (another name for Mount Sinai) for all Israel, all the rules and procedures for right living.* Malachi 4:4 (The Message).
- As we live for God – as we are being Jesus in a culture that is evil we have this promise, GOOD WILL WIN OUT and . . .

Redemption will come

- Adamson says that the conclusion of Malachi is like the ending of Ecclesiastes which has this, *The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.* Ecclesiastes 12:13-14. And Adamson is right. Here is what we need to do – we need to wait on the promise. God’s plan is perfect and it’s unfolding even in the face of a big silence. When you don’t hear from God just look back on what he’s said before. Guzik gives this powerful reminder: *In these last few prophetic words of the Old Testament, Malachi warns Israel to remember the Law because God’s prophetic voice would be silent for some 400 years. We never need to despair when God seems silent, because what He has already said is rich enough – if we will only remember.*

Conclusion: God arrived. Everything changed. People didn’t think they had hope but then they learned just exactly what I M M A N U E L means God WITH us. We will look at that as Jeffrey leads us into our Advent/Christmas Series, A WEARY WORLD REJOICES. God arrived. Everything changed. We will rejoice. Amen.