

Sunday 12-Dec-2021

Malachi 3:1-5

"I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty.

² But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. ³ He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, ⁴ and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years.

⁵ "So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me," says the LORD Almighty.

Matthew 3:1-12

John the Baptist Prepares the Way

3 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea ² and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." ³ This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

"A voice of one calling in the wilderness,
'Prepare the way for the Lord,
make straight paths for him.'"

⁴ John's clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. ⁶ Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River.

⁷ But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? ⁸ Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. ⁹ And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. ¹⁰ The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.

¹¹ "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹² His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

Sermon: Preparing for Jesus

Intro

- **G'day** Church Family
- It would be great to have your **Bibles** ready and **open at Malachi chapter 3** – and then we will also look at **Matthew 3**
- You can take **notes** on the **sermon outline** provided
- Let me **pray** first
 - *Father God as we look at preparing for Jesus – please be preparing our hearts and minds to receive your message*
 - *Help us to fix our eyes on your Son*
 - *In His name, we pray. AMEN*
- Just in case you **ever** have to **meet** the **Queen** – you **need to be prepared!**
- Here's some **dos** and **don'ts**

[PowerPoint 1-Dos]



- The do's
 1. You must **Curtsey** or **bow** (the head only) - although you **can** also **shake hands** or do a **combination** of the two
 2. Use the **right greetings** – the correct address is **Your Majesty** and subsequently **Ma'am**, pronounced like **jam**.
 3. **Be early**. Guests should **arrive before a royal**.

[PowerPoint 2-Don'ts]



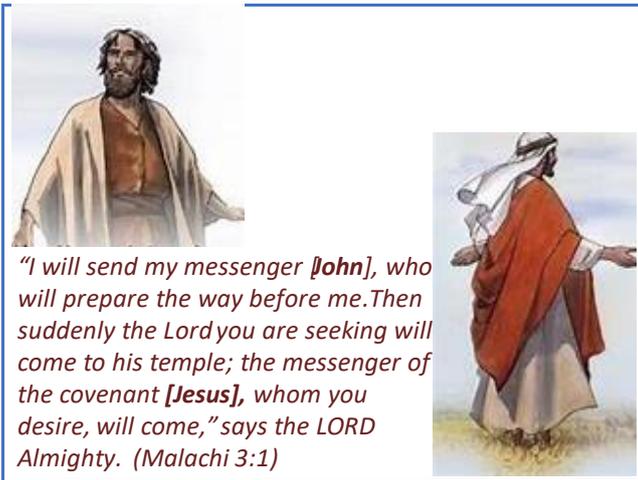
- Don'ts
 1. Don't touch the Queen – as Paul Keating did
 2. Don't turn your back on the Queen – it's **rude** (like Donald Trump)

3. Don't talk unless spoken to, don't sit until she sits and don't begin eating until she does.
 4. Don't leave before the Queen
 5. Don't take photos or selfies
 6. Don't ask personal questions
 7. Don't get drunk
- As you can see you **need to be prepared to meet the Queen**
 - And it's the same when it comes to **meeting Jesus** – we **need to be prepared**
 - **God knows this** and so in our OT reading from **Malachi 3** – **God announces how this preparation will take place**
 - The prophet **Malachi prophesied** between **445 and 425BC** – way before Jesus was born
 - In Malachi's time – even though **God shows His love for His people** and says He loves His people - the **people** of Israel doubted **God's love for them**
 - However, the **people** shouldn't have been **looking at God's behaviour** – God says in first two chapters of Malachi – they **need to look at their own behaviour** – they are not worshipping God properly – in their **sacrifices they offer animals that are sick or lame**
 - And the **priests** who are supposed to teach the people about God **have led the people astray** – and the priests have **married foreign wives who worship foreign gods** and **God says that the priests have a low view of marriage** and too easily accept divorce; and on top of that the **people** even **question God's justice?**
 - So, in our Old Testament reading from Malachi 3
 - **God announces 2 messengers**

God Announces 2 Messengers (Malachi 3:1-5)

- Look at v1 – God says He will send the first messenger – who will **prepare the way before God Himself**

[PowerPoint 3-v1]



- This **first messenger** is **John the Baptist** – who will be born 400 years after Malachi
- We know this because in the **NT in Matthew 11:10**, Jesus quotes Malachi 3:1 and He is **talking about John the Baptist**. [Also in Mark 1:2 and Luke 7:27]
- Malachi says - this **first messenger** – John the Baptist - will prepare people for the second messenger
- The **second messenger** will be the **messenger of the covenant** – that's the New Covenant we mentioned last week – the **New Covenant** that the 2nd messenger – Jesus – God's Son – will introduce – by His blood shed on the cross – to allow sins to be forgiven
- Malachi says this second messenger Jesus **will come to His temple** – some versions of the Bible say "**suddenly come to His temple**" (probably better to say surprisingly) - **Jesus will surprisingly come to His temple**
- Now remember there's a **400-year gap from Malachi** until Jesus' birth

- The **people of Israel** had been **waiting many generations** for this promise of this second messenger from God to come
- Just before Jesus came - the **nation of Israel was under Roman rule** – and they were struggling with not being completely their own nation – they longed for their own King again – someone like David
- If we **fast forward 400** or so years after Malachi to Jesus' time – **suddenly** after all this time - **Jesus is born**
- In Jesus' life on Earth – He had **several encounters with the Temple** – but the most important of these encounters – **happens when Jesus is just over a month old** – in Luke chapter 2 – **His mum and Dad take Jesus to the temple to present their baby to the Lord** – and **give thanks for Him**
- And they **meet** a **righteous and devout old man called Simeon** –
- **Simeon** took the **baby in His arms** and **said** Luke 2:29-32
- ²⁹ *“Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.*
- ³⁰ *For my eyes have seen your salvation,*
- ³¹ *which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:*
- ³² *a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel.”*
- **That's amazing** – **Simeon holding the Saviour of the world** in His arms
- But back to Malachi – and what will this second messenger – **Jesus** - do
- Look at verses 2 to 3

[PowerPoint 4-vv2-3]

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 launderers' soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the Lord An offering in righteousness.



- He will do **two things** – He will **purify** and He will **judge**
- Malachi uses **two pictures of Jesus' purifying work** on people in vv2-3
 - The **first picture is of launderers soap** which would give a thorough cleansing making garments white as snow – that's how God sees us when we believe Jesus died for our sins – *though our sins are like scarlet, Jesus will make them as white as snow* (Isaiah 1:18; cf. Psalm 51:7)
 - And the **second picture is of a refiner's fire working on gold and silver to separate the dross (impure bits) from the pure metal (good bits). Again, **that's what Jesus does - through the HS - to us - as we persevere in our faith in Him through many trials** – our **faith is tested and proved genuine** – and our rough edges and impurities are removed**
- The purpose of Jesus' purifying is to **make us like priests** – just like the Levites in the OT were – but in our case we are made part of spiritual priesthood as we are spiritual stones attached to the Jesus the foundation stone of a spiritual and holy temple (1 Peter 2:5)
- God's ultimate goal, through this promised messenger Jesus, is to **cleanse society and change the hearts of people, so that they return to God.**
- Jesus' death on the cross, cleanses believers from their sins and the Holy Spirit turns people's hearts back towards God.

[PowerPoint 5-v5]

Malachi 3:5

“So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me,” says the Lord Almighty.

- The **other thing** that this second messenger Jesus does – is to **judge** – so Malachi **warns in verse 5** – that **the wicked** [all those people listed in v5] ultimately will not go unpunished – **WE ALL will have to face God’s judgment** – when God’s judge – Jesus – returns one day (Matthew 12:36-37; John 5:22, 27; Acts 17:31; Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 9:27; and Revelation 20:11-15)
- As we leave Malachi 3:1-5 – we have God’s promise of two messengers to come – **John the Baptist and Jesus**
- 400 or so years go by – waiting waiting waiting - God keeps His promises in His own perfect timing

John the Baptist prepares the way for Jesus (Matthew 3:1-12)

[Please Turn to Matthew 3:1-12]

- **John** the Baptist and **Jesus** have **both** been **born** [we will look at Jesus’ birth next Sunday and Christmas Day]
- We pick up the story in v1 & 2– John is in the wilderness **preaching**

[PowerPoint 6-vv1-2]



John the Baptist came, **preaching** in the wilderness of Judea and saying "**Repent**, for the Kingdom of Heaven has come near" (Matthew 3:1-2)

- Preaching that people must **repent because the Kingdom of Heaven is near** [it's come near because God has come to live with His people – in Jesus – Immanuel – God with us]
- What is **repentance**?

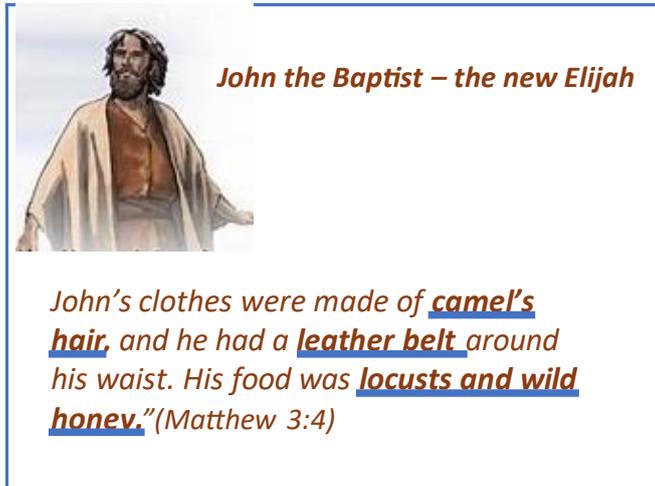
To feel or express sincere regret or remorse about one's wrongdoing or sin.

To do a complete U-turn – a person is heading away from God and going their own way, not God's way – then they make a complete U-turn, acknowledge their sin and rebellion against God; they say sorry to God and then head in God's direction, following God's ways and put their faith in Jesus' death for their sins to be forgiven and put their faith in His resurrection for eternal life.

- **Repentance** is something **everyone on this planet must do**
- And it's not just a **one-off exercise** when we become a Christian
- We must be **continually examining our hearts for any offence against God** – and bringing it to Him in genuine heartfelt sorrow
- Matthew tells us **John is fulfilling prophecy** – not only what the prophet Malachi said about God sending a messenger
- But also, what the prophet Isaiah said in Isa 40:3
- That John would be **a voice in the wilderness calling people to repent and preparing the way for the Lord Jesus to come**

- And literally making a straight path for the Lord to enter people's hearts

[PowerPoint 7-v4]



- The **description** of **John** in v4 is a bit wacky!
- He's hardly a fashion icon – **clothes** made of **camel hair** – nice and **itchy!**
- And his diet is hardly nouvelle cuisine – **honey flavoured locusts** (grasshoppers)
- But there's a point to this description – **John is like the OT prophet Elijah**
- Elijah and John not only share the same fashion and diet (2 Kings 1:1-8) and they share the same ministry – they **both call people to turn back to God**
- Malachi even says in the next chapter – in **4:5** – that God will send the prophet Elijah – which might seem a bit strange – because Elijah has already been and gone before Malachi's time
- But then we find out from Jesus in Matthew 11:14 – **that John the Baptist is the "Elijah to come"** that Malachi was talking on about

[PowerPoint 8- Responding]



John the Baptist's ministry

- *Confessing their sins and being baptized*
- *Produce fruit in keeping with repentance*
- *Don't rely on tradition or family line*
- *Beware of Judgment to come!*
- *Jesus will baptize with the Holy Spirit*

- And look how people respond to John the Baptist's ministry in vv5-6
- He had **people come to him from Jerusalem, Judea and the whole region of Jordan.**
- And look what they are doing
- They are **confessing their sins** (i.e., repenting) and **being baptized by John** in the Jordan river.
- **Baptism** (as we saw in our baptism of baby Theodore) is a **symbol of sins being washed away!**
- It's a **wonderful response** to John's call for repentance – isn't it?
- But there's another bunch of people who turn up – in v7 – the Pharisees and Sadducees
- The **Pharisees** are a **religious group** – they followed God's Law and 613 laws and oral tradition
- The **Sadducees** were a **religious/political group** – they only followed first five books of the Law – didn't believe in oral tradition and didn't accept anything supernatural – like the resurrection of the dead – or **existence of spiritual world** – like **angels and demons** (Acts 23:8)
- So as these two groups turn up to see John baptize people
- John's reaction is strong – see v7 – **John calls them a brood of vipers**

- The use of “**viper**” is a **reference to evil** and to the **serpent – the Devil - in the Garden of Eden**, devouring people with his lies (his native language). Both John and Jesus label the Pharisees and Sadducees as having corrupt, evil and hypocritical hearts – who were leading people astray – they looked good on the outside but their hearts were corrupt – even working together to kill Jesus
- John tells them what they should do and what they shouldn't do – in vv8-9
- What they should do is: **produce fruit that is in keeping with repentance**. That is their **repentance must be genuine and from the heart** – and not lip service to God and hypocritical. They can't just turn up to be baptized and not have genuinely repented. That's a **warning to us too** – that our repentance needs to be genuine and should be accompanied with genuine fruit – we must walk the talk
- What they should not do: they should not rely on the fact that they are descendants of Abraham (i.e., trusting in their Jewish heritage rather than God) to save them from God's wrath. Again, a **warning for us** – not to rely on our traditions or upbringing – or rely on the fact that our father, mother, grandfather or grandmother were Presbyterian Christians – but to **realize we have to have our own personal genuine faith in Jesus**
- John says in v11 – his ministry is only the start – and that ONE coming after him – Jesus – won't baptize with water – **but with Holy Spirit**
- This is the promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit, promised by the New Covenant we looked at last week in Jeremiah 31:33 [where God promised He would put His law in people's minds and write it on their hearts] and Ezekiel 37:14 [I will put my spirit in you] and Joel 2:28-29 [I will pour out my Spirit on all people...I will pour out my Spirit in those days]. See also Isaiah 11:2.
- But John also gives stern warnings in v10 and v12 – of God's judgment on sin

- In v10 – there’s the picture of *the axe ready to chop down the worthless tree that doesn’t produce any fruit*
- *“No mere pruning and trimming work did John come to do; he was the handler of a sharp axe that was to fell every worthless tree.”* (Spurgeon)
- And in v12 – a picture of a **winnowing fork tossing both the good (the wheat) and the bad (the chaff) in the air.** The wind blows the chaff (the bad) away and the heavier wheat (the good) falls to the ground. The scattered chaff is then swept up and burned in a fire and the threshing floor cleared (Don Carson)
- John’s ministry shows us clearly what has to happen to prepare someone to meet Jesus
 - There has to be a **turning back to God** in **genuine repentance and sorrow for a person’s sin.**
 - Then a **commitment to follow God’s way** not their own way.
 - Then, being **baptised with Holy Spirit** – as they believe in Jesus
 - Then, that person is **ready to accept Jesus’s death for their sins to be forgiven;** and to **accept Jesus’ gift of eternal life, through His resurrection.**
 - With the inclusion of how John dealt with the Pharisees and Sadducees, we see that this faith in Jesus, **must be a genuine heart-felt faith** and not in any way **lip-service or hypocritical.**
 - Having trusted in Jesus, we next have to **keep in step with the Holy Spirit** and **produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit.**

How can we be like John the Baptist?

[PowerPoint 9-We prepare people to meet Jesus]



- Just like John the Baptist - we [here at St. David's Toukley] - can prepare people to meet Jesus
- We're in an even better position than John the Baptist
- That's not me saying that
- Jesus says in Matt 11:11 – **the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than John the Baptist**
- How can Jesus say that?
- In Matthew 11:3 – Despite John's wonderful ministry of repentance and preparing people to meet the Lord; John is uncertain if Jesus is the ONE who is to come. We are in a greater position than John, because we are on the other side of Jesus' death on the cross and His resurrection, and **we KNOW Jesus is the ONE**.
- In God's grace, because of the age we were born (other side of the cross) we have seen and heard what John didn't see and hear (Matthew 13:16 and Hebrews 12:39) – because we have the complete Bible in our hands.
- Whilst John was certainly filled with the Spirit in a real way (Luke 1:15), he didn't live to experience the Pentecost outpouring of the Spirit he had predicted (Acts 2) whereas even the most recent new-covenant believer is indwelt with the Holy Spirit and lives under the kingship of Jesus
- So how can we **be like John the Baptist**

- Continually, repent of the sin in our lives
- Be prepared to **give our testimony of how we came to believe in Jesus.**
- **Share our faith and certain hope we have in Jesus** – taking the Great Commission seriously.
- **Realise the urgency of sharing our faith;** as we don't know when Jesus will return to judge.
- **Christmas is a wonderful time to - not only fix our eyes on Jesus - but to also prepare others to meet Jesus!**
- **Two Practical ways we can do this:**
 - For children – give them this **Christmas Card which has a QR code** – on it – so they can **watch a Christmas video from Quizworx** – called “**Does God care?**”
 - For adults – you all received a **flyer with our Christmas services** – **invite a non-believing family member or friend to one of our Christmas services** so they can prepare to meet Jesus – and hear the Good News

Conclusion

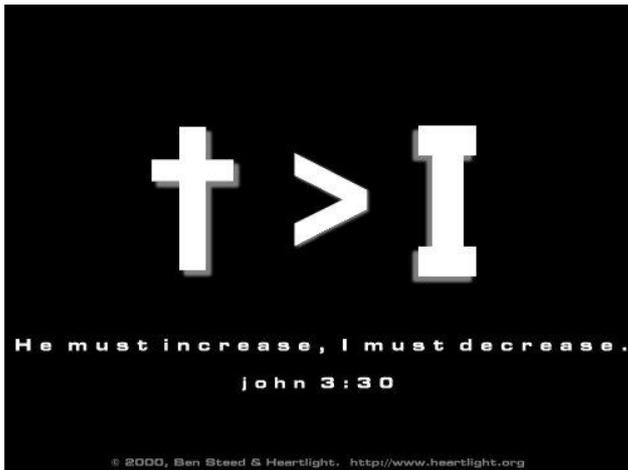
Let me finish with a **quote from John the Baptist**

John's disciples started to complain that people were going to Jesus now and not to John so much

John wasn't fazed by that – His job was to point people to Jesus

So, in John 3:30 – John says:

[PowerPoint 10-Jesus>I]



He [Jesus] must increase; I [John] must decrease

It's the same in our lives

Jesus must increase, we must decrease

As we approach Christmas – I pray that Jesus increases more and more!

Let's pray

Heavenly Father thank you for sending Jesus – the messenger of the New Covenant – who came to save people from sin and death

Thank you that your word shows us how we can prepare to meet Jesus

Help us to be continually examining our hearts and repenting of our sin

Help us to be like John the Baptist – and prepare people to come and meet Jesus

Grant us opportunities over the Christmas period to share our faith and hope in Jesus

In His name, we pray. AMEN