

Sunday 27th November 22

Silence is Broken

Malachi 4:1-6

4 "Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire," says the LORD Almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them. **2** But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays. And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves. **3** Then you will trample on the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act," says the LORD Almighty.

4 "Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel.

5 "See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. **6** He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction."

Luke 1:1-25

Introduction

1 Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, **2** just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. **3** With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, **4** so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

The Birth of John the Baptist Foretold

⁵ In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. ⁶ Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. ⁷ But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

⁸ Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, ⁹ he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

¹¹ Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. ¹³ But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. ¹⁴ He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. ¹⁶ He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

¹⁸ Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

¹⁹ The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. ²⁰ And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time."

²¹ Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. ²² When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

²³ When his time of service was completed, he returned home. ²⁴ After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. ²⁵ "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favour and taken away my disgrace among the people."

Sermon: Silence is Broken

[It would be good to have your Bibles opened at Malachi chapter 4 – let me pray before we begin]

Intro

As we mentioned in our **children's talk** this morning - we are **preparing for Christmas**

In our passage from the **Old Testament** from **Malachi chapter 4** this morning - **God is preparing** for the very first Christmas - and his **preparation starts 400 years before** Jesus is even born.

Context

Now the **context** of Malachi chapter 4 is that **God's people** – the people of Israel - had the **wrong idea about God**

[Slide 1-Context]

They **doubted God's love** (chapter 1)

And they also **treated God with disrespect** – by offering animal sacrifices with blemished animals – **animals** that were **injured, lame or diseased** (chapter 1)

And they also **broke God’s rules in general** – and **broke God’s rules about marriage** (chapter 2) – and they **weren’t giving the Lord a tenth of their harvest** (chapter 3) – instead they **robbed God** and **gave Him their leftovers** – not their **best**.

And if that wasn’t bad enough, they even accused **God of being unjust**

In chapter 2:17 – they said this about God - *All who do evil are good in the eyes of the LORD, and he is pleased with them!*

And they asked - *Where is the God of justice?*

And so, the people came to the wrong conclusion about God in chapter 3:14 – and said - *It is futile to serve God. What do we gain by carrying out his requirements?*

(pause)

If we think about it – **we hear the same wrong ideas and complaints about God today** – don’t we?

Like – **‘God isn’t a God of love’** – **‘how come bad things happen to good people?’** – **‘why is God so unfair?’**

And we also have people doing the wrong thing by God – and **disobeying His rules** – and **thumbing their nose at Him too?**

Here in Malachi chapter 4 – we have the **final words of the Old Testament** – the **final words from God** – before **He goes silent** for **400 years!**

Before God goes silent though – He sets the record straight – and answers this false allegation – that He is an unjust God – and that He lets evil go unpunished.

God's Final Words in the Old Testament (Malachi 4:1-6)

[Slide 2-Final Words in OT]

Look at verse 1 of chapter 4

God says: surely the Day is coming...

What day?

Judgment Day is coming –

When all the **arrogant** and **evildoers** will be **burned up** like **stubble** in a **fire**.

What God is promising through Malachi here is that **there will be a Judgment Day where God will deal finally and decisively with His enemies** – no more chances!

The wicked don't get away with it forever.

The **wicked will face God's appointed Judge** – His Son Jesus – and they will be cast into the fires of **Hell** (Acts 10:42; 17:31?)

Whereas – in verse 2 – **those who revere God's name** – those who truly believe in Him – will experience the healing rays of the "sun [S-U-N] of righteousness"

Who or what is this sun – S-U-N- of righteousness?

Well - as God's Son – **Jesus** – describes Himself as the **Light of the World** (John 8:12) and He **shines His light on the darkness of this world** – and **calls people out of the darkness of their sin and into His light**

So, Jesus is this promised sun - S-U-N - of righteousness because He is the SON – S-O-N of righteousness from God

What **God** is **promising** through Malachi is – as v3 says – all who are **wicked** will be **trampled on** and be like **ashes** under the feet of those who believe – because those who believe will **escape judgment and condemnation** – and they are **pictured** like **happy frolicking well-fed calves!**

And why wouldn't they be happy and frolicking – because they have been **healed of their sin by Jesus** – this sun of righteousness – and they are **destined for Heaven** – rather than Hell!

So – **God's answer** to the complaining people of Israel – and to the complaining people of today – is that **He IS a God of Justice** – and this **Judgment Day** is certain! God will destroy the wicked and preserve those who believe.

Application – For us it means – it's **not futile to serve the Lord** – as the people of Malachi's time thought. **It does pay to serve the Lord.** The fact that there is a Judgment Day affects our view of the world and how we live our life. We can be confident that **evil will ultimately be dealt with** – and we don't have to stress or worry about that. We may even have **pity** on those who continue to perpetrate evil – in fact we should witness to them about this coming day – so that they don't perish.

Application – and if we know that those who believe will be preserved – **we will be more patient when we don't receive our reward in this life.** **We will be willing to keep obeying God,** even when we suffer, because **we know** that **one day, serving and loving God will pay off.**

Malachi is saying **how God's story will end** – the **good guys win!**

But how do we know who the **good guys are?**

V4 – tell us – the standard for God’s judgment **is His Law** – the Law that He gave Moses on Mount Horeb (Sinai) – and **Malachi tells the people to remember God’s law**

And when Malachi says remember the Law – it’s not just head-knowledge but heart knowledge – they are to **put God’s law in their hearts**

It’s like God’s saying – I’m **going into radio silence for 400 years** – but **REMEMBER** my Law – **REMEMBER** my rules –

But it’s worth asking ourselves – how do we **measure up to God’s Law?**

Do we **keep all God’s commandments? Perfectly? All the time?**

No, we don’t – the Bible even tells us – **we have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God** (Romans 3:23)

So, if we don’t measure up to the law – how can we **be one of the good guys?**

How can we **avoid being judged as wicked sinners** and burned up like stubble?

Well verses 5 and 6 – **help us here**

Before that Day – **God will send the prophet Elijah** – v5

His job – v6 – **is to turn the hearts of parents to their children – and the hearts of children to their parents**

In other words – this **Elijah** fellow – **will remind people to repent and turn back to the faith of their forefathers** – the people of Israel are to **remember the faith and obedience** their **ancestors** like **Noah, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob** had.

And for us – we have been reminded this morning of our **Scottish Presbyterian heritage** – in our St. Andrew’s Day service – and so **we must repent and turn back to the faith that our Scottish Presbyterian forefathers had!**

What exactly **is this faith our forefathers had?**

Well - it's the faith that knows **we are all sinners and fall short of God's perfect standards**

It's the faith that says **God's Law matters and we are to obey it**

It's the faith that acknowledges what Romans 6:23 says - *That the wages of sin is death – BUT – the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Romans 6:23)

It's the faith that says **people are forgiven their sins by faith in our Lord Jesus' death on the cross** (Gal 2:16)

It's the faith that says – **I can't keep God's law perfectly** – but I understand God's law shows me my sins – and **shows me I need to put my faith in the only one who can keep all of God's Law** – that's Jesus – this *Sun of Righteousness*

It's the faith that says – by believing in Jesus' death and resurrection – **I am seen by God as one of the good guys**

(pause)

Malachi does leave us with a problem though

In v5 God promises He will send His prophet Elijah – but Elijah lived in 904BC-850BC – way before Malachi who lived in 470BC-420BC. And so, Elijah is long gone before Malachi comes along? So, who is this promised Elijah?

The answer lies in our NT reading from Luke 1 – where the son born to Zechariah and Elizabeth – a son to be named John – we are told “*He will go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah*” (Luke 1:17) – in other words this son John will have the same ministry as Elijah. More about that shortly.

But as we leave Malachi now – **God goes silent for 400 years!**

So - it's worth pausing to get a bit of a timeline

[Slide 3-Timeline]

In **420BC Malachi** makes his **prophecy**

There's a **coming Day of Judgment**

But before this **judgment**

The Judge – Jesus – has to be born

Before Jesus is born – the **promised Elijah [aka John] must be born** - so He can go before the Lord [[While AD 1 is when Christ was believed to have been born when this system was invented in 525AD by Dionysius Exiguus and Eastern Roman monk, historians now believe that Christ was actually born between 7 BC and 4 BC.](#)]

And before this coming day of judgment – **Jesus Himself - talks about another Day of Judgment on Jerusalem** – which happened in AD70 (after Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension) – Luke 21:6 and Matthew 24:2

God's Silence (Luke 1:1-4)

Back to God's silence.

[\[Slide 4-God's silence\]](#)

It's an **EMPHATIC** pause by God

It's a time between the Old Testament and New Testament – **for a number of historical events to happen in Israel**

It's a time for God's people to **reflect** on His Word and His promise of a Messiah – and to **anticipate the coming of this promised Messiah**

It's a time for God to prepare the circumstances for Jesus – His Son - to come to Earth at the perfect time – when Israel is under Roman rule and so on...

[\[Please turn to our NT reading from Luke chapter 1\]](#)

And **God** arranges for a **believer called Luke to write an eyewitness detailed account of Jesus' life** – so that Luke's friend – the most excellent **Theophilus** can know the certainty of the things he has been taught about Jesus and His mission.

Theophilus' name means **“friend of God”** or **“lover of God”**

So, in a sense Luke is writing his story to all of us – as “friends” of God...

God's Silence Broken with a Promise of Grace (Luke 1:5-15)

[Slide 5-Promise]

We pick up the story in Luke chapter 1 v5 – where there is a **King ruling in Judea** – called **Herod** – who reigned from [37BC-4BC or 36BC-1BC]

Herod was an **Edomite**, or an **Idumean**. He was a **puppet King** for the ruling **Romans**. He was known for his spectacular building programs, but even more so for his **paranoid cruelty**, which drove him to **execute many people**, including members of his own family.

Luke introduces us to the **main characters** in vv5-8

A priest called **Zechariah** – who belonged to the **priestly division of Abijah** (2 Chronicles 24:10) – He is from the **tribe of Levi** – his **wife is Elizabeth** – also from the tribe of Levi.

We're told **Zechariah and Elizabeth** were **righteous** and **observed** all the **Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly**.

But they have a **problem** – v7 – they are **childless** – **Elizabeth is unable to conceive** – and they are **both very old**.

But nothing is impossible for God

We find out in vv8-10 that **Zechariah's** lot has been drawn out – it's a **once in a lifetime experience** for him to serve as the priest in the Holy Place in the Temple and burn incense to the Lord!

It's pretty much **one of the best days of Zechariah's life**

And then **God breaks His 400-year silence** with a promise of grace in vv11-13 – by sending an **angel to appear to Zechariah** – in the temple on his special day – burning incense to the Lord.

The **angel tells Zechariah** – your **prayers** have been **answered** and God **promises** that **Elizabeth will have a son** – and **call him John!**

John's name in **Hebrew** is **Yohanan** and in **Greek** is **Ioannes** – means **“God is a gracious giver”**

And the **promise of a precious child** in their old age shows God is the **most gracious giver indeed!**

And this promised son John – will be a **joy and delight to his parents** – and **many will rejoice at his birth** – v14

And he will be **great in God's sight** – and **fully committed to God** (no wine) – and **filled with the Holy Spirit** – v15 – what a gracious giver God is!

God's silence broken with a Call to Return to Him (Luke 1:16-23)

Not only is **God's silence broken with a promise of grace**

But God's silence is broken **with a call to return to Him**

[Slide 6-Call to Return]

See v16 – the angel tells Zechariah - **this promised son John – will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord God**

How will he do this?

V17 – *He will go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous – and make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*

John – just like the Elijah of the Old Testament - will call the people to recall the faith of the forefathers of Israel – and turn away from their disobedience towards God – and repent – and return to God

Application – wouldn't it be great if many unbelievers in our nation returned to the faith of the forefathers who established our nation!

Amazingly – v18 – even though Zechariah is standing in the Holy Place of the Temple – for the only time in his life – talking with an angel sent from God – Zechariah asks “*how can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years*” – how much more proof does Zechariah need that this is a promise from God?

Application – **we must never doubt any word from God** – as Psalm 119:160 says *“All your words [God] are true; all your righteous laws are eternal.”*

The angel even explains who he is – v19 – he is **Gabriel** [which means man of God] – **and he has been sent with this good news!**

Why is it good news?

It's good news – because John will grow up to be John the Baptist

He will prepare people to meet God's Son Jesus – by calling people to repent and come to Jesus

And **Jesus Himself will bring more Good News** – that He is the Grace of God – who will take the punishment for the sins of the world – upon His shoulders on a cruel cross – **and grant forgiveness to all who believe in Him!** And more Good News - Jesus won't stay dead – He will rise from the grave – **to offer all who believe, eternal life**

Because Zechariah doubts the angel's message – He **experiences his own silence** – until the promised son John is born (v20)

God's Silence Broken with the Fulfilment of His Promise (Luke 1:24-25)

With God's silence broken – and the promise of grace given – and the call to return to God proclaimed –

Things turn out just as the angel said

[Slide 7-Fulfilment]

V24 – Elizabeth became pregnant – **and she praises God for His favour (grace)** and **she thanks God that her disgrace (in being barren) has been taken away.**

Elizabeth's pregnancy is a fulfilment of the prophecy that Malachi gave in Malachi 4:5 that God would send the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord comes

Application - God always keeps His promises – in His own perfect timing! Even if it takes 400 years! We can ALWAYS trust God's promises

Conclusion/Challenge

To finish up then

[Slide 8-Conclusion]

We can say this:

- God kept his promise to send Elijah
- And God kept His promise that Zechariah and Elizabeth would have a child
- And God kept His promise in sending Jesus

Therefore, we can be confident in God's promise that Jesus will return one day

Hebrews 9:27-28 tells us: *²⁷ Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, ²⁸ so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.* (Hebrews 9:27-28)

It's one thing to be ready for Christmas

It's another thing totally - to be ready for Jesus' return

Picking up on what God said was John's purpose from v17 – ***to make ready a people prepared for the Lord***

How are people today ***made ready to meet the Lord?***

- *People are made ready - by admitting they are sinners, repenting of their sins and putting their faith in the only one who can forgive sins – that's Jesus – and believing in Him - before He returns – and we don't know when that will be – so there's an urgency to repent!*
- *People are made ready - by being born of the Holy Spirit.*
- *People are made ready - by hearing the Word of God and applying it to their lives.*
- *People are made ready - by worshipping together as God's people.*
- *And people are made ready by sharing their faith - so others can also come to faith in our Lord Jesus.*

So let me leave us with a challenge

[Slide 9-Challenge]

*I invite each one of us to give someone we know who is a non-believer – a **Ticket to Heaven tract** – [which explains how Jesus gives forgiveness and eternal life] - and invite them to church to hear about Jesus.*

And **let's not put it off for another day** – what if Jesus returns tomorrow?

Let's pray

Heavenly Father

Thank you that you always keep your promises in your own perfect timing.

Thank you for sending Jesus – the Good News – the one who deals with sin and death.

Help us to be people made ready to meet Jesus when He returns.

Help us to see the urgency in people coming to You – as we don't know when Jesus will return.

Help us to take up the challenge to share the Good News of Jesus with unbelievers.

In Jesus name, we pray, Amen.