

**Hurst Green**  
**18<sup>th</sup> Aug 19**  
**Malachi**  
**Malachi 1:1-5 and Malachi 4**

So we have had a 14 week tour through the life of Ezra and what a lot it taught us as Margaret summarised last week.

And it was an amazing journey for Israel as they went from a people scattered in exile to a united people signing that great covenant.

They promised:

- To set themselves apart for God
- To keep the Sabbath
- Give God all that his law required.
- Look after the priests and Levites
- Keep the temple

Things we still need to do today!

And we left them in that great place. A nation united under God; under God's blessing and committed to God.

That's a great place to be!!

From here all things should be going well but as we will see the train comes off the rail rather quickly.

We are now going to move on to Malachi – the last of the books in the Old Testament and the last of the recorded prophets. Which is a fortunate coincidence because, as we know, the bible is not laid out as a history book. While it has some very interesting historical sections they are there to inform us not to provide a chronology.

This week is an introduction to Malachi to set the scene for the coming weeks that will take us through until Margaret and I go to America.

So the first great question that the theology colleges love to debate is “who is Malachi?”

They have all sorts of ideas because Malachi means “the messenger of God”. So is it a person? Is it a number of people put together in one book? Is it actually his name?

Who knows?

With my usual flippant disregard of such things – Who cares?

We have a book in the bible that may be by a person whose name is Malachi or it may be from someone else who has been given the name “Messenger of God”.

God has given us this book in the bible. He is a great big God who arranged for which books went into the bible and which ones did not. He is big enough to do that.

God is good!

Malachi is in the bible for a reason – to teach us and that is what he is going to do.

He was accepted as a great prophet – although his book is in the section known as the Minor Prophets! How minor is it to be recorded in the bible?

Look at:

**Malachi 1:1 (ANIV)**

<sup>1</sup> *An oracle: The word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi.*

That says it all doesn't it?

The other thing that people say is that this book is the end of prophecy.

That is a load of hogwash.

We all know of Anna in the temple – the story comes up every year at Christmas.

But do you remember what she was called? A prophetess!

Prophecy has gone on all the time – it is one way that God speaks to his people and even today people are prophesying God's word to his people. Are we hearing them?

Because prophecy is one of the gifts of the Spirit:

**1 Corinthians 12:10 (ANIV)**

<sup>10</sup> *to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues.*

It is one of those gifts I want to see us exercising here but we have not got there yet. We will when we learn to get out of the boat more often! Which one do you have? As for prophecy:

**2 Peter 1:21 (ANIV)**

<sup>21</sup> *For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*

When we let the Holy Spirit move and become more charismatic but always remember

**1 Corinthians 14:22 (ANIV)**

<sup>22</sup> *Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is for believers, not for unbelievers.*

But as that passage in Corinthians goes on to say if someone who is an enquirer, that is curious about our faith, comes in and hears prophecy they will be convinced of the truth and fall down and worship God.

So let the Holy Spirit flow and convince the heathen of the truth of our God. They will believe!

All the gifts of the Spirit work like that. They are good for the person who exercises them, they are good for the recipient and they convince the onlooker of the truth of our God. Triple benefits from our bountiful God.

And God is not stingy with them holding them back for the special few – they are there for all to bless us, to bless each other and to bless those around us. That's how good God is.

And as we will see later in Malachi 3

**Malachi 3:6 (ANIV)**

<sup>6</sup> *"I the LORD do not change. ~~So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.~~*

We have a consistent unchanging God and the gifts he has given he will keep on giving.

You may remember from Ephesians

**Ephesians 2:4 (ANIV)**

<sup>4</sup> *But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,*

That says it all.

God's amazing love for us each as individuals. His great love. That single truth should leave us amazed and thankful but of course God keeps on giving.

He is rich in mercy and because of that we have Malachi – another book showing God's love for his people as he sends another messenger to call his people back.

Now you need to remember when Malachi was bringing an Oracle of God to his people.

Do you remember the timeline/book comparison I gave you all back at the start of Ezra?

Malachi stared on there.

Just at the bottom.

Malachi started prophesying just at the end of Nehemiah.

There is nothing that gives us a precise date and so theologians earn their Masters degrees arguing for one date or another. Again I take the simple approach – we cannot say a precise date.

But he finished by 400 BC – the start of the so called long silence which, as we already know, was not silence at all just no-one got their books into the bible.

So Ezra is prophesying to the people some of whom would have been there when the solemn covenant was signed. Some of whom made those great promises having seen or heard of the great miracles of the three returns. The miracles of God turning the hearts of heathen kings to open up their coffers and the hearts of heathen neighbours to give them millions of pounds in gold and silver so they could rebuild the temple and their land.

As we look at this book over the next few weeks remember that the people either signed the covenant or are the children of the covenant.

That is part of the lessons for us – how quickly people can forget!

Remember the week on spiritual amnesia or has spiritual amnesia already stolen that away from you?

So the themes of Malachi.

For the overarching theme I was torn between two main things that I see Malachi is prophesying. The first is as a prophet of God's love. God is once again calling his people to repent of their evil ways and turn again to him. Our unchanging God continues to do this.

As we sang in one of the Townend hymns

"And your cry of love rings out across the lands."

And, as an aside that hymn also reminds us:

"From each tribe and tongue and nation You are leading sinners home."

God is still building his church today just as he has every day because he is an unchanging God. The only difference is whether man will listen to him.

The people of the solemn covenant listened but within a generation they have hard ears again and God sends another prophet to tell of his unchanging love. And he still does that today – he sends people to turn the hearts of their neighbours and you are those people!

Whose hearts are you turning?

The other main theme I consider was Malachi as a prophet of the coming age.

Throughout the book there are references to the coming of Christ and the final day of judgement such as

**Malachi 3:1 (ANIV)**

<sup>1</sup> *"See, 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.*

That can be read as both events and

**Malachi 4:1 (ANIV)**

<sup>1</sup> *"Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire," says the LORD Almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them.*

Which is the second coming or

**Malachi 4:5 (ANIV)**

<sup>5</sup> *"See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.*

Which of course is the first coming and crops up in the gospels several times but the people expected their interpretation of it not the way God actually did it.

And we shall of course look at those in more detail over the coming weeks.

So what will those weeks hold? As they say “in no particular order.

The love of God and how it rings out down the ages.

People’s reactions. Either boredom with God or playing with religion. Going through the form without being led by the heart. Too easy to do.

What faithful ministry should actually look like. How the ministry of all believers means that each of us is taught by the message to the priests to be priests to one another..

God’s dare to us his people.

And the message of the coming day.

As always there will be many more messages and blessings that I won’t have time to touch on but you can extract if you read your bible as we go along.

So some simple messages today.

An unchanging God whose cry of love still rings out across the lands and who gives us all of the gifts of the Spirit to bless us, to bless each other and to bless those around us. If we don’t use them that is our fault not Gods.

