

Promise of Christ keeps us steady through silence.

Malachi 4:1-6 “For look, the day is coming, burning like a furnace, when all the arrogant and everyone who commits wickedness will become stubble. The coming day will consume them,” says the Lord of Armies, “not leaving them root or branches. 2 But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings, and you will go out and playfully jump like calves from the stall. 3 You will trample the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day I am preparing,” says the Lord of Armies.

4 “Remember the instruction of Moses my servant, the statutes and ordinances I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. 5 Look, I am going to send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. 6 And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers. Otherwise, I will come and strike the land with a curse.”

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“Through.” This has been a key word for us in our brief Advent series. The weeks leading up to Christmastime, a liturgical periscope above the waters of self to see the world around us and starkly, the darkness so in need of light. We, like sojourners, travel through the things of life. Through grief, through unmet expectations, through the wildernesses of life. And we find hope through another - through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

These weeks our approach has been to be acquainted with darkness so the light is brighter.

This year, or the last two, have been different and difficult. The horizon keeps moving further away, farther off. We need something to “keep us,” to root us.

My dear friend Ben is preaching this morning on encouragement. And in preparation he asked our little group, “why do you need to be encouraged?”

I responded: ‘Because we wake up in this world everyday. Toddler funerals. Covid crisis. Beat down worn out people. And Christmas feels like an ice pack for our

ache... does it fully bring relief or is it temporary... And every therapist has a waiting list. So we can't even get help for unprocessed trauma.'

And I am the optimist in the group!

When these things pile up, when things won't "get back to normal," it can feel like God is silent. "Are you even hearing my prayers?" "Are you seeing this?"

But it's his promise that keeps us through it. His promise that tells us he is here, that he hears and sees, and that he is working. And it is his advent - fulfilling the promise - that gives us hope.

So why Malachi?

Israel's situation: idolatry, wickedness, calling evil good etc. All the bad things that God's people have been prone to. But it is not so much the warnings, which are many, but the timing of Malachi that benefits us in Advent. This is the last word before the promise comes.

This is what a remnant of faithful people will hope for, and like them I think it is what we should cling to.

Before these final verses that we have read this morning, there is a clear promise for the people.

"See, I am going to send my messenger, and he will clear the way before me. Then the Lord you seek will suddenly come to his temple, the Messenger of the covenant you delight in — see, he is coming," says the Lord of Armies. **2** But who can endure the day of his coming? And who will be able to stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire and like launderer's bleach. **3** He will be like a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver. Then they will present offerings to the Lord in righteousness." -- **Malachi 3:1-3** (CSB)

There is about to be 400 years of prophetic silence, and this is what they wait for. And while they were a people waiting for the promise, we are a people living from the promise.

Trouble will come. Doubt will come. The turbulence of life will come. What will we hold on to?

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As we hear the voice in Malachi, I think there are some key ways for us to find a gospel-steadiness.

Acknowledge the Silence

Life is full of moments when it feels like God is silent. Non-responsive. It's real.

Saints of old would call it the "dark night of the soul." When the darkness seems overwhelming and the clouds never break.

The truth is that life won't be always "happy clappy." And it's okay to recognize that. And what we do with that is important.

When we come to the end of Malachi we reach the blank page of the intertestamental quietness. No more prophets speaking for God. No new messages to God's people. As if they have heard what they needed and the whisper lessens to a fading breath.

Like reading a contract that has the silly declaration "this page intentionally left blank."

There are seasons of life when our "pages are left blank" and we are not sure God is there.

We aren't the first to feel it.

We have plenty of examples from the Psalmists feeling this same thing.

"Lord, hear my voice when I call; be gracious to me and answer me. 8 My heart says this about you: "Seek his face." Lord, I will seek your face. 9 Do not hide your face from me; do not turn your servant away in anger. You have been my helper; do not leave me or abandon me, God of my salvation." -- **Psalms 27:7-9** (CSB)

“My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why are you so far from my deliverance and from my words of groaning? 2 My God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, by night, yet I have no rest. 3 But you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. 4 Our ancestors trusted in you; they trusted, and you rescued them. 5 They cried to you and were set free; they trusted in you and were not disgraced -- **Psalms 22:1-5** (CSB)

“How long, Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? 2 How long will I store up anxious concerns within me, agony in my mind every day? How long will my enemy dominate me? 3 Consider me and answer, Lord my God. Restore brightness to my eyes; otherwise, I will sleep in death. 4 My enemy will say, “I have triumphed over him,” and my foes will rejoice because I am shaken. 5 But I have trusted in your faithful love; my heart will rejoice in your deliverance. 6 I will sing to the Lord because he has treated me generously. -- **Psalms 13:1-6** (CSB)

How many times was this prayer sung in the years that followed Malachi? How many times were the psalms calling the reader to “wait on the Lord” recited to get them through?

And that is key. It is not just a mental acknowledgement. Or even talking about it with friends. It is prayer to the One we long to hear from.

How many times have we prayed this same way? Waiting? Straining to hear. Wondering.

Acknowledge it. It’s okay. It is normal to feel like God is silent. But when you feel it, realize it is preceding promise.

Know You are Not Alone

The One promised, the “Lord you seek,” the King we need, he has come, Merry Christmas!

And he has also faced the same sense of silence in order to bring redemption to you, to answer the voice crying out from the wilderness.

In the most significant ways he faced this sense of silence in the garden of gethsemane. While his friends sleep, he pleads with the Father. Scripture doesn't indicate a response, but a steadiness in the face of what is to come.

And on the cross, in agony, Jesus recites the psalmist's cries of abandonment. "My God, why have you forsaken me?" We can't even fully realize the depth of this pain, this type of silence. From eternity, the union of Father, Son, and Spirit, and here an experienced separation.

He did it for you - to own your experience. He was forsaken by the Father so you wouldn't be.

Jesus is our companion in moments of silence. Where the remnant held tight to the promise given by the prophet, waiting. We are held tight by the promised One who has come.

In turn, his life, death, and resurrection for us is what we hold onto to make it through, his redemption is our refrain when the dark night comes. His work for us and his promise to be with us always until the end of the age is what keeps us steady.

Living in DC, on occasion on the metro (subway) there would be a quick start or stop that if you were standing could knock you off your feet. Poles throughout for you to hold onto, to steady yourself. That is the cross for us. When life shakes us, when the starts and stops take us by surprise we can find our footing in Christ.

And his promise to return is as sure as his first arrival.

That is why I think Malachi is helpful because the promise is of one to come, and for the day of the Lord. The One like a refiner's fire that will make clear what his people are to live for, how reconciliation will come. But it also has the sense of final judgment yet out ahead of us.

In the between time, Jesus is with us by His Spirit.

And he has given us a family to wait with. To be a community that reminds each other of his promise, his grace for us, his closeness, and his coming.

When the sense of silence comes, acknowledge it, know you are not alone, and determine to hear his voice.

Determine to Hear His Voice

As I was preparing this week I heard a story on the radio, as a young man was recounting the death of his grandmother, and to end the segment they played an old voicemail with the grandmother wishing him a merry Christmas.

We often hear stories of people who have lost loved ones doing everything they can to remember their voices, what they sounded like. Keeping voicemails, cherishing old VHS tapes.

When seasons of silence come upon us, Malachi, the promise of reconciliation and healing, is the voicemail - This is all of Scripture for us.

“The Old Testament closes, then, with a word of promise ringing in the minds of its readers concerning the two greatest prophets of old: Moses (Mal. 4:4) and Elijah (4:5). When God determined to show the significance of Jesus’ earthly ministry, he had these two men appear on a mountain with our Savior in the transfiguration (Mark 9:4). Moses represented the Law and Elijah represented the Prophets. Their appearance in Christ’s time indicated that he was the apex of their messages, fulfilling and transcending them both, as demonstrated by his resplendent radiance (Mark 9:3). He is the One whom the Law and the Prophets ultimately anticipated—as he said to his disciples, “everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44).

In Jesus the entire Bible clicks into place. The whole Bible is, at its heart, the word of God’s grace that culminates in his Son (Rom. 1:1–2; 2 Tim. 3:15).” GTB

And every time we read or hear the Word we hear his voice. The voice that speaks grace and forgiveness over us. That promises help, that sings over us, that quiets our souls. That challenges us to live for something more than self. That anchors us in him. The voice that says you are mine!

And we eat this book! We know man and woman don't live on bread alone but on the word of God. When we face what seems like silence we must have a steady diet of Bible until it becomes our sustenance.

I have yet to meet a believer that wishes they would read less Scripture.

Truth is, most often when I think God is silent it's because I've stopped listening... I think I can do better on my own or change the script. And in those moments the remedy is playing the voicemail.

Hearing that as we draw near to God he will draw near to us.

To Israel in Malachi, the Lord says, "remember the instruction of Moses... and the prophet Elijah." Stick to his voice as recorded here and when he comes he will bring reconciliation, hope realized, and life with him.

As we listen to his voice, the horizon gets closer. The dark's dominance lessens. Hope builds as we lean forward toward his return. The final promise.

Promise of Christ keeps us steady through silence. He has come and is coming again. His light makes the darkness flee.

Acknowledge the silence, know you are not alone, and determine to hear his voice.

If you find yourself in need of something to hold onto, to a voice to hear, here is Jesus. The messenger and Lord come to save those he loves. No better time than now.

From silent night, to playfully jumping like calves may we live through the silence clinging to promise, from the birth of Christ and his life, death, and resurrection for us, anticipating his return. To glory and eternity with him.