

PostExilicProphets 22-06-22b

We're ready now to resume our study on this 22nd day of June 2022 in Malachi chapter 4. We're hoping to come to a good understanding of not only the sending of Elijah the prophet before the great and dreadful day of the Lord, but to see what we should make of it and what the meaning and purpose and application is once we get the best grasp of it that we can. So we have seen in the immediate Malachi context that the hearts of the fathers were those that were dedicated to God in covenant that feared God's name and honored him in their hearts. This is the kind of heart that God is looking for when he sends Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day.

So the when is in advance of judgment because judgment is coming and we've seen the similarity of this juxtaposition of opportunity before judgment in Hebrews chapter 6 and in Malachi chapter 2 and in chapter 3. If you are back in Malachi, you remember the challenge to the Levites. Levi entered into covenant with God. He took the word of God to heart.

He spoke it. He communicated it. The word was on his lips and he was faithful, but his sons have not been faithful.

And the call to them in this book is to return to the heart that their father Levi had that their fathers, the early priests in Israel had. And the consequence, the coming judgment is then found in chapter 3. I send my messenger. God says he will prepare the way before me.

What is the nature of that preparation? Challenge the people of God to get their heart right in advance of that dreadful day, because he's going to suddenly come to his temple, the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight. He is coming, says the Lord of hosts. Look, he's coming.

Who can endure the day of his coming and who can stand when he appears? Well, those who listened to Malachi, those who listened to God's messenger, those who listened to the charge of Elijah to return their hearts to the kind of heart that their fathers had, the kind of heart that Levi had in being faithful, not only to absorb and to honor God's word and God's name, but to communicate it, to be witnesses of it. And to it, we saw that in chapter two, who can stand when he appears? He is like a refiners fire and like launderers soap. He will sit as a refiner.

This is three, three of Malachi and a purifier of silver. He will purify whom the sons of Levi. We are still talking about Levi as the symbol, as the metaphor for everyone in Israel who needs to have the heart of the fathers.

He will purify the sons of Levi. Those sons better have turned their hearts back to their father, Levi, who was faithful and obedient chapter two, two through four. He is going to purge the sons of Levi as gold and silver so that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness.

Interesting purified so that they can offer an offering to the Lord in righteousness. So we

understand this now, and we know that the purpose to send Elijah is for turning hearts. This is the primary mission.

The why question is answered in preparing the way of the Lord and making his path straight. This is preparation of God's people's hearts. It's not an evangelism explosion.

It's not a crusade to win the lost. Elijah comes to convict God's people and get them to return their hearts to what they were when they first believed. Got parallels in the letters to the seven churches that we've seen many times.

If you've lost your first love, you need to recover that love. You need to recognize that you're poor, miserable, blind, naked, and buy from me medicine and get fixed, get healthy, get ready, be qualified to offer sacrifice, offer the sacrifice of ourselves, be not conformed to the world, be transformed by the renewing of your mind so that you understand God's will, the good and acceptable and perfect, the three different types of the will of God. You want to understand God's will.

Is it permissive? Is it dictatorial? Is it all decreed and predetermined and foreordained? Read Paul, Romans 12, two. There is the good will, there's the acceptable will, and then there's the perfect will. And to understand the difference, divorce is sometimes acceptable in God's sight.

It's not his perfect will, but it's acceptable. And in some cases it's good. It's needful.

Somebody's got a hard heart and they're unequally yoked with someone who has a willing heart. It's all about the heart. Get your heart right.

Do what you have to do to get your heart where it needs to be when the refiner comes and the refining fire is lit. What does it take? Do whatever you have to do to get your heart right. This is the mission of Elijah.

So to understand the sending of Elijah and the identity of Elijah, this is central. What is his mission? Because any future Elijah to this prophecy is going to have that as a mission. Obviously this brings us to John the Baptist.

Turn to Luke chapter one, verse 17, Gabriel speaking to John's father in the holy place, a place where incense is burned on an altar before the Lord. Gabriel is speaking of the coming son for this barren couple. And beginning in verse 13, Luke one 13, Zachariah saw him.

He was troubled. Fear fell upon him, but the angel said to him, do not be afraid, Zachariah. Your prayer is heard.

Your wife, Elizabeth will bear you a son and you shall call his name, John, Yohanan. This is the Lord is gracious. Hanan, C-H-A-N-A-N.

Grace. Yo is Yahweh. Yohanan, the Lord is gracious.

You will have joy and gladness. Many will rejoice at his birth. Why? He will be great in the sight of the Lord.

He will drink neither wine or strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. Remember we put a star by the Holy Spirit in Hebrews chapter six, the Holy Spirit.

You think about Elijah, you think about Elisha. You can't help but think about the double portion of spirit that characterizes that transfer of prophetic office. Spirit, spirit, spirit.

One of the characteristics of Elijah is association with God's spirit. So when John comes, he is going to have this spirit, the spirit of Elijah, the Holy Spirit of God from birth out from his mother's womb. Well, what is he going to do? He is going to turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord, their God.

This is the kind of heart that the fathers had. The heart of the fathers is a heart that turns to the Lord, their God. This in Greek is epistrepho.

Epi is upon and strepho is turn, turn upon to turn around. And the second most common meaning and translation of epistrepho in Greek is to return. It is to turn back to where you came from.

It is to return, to turn around and retrace your steps, to return to the place from whence you came. Epistrepho, he will return the hearts of the children of Israel to the Lord, their God. God is already.

The Lord is already their God. Blessed is that nation whose God is the Lord. Well, the Lord is their God, and that's why the possessive is here.

But their hearts need to return to their God. And that's what John is going to do. He will go before him.

Capital H. He will go before the Lord. In this case, the Lord Jesus Christ in the spirit and power of Elijah in the spirit. They don't capitalize this in the New King James, but following their format, they should because this isn't just a willing human spirit.

This is the Holy Spirit that empowered Elijah and empowered Elisha. This is he will be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb, and he will go before the Lord in the Holy Spirit and in the power of Elijah. Where did Elijah's power come from? Not only the spirit, otherwise it would just say the spirit of Elijah.

How did Elijah get empowered? How did he how did he make that 40 day journey with no other food? God fed him. God fed him some physical food, and it must have been something off. It's like a piece of fruit off the tree of life or something, because he ate one meal and he went a month and 10 days from one meal.

Actually, I think he had a couple of, you know, a couple of meals there, but by the time he finished eating the food that God provided, he made a 40 day journey with no other food in the strength of that meat, 40 days and 40 nights. He didn't even have to sleep. That's why one of many, many reasons why we want to live in the New Jerusalem, because you can just walk down to the river of life and pick this fruit.

You don't need to sleep. You don't need to rest. Don't need to eat for a good long time.

It is amazingly powerful stuff as a picture of the word of God. It is the word of God and the spirit of God that puts God's power in our lives. And this physical food reflects the word of God, spirit and power of Elijah.

Now we have a direct quote of our passage to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children. This is Epistrepo again, to return the hearts of the fathers to the children. The children started out with this heart.

If their fathers made an issue of the word and talked about it in the way in their rising up and in their laying down, when they go out and when they come in, train up a child in the way that he should go so that when he's old, he does not depart from it to make an issue of the word of God. This is the heart the fathers had. This is the heart, the sons, the children should have.

And the hearts, uh, the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, not only to hear the word, but to heed it, to change from being disobedient rain falling many times producing only thorns and briars, as we saw in Hebrew six, producing the fruit of it, the wisdom of the justified, the wisdom of the righteous. This is what John the Baptist in the spirit and power of Elijah is going to do. Anyone who comes as Elijah is going to have the power of the Holy spirit and is going to have the mission of returning the hearts of God's people.

He's not an evangelist. He's not trying to win the lost. He is turning the hearts of God's people who are disobedient back to the wisdom of those who are justified.

Those who are cleansed those in Israel, who will be able to stand the sons of Levi, who will be able to stand in the day of the refining fire, the return of the Lord in power and judgment, who will stand in that day. Those who listened to this message and turned their hearts, who was able to stand in Jesus day and who came under condemnation. You think about those who listened to his word and took it to heart like Nicodemus, like his disciples, like the ladies who accompanied him, like Joseph of Arimathea, like that first generation of the Jerusalem church on whom the Holy spirit descended like fire on their heads, upwards of 500 gathered in one place.

And it was the beginning of the inception of this age about which we will say more soon. So he's going to turn, return the hearts of God's people to the kind of heart the father's had and turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the just. This is how you make a people ready for the Lord, ready for the Lord, have nothing to fear in the day of his coming.

When the refining fire hits, bring it on. This is just going to be the son of righteousness arising with healing in his wings for me, for us. We have nothing to fear because our hearts are already judged.

We have judged ourselves so that we are not in any need of judgment. We've already purged, confessed, refined, departed from, turned away from disobedience and turned toward the wisdom of those who are justified, who understand that it is only God that can cleanse. I want him to cleanse me now so that he does not purge me out of the group later as unqualified, as unfit, unsuitable, disqualified from entering the gate where righteousness dwells.

That's what John the Baptist is going to do. He comes in the spirit and power of Elijah and hearts of God's people are returned to what they ought to be, to the way they were at the beginning of the people, the hearts of the fathers. Now turn to Matthew chapter 11, verse 14, back several pages past Mark to Matthew chapter 11.

Did John fulfill this mission that was foretold by Gabriel to his father Zachariah? Jesus says in Matthew 11, 14, all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come. So John is a contingent Elijah.

What does this mean? If you are willing to receive him as Elijah, he is Elijah. If you are not willing to receive it, he is not Elijah. And what comes instead of the Lord's blessing, the stall fed calf walking on the cinders and looking for the new grass growing up in this endless field that is illuminated by the son of righteousness with healing in his wings.

If you do not receive it and he is not Elijah, what is the alternative? The refiner's fire, the purging, the dross scooped away and discarded, leaving behind the silver and gold of the qualified sons of Levi, right? If you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah. Ultimately as a nation, they were not willing to receive it. There were notable exceptions, but the nation as a whole with its leadership and the bulk of its population did not receive the witness and testimony of John.

They all went out and got baptized. All Israel went out to John to be baptized. It tells us, but what is the result? More about the baptism here shortly.

So he was John's mission was to make ready a people that are prepared for the Lord. That largely did not happen. Wasn't John's fault.

John did his job. He dedicated himself to it. He drank no wine or strong drink.

He had no interest or time spent in personal pleasure or diversion. He was fully dedicated. This is the Nazarite vow, fully dedicated to a purpose related to God.

You can take a Nazarite vow for a short time as Paul did. Or you could take a Nazarite vow for life as John the Baptist did, as Samson was dedicated. So turn to Mark chapter nine.

What is another of the purposes of the Elijah who is to come? And did John fulfill or did he not fulfill this purpose? John chapter, I'm sorry, Mark chapter nine, verse nine, after the transfiguration, after seeing who up on the mountain with Jesus, who's up there on the Mount of Transfiguration, quick review, who's, how many people are on the Mount of Transfiguration total? Let's do a little pop quiz. Total, total human individuals on the Mount of Transfiguration during the time of the transfiguration. How many people are up there? Six.

Who are they? The Lord Jesus, Peter, James, and John, Moses, and Elijah. They come down from the mountain. They have just seen Elijah, right? Now, Peter, James, and John have also seen John the Baptist, right? They saw John the Baptist with their human eyes.

They went up on the Mount of Transfiguration with the Lord Jesus, and they saw the real Elijah standing up there with Moses and the Lord Jesus. Now they're coming down. This is such a pregnant passage, so full of meaning.

So in verse eight, when they had looked around, they saw no one anymore, but only Jesus with themselves. As they came down from the mountain, he commanded that they should tell no one the things that they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead. So much going on here.

We took the best look at it we could when we did Mark, and we've seen it in Luke. We've seen it in Matthew. But you could never exhaust everything.

We could go back and study the transfiguration and find a whole bunch of new things, especially in light of what we are about to see. Tell no one until the Son of Man has risen from the dead. So they kept this word to themselves, questioning what the rising from the dead meant.

Hadn't yet figured out that Jesus was going to die and rise from the dead at this point. And they asked him in verse 11, saying, Now the they here, who is the they? Peter, James, and John. Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first? He answered and told them, Indeed, Elijah is coming first and restores all things.

And how is it written concerning the Son of Man that he must suffer many things and be treated with contempt? But I say to you that Elijah has also come and they did to him whatever they wished, as it is written of him. Interesting. As it is written of him.

Was it written of Elijah that they would do to him whatever they wanted? Jesus said they did to Elijah whatever they wished, as it is written of him. I've read all through first Kings. We have studied it together.

We've been in the first two chapters of second Kings, all about Elijah from when he first appears in first Kings 17, saying there will be no rain. His interaction with Ahab, with Jezebel, with the priests on Mount Carmel, all the way up through with Obadiah, all of these interactions with Ahaziah falling through the lattice and then into chapter two, where he, the sons of the

prophets and Elisha. I didn't see anything about them doing whatever they wanted to, to Elijah.

So what does the Lord mean? Well, let's start first of all, in verse 12. Indeed, Elijah is coming first. Jesus says he is coming in the future and he has already come.

He is coming, but he's already come when he came the last time they did to him, whatever they wanted, as it is written. What is written about response to Elijah? There's only one place that prophesies anything about response to Elijah. And that's our passage Malachi chapter four, verse six, if their hearts do not return to being like the hearts of the fathers, these sons, I will smite the land with a curse.

They have done to him what they wished, which is not to respond, not to turn their hearts. They rejected they being the leadership and the bulk of the population, even though they went out, it was a big fat to go get dunked by John the Baptist, but their hearts didn't turn. And these same people will be clamoring for Jesus' crucifixion just a few years hence.

So as it is written, Jesus is saying a curse is going to come on this land because they did not turn at the preaching of Elijah, which was the Lord Jesus. If you received it, he's Elijah. If you didn't receive it, you're going to receive the curse instead.

They did to him what they wanted. And of course the generation of those people is personified by Herod who had John beheaded on a pretext. Elijah is coming first.

And not only is he going to challenge on those, is he going to preach the word? Not only is he going to turn the hearts of those who will turn and the rest are going to be smitten with a curse, but it says he will restore all things. Interesting. He will restore all things.

What did John the Baptist restore? He comes after 400 years of revelational silence from God and preaches, prepare the way of the Lord, make his path straight. What did John say about himself? Turn to John chapter one, because Jesus says if you receive it, John is Elijah. Go to John chapter one, verse 21.

And the testimony of John in verse 19, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, who are you? Notice John one 19, who is sent to ask John who he is? Priests and Levites. Priests and Levites. Who are the focus of most of the attention in Malachi chapter two and chapter three? Who is the father whose heart needs to be returned into the children? Levi and the covenant.

So the priests and Levites sent from Jerusalem to ask him, who are you? Now this is doubly understandable because they have to know that John is the son of Zechariah, the priest, that he is a Levite. Right? So who are you? He confessed and did not deny, but confessed. I'm not the Christ.

Let me just set that straight right now. I am not the Christ. I'm not claiming to be the Christ.

They said, what are you then? Are you Elijah? He said, I am not. Jesus said, Elijah has already come. Jesus said, if you're willing to receive it, he is Elijah.

Yes. John as a priest and a Levite. And he says, I'm not Elijah.

Why? The priests and the Levites have already rejected the message for them. He is not Elijah. He's only Elijah.

If you receive it, the priests and Levites are not receiving it. Notice as it goes on. Are you the prophet? Capital P that Moses said, you know, a prophet greater than like, like unto Moses is going to come.

He said, no, I'm not a latter day Moses. I'm not a latter day Elijah. Well, who are you then in verse 22, that we may give an answer to those who sent us.

What do you say about yourself? Then he quotes Isaiah chapter 40, verse three. I'm the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord. You need to go back.

You're not ready for Elijah. You won't accept the testimony of Elijah. You need to go back to Isaiah chapter 40 and start there.

I'm not Elijah for you, for you. I'm Isaiah. We don't have time to go back and review that, but he says, I am the voice crying in the wilderness.

As Isaiah said, you need an, you can't take the meat. You're not even ready for the meat that Elijah would present. You need the milk of Isaiah.

And of course it's Isaiah chapter 40, speak comfortably, make straight the way of the Lord. So now look at verse 24, a new group of questioners comes. Now those who were sent are from the Pharisees.

The Pharisees are not the Levites and priests. This is a different group. Now there are those who were sent from the Pharisees and they ask him saying, why do you baptize? If you are not the Christ nor Elijah, nor the prophet, they hear the answer that was given to the Levites and priests.

And they say, well, why are you baptizing? John says, I baptize with water, but there stands one among you, whom you do not know. It is he who coming after me is preferred before me, whose sandal strap I'm not worthy to lose. There is one standing in your midst whom you do not know.

I baptize with water. John comes in the spirit and power of Elijah. He baptizes with water because he is a metaphor, a physical picture of what the Holy spirit is going to do.

And from other records of the preaching of John, we know that when he comes, he will baptize you. How I baptize you with water. What's he going to baptize the Holy spirit and fire, who gets

the baptism of the spirit, those whose hearts turn, who gets the baptism of fire, those whose hearts don't turn.

So the issue in the coming of Elijah, and we're working our way forward to identifying him before the future coming of the great and terrible day. That ministry, the messenger ministry that comes is going to be in the spirit and power of Elijah. It is going to be Holy spirit fueled.

It is going to pronounce deliverance and blessing for those who turn their heart and become like the fathers. And it is judgment of fire for those who don't, he will baptize you with the Holy spirit and with fire. So there is one coming after me who came after Elijah, Elisha.

How much of the spirit of Elijah did he have double a double portion. So for us, what is the witness and the ministry, who is our Elijah? Now it is the witness and the ministry of the Holy spirit, which comes directly to us. We don't need an Elijah to come in the spirit and power.

Elisha has come. The Lord Jesus Christ has come with the double portion of the spirit, the double portion of power. But remember what the Lord Jesus said that those who follow him, John 14 verse 12.

I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing and they will do even greater things than these because I am going to the father. Elijah ascended and left a doubly fortified Elisha behind, right? The Lord Jesus like Elijah ascended and has left a doubly fortified body behind. We have the word and the spirit.

We have the spirit and the power to be the Elisha to the Lord Jesus. Elijah. We have been called by the Lord Jesus to represent him and to do even greater works than what he has done.

And it is all about the ministry of the Holy spirit. So first and foremost, when we think about the coming of Elijah, this is the spirit that convicts of sin, righteousness, and judgment for us. When we respond to that conviction, when we purge ourselves, when we allow God to cleanse us with the washing of water by the word, when we wash our robes in the blood of the lamb and make them spotless by acknowledging our sins, by turning our hearts away from our sins and toward God honoring his name, we are now ready to stand.

Elijah's work is done in our lives by the Holy spirit. Now make sense. We don't need an Elijah in the church age to come, do we? When our age is over and we with the Holy spirit's ministry depart and the man of sin is revealed, there is going to be the need for an Elijah to come and preach to God's people, Israel about the necessity for repentance, the necessity for their heart to be right.

Elijah for us has already come. And there is an echo of John the Baptist to the Lord Jesus and from the Lord Jesus to us. Remember, and this is the distinction you would say, well, isn't the Lord Jesus, Elisha to John's Elijah? No, because if you go back to first Kings chapter 19, the calling of Elisha, it says, Elisha abandoned his plow and became Elijah's servant.

Jesus is not John the Baptist's servant. John's ministry was to the people of Israel and those whose hearts turned benefited and entered into the church age because they were so close in time to the church age. Those who responded genuinely to John's ministry as Elijah became Elisha as church age believers.

They only had to wait two or three years and here they are in the church age, right? Jesus is the Lord who comes. He is not Elisha. He's not the servant of Elijah.

That's us. We are Elisha. We have twofold the opportunity that John had to not only turn our own hearts, but to speak the truth in love and to challenge the world around us, to shine the light of the glory of the gospel of Christ, who is the image of God so that others will be drawn to that light.

That's our opportunity. When we as Elisha leave in the 70th week, the last seven years of the age of Israel, you're back to needing an Elijah to come and challenge those people to become Elisha in the millennial kingdom when the spirit will be poured out on all flesh. So we still don't know who that Elijah is.

And I've got at least two more lessons to cover whether or not the two witnesses of revelation serve as Elijah. Could they be a double portion Elijah? Do they witness and judge in the spirit and power of Elijah? And if so, who are those two witnesses? Is Elijah one of them? In fact, well, this is a whole interesting area to explore and to understand who they are. We have to go back to first Kings and look at the interaction between Elijah and Elisha.

That will help us understand what the coming Elijah before the great dreadful day is going to do and who his Elisha is going to be and how that transfer is. What does the mantle mean? What is the spirit and power? What is the purpose and what is the mission? Well, it's all very fascinating. Hopefully you understand what our application is.

We are already at the point of turning our hearts, of being qualified to offer our sacrifice, of cultivating the presence and power of God's Holy Spirit in our lives so that when the great refining judgment comes for us, we are those who can stand, stand confidently, stand joyfully, looking into the future where that beautifully cleansed holy land awaits, where the sun rises with healing in his wings and we as stall-fed calves enjoy the fruits of the victory of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross over sin. Honoring him enables God to honor us and to bless us. So nothing to fear if we have turned our hearts.

It all depends on what we choose. Very clear in Malachi. Look at that again in chapter 4 verses chapter 2 and chapter 3. As go those Levites, as goes the heart of Jacob and Israel.

It's a beautiful, perfect picture for us. Let's close here in a word of prayer. We'll pick up this study again next week.

Father, thank you for the truth of your word. Thank you for how clearly and powerfully it shines a light on our hearts, on our opportunities, on the provision that you have made for us through

your son, the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior. We pray that as we reflect on these truths, that your Holy Spirit will clarify them, help us to see clearly what the action is that we should take, what new direction we should pursue, what priorities we should establish, the narrow path that leads to the straight gate.

We pray that you will light it on both sides with these truths from your word so that we can steer a straight course and enter into that life that you so greatly desire to give us because of the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ in whom we have all of our righteousness and peace and sanctification. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.