**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes 7-30-2023
Majoring in the Minors – Malachi**

Fifty years ago, back in 1973, a movie was released called *Godspell*. Has anyone here heard of it? Perhaps you’ve seen it? A number of years ago, I came upon it and have watched it a handful of times. It is a musical and the music is well done and the story is, for the most part, faithful to that of the gospel.

But this movie is also quite different in that it is set in New York City and people are dressed like the 1970’s rather than from the 1st century. And of course, it is a musical, which would be different than how things were experienced in the first century as well.

But I share all this with you today, because the first song at the very beginning of the movie relates to our final minor prophet. Today we conclude our journey through the minor prophets of Scripture with that great Italian prophet, Mal-a-chi - actually it’s pronounced Mal-ach-i (although Mal-a-chi would be pretty cool).

And in Malichi, one of the things that God is making very clear is that the coming Messiah and King would have a forerunner, a messenger to go before Him. This person’s ministry would prepare the way for the ministry of the Messiah.

The prophet Isaiah had also written centuries earlier about this messenger preparing the way for the divine King, but the prophet Malachi confirms this again. And we know from the New Testament that this messenger was John the Baptist.

So as we begin this time, I think it would be fitting for us to watch this opening song from Godspell. It is called *Prepare Ye.* And in it, we see John the Baptist bursting into song as he is calling people to turn to the Lord. And people are responding by coming to the water to be washed clean of their sins.

We also see Jesus coming to be baptized during this song. And we remember that Jesus chose to be baptized as one way of showing that He supported what John was doing in preparing people for Him.

Show clip

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c1SiaCV26aQ>

That’s a fun song. And it is certainly a very different portrayal than we probably picture in the gospels, but in reality, there are at least three big similarities between *Godspell* and what we read about in the Scripture.

First, the calling is to everyone. It is for male and female and for people of various ages and backgrounds and ethnicities. This is consistent with Scripture. The invitation was and continues to be for all.

Second, some respond positively and some do not. Those that responded well recognized their need and those that didn’t respond well rejected what John was doing.

A surprising fact about baptism is that water baptism existed before John the Baptist. John didn’t invent it. When non-Jews wanted to follow the God of Israel, baptism would be a sign of their being cleansed of their sin and turning to follow the Lord.

But John said that everyone needs it – Jew and Gentile. John believed that everyone needed God’s cleansing upon them. And this was offensive and scandalous to many of the Jews, who saw themselves as not needing this.

And third and finally, we see joy on those that turn to follow God’s way. There was such joy depicted on the film as these people turned to God. And I believe that this was the case in the first century and continues to be true today. When people truly turn to the Lord, there is a true joy that comes from this.

But before we dive further into Malachi’s book, let’s set the context a little bit. Most scholars believe that Malachi was written around the year 430 BC. This would be a little over 400 years before the incarnation and birth of Jesus Christ. And since Malachi references various worship practices taking place, it seems to indicate that the Temple in Jerusalem has now been rebuilt.

But not all was well in Israel. For even though the Temple was now rebuilt, the hearts of many people were not joyfully following the Lord. Malachi shows this in a variety of ways.

One way was through the lack of giving. Offerings were meager and the giving of the tithe or tenth of one’s income was not being practiced very much. In short, people were not excited about giving to the Lord.

Certainly, God didn’t need these offerings for His own ego. But the sparsity in giving indicated a lack of spiritual commitment and zeal for the Lord.

Another problem Malachi highlights is divorce. Many men were apparently divorcing their wives for trivial things. And Malachi tells these Jewish men that they are not to enter into divorce lightly. And when they do, they are doing violence to the wife, whom they were called to protect.

Divorce is always meant to be a last resort, rather than a first impulse.

And lastly, Malachi tells the Jews that they should not be marrying people that were not worshipers of God. Entering into these unions leads to many problems and challenges and God wanted to spare these from His people.

So, what is the solution that Malachi proposes? It is to turn back to God. God has not given up on Israel. But Israel was to turn back to God. They were not to just be going through the religious motions, but to be all in for knowing and loving and serving God. The Jews were not to be lukewarm, but fully committed to the Lord.

And Malachi promises that God Himself was coming to them. He was going to visit them. And before He does, He would also send a messenger that would prepare the way for Him.

Please turn with me now to Malachi 3:1-4 & then chapter 4:1-6

**3:1 “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.**

**2But 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. 3He 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, 4and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years.**

**4:1 “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. 2But 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. 3Then 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. 6He 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.”**

So, what is going on here? Clearly, there is a messenger that will come. This messenger will be Elijah or resemble Elijah in some way. Elijah was a rugged and wild prophet of God who zealously called people back to God who was willing to speak hard words to those that would resist God.

And then the Lord Himself will come. And His coming would be powerful. What He would say and do will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap.

Malachi is saying that when God comes to them, He would purify them in some way. Think about how a refiner’s fire would burn the impurities off of something or how a launderer’s soap would take away stains and make clothes clean and bright again.

But Malachi ends, and in fact the entire Old Testament ends, without this coming to pass. The Old Testament is a book without an ending. It ends with an expectation for this messenger to come preparing the way for the Lord and that the Lord Himself would come to His people.

Many of the Jews today who do not believe in Jesus are still awaiting the fulfillment of these promises found in Malachi.

But friends, these promises have been fulfilled. Elijah as come in the Elijah-like person of John the Baptist. John’s ministry was very similar to that of Elijah (his clothing, his boldness, his willingness to confront sin and hypocrisy, his desire to empower others). And Jesus confirms that John was the Elijah that was to come.

And the Lord Himself did indeed come to Israel in Jesus. Jesus is fully God and also became fully human. Jesus was everything that had been prophesied about the coming King. He would be Israel’s Anointed Messiah, He would be the righteous branch of the line of David, He would be born King of the Jews and the true emperor over all. He would be an eternal high priest and we can go on and on.

And John and Jesus would call people back to God. And with this we come back to *Godspell* again.

The invitation was to everyone. Male and female, Jew and non-Jew --- everyone is invited to come and find cleansing from sin and blessing from God. And when people do turn to God, there is great joy that comes.

So as we think about these words of Malachi, what is the main thing for us to remember today and to take with us.

**And I believe that it is this. We are to look to Jesus to refine us in every way.**

One way that we do this is by regularly remembering our baptism. We are no longer our own, but His, as the Wesleyan Covenant prayer we prayed together at the beginning of the month states.

As God’s people, the Lord wants us to be intentional in inviting Him to refine us and to make us more like Himself every day.

Friends, God is so good and gracious. When we said yes to Jesus, He receives us and adopts us into this eternal family immediately. Praise be to God! There is great rejoicing in heaven when this happens.

But Jesus also wants to refine us. He wants to transform us. I think of Romans 12:2, where Paul writes to Christians in Rome, telling them **“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will.”**

Is there anyone here who would like to know God’s will more clearly? The more that our minds are renewed to think like Jesus Christ, the more that we will be able to know God’s good will.

Jesus is the potter and we are His clay. When we are willing to be shaped and refined and lovingly corrected, He can shape up and transform us much more easily.

He gives us His Word. He gives us His Spirit. He is waiting for us to come to the potter’s house, so to speak.

We come to the potter’s house inviting His refining over us in a variety of ways, from being prayerfully in God’s Word to developing a rich prayer life, to seeking to bless and serve others in Christ’s Name in some way.

And in all of this there is joy. Joy increases when we are pursing growth in Jesus. Again, I think of *Godspell* and the joy that was evident in those that were responding to John’s message.

When we yield to God in these ways, we will be preparing the way for the Lord to move within us and through us to a world that so needs Him. Let us yield to His work in our lives every day.

Let’s pray…