

The Ultimate Answer to the Unsightly Autopsy

Malachi 4:1-6

Pastor Michael Lynn / West Hampden Baptist Church

January 29, 2023 a.m.

Introduction: The medical examiner has just filed his report. The lifeless body of the young man still lies on the cold, steel table. He had died of a drug overdose – the result of a “speed-ball” in terms of the drug culture. Though the M.E. had never met this young man when he was alive, by examining the body he was able to surmise the circumstances leading up to his death. He conjectured that the young man as a pre-teen had begun smoking behind his parents’ back. What probably started as a “lark” or the chance to look “cool” had turned into a nicotine habit. Though only a young man, his teeth were stained from the smoking & his gums already were showing signs of disease. Perhaps marijuana was next, but soon even stronger drugs were attempted. The tell-tale needle marks of both arms pointed to a “crack” addiction. No doubt deceiving himself with the lie that he could stop at any time, he never did – until that speed-ball brought an end to his life. A deadly “game” of playing with fire caused his premature death. The causes for such behavior could not be determined by the M.E., but the symptoms & consequences of his lifestyle were all too evident. – I remind you again this morning of the “theological pathologist” named Malachi. He has been examining & exposing & identifying something lifeless as well – only not a body. His spiritual scalpel has been used to reveal the causes & signs of dead religion & spiritual decay. His goal has not been just to be a bearer of bad news as he submits his report. His desire is that in such exposure of lifeless religion we might avoid this same religious death from happening again. The warning for all generations, beginning some 2,500 years ago, down to today, is that external, formalistic, heartless religion can not & will not be accepted by God. Following the **unsightly autopsy**, Malachi has given us the **unique antidote** (3:16-18, the “fear of the Lord”). Today we see again the **ultimate answer** (first seen in 3:1-6), the Lord’s return. Follow along as I read 4:1-6 & consider with me that God has given ample warning through His messengers that the wicked will be judged & that the righteous will triumph.

I. The **execution** of judgment upon the wicked (:1) [The coming day]

A. Characteristics of the wicked:

1. They are “*proud*” – arrogant, conceited; “practical atheists” – living as if God does not exist.
2. They “*do wickedly*” – live contrary to Biblical morality (cf. 3:15).

B. Consequences for the wicked:

[“*The day*” (:1); “*day of the LORD*” (:5) > “The period of time in which God directly interrupts the affairs of time either for the judgment of the wicked or the blessing of the righteous” (Barrett). A time period of 1,007 years?]

1. “*Shall burn as an oven*” (cf. Isa. 10:16; Jer. 21:14; Ezk. 20:45, 48; Amos 1:4; Zeph. 1:18).
 - a. Judgment by fire illustrated by a furnace – a beehive shaped metal furnace, stocked with wood & fanned to make as hot as possible for the smelting process.
 - b. Judgment predicted earlier by Malachi in 3:2, “*refiner’s fire.*”
 - c. Judgment indicated by “*stubble*” – dry & easily ignited, like chaff (cf. Mt. 3:10, 12)
2. “*Shall leave neither root nor branch*”
 - a. Root & branch represent the 2 extremities of the tree (or plant) – indicate totality.
 - b. A metaphor or idiom meaning totally, utterly destroyed.
 - c. An expression also of the wicked having no posterity, no survivors (cf. Obadiah :18).

Observation: Some use this verse to teach “annihilationism” – the false teaching that the wicked will be blotted out of conscious existence completely. But consider Christ’s words in Mt. 5:29-30 & Lk. 16:19-31 & compare as well Revelation 19:20 with 20:10.

II. The **experience** of triumph for the righteous (:2-3) [The coming dawn]

A. Their identity (:2a)

1. Those that **fear** God’s name:
 - a. “*Fear of the Lord*” defined in the Scriptures > Pro. 1:7; 9:10; 15:33; 16:6.
 - b. “*Fear of the Lord*” demonstrated by the saints > see Mal. 3:16 (fellowshipped & focused).

2. Those that **find** God's healing:

a. "*Sun of righteousness*"

(1) The literal sun personified??

(2) The Son, Christ Jesus?? – cf. Isa. 9:2; 49:6; 60:2, 19-20; Ps. 84:11; & II Pet. 1:19.

(3) The Lord our righteousness – Jer. 23:5-6; I Cor. 1:30.

b. "*Healing in his wings*"

(1) The physical sun gives light & heat for growth of plants & animals.

(2) The "Son of Righteousness" heals those who were previously oppressed & afflicted.

(3) The healing is also spiritually – from the effects of sin; Ps. 103:3; Isa. 53:5; Jer. 17:9.

B. Their destiny (:2b-3)

1. They "*go forth & grow up...*"

a. As stall-fed calves – those being fattened for slaughter.

b. As now set free, to frolic & jump – speaks of the righteous now joyful & vigorous.

2. They "*tread down the wicked...*" (See Isaiah 63:1-6.) [The coming doom]

a. The ultimate triumph over their foes (reverse of what often happens in this life).

b. The reference to "*ashes*" – result of the fire of God's judgment.

III. The expectation of preaching by the prophet Elijah (:4-6)

A. The previous messengers (:4)

1. **Moses:**

a. Often referred to as the great "law-giver."

b. Presented here as the great "law-receiver" – as God's servant.

c. Referenced here to remind Israel of their need of obedience to the law > "*Remember...*" (not lost to memory, but ignored; here the need is to heed, to pay attention to, be mindful).

2. **Elijah** (of old):

a. The prophet who met with God (I Kgs. 19:8) & faithfully served God (cf. I Kgs. 17).

b. The person who met with Christ (along with Moses) on Mt. of Transfiguration (Mt. 17:14).

c. The witness of Revelation 11:1-3??

B. The promised messenger (:5-6)

1. The "Elijah-like" ministry of John the Baptist fulfilled in Christ's day (Lk. 1:17; Mt. 11:13-14)

2. The literal ministry of Elijah in the Day of the Lord??

a. Precedes the "*great & dreadful day of the Lord.*"

b. Preaches for the hearts of the fathers & children to turn (see Lk. 1:17).

c. Performs miracles, along with Moses, in Revelation 11:1-3??

C. The predicted curse (:6)

1. Its **announcement:**

a. "*Curse*" here is a different word than used in 1:14; 2:2; & 3:9.

b. "Under the ban" refers to complete destruction or extermination (see Dt. 20:17-18; Josh. 6).

2. Its **avoidance:**

a. An implication > to avoid the curse ("*lest...*").

b. An invitation > to return to the Lord in repentance & faith.

Application: Compare the message of John the Baptist, "*Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*" Same invitation offered today – Gospel of repentance; be ready for His coming.

Conclusion: Are there any signs of spiritual decay in your life – in our church? Could the spiritual scalpel of Malachi uncover ingratitude (insensitivity) to God's love & grace in your heart? Are you guilty of insincere worship? Charged with insubordination? Identified with the infidelity of unequal marriage or unbiblical divorce? Having inaccurate views of God – a "god" made in your imagination? Accused of robbing God, insufficient in your giving of tithes & offerings? Manifesting a spirit of impiety, always grumbling & complaining, even blaming God for your misfortunes? What is the unique antidote? The fear of the Lord. When is the ultimate answer? The return of the Lord? Can you see yourself this morning on the spiritual operating table, examined by the Great Physician? How will you respond to the exposure of your sin? Are you ready for His coming?