

God's Messenger and Message

Malachi 3:1-6 (New American Standard Bible)

“Behold, I am sending **My messenger**, and he will clear a way before Me. And the Lord, whom you are seeking, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming,” says the Lord of armies. ²“But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire, and like launderer’s soap. ³ And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to the Lord offerings in righteousness. ⁴ Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old, and as in former years.

⁵“Then I will come near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, those who oppress the wage earner in his wages or the widow or the orphan, and those who turn away the stranger from justice and do not fear Me,” says the Lord of armies. ⁶“For I, the Lord, do not change; therefore you, the sons of Jacob, have not come to an end.

Luke 3:1-6 (New American Standard Bible)

Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee and his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, ² in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness. ³ And he came into all the region around the Jordan, **preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins;** ⁴ as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet:

“The voice of one calling out in the wilderness,
‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
Make His paths straight!

⁵ Every ravine will be filled,
And every mountain and hill will be lowered;
The crooked will become straight,

And the rough roads smooth;
⁶ And all flesh will see the salvation of God!”

Introduction

Names of the Hebrew Bible: In our protestant tradition, we call the first four books in the Old Testament, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. But, in the Hebrew tradition, they are called differently: *B'reishit* (in the beginning), *Shemot* (names), *Vayikra* (And He called), *Bamidbar* (in the wilderness). These are the first words each book begins with. As

you remember, in the English translation, Genesis begins with the phrase, “In the beginning” and that’s how it is called in the Hebrew tradition: *B’(in)- reishit(the beginning)*.

The same thing goes with one of the minor prophetic books. *Malachi*. Prophet Malachi was in active service around 460 B.C. He was a prophet whom God called ‘My messenger.’ Look at verse 1. *Behold, God said, I am sending My messenger* (Malachi 3:1). The Hebrew word for ‘my messenger’ is ‘*Malachi*.’ It is pronounced “Mah-le-Ah-K-i”---“Mah-le-ah-k” means “messenger” and the possessive suffix “i” means “my.” Enough Hebrew lessons 😊.

This morning, I am inviting you to think with me about God’s Messenger and God’s Message.

Content

Speaking of God’s messenger, what is the mission/role/task of the messenger? It is to proclaim and declare God’s message to God’s people as he was told by God. He must deliver the message from God to God’s people with no altercation, no omission, no addition or subtraction. To speak to God’s people as exactly as he was told by God the Almighty---that’s the task of the messenger. If the messenger proclaims a different message from the one as God has sent him with, he is no longer the true messenger, is he?

Question: In the house of God, has there been always the true messengers of God? I wish my answer were affirmative. However, the reality says otherwise. The answer is negative. In fact, throughout the history of God’s Church, both in the Old Testament and the New, in the house of God, there has been always false prophets, corrupt priests, and compromised pastors who would mislead God’s flock with the message adulterated. It was so before Jesus’ time. It was so in the first century. It will be so in the future too. E.g. In my seminary days, a professor of the New Testament, openly acknowledged in the name of science that he didn’t believe in Jesus’ historical and bodily resurrection. Even in our own denomination, I have seen a candidate for ordained ministry who doesn’t believe in the bodily and physical resurrection of Christ commissioned and ordained. You can imagine what kind of message would come out from the mouth of such messenger of God on every Easter. Anything but the real resurrection; anything but the physical resurrection of Christ or ours, for sure.

For such house of God, God declares that He will clean up His house. He will hold the religious leaders and preachers accountable and will purify them in the day of the LORD (v. 3). My prayer for myself each Sunday morning before I stand on the pulpit is this: *I present myself approved to God as a workman unashamed, **handling accurately the word of truth*** (2 Timothy 2:15). Pray for your preacher---the messenger of God---to handle God’s message in the Bible accurately.

On the receiving end of God's message, you too have a responsibility to discern who is a true messenger of God and who is not. It is your responsibility to discern and reject any false message of God from the pulpit. That's why the Bible urges you to test every spirit, every teaching and preaching you hear from the pulpit against the Scriptures, the Word of God: *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world* (1 John 4:1). E.g. Many years ago, I remember seeing a preacher standing before the body of preachers claiming that the Holy Spirit had told him to divorce his faithful wife to be true to himself, that is, to commit himself to another relationship. That was a clear violation of God's Word by the confused messenger of God's Word. Pray for yourself to discern God's true messengers and messages.

Let's turn to the second passage of today's reading: the Gospel according to Luke. Chapter 3 verses 1-6. Incidentally, the same number of chapter and verses as those of Malachi. 500 years after the Prophet Malachi, the same God sent to His people another messenger. His name was John, a.k.a., the Baptist. His mission was to prepare the way of the LORD, to remind God's people of the covenant between God and them made, and to turn their hearts toward God their Father. Basically, God's message through John revolved around one thing: the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 3:3).

Please allow me to briefly touch on the topic of repentance and forgiveness.

First, the meaning of repentance. To repent means to stop doing what is wrong and evil in the sight of God (they may look OK in human eyes) and to start doing what is right and good before the LORD. It is to stop going in the wrong direction and start going into the right direction (E.g. changing the train). Repentance ought to be genuine and sincere. Lip service and word-only repentance is no good. You may fool people with pretense but not the Lord. Furthermore, repentance must bear the fruits worthy of repentance. John the Baptist gives us an example of true repentance in Luke 3:7-14. For soldiers, he says, to stop *exploitation, threats, false accusations, and be content with wages*. Another instance, if you are guilty of lying, stop lying. If you are guilty of stealing, steal no more, and so forth. With no repentance, there will be no forgiveness.

Next, the forgiveness of sins. Forgiveness has two aspects. On the one hand, we must accept God's forgiveness of our trespasses through Christ's redemption. Christ has paid the full wages of our sins on the cross. The wages of our sins have been fully paid by the death of Christ. We are forgiven in Christ through His blood. On the other hand, we must reciprocate the same forgiveness and grace toward others as we have been forgiven by God.

Conclusion

Now, coming back to God's messenger and God's message. As we await Christ's Second Coming, and when God sends another messenger to prepare the way of the Lord, will the message be different from the ones in Malachi and in Luke? Or will it be the same? I

believe it will be the same because God is the same. *For I, the Lord, do not change;* (Malachi 3:6).

Here's the truth: throughout the history, the messenger of God repeatedly proclaimed the same message for us: Prepare for the coming of the Lord. Repent of your sins to receive forgiveness in Jesus, bear the fruits worthy of repentance, and forgive others in the name of Jesus.

That's the surest way to prepare for Christ's Second Coming. That's the message every messenger of God must preach. Amen.