

Message: Take Malachi Moment Challenge! (Mal. 3: 1-4) Sun. Feb. 9. 14

Pray

We've made it to Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, the Bible Jesus Read. How has the bible reading challenged you? It's great to hear stories of people reading their bible at home before they come to church, or arriving early enough to read. I have another challenge for you this week, but first let's review.

We are surveying the Old Testament during Epiphany Season in a series called The Bible Jesus Read.

Part 1 of the Bible Jesus Read: In our struggle to understand the Bible, we find not less, but more, astonishment in the Old Testament, whose purpose points toward grace.

Part 2 of the sermon series: the Psalms, like a collection of songs, inspire us to talk to God in the power of prayer, a spirituality in every key of life. If you're stuck, read a psalm.

Part 3. From Ecclesiastes, a meaningless life is transformed by trusting God; watch for the miracles, everyday.

Part 4. The Old Testament helps Christians live life with faith, and faith with chutzpah! (the Rev. Scott Young's message last week Feb. 2)

Part 5. Through the Prophets, like Isaiah, Jeremiah or Ezekiel, God talks to us, including through the last book of the OT, Malachi.

I need your help as we embark on Part 6 of our series The Bible Jesus Read. Where you're sitting, I invite you to begin a simple, gentle beat on your thighs: 1, 2, 3, 4. Great. Keep it up! Join in the chorus if you like.



Chorus: Malachi, Malachi, never been a guy like Malachi (2x)

Verse 1: Malachi was quite a guy

In only 4 chapters

To pro-feh-sigh

When life is dull and

God's not our thought

Half-hearted worship

Our givings we drop

What gets our attention

Crisis intervention

Doctor report or tropic resort?

Chorus: Malachi, Malachi, never been a guy like Malachi (2x)

Verse 2: Malachi was quite a guy

religious complacency to defy

God is not a sideline frustration

And won't tolerate temple desecration

Washer and dryer of efficiency high

Scrubbing souls clean, refining our lives,

That's God's work through Malachi

Chorus: Malachi, Malachi, never been a guy like Malachi (2x)

Give yourselves a hand!

It's one thing to have some fun in a little rap rhyme, but there is a legitimate criticism of the prophets, that their confusing. No argument. "In many cases, the prophets were not composed as books at all. Rather, they consist of speeches delivered over many years and later gathered into a collection, with few clues as to context. They abound with repetitions, shifts of moods and strange images that somehow meant something to the original audience" (Philip Yancey, The Bible Jesus Read, page 181, 182).

I've learned a few clues that help us see beyond the surface to the essential message of the prophets.

There are three categories of prophecies: Now, Later, and Much Later. Near and distant prophecies can occur in the same paragraph or have two different fulfillments.

Malachi, the last of the Old Testament books, means "my messenger". The book was written about 400 years before Jesus was born, around the time Nehemiah and his team had joyfully re-built the temple in Jerusalem. After the initial surge of energy to restore their beloved place of worship in Jerusalem, enthusiasm waned – like after a church building program – the people lost a sense of direction and purpose. Life was relatively comfortable and dull.

Malachi addresses boredom, complacency, half-heartedness toward God. Like the other prophets, Malachi is not winning friends or seeking popularity; he's conveying a message that is hard to take and easy to dismiss. While we may try to "fit God" into our life, the prophets remind us if we want to do anything with God, we have to fit into him. Malachi packs a punch as Eugene Peterson writes in The Message, "by leaving us in the company of mighty Moses and fiery Elijah, considerably reducing the danger of our trivializing matters of God and soul" (The Message, page 1319). In the part of Chapter 3 we read this morning, Malachi's words point to a 'later' time, to John the Baptist and Jesus, the fulfiller of prophecy. Another to clear confusion regarding prophecies is that God is not bound by time, yet enters into time as Jesus, like a painter entering the world of his own painting, as C.S. Lewis suggested in his book The Problem of Pain. Keeping company with Jesus each day, our light shines a little brighter.

There was tragic news last Sunday of a 46 yr old American actor Philip Seymore Hoffman who was found dead of a suspected overdose of heroine in his New York apartment. His friend, fellow actor and former addict Aaron Sorkin wrote a blog saying Hoffman's death may save 10 lives because they'll be scared clean.



Malachi may be doing the same thing, scaring people clean toward God. Will people be scared clean, and lives saved, now that someone has called a spade a spade and named Israel's hand-me-down, broken and useless God-offerings, their desecrating God's house, robbing God of tithes and offerings and sniveling while doing it? It's no wonder there needs to be purifying and reforming in the attitudes of God's people.

Will people today be scared clean / awakened from their addictions to substances, to gambling, to consumerism, to always craving the newest thing or juiciest gossip, if they think they too could die apart from God?

Someone once wrote, "When God is going to do something wonderful, God begins with difficulty. If it is going to be something very wonderful, God begins with impossibility!"

As many in the leadership of his day in England despised Winston Churchill, it was his remarkable capacity as Prime Minister to speak the truth as difficult as it was to hear, that helped Great Britain defeat the German air force in the Battle of Britain and ultimately, with allied help, defeat Nazi Germany in World War II. His first statement as Prime Minister to the House of Commons on May 13, 1940 was this: "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat." Three weeks later after the capture of Dunkirk, France, Churchill rallied his nation with these words, "We shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall



never surrender." One man's voice, determination and courage, with God's help, did the impossible.

The Old Testament closes with the word "curse." But it is expressive of the great desire of God's love to avert it, for God says through Malachi, "Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse." The New Testament closes with blessing. "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

A silence of 400 years lay between the voice of Malachi and the voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of the Lord." "But there is a remarkable link between the two Testaments: the last figures on the inspired page of Malachi, and the first on the inspired page of Matthew, are the messenger who prepares the way – John the Baptist - and the messenger of the covenant, Jesus the Messiah. ☞

So, here's this week's challenge: TAKE A MALACHI MOMENT.

If you find yourself watching too much Olympics, OD'ing on TV, take a Malachi Moment. In addition to reading the Next Week's Bible Reading before you come to church, I am issuing a new challenge for this week. I call it the Malachi Moment Challenge. It's counter-cultural and so crazy, it just might work!

Take a Malachi Moment. Do something kind. Tell us what happened.

Malachi Moment Part 1: Stop and say or do some act of kindness for someone. Put a quarter in someone else's parking meter. Pay for the coffee of the car behind you at the drive-thru, shovel someone's driveway, call someone you haven't talked to for a while, invite someone to the 'Son of God' movie coming soon, send a note, introduce yourself to someone in church you haven't met, give a gift card to the garbage /recycle man.

As you stop and do this act of kindness, the act itself may help us hear Jesus' words, of you and I being salt and light.

Malachi Moment Part 2. I invite you to share a story about what you did to brighten someone's day. Malachi, the messenger, did NOT keep God's word to himself. He shared it.

You have helped a friend. You have comforted someone you love that is suffering. You have helped strangers. Maybe you saw someone trying to push his car out of a snow bank and you went to help. Maybe you were a reading tutor or a mentor to a young person. Maybe you did something big, like volunteering your time or contributing to a cause you believe in. Or perhaps you did something like buying Fair Trade coffee, tea or hot chocolate from the grocery store or visiting someone who is lonely. So this is the second part of the challenge is to tell us what happened; this may be even harder than actually doing something kind for someone. Then, tell me how you brightened someone's day.

If you just can't bring yourself to talk about yourself, try starting with someone you know. You can share your stories with me by emailing me (kitgreaves@icloud.com) or you could send me a note in the mail.

What act of kindness might you do this week to brighten someone's day? Take the Malachi Moment Challenge.

Do something kind.

Tell us what happened.

The Hebrew prophets from Isaiah to Malachi help us stay alert and knowledgeable in cultivating faithful and obedient lives before God.

You see, you can be a Malachi, there's never been a girl or guy like you, a messenger of God.

Let's pray.