

PostExilicProphets 22-06-22a

Greetings. Welcome to the Wednesday night Bible study here at Grace and Truth Bible Church. We're in the book of Malachi.

We're in the final couple of verses resuming at Malachi chapter 4 verse 5. I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord. We know that there are some fulfillments of this idea in the ministry of John the Baptist. Does that exhaust this prophecy? Is it yet future? That's what we're going to be looking at tonight because everything related to Israel has application for you and for me.

So what are we to make of all of this? How does it pertain to us? That's our goal and objective this evening. Let's stop and ask God's blessing on our fellowship, on our investigations, on our understanding, our perspicacity, and then we'll begin. Father, we thank you for this day and the many ways that you have blessed us and provided for all of our needs.

We're grateful for this opportunity to spend time together in looking at the truth of your word, hoping to arrive at a better understanding. We ask that your Holy Spirit give us insight and perspective, help us to understand the pertinence and the application of these things for our own lives in the time that remains to us so that we can be good stewards of what you have placed at our disposal. We can make the most of our opportunities.

We can invest in the future and in the kingdom of your son and in your own kingdom in which we hope to dwell. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, it's always a good thing to begin with our passage, so if you've not already done so, please turn to Malachi chapter 4, where the day is coming, burning like an oven, all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. This is not a picture of blessing. This is a picture of judgment, judgment on the wicked, pictured as fire that is going to leave whatever they have grown in their field as stubble.

You will remember a similar picture other places in the Bible, including the book of Hebrews, where the ground that has the rain many times coming upon it and produces thorns and briars is fit only for burning and is near to a curse. You remember where this is in Hebrews chapter 6? Keep your finger here in Malachi and turn to it because this directly pertains to our study. Hebrews chapter 6. Remember the author, the Apostle Paul, has been heading toward the greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ as our High Priest after the order of Melchizedek, but he is disappointed because in verse 12 of chapter 5, by this time you ought to be teachers.

You need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God. You have come to need milk and not solid food. Everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness.

He is a baby. Solid food belongs to those who are of full age, those who by reason of use have

their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. So then in chapter 6, leaving these elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation.

He gives that foundation. It is impossible for those who once having been enlightened have tasted of the heavenly gift and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit. In your mind at least, if not in the margin of your Bible, put an asterisk next to partakers of the Holy Spirit.

This is part of what directly pertains to our study of the coming of Elijah tonight. These who have tasted the heavenly gift and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, they haven't just received a ministry of conviction, they are partakers. If you partake of the Holy Spirit in this age, you are a believer, you are a body of Christ.

And shame on us if we have once been enlightened, have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come. This doesn't happen for unbelievers, only believers. Born again, those of us who fall away from this great start, you are running well, Paul tells the Galatians.

Who hindered you? Who tripped you up? You started out great. Having begun in the Holy Spirit, are you now going to reach maturity by works? No. If they fall away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, which is the first brick in the foundation.

Not laying again the foundation in verse 1 of repentance. You can't even get back to square one. It's impossible to renew them to repentance or anything else in this list.

Change of mind, turning the mind, and in the case of believers, what does it mean to turn our mind? I almost said it. It is a return. Yes? If we have accepted that God is and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him, that's the Old Testament basis of salvation, and in this age we have placed our faith in Jesus Christ and we fall away.

If we repent, if we metanoeo, change our mind, what are we doing? Are we turning to something new? Are we saying, well, I'm going to turn away from this. I'm going to try something completely new. No, we are returning.

It is impossible to renew believers to returning to God. It is impossible to return and renew so long as they crucify again for themselves the Son of God and put Him to an open shame. And this is pictured in the next verse, the earth which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it.

The very first weather phenomena associated with the prophet Elijah is rain versus no rain. What happens if rain falls and you don't use it for benefit? You don't take advantage of this God given resource. The earth, the land which drinks in the rain that often comes upon it and bears herbs useful for those by whom it is cultivated, receives blessing from God.

The earth is blessed by God when it produces what it is supposed to produce. Having received the rain, cultivation is useless when there is no rain. You can plow, you can cultivate, you can harrow, you can weed, you can remove rocks, you can plant, you can do all of the other

gardening events, but without water, it's all fruitless.

But the land that does what it is supposed to do when it But if it bears thorns and briars, it is rejected and near to being what? Cursed. Put an asterisk. You've got rain, you've got cursing, all of these associated with the ministry of Elijah.

And its end is to be burned. Its end is to be burned. So now back in Malachi, the day is coming.

Chapter four, verse one, burning like an oven. All the proud, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, that will leave them neither root nor branch.

No means of further production. But to you who fear my name, where's the last time we saw that referenced? Chapter three, verse 16. Book of Remembrance was written before the Lord for those who fear the Lord and who meditate on his name.

Those who fear the Lord, fear my name. The sun of righteousness shall arise with healing in his wings. The sun is hotter than any fire you can ignite on this earth.

And yet for us, for those who fear his name, those who honor God, the sun of righteousness arises and it is a beneficial healing presence. And you shall go out and grow fat like stall fed calves. What an interesting picture.

When we looked at this in detail, you will trample the wicked. They shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this, says the Lord of hosts, where they once tried to dwell and produce their thorns and brambles. You are going to be walking like fat, stall fed calves.

They will have neither root nor branch. You will occupy the ground that they once tried to possess. Now, verse four, remember the law of Moses, my servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel.

There have been two prophets who famously visited Mount Horeb. Who are they? Moses and Elijah. Remember the 40 day journey that Elijah makes? The angels feed him and he goes in that strength of that meat, 40 days and 40 nights.

What's his destination? Back in first Kings chapter 19, I think it's 19. We'll be there shortly. He goes to Horeb.

Moses and Elijah are the two prophets with whom God deals on Mount Horeb. I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel with statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers. Lest I come and strike the earth slash land with a curse. In this case, Eretz is Eretz Yisrael.

It is the land. The rejection of God by Israel isn't going to result in a curse on the entire earth. It is going to be a curse on the land.

This is applicable to those who are under the law of Moses. There's a different, although related fate for the earth. So I will send you Elijah the prophet.

We started looking at this last week and we recognize that the new Testament has a lot to say about the fulfillment of this prophecy. Behold, look, pay attention. I will send you Elijah the prophet.

When, when can Elijah be expected? Before the great and dreadful day of the Lord. So he is going to do what? When is before the coming of the great and terrible day. Why? Let's just, let's use all of our what, where, when, why questions.

When? Before the great and terrible day of the Lord. Why? Why is God going to send Elijah? To turn hearts of the fathers to the children, turn or return. And we began looking at this last time.

This is the Hebrew word shuv, S H U soft B. It's B or V shuv, shuv, shuv means to turn or to return the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers. And we began analyzing this last week. Does this mean that there's going to be a new and fresh love of parents for children and children, children for parents, their, their hearts are going to be knit together in their families.

Is that what this is talking about? My suggestion, my belief is no, that is not at all what this is talking about. It doesn't fit the context. Uh, plenty of unbelievers can love their kids and kids can love their parents.

We just had father's day people worldwide celebrated their parents and they've got nothing to do with God, the law of Moses, Elijah, or anything else. Uh, it isn't a necessary precursor to the great and terrible day of the Lord that families be more closely knit. That's just not a biblical concept.

You don't find it anywhere. So if that is not what it means, what does it mean? How do we crack the meaning of obscure claims and statements in scripture when they're obscure at first glance, where do we look for help? The three rules of interpretation, as you well know. So let's think about this.

The hearts of the fathers, et cetera. Turn back to Malachi chapter three Malachi chapter three. I will send my messenger verse one and he will prepare the way before me and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple.

Even the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight. He is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming? I'm going to send my messenger to prepare the way and the Lord whom you seek is going to come to his temple.

But who can endure that day? This is a fair question. Some will endure that day. Some will survive that day.

Some will actually prosper and be blessed on that day and be like the stalfed calves. Others are going to be ashes under the hooves of those calves with neither root nor branch. This is our context.

So what determines whether you are a stalfed calf or ashes under the hooves? Well, we can, we can figure this out fairly easily just by remembering the difference between faithfulness and faithlessness between obedience and disobedience. But the context helps us here as well. This book of Malachi has been leading up to the culminating force of this prophecy at the end of chapter four for its entire length.

So turn a bit further back to Malachi chapter two, verse four. Remember he starts chapter two talking to the priests and he says, now, O priests, this commandment is for you. If you will not hear, and if you will not take it to heart, ah, we're talking about the Lev, L-E-V in Hebrew, the heart.

If you will not hear, if you will not take it to heart to do what? To give glory to my name. This is the kind of heart we instinctively know God is talking about. Whatever heart is going to be turned in chapter four, verse five, the messenger is going to come.

Elijah is going to come and he's going to return hearts to some status. I'm pretty sure without any further help that the kind of heart God is looking for and that his messenger Elijah is going to call for and charge the people of God with is a heart that gives glory to God's name. This would be a safe assumption, right? So we're answering these questions.

When is Elijah? When is my messenger going to come? He's going to come before the coming of the great and terrible day. The great and terrible day is when the Lord comes and refines. He sets everything on fire and you either end up having either root in a branch or you're a stall fed calf who is let loose after the fire has ceased and you possess the ground.

Native Americans used to burn the berries. They used to burn the forests because it was good for vegetation and their gardens, which the Europeans completely didn't recognize because they didn't know what a squash was and they didn't know what berries were and they didn't want a lot of the wild roots and fruits and and herbs that Native Americans grew in the forest. The more shade tolerant ones grew in the forest and others grew in the open grassland.

The Europeans came in, burned it all down, plowed, put up fences and then tried to grow things that they were used to and they failed dismally and they destroyed the natural and and long cultivated crops, fruits, herbs that Native Americans have been growing for centuries and one of the ways they refertilized the ground was to burn patches of it. This also kept down the ticks and the chiggers and the poison ivy and the snakes and they did regular burning. There are accounts, if you read 1491, I think it is, and he records the account after account after account

of the earliest explorers and settlers who came to America and as they would travel up rivers they would see vast columns of smoke because the Native Americans were burning off sections of the land and planting others and then they would plant the ones that they had burned the previous season.

They would burn the others and this is why you could drive a wagon with six horses abreast through the trees in New England for miles because the undergrowth had been burned away and it was wonderful usable ground underneath. You could camp in it, you could grow things in it, but the Europeans were ignorant of all of this thinking that they had the superior culture and knowledge and ended up destroying a very fruitful productive and organic way of life, never to be recovered. But burning is good for land at certain times and in certain ways and this is what God is going to do.

He is going to turn that which was evil, that which was thorns and briars, fruitless into something that is usable by those stall-fed calves who will soon be grazing on fresh new growth. If you've ever seen fires that are set accidentally, somebody flips a butt out of a car and somebody's whole pasture goes up, you drive by there six months later and there's fresh green grass growing up. In many cases the grass comes back and the weeds do not because the grass roots are more burn tolerant and there are people who will burn their fields on purpose.

They will plow the edges and then they will burn the middle because it's a lot easier than trying to weed and they don't have to use chemicals to get rid of the kind of grasses they don't want. God knows this, it's as old as God's encouragement of agriculture to till the soil and earn your bread by the sweat of your brow. That's the picture here in Malachi.

But when you come back here, if you will not hear, this is 2-2 of Malachi, and take it to heart. If you don't have a heart that takes the message, if you will not hear the message, my messenger is bringing the message. Take the message to heart.

What is the application for us? That's why you're here tonight. You understand this. You're not here for me.

You're not here for any reason other than taking the word of God to heart. We know this is the key to life. It is the key to the present.

It is the key to the future. It is the key to spiritual growth. It is the key to producing the fruit of the spirit.

Taking the word to heart. It is the rain that falls many times on the ground. But this is not the end.

It is not enough to absorb the rain. It is not enough to hear the word. What does he say? This is the negative side.

If you will not hear and if you will not take it to heart. We want to hear and take it to heart. What

happens when the good ground absorbs the rain? What did we see in Hebrews chapter 6? It produces herbs that are desired by those who are cultivating that ground.

We want to not only hear the word, we want it to get inside us and water the seed. It's interesting. Jesus uses both water and the seed as a picture of the word.

Washing of water by the word. Sometimes the water is the word. Sometimes the seed is the word.

The sower went forth to sow. The seed is the word. But what's interesting to me is you can have word as seed in the soil of your soul and it might just be sitting there dormant and it gets planted.

But it doesn't do anything until the water of the word comes and rains on it. Word with the word. Scripture with scripture.

There is a dynamic where at different times sometimes scripture is like the rain. Sometimes the word of God falls out of the sky on an occasion. Many times it's stormy weather where that water comes.

But there's already the planted seed and the combination of the two. Scripture with scripture. The word with the word.

Truth with truth. Speaking the truth with one another in love. And the two different aspects of the word come together to produce fruit.

The rain is the word. So is the seed. Initially confusing but the more you think about it the more sense it makes.

Especially in the light of our own experience. Where suddenly we hear a passage of scripture or gain insight into a concept of scripture. And it activates all kinds of things that were already sitting in our in our soul.

And suddenly we've got a whole fresh energy. We've got more fruit of the Spirit. We can be more patient.

We can be more kind. We can be more loving. We can be more of each of those aspects of the fruit of the Spirit.

Because the word has met the word. The word we get tonight meets some that might have been planted months or years ago. And suddenly there's fresh produce.

So if you take it to heart to give glory to God's name. He is preeminent. He is first.

No other gods before him. No other objectives before him. No other priorities before him.

No other concerns outweigh our desire to live in a way that is pleasing to God. That we are

acceptable in his sight. Romans 12 1 and 2. Give glory to my name, says the Lord of hosts.

If you will not hear, receive the word. And if you will not produce that fruit honoring and glorifying God's name, I will send a curse upon you. Malachi 2 2. I will smite the earth with a curse.

Malachi chapter 4 verse 6. If it doesn't enter into your heart, if you don't take it to heart, a curse is coming. If your heart doesn't return, a curse is coming. Makes sense? Parallel.

Each illuminates the other. And I will curse your blessings. We're back in 2 2 here.

I will curse your blessings. The word for blessings here, some of you are familiar with. It's the same word you get Baraka from.

Barak to bless. Barakoth, blessings plural. There's a valley of Baraka.

Some of us are familiar with a church called Baraka. Actually more than one church. There was a hospital over in Israel that was called Baraka.

Sometimes they spell it with K. A. H. Sometimes C. H. A. H. Blessing. I will curse your blessings. Yikes.

What is the source of blessing? Blessings come from God. God will revoke. God will cancel.

God will curse your blessings. This is why God can give Israel the land. And then through disobedience, not hearing, not taking it to heart, not giving glory to his name.

God took the land away. God gave them a king. God took their king away.

God gave them a temple. God took the temple away. God fulfilled all manner of blessings and bringing them into the land of promise into the land of Canaan.

And he took them all away and he scattered them amongst the nations. He gave them a capital city of Jerusalem. He gave them Mount Zion and he took it away.

I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have cursed them already. Look at history.

Post-exilic Israel, post-exilic Judah. I've cursed them already. Why? Because you do not take it to heart.

Your complaint, in what way have you loved us? Why do the wicked prosper? What is the point of being faithful and obedient? I'm cursing your blessings because you are not taking the word to heart. The word from a messenger to heart. That's the key here in 2, 2 through 4. Look at verse 3. Behold, I will rebuke your descendants and spread refuse on your faces.

The word refuse is a bit stronger in Hebrew. I will spread refuse on your faces, the refuse of your solemn feasts. I was just talking about the biogenic cycle of carbon dioxide and methane

and such, you know, over the last few days.

And one of the things that they are doing, because methane, when it gets into the atmosphere, is 28 times more effective as a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide is. Everybody's wringing their hands about carbon dioxide. But methane is 28 times worse.

Although it does not persist as long. Methane only lasts 12 years in the atmosphere. And over 12 years, it all converts back to CO₂.

But because of the deleterious effects of methane, they say, oh, cows are bad and so on. Well, it's not their burping and their, their rear end emissions of gases that are the problem. It is their manure.

And by the way, the manure from any biological creatures, including humans. And what they generally do is use biodegradation, sort of like composting, to convert manure and other biological sludges into something else. And those gases escape into the air.

And one of the primary gases is methane. Well, natural gas is methane. So instead of just letting this escape into the air, what they have started doing is putting giant impermeable membranes over dairy manure cesspools and such and trapping the methane that escapes.

And then through a refining process, they are turning it into RNG, which is renewable natural gas. And they can pipe this directly into natural gas pipelines. And instead of escaping into the air and turning into CO₂, they can turn it into biologically derived fuel, which is a renewable resource.

And there is a carbon cycle where when you burn natural gas, you put carbon dioxide into the air, but the carbon dioxide is absorbed by plants, which are eaten by animals, which then produce their sludges, which are then processed. And all of this is carbon dioxide that was already existing into the air. If you're concerned about greenhouse gases, look into fossil fuels.

Because you are, everything in the biological cycle is recycling existing atmospheric CO₂. It is the coal and the oil that you take out of the ground that trapped carbon dioxide millions of years ago. Burning that and releasing that into the atmosphere, that's new.

And that adds to the carbon load. But the refuse of your solemn feasts, what is he talking about here? The trash left over and your indigestion and so on after your feasts, the product of all of that, it gets smeared on your face. And you will be taken away with it.

You're going to smear, the trash is going to be smeared on your face. And when they haul off the trash, you're going to be hauled away with it. Then you shall know that I have sent this commandment to you, the word of the Lord, that my covenant with Levi may continue, says the Lord of hosts.

My covenant with Levi may continue. All of this boils down to the covenant with Levi. Now we're

trying to figure out what is this heart of the fathers in Malachi chapter four, verse five.

Notice verse five of chapter two, my covenant was with him, one of life and peace. I gave them to him that he might fear me. So he did fear me.

What was the problem in verse two? You don't take it to heart. You don't give glory to my name. So I have to send a curse upon you.

Levi, when the covenant was made with him, he took it to heart. He feared God's name. He feared me and was reverent before my name.

The law of truth was in his mouth. It entered into his heart and it came out his mouth. He absorbed it.

He metabolized it and he reiterated it. He communicated it. He shared it with others, which is his job.

The law of truth was in his mouth and injustice was not found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and equity and turned many away from iniquity. Because he took the word to heart, because it was on not only in his heart but on his lips, he turned many away from iniquity.

Turned, shoo, same word. He turned them. What turns the heart? Heeding the word.

Taking the word to heart turns and returns the heart to God. The lips of a priest should keep knowledge. People should seek the law from his mouth.

He is the messenger, the Malachi, the Malak of the Lord of hosts. But you have departed from the way. You are not a messenger delivering the word that will turn the hearts.

So God says, I'm going to send my messenger. He will turn the hearts to the fathers, to the kind of heart the fathers had. Who are the fathers in this specific context? He's talking to the Levites and to Judah and their fathers are the ones who entered into covenant with God and were faithful.

God made a covenant with David and David was faithful. God made a covenant with Levi and Levi was faithful. God made a covenant with David, speaking for Judah, and there was faithfulness to the covenant.

The fathers in this context, first and foremost, are the rulers of Judah who were faithful and the rulers in Levi, the priests in Levi, who were faithful. I will turn the hearts of the sons, I will return them to be like the hearts of the fathers. And the hearts of the sons will be like the hearts of their fathers.

You can go back to Levi, you can go back to David, you can go back to Judah, you can go all the way back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But a heart of what kind? What kind of heart did the fathers have? They were faithful enough that God entered into covenant with them. We saw

God walking between the pieces back there in Genesis, making a covenant with Abraham because Abraham was a man of faith.

Abraham took God's word to heart. When God said, take your son Isaac up the mountain, Abraham went. Abraham offers or is ready to offer a priestly sacrifice of his son Isaac, foreshadowing the Lord Jesus Christ being placed on the altar by his father.

But it is a priestly function. This is why Levi is so prominent here in chapter two. So application for us.

If our heart has in any way strayed. Remember again in Hebrews in the earlier chapters, take heed lest there be in any of you an evil heart of faithlessness falling away from the living God. Take heed to your heart.

God is going to send a messenger and give a last challenge, a last message, a last word to return the hearts of his people to himself. Like the fathers, a heart like the father's head. If they do not turn, what is the result? I will curse your blessings.

And for those people that have already rejected the word, I've cursed their blessings already. Their eternal inheritance has been canceled and will be found in the lake of fire. Outside dogs, fornicators, those who love and practice a lie, their part, their Maros, their inheritance is in the fire.

It has been incinerated and the fat stall fed calves are going to be. Roaming and enjoying the sun of righteousness with healing in his wings over a wonderful Montana, Wyoming landscape of immense fruitful pasturage. It's our choice.

It's what we do with our heart that decides which of those fates we share. As goes Israel as a nation in the old testament and in prophecy. So goes the individual believer in this age.

Take heed to your heart. Heed the message from the messenger. Well, this still doesn't answer the question about is there a future Elijah coming? What will he look like and what will he do? This is what we'll address when we come back from the break.