

*Sermon on Malachi prepared by Jonathan Shradar*

**God accomplishes his promises.**

**Malachi 3:1–5** “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. [2] But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap. [3] He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD. [4] Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

[5] “Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.” (ESV)

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This is what we need to know to make our lives about him. The lives we are building as we go. And what a time to be alive, and building a life! On our way out of a pandemic. Pondering what’s next, picking the perspective that most matches my inclination... hoping for the best.

*Craig Alter*, a Cincinnati poet, wrote of his hope for building back to “normal.”

“My wish as we transition to a new year;  
is a return to normal and the things we hold dear.  
I dream of going to concerts and sporting events;  
and to be in a theatre that says, “AMC presents”.

I want to hug my friends and shake people’s hands;  
I want to travel to distant, far-away lands.  
I want to kiss my parents on the cheek;  
shed the masks and smile all week.

I want the “new normal” to transition back to the “normal”;  
with weddings that are large and formal.

I want in-person connection and lots of hope;  
without always worrying “where’s the nearest soap?”

...Stay healthy and fit and say your prayers;  
be hopeful and trust the man upstairs.”

I want those same things, even if I am more of a Regal Cinemas guy! To get  
“back” to the known, the expected, the steady, the comfortable.

Truth is though, the last year has in many ways been enlightening, if we have  
been paying attention. Crisis helps clarify things, it forces a focus on important  
things and what is really significant. Our time takes on new meaning when the  
next day is uncertain. Everything matters, but the essentials rise to the top.  
Family, friends, faith.

C.S. Lewis described how God speaks in his sermon, the Problem of Pain, and I  
think it can easily match the context of crisis. “Pain insists upon being attended  
to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in  
our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”

The pandemic, racial injustice, uncertain economic realities, they have been just  
that for many, God rousing people toward himself. Crisis can create a hunger for  
that which stands against all else. God is just that, steady, loving, a strong tower  
to run to.

While we don’t want to reside forever in crisis, we can’t neglect it and miss the  
opportunities for growth. Because once we are back to normal, it is far easier to  
ignore whispers. Normal can be dangerous!

"During humdrum times, when things are, as we tend to say, "normal," our  
interest in God is crowded to the margins of our lives and we become preoccupied  
with ourselves. "Religion" during such times is trivialized into asking "God  
questions" - calling God into question or complaining about him, treating  
worship of God as a mere hobby or diversion, managing our personal affairs  
(such as marriage) for our own convenience and disregarding what God has to

say about them, going about our usual activities as if God were not involved in such dailiness." Eugene Peterson

This is the exact situation for Malachi's audience. They were back to normal and missing God's best.

460 BC Jerusalem. The Babylonian exile was quickly becoming a distant memory. The Temple had been rebuilt and the people of God had returned to a level of normalcy. It was a numbing normalcy.

They began to lose faith in God and the lack of faith was demonstrated in their behavior. Old habits die hard. Not unlike post-Christian parts of our world, an inclination to secularism amongst giant "temples" of a faith of the past.

Into this God sends Malachi, "my messenger."

He comes challenging the people to believe God. To live according to his commandments.

It was their unfaithfulness that God desired to plow under with repentance and hope.

"Unfaithfulness was a problem in Malachi's day, it was a problem at the time of Jesus' earthly ministry and it remains a problem for us today. The Bible continues to call on Christians today to repent for these very same sins."

Four key ways the people had been unfaithful.

Unfaithful in worship. Going to the Temple, honoring God, it had become routine and rather than take the time and intention to bring spotless offerings, they brought what God called defiled sacrifices. And by bringing leftovers, the least, they have profaned the name of God.

**Malachi 1:13** "But you say, 'What a weariness this is,' and you snort at it, says the LORD of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the LORD." (ESV)

As if the worship of Yahweh was getting in the way of their schedule, their “best lives,” and they kept back their hearts, their honor, their worship.

Unfaithful clergy. A huge part of the problem then is that they very group of people meant to stir the people to worship had lacked piety and humility themselves.

**Malachi 2:7–8** “For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. [8] But you have turned aside from the way. You have caused many to stumble by your instruction. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the LORD of hosts,” (ESV)

Not unlike “PreacherN Sneakers,” living in extravagance at the expense of those you are supposed to be serving. The priests were reckless with theology, calling evil good, and creating a permissive culture where your opinion superseded Yahweh’s.

Unfaithful marriages. Profaning the covenant commitments they made was a common occurrence. Divorce was regular, but not the type with cause, this was a recklessness that lived like commitments were meaningless.

**Malachi 2:14–15** “...the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. [15] Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth.” (ESV)

Unfaithful in financial giving. God tells the people that they are robbing him.

**Malachi 3:8–9** “Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions. [9] You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you.” (ESV)

Keeping back what belongs to God, we know this one, we are strategic about it.

The people forgot God's love for them. When we forget God's love and faithfulness to us, we lose our motivation to obey him and may blame God's perceived unfaithfulness or unfairness for our sin.

The people had settled into a normal that allowed them to ignore God, his way, the life they were supposed to live in response to the rescue he had worked for them. And the message is that they should turn again to God in repentance, giving their hearts and lives to him. Pretty straightforward and the message of every single prophet we have studied!

And he gives them, and us, incentive to live this way. Apart from the sin of the people, Malachi makes clear that God has remained faithful - and this book reveals that it is His promise that matters, that the people can live from, secure, thriving.

### **God accomplishes His promises.**

The call to repentance in Malachi, and the invitation to God's way of living, is all motivated by God's love for those he calls his own and his ability to keep his promises.

Malachi is one messenger, but there are two others that will come. And on this side of the Old Testament we have the privilege of witnessing the promises kept. It is by this promise that Malachi turns our eyes to Jesus.

“Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming says the LORD of hosts.”  
(3:1)

The messenger of the covenant. He will refine and cleanse his people.

**Malachi 3:2–3** “But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. [3] He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD.” (ESV)

Sins taken on and refined away, through the heat of atoning sacrifice. This messenger of the covenant, the Lord we are to delight in, will come in the crisis of humanity and keep what is made pure, what is cleansed by his hands. And when he comes right worship will be restored, it will be pleasing to the Lord again.

**Malachi 4:5–6** “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome 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, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.” (ESV)

To a people lost to themselves, doubting God, keeping worship from him, numb to things spiritual and eternal, God promises to send a Savior. Who will make them new, establish them as a people forever. And he will be preceded by one in the spirit of Elijah calling the people to repentance and restoration.

I imagine Malachi wished he was that one, but it was kept for the fullness of time. Out in the future for Israel... now in our past. John the Baptizer, calling the people back and Jesus, announcing the arrival of the kingdom, proclaiming good news and giving himself to forge a new covenant by his blood. A covenant of grace.

The sins of his people assumed and what they deserved extinguished on the cross of his perfect, undefiled offering.

He is the ultimate promise and because he has come, we can rejoice that God accomplishes his promises.

Like those out of the wilderness, we can say, **Joshua 21:45** “Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.” (ESV)

**2 Corinthians 1:20–22** “For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. [21] And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, [22] and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.” (ESV)

All promises point here, and it is the last word spoken through a prophet - the next act is realization of the promise and when Jesus ascends the cross and proclaims "it is finished" we have the accomplished promise of God.

Humanity can be awakened out of its numbing normalcy, to real life because Christ has come. We have someone to cling to when the water rises, when the next steps aren't clear, when we feel alone, when we are exhausted by the chaos. We have someone to give our whole lives to because this promise has been kept.

This Jesus who lives a life we never could, in perfect obedience. Who takes the lashes our behavior deserves. Who faces the agony of separation from the Father for the only time in eternity so that he can win those he loves.

We dive in with repentance and look to him as we live the race he has set before us. This is exactly what Israel is invited into through Malachi, and it is what drives us to go on, into the unknown, because we are known by the promise himself.

"Malachi informs us that the ultimate message (and promise) is Jesus Christ and that how you respond to this ultimate message will determine your fate."  
Selvaggio

**We live from this promise.**

All of us have two choices in light of the accomplished promise of God. Malachi gives the outcome.

We can stay "normalized" like the audience of Malachi. We can doubt and reject God. We can call evil good and say that God doesn't care. We can say this kind of life is pointless.

**Malachi 3:14** "You have said, 'It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the LORD of hosts?'"  
(ESV)

Or we can fear the Lord. See him for who he is, experience his promise of forgiveness, identity, belonging, and life for ourselves. Surrender to Christ with humility and awe turning to him for help and salvation.

**Malachi 3:16–18** “Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the LORD and esteemed his name. [17] “They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. [18] Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.” (ESV)

If there was no Jesus we wouldn't have to make a choice. It wouldn't matter.

But into the “normal” of first century Jerusalem came the King riding on a donkey. The fulfillment of the law and prophets. The anointed One. the Messiah, the rescuer.

The ultimate promise kept. And because that is true, our only right response is to come in repentance. “Return to me and I will return to you says the Lord.” (3:7)

Safe in his rescue we stand through pandemic or health. Violence or peace. Uncertain paths or a clear way forward.

**Malachi 4:1–3** “For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. [2] But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. [3] 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. (ESV)

"Our own righteousness cannot stand the exposure that that day will bring any more than dross could survive the refiner's fire or dirt could endure the laundry or soap. We need the righteousness of another, if we are going to stand on that day which is precisely what God gives us in the gospel. As a result, the day of the Lord's coming for believers is not a fiery, destructive furnace that we need to fear but rather a warming sun of righteousness that rises on us for our healing." GTB



The worst sinner is made clean by his sacrifice for us. And he will never cast you out, he sticks with you, you are as secure before the Father as Jesus is. He promised.

This promise kept forms us into a people that are settled but urgent, to live consumed by Jesus, that he would be our all in all, and to share him with others. Because he lives and gave his all to call us redeemed.

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Some of us are struck by this reality, that the promise of Christ has been accomplished. And some of us feel like we are still waiting on other promises of God for us to come through, a season of crisis making it all the more clear.

Because this promise was kept, we know we have been given what we need in Jesus. If you have trusted in him, you are in God's book of remembrance, you are his treasured possession.

But lest I fall into the way of the unfaithful clergy, this isn't just nice news that makes for moral living and inspiration on occasion. This is a radical promise that bends the possible into miraculous and demands not mere participation but surrender of every fiber of our being.

We are ripe for something more than pleasantries and muffins on a Sunday morning.

Instead of returning to normal would you **give your life away** for the one who gave his life for you? Only you know what that will mean for you, but it will likely be something different. And it is something your community can help define and walk out together.

Palm Sunday is a reminder to welcome the King in. With shouts of Hosanna, "Save us," "Rescue us," we return to this place of surrender and belonging, holding onto His promise, his grace, his power. May it be so with us.

**Hebrews 10:23** "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful." (ESV)