

The Books of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi

Lesson 13: The Sun of Righteousness and the Coming Elijah -- Malachi 4:1-

6

Think about the moment just before dawn. It is the coldest, darkest part of the night, the hour when the fire has burned down to embers and everything feels stalled, as if the morning has forgotten to come. You stand at the window, and the whole world is gray and waiting. And then, almost without your noticing the exact instant, a thin line of gold appears at the edge of the hills. The light does not argue or announce itself. It simply rises, and the cold begins to lift, and the birds that were silent start to sing, and a calf that has been shut up all night in a dark stall is let out into the warm pasture and goes kicking and leaping across the grass for the sheer joy of being alive. That is the image God reaches for at the very end of the Old Testament. After all the rebuke and all the waiting, He promises a sunrise.

Malachi 4 is a short chapter, but it carries enormous weight, because these are the last recorded words of the Old Testament. After Malachi lays down his pen, there will be four hundred years of silence, four centuries with no prophet, no new word from heaven, just the people of God waiting in the long gray hour before the dawn. So God chooses His closing words with care. He sets two destinies side by side. There is a day coming that will burn like an oven, a day in which the arrogant and the evildoers will be like stubble, dry stalks left in the field that the fire consumes in a moment. And there is the very same day for those who fear God's name, a day not of burning but of healing, when the sun of righteousness rises with healing in its wings.

We have walked a long road to reach this sunrise. We began with Haggai, calling a discouraged people to consider their ways and build the Lord's house. We moved through Zechariah, with his strange and glorious visions of a coming King who rides in humble on a donkey, who is pierced for His people, who opens a fountain to wash away sin. And we have spent these last weeks with Malachi, who held up a mirror to a tired, half-hearted, cynical people and asked them, again and again, how they had robbed God and wearied Him and despised His name. The whole study has been leaning forward, like a runner straining toward a finish line, and here is the line. Every promise, every warning, every vision has been pointing to a Person who had not yet come.

So read this last chapter slowly, the way you would savor the final page of a beloved book. Hear the certainty of the judgment and the warmth of the promise. Watch for the sun of righteousness rising on those who fear God, and know that He has a name: Jesus. Watch for the Elijah God promises to send, the voice in the wilderness who would turn hearts and prepare the way. And when you reach the very last verse, remember that the silence that follows was not

abandonment. It was the held breath of the world, waiting for the morning star to rise. The Old Testament does not end in despair. It ends looking east, toward the dawn.

Group Discussion: Malachi closes by setting two destinies side by side: a day that burns like an oven for the arrogant (4:1), and a sun of righteousness that rises with healing for those who fear God's name (4:2). Why is it important that we never separate these two, the certainty of God's judgment and the warmth of His salvation? What goes wrong when a person or a church holds only one of them?

Personal Reflection: God promises that for those who fear His name the sun of righteousness will rise "with healing in its wings" (4:2). Where in your own life do you most need the healing light of Christ to rise right now, some place that has been cold, dark, or stalled? Name it honestly, and bring it into His light.

Read Malachi 4:1–6

Study Questions

1. Malachi says, "Behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble" (4:1). What does this opening declaration teach us about the certainty and the seriousness of God's judgment? Why does God place this solemn warning at the very threshold of His final word to His people?
2. The arrogant and the evildoers are pictured as stubble, dry stalks that the fire leaves "neither root nor branch" (4:1). When you look honestly at your own life, where do you see the brittle, dried-out things you have been quietly building, the achievements or attitudes that could not survive God's fire? What would it mean to stop investing in the stubble?
3. To those who fear His name God promises, "the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings" (4:2). Who is this sun of righteousness, and how do passages like Luke 1:78–79 and John 8:12 help us see that this promise is fulfilled in Christ, the light that rises on His people? What does it mean that He rises with healing?

4. God says that those who fear Him will “go out leaping like calves from the stall” (4:2). A calf shut in a dark stall and then released into the open pasture is a picture of pure, kicking joy. Where has the gospel set you free, and does your life actually look like the freedom and gladness of someone the Sun has shone upon? Where might that joy have gone cold?
5. The Lord promises that the righteous will “tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet” (4:3). What does this teach about the final triumph of God’s people and the ultimate vindication of righteousness? How does this guard a faithful person from despair when evil seems to prosper now?
6. Right after the great promise, God says, “Remember the law of my servant Moses” (4:4). Why do you think God anchors His people to His revealed word at the exact moment He points them forward to the dawn? Where in your own walk have you drifted from steady attention to God’s word, and what would “remembering” it look like this week?
7. God commands His people to honor “the statutes and rules” He commanded through Moses (4:4). The Old Law was holy and good, and it has now been fulfilled and taken away in Christ (Matthew 5:17; Colossians 2:14–17; Hebrews 8–10). What does it teach us about God that He governs His people in different ages by His revealed word, yet that word has always pointed to the same Christ?
8. Malachi says God will send Elijah “before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes” (4:5). In your own life, who have been the “Elijah” voices, the people God sent to turn your heart back to Him and prepare you to meet the Lord? And whose “way” might God be calling you to help prepare right now?

9. The book closes, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers” (4:5–6). Who was this promised Elijah, and how do Matthew 11:14, Matthew 17:10–13, and Luke 1:17 show that this was fulfilled in John the Baptist, who came “in the spirit and power of Elijah” to prepare the way for the Lord? Why does it matter that we understand this as already fulfilled in John, who prepared the way for Christ’s first coming, rather than as a still-future return of the literal Elijah, and what does God’s concern to turn the hearts of fathers and children tell us about the kind of repentance He desires?
10. Look back not only across this final chapter but across the whole study, from Haggai’s stalled temple, through Zechariah’s pierced and coming King, to Malachi’s closing sunrise. Name one specific way the Lord has used these three prophets to form Christ in you, and one concrete step of obedience or worship you will take this week in response to the God who kept every promise and sent the Sun of righteousness to rise on you.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Luke 1:76–79, Zechariah’s song of the sunrise that visits from on high to give light to those in darkness; John 8:12, Jesus declaring Himself the light of the world; Matthew 17:10–13, Jesus identifying John the Baptist as the promised Elijah; Hebrews 8:6–13, the new and better covenant that fulfills and replaces the old; 2 Peter 1:19, the prophetic word as a lamp shining until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts.

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