

THE DAY OF THE LORD: THE UTTER NECESSITY TO BE PREPARED FOR THE LORD'S COMING MALACHI 04:01–06

Introduction

These six short verses conclude the great the book of *Malachi*. A close observation reveals a significant fact: the verses present the chief points of the gospel. They may present only a sketch, but the basic outline is here:

- => The fact of sin (as seen in the judgment of the wicked), v. 1
- => The warning of final judgment against the wicked, v. 1
- => The promise of salvation offered to those who revere and fear the LORD, v. 2a
- => The promise of the Messiah who heals and brings joy, v. 2b
- => The promise of the Messiah who comes to deliver and strengthen (give victory), v. 3
- => The exhortation to remember and obey God's Holy Word (the law of Moses), v. 4
- => The promise of peace and reconciliation, v. 6
- => The promise of a changed heart, a renewed heart that restores all broken relations, v. 6

These verses also present a fundamental truth. The Messiah will come for two distinct purposes: He will come to judge and to save (see 1:1, 2). This is a vital distinction and one that is often overlooked, denied or ignored by people today.

- => The Messiah will be the Saviour and Healer for all who truly fear and believe in Him. He will be for them the *sun of righteousness* who rises with healing in His wings (v. 2).
- => The Messiah will be the judge of all the wicked and unrepentant, those who arrogantly reject the Messiah. All evildoers who refuse to repent will be destroyed, burned up completely like stubble (v. 1).

It is critical that every person understands these two purposes for the Messiah's coming. He comes first to offer salvation and healing. However, for those who reject Him, who have no fear of the LORD, He will come in judgment. Indeed, the same righteousness offered to those who fear the LORD will be a consuming fire to all who reject Him. This is the sobering yet joyful message of the great passage before us, *The Day of the LORD: The Utter Necessity to Be Prepared for the LORD's Coming*, Malachi 04: 01-06.

- I. God's emphatic declaration: the day of judgment is coming (v. 1).
 - II. God's promise to all who fear Him (vv. 2-3).
 - III. God's demand: remember and obey His Holy Word — the laws and decrees given to Moses (v. 4).
 - IV. God's promise and warning to all (vv. 5-6).
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I. *Malachi 04: 01 God's Emphatic Declaration: The Day of Judgment Is Coming*

A day of judgment is coming — a terrible and fierce day of wrath. When it comes, it will burn like an oven and the wicked will be totally consumed. Note the Scripture and outline:

1. The day of judgment will be a fiery day that will burn like a furnace (v. 1a). The prophet minced no words. He described the day in graphic, horrifying terms. Picture a massive oven with its contents ablaze, scorching and devouring everything within it — all those appointed to judgment — burning it as if it were dry stubble. The images of fire and furnace describe just how intense God's judgment will be.
2. The day of judgment will consume the arrogant and the wicked (v. 1b). The images of fire and furnace symbolize the purpose of judgment. God's judgment is meant to purify the earth, to rid the earth of the wicked and all their wickedness — just like the refiner's fire and launderer's soap that would purify the priests and people of Israel (see Mal 3:2-3). Although not stated in verse one, verse two makes it clear that the wicked and arrogant are those who do not fear or revere the LORD. Note what is said about the judgment of the wicked and arrogant.
 - a. They will be set on fire.
 - b. They will be totally consumed — not a branch or root of them will be left.

Thought 1. Most people do not want to think about or hear about judgment. And they never consider themselves among those who will be judged. Nevertheless, God's Word paints a clear picture of who will be judged: the wicked and the arrogant. Every one of us should carefully study these words before dismissing them too quickly. Are we among the wicked? If we wilfully reject Christ and His great gift of salvation, we are. We either choose to live with Christ or choose to live in a state of sin apart from Christ. God declares that every one of us has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). Therefore, none of us can break out of that category. Who are the arrogant? We are arrogant, if we think we have no need of a Saviour, no need for God and His everlasting mercy. We are arrogant if we reject Christ and His deliverance from sin and death (Rom 6:23). Thus, each of us is in desperate need of a Saviour. God's Word tells us exactly what we need to know about the coming judgment:

=> We all need Christ.

Rom 3:23 *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

Rom 6:23 *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

=> Many reject and deny Christ.

Mat 8:34 *Then the whole town went out to meet Jesus. And when they saw him, they pleaded with him to leave their region.*

Mat 13:57 *And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honour except in his own town and in his own home."*

Mat 21:38 *"But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.'"*

Mark 5:17 *Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.*

Mark 8:31 *He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.*

Mark 15:13 *"Crucify him!" they shouted.*

Luke 4:28-29 *All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff.*

2 John 1:7 *Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.*

⇒ Those who reject Christ will be judged.

Mat 21:40 *"Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"*

Mat 25:32 *"All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats."*

John 5:22 *"Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son."*

Heb 12:25 *See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven?*

1 Pet 4:5 *But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.*

Rev 19:11 *I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war.*

Isa 11:4 *But with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.*

II. Malachi 04:02–03 God's Promise to All who Fear Him

God makes a wonderful promise to all who fear Him. Fear of the LORD is critical.

Without a proper fear and reverence for the LORD, people are far less likely to cry out for God's mercy and salvation. Fear of the LORD is a necessary condition for receiving the LORD's promises — specifically the promise of the Messiah. The Messiah is pictured

here as the *sun (or Son) of Righteousness*. It is the *Son of Righteousness* who will bring healing to God's people, healing to all who fear and revere the LORD. Note the Scripture and outline:

1. The *Son of righteousness* (Christ) will come to heal His people, make them righteous (v. 2). Verse 4:2 is a favourite of many believers and justifiably so. It paints a beautiful picture of Christ and His glorious, liberating salvation. Note the first of these beautiful images: Christ is like the sun that rises. But He is no ordinary *sun*. He is the *Son of Righteousness* and He rises with healing in His wings. Think of the warmth, glow and brightness of a new day — and with it the hope and anticipation of what lies ahead.

As a bright sunny day brings joy and the chance for a brand new start, so the *Son of Righteousness* will bring with Him the warmth of His love, the brightness of His glory and a complete restoration — the forgiveness of sin, healing and a new life. God was declaring that the Messiah would come and that He would bring the ultimate healing to His people — the righteousness that only Christ could bring. Christ would bring purity and perfection to God's people because He alone is perfect and pure — without any sin whatsoever (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15-16; 7:25-26; 1 Pet 2:22; Isa 53:9).

2. When the Son of Righteousness comes, the righteous will be blessed (vv. 2c-3). Two glorious blessings are promised to those who have been healed and made righteous, those who feared and revered the LORD:
 - a. The righteous will leap with joy (v. 2c). This is a striking image. Those who revere the LORD will be set free like calves released from their stalls, jumping and frolicking with energy and excitement. Think how fitting an image this is. The whole human race has been penned up — held captive by sin. But the Son of Righteousness is coming to free His people, all who will call upon His Name. The picture is of complete liberation and jubilation. Once freed from captivity, the righteous will leap for joy at their release.
 - b. The righteous will conquer and trample the wicked *in that day*, defeating all enemies (Isa 63:1-6) (v. 3). This symbolizes the victory of God's people in Christ. They will crush the evildoers — all of God's enemies as well as their own. This will not be done in their own strength nor according to their own timing. Such victory will be won by the LORD and only on the day He has ordained. And the day of judgment has been established. But no man knows the day or the hour (see Mark 13:32).

Note how forcefully these promises answered the people's former questions and doubts. They had been questioning whether or not serving God had any value, and whether or not obeying His Word was profitable. Given the infinite blessings and joy God had in mind for the people, think how pathetic and absurd these questions seemed now. There is absolutely no comparison between a life lived for God and a life lived apart and alienated from Him. One is infinitely glorious and the other infinitely useless.

Thought 1. God's Word declares that no one is righteous. Every man, woman and child is therefore dependent on the righteousness of Christ. He and He alone has lived a perfect and righteous life. When we sincerely trust Christ as our Saviour, His righteousness is passed on or credited to us *as if* we were righteous. Therefore, when God looks at us, instead of seeing our sins and our failures, He sees only Christ's righteousness that covers us. This is the great gift of God revealed in His Holy Word:
=> Every person is called to be righteous.

Mat 5:20 *"For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."*

Rom 14:17 *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

1 Cor 15:34 *Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God — I say this to your shame.*

Eph 4:24 *And to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

2 Tim 2:22 *Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.*

Titus 2:12 *It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age.*

=> Righteousness comes only through Christ

Rom 5:19 *For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous.*

Rom 10:4 *Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.*

1 Cor 1:30 *It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God — that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.*

2 Cor 5:21 *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

Ga1 3:6 *Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."*

Phil 3:9 *And be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ — the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.*

Col 1:22 *But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.*

III. *Malachi 04:04 God's Demand: Remember and Obey His Holy Word — The Laws and Decrees Given to Moses*

Obedience to God's Word is not optional — it is required. God has established His law on earth and given the human race His perfect instructions, the guiding principles to teach every individual how to live. There is therefore no excuse for living apart from His Holy Word. For this reason, God's charge to remember His Word must be the vital concern, not just of every believer but also of anyone who seeks God's great salvation. Failure to remember and heed God's Word is equal to not fearing His Name. And failure to fear God's Name places a person among the wicked and arrogant of the world, among those who will certainly be judged. Note the Scripture and outline:

Note that the promises of God are conditional. The condition for blessing is only implied, but nevertheless obvious: people will not inherit God's blessings apart from heeding His Word. They must remember His commandments and obey His Holy Word. The implication is striking: apart from obedience, the people will be doomed to destruction — doomed to everlasting judgment along with the wicked and arrogant. Therefore, it is critical for people to read, study, teach, preach and share God's Word. They must never forget God's Holy Word but, rather, remember it and live by it. This is a principle as valid today as it was in Malachi's day.

John 5:39 *“You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me.”*

Acts 17:11 *Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.*

Rom 15:4 *For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

1 Tim 4:13 *Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.*

Josh 1:8 *Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.*

Psa 1:2 *But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.*

Isa 34:16 *Look in the scroll of the LORD and read: None of these will be missing, not one will lack her mate. For it is his mouth that has given the order, and his Spirit will gather them together.*

IV. *Malachi 04:05–06 God's Promise and Warning to All People*

The LORD has given the world a clear warning, the warning of coming judgment. With the warning of judgment also comes the promise of salvation — the salvation that is offered in Christ Jesus. A person who trusts Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour need not fear the coming judgment. By trusting Christ, the person is reconciled both to God and to others. Malachi prophesied of another prophet to come, Elijah, a messenger from the LORD Himself. This messenger will turn the hearts of all people toward one another, bringing peace and reconciliation. The picture is that of peace and healing — the restoration of all that sin and corruption have torn apart. The great promise given to those who heed God's Word and messenger is that they will be saved from certain judgment. On the other hand, those who refuse to obey God's Word and who refuse His messenger will be doomed to certain judgment. Note the Scripture and outline:

1. God will send the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful *Day of the LORD*: Elijah will come to reconcile the families of the world (vv. 5-6a). Commentators have had a difficult time with this verse since Malachi is the only prophet to claim that Elijah had a future ministry. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* provides a clear description of this issue and a more-than-reasonable solution:

*Many commentators have linked this prophecy to 3:1 which speaks of a messenger who prepares the way for the LORD's coming. However, Mathew (Mat 11:7-10) specifically states that John the Baptist was the messenger (Mal 3:1) who prepared the way for the LORD. But should John the Baptist also be considered the fulfillment of the prophecy about Elijah? (Mal 4:5-6) Before John the Baptist was born an angel of the LORD predicted that he would minister "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 — to make ready a people prepared for the LORD" (Luke 1:17). This would seem to put together the two prophecies (Mal 3:1 and 4:5-6) and to see John as fulfilling both of them. (John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, ed., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 1587).*

With the above in mind, this prophecy has already been partially fulfilled. The spirit of Elijah came in the person of John the Baptist who prepared the way for the LORD, Jesus Christ, the Messiah. After John, Christ came to earth to offer its people salvation. For over two thousand years, God's free gift of salvation through Christ has been available to the world. But some day in the future, the other part of this prophecy will be fulfilled: the final judgment of the world will come — the dreadful *Day of the LORD*. Simply stated, two out of three parts of this prophecy have been fulfilled. The only part lacking is the coming of final judgment. And it will surely come!

Consider why the prophet Elijah — his spirit — would come in the person of John the Baptist: John the Baptist was to preach the truth of God's Word. In the fiery spirit of Elijah, John preached the coming of God's kingdom and the utter necessity for people

to repent and be baptised. By so doing, John prepared the way for Christ, who would preach the same message and much more. Christ came...

- to reconcile God to man (Rom 5:10).
- to reconcile people to one another (2 Cor 5:18).

The message of reconciliation has now come to earth through Christ, and reconciliation is now available to all. Apart from Christ (or without His death and atonement), there is no reconciliation — regardless of who might preach it. In short, only Christ has made reconciliation possible; only Christ has reconciled the world to God, thereby making it possible for people to be reconciled with one another. Because of this fact, the LORD could say that a future Elijah (John the Baptist) would turn the hearts of the fathers to the children and the hearts of the children to their fathers. This last statement simply refers to the possibility of reconciliation with God and among people — all made possible by John's preparing the way for Christ.

2. God warns all people: they must be reconciled to God or else be cursed on earth (see 1:3-4; Rev 11:18; 16:1-21; Isa 34:1-17) (v. 6). This final verse suggests that a person can refuse to be reconciled to God by rejecting the Messiah, Jesus Christ. If a person rejects Christ or refuses to be reconciled to another person for any reason, the effect is the same: he or she will be cursed or judged. In the coming *Day of the LORD*, the entire land will face the judgment of God. *In that day*, all who reject Christ will be cursed.

Thought 1. In light of the grave consequences for rejecting Christ, every individual needs to honestly examine his or her own soul to determine where he stands with Christ.

- => Apart from obedience to God's Word, there is no escape from the judgment to come.
- => Apart from faith in Jesus Christ — clearly required by God's Word — there is no hope for reconciliation.
- => Apart from reconciliation, there is no hope for salvation — we are doomed to certain judgment.

Judgment of sin and sinners is an absolute certainty. The day of judgment *will* come. On the other hand, salvation through Christ is just as certain — it can be obtained. God's Word teaches that a person can be saved and delivered from judgment by calling on the Name of the LORD. This plea requires sincerity and a commitment to walk with Christ. Yet even in this matter, Christ provides for our need. In Him, not in ourselves, we find the strength and diligence required to follow Him. He is the Author and Finisher of our faith. His ability is not only to save us but also to preserve us and keep us:

- (1) Christ is able to save.

Rom 6:23 *For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Rom 8:32 *He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?*

Eph 2:8 *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.*

1 John 4:9 *This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.*

1 John 5:11 *And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.*

(2) Christ is able to keep, guard, preserve and protect.

2 Tim 1:12 *That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.*

Heb 12:2 *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

1 Pet 1:5 *Who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.*

Jude 1:24 *To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy. ■*