

June 3, 2007 by Steve Brandon



A Final Word

Malachi 4:1-6

1. The Coming Heat (verse 1)
2. The Coming Hope (verses 2-3)
3. The Coming Help (verses 4-6)

This morning, our text is in the book of Malachi (the last book of the Old Testament). For the past 2 ½ months, we have been going through this book, verse by verse, and phrase by phrase. We come this morning to our last message in the book. Our focus this morning will be upon the last six verses, which includes all of chapter 4. Please read the text carefully

Malachi 4:1-6

"For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze," says the LORD of hosts, "so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall. You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing," says the LORD of hosts. Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel. Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse."

Every single one of these verses is looking forward. They are all anticipating a future day. Four times in these six verses we see this future day mentioned. The first comes at the beginning of verse 1, "For behold, the day is coming." Toward the middle of the verse, again we read, "and the day that is coming will set them ablaze." In verse 3, we read, "on the day when I am preparing." In verse 5, we read of "the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD."

How appropriate these words are for Malachi to speak! Historically speaking, he was the last of the long line of prophets that we have in the Old Testament. He prophesied long after Isaiah and Jeremiah were laid to rest. He prophesied after Ezekiel and Daniel. He prophesied after Hosea, Joel, Amos, and Obadiah. He was after Jonah, Micah, Nahum, and Habakkuk. He even prophesied after Zephaniah, Haggai, and Zechariah. He was the last prophet of the Old Testament prophets to write. It is appropriate that Malachi's book is the last book of the Old Testament.

My message this morning is entitled, "A Final Word." Not only does our passage this morning contain the final words of Malachi's oracle, but it also contains the final words that the LORD spoke to the nation of Israel before the dawning of the Messianic age. Unknown to the readers of the Old Testament, these would be the last words that God would communicate to the nation of Israel, until the Messiah would come on the scene, some 400 years later. After these words, God would be silent for 400 years. Now, of course, God knew that these would be the final words for the people of Israel to hear before the long silence in the inter-testamental period. And He made sure that He communicated the most important things for the people of Israel to hear. They were not to forget these words.

By way of outline, I have identified three coming events. Let's consider the first one.

1. The Coming Heat (verse 1)

This comes in verse 1, "For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze," says the LORD of hosts, "so that it will leave them neither root nor branch." The words we read here describe the day when the LORD returns. And that day will be a very hot day.

Here in the Midwest, we think that we know what hot is about. During the summer, late August, we usually experience a week of 95 degrees with 95% humidity. We think that that's hot. And indeed it is. I got an email from a former member of our church this week, that helped to put it in perspective. He recently entered the military and is currently stationed in Florida, near the coast. They are doing well. In one of his paragraphs, he wrote to me about the weather in Florida at this time of the year. He wrote, "It is starting to get very humid now, although we have been told that so far this is nothing." You can only imagine Florida in the summer -- hot and humid. beyond what we know and experience here in Illinois.

But, those in Florida don't know hot as Malachi describes this day. Malachi describes this day as hot "like a furnace." When you think of furnace burning, you think of several hundred degrees and too hot to touch. My mind thinks back to Daniel, chapter 3, when Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego refused to bow down to the golden image of Nebuchadnezzar. It was very clear to them that if they would not bow down and worship the idol, they would "be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire" (Daniel 3:15). When they refused, Nebuchadnezzar was enraged and gave orders "to heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated" (Dan. 3:19). The blazing heat of the furnace

was so great, that the fire killed those men who brought Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego to the precipice of the furnace to be thrown in (Dan. 3:22). This is the type of heat that Malachi wants for us to have imbedded in our minds. These are the words that Malachi uses. He says that this day will be "burning like a furnace." He says that this day will be hot like a fire "ablaze!"

In the upcoming days at Rock Valley Bible Church, a family has invited the church to their home on for a picnic and bonfire. They live on several acres of land and have accumulated a huge pile of brush. Several years ago, I remember them hosting us for a similar event. It was a great time. I have been assured that the pile of brush this is even bigger than what they had several years ago. I remember when the pile was lit on fire, I remember being amazed at the heat that it put off. You couldn't come within 30 feet of the fire without your face feeling the intense heat. When the LORD returns, this is the feeling that all who are alive will experience. a furnace burning! a fire blazing!

This picture is consistent with other pictures given in the Bible of Christ's return to this earth. When David prophesied of the end of the enemies of God, he said, "You will make them as a fiery oven in the time of your anger; The LORD will swallow them up in His wrath, And fire will devour them" (Ps. 21:9). Jesus described how "The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire" (Matt. 13:41-42). Paul described the day when the LORD Jesus would be fully revealed from heaven with these words, "The LORD Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our LORD Jesus" (2 Thess. 1:8-9). The apostle John described the coming judgment in similar terms. In Revelation 16:8-9, we read of the fourth angel, who pours out the bowl of God's wrath that was given to him. We read, "The fourth angel poured out his bowl upon the sun, and it was given to scorch men with fire. Men were scorched with fierce heat" (Rev. 16:8-9). This is the picture that God gives of the day of the LORD. It's a burning, blazing, hot day of destruction! And it's not pleasant. It's not supposed to be pleasant. But, it's the future of this world. There is a coming heat upon this world.

There is a reason why the LORD will reveal Himself in this way. It all has to do with His character. It all has to do with a promise that He made. See, the LORD can only tolerate evil for so long. As people rise up against Him in their "arrogance" and "evil deeds" (verse 1), though He is extremely patient now, His patience will come to an end, as He ultimately vindicates Himself by punishing those who have transgressed His ways. This very thing took place long ago in the days of Noah, when "the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). Because of the sins of mankind, He brought a world-wide flood upon the earth and destroyed all life upon the earth, except for the eight people and scores of animals that they had brought with them in the ark. And then, once the ark rested upon the mountain and the earth dried up, the LORD made a covenant with Noah, saying, "I establish My covenant with you; and all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to destroy the earth" (Gen. 9:11). Every time that you see a rainbow, you ought to be reminded of this promise (Gen. 9:13).

But, while the LORD will never again flood the earth, there awaits a day when it will be burned. What drowned the first time will be incinerated the second time! This was Peter's message. "By the word of God the heaven existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. But by His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men" (2 Peter. 3:5b-7). And this is exactly what we read about in Malachi, chapter 4. "For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze," says the LORD of hosts, "so that it will leave them neither root nor branch."

As I preach this message of a coming day of fire, this message may come to you in several different ways. First of all, it may generate ...

a. A response of unbelief

Many who hear this message of coming judgment first of all deny that it is true. They don't believe that it's true. As a result, they are apathetic to the message. These people actually should realize that they will be the recipient of the brunt of God's wrath, which should cause a response of fear. God's fiery wrath will come upon the "arrogant," that is, those who are proud and see no need for anyone to correct them. God's fiery wrath will come upon the "evildoers," that is, those who are engaged in evil practices. And God will make these people like chaff, which will blow away and be heard from no more (verse 1). God's destruction of them will be complete, penetrating even to the root of the tree (verse 1).

There are some who simply don't believe that such a fiery future awaits them. If this is you this morning, you have great reason to fear what awaits you if you don't repent. Oh, things may be going well for you right now. That's the point of Malachi 3:15, the arrogant were appearing to be blessed, and things were going well with the evildoers, who were testing God and escaping. But, such prosperity will come to an end. If not now in this life, in the one to come. You need to repent while there is hope.

And I believe that this is one reason why Malachi wrote! He was writing to a disobedient, unbelieving people who needed to have their sins exposed and the consequences that await them if they don't repent. They needed to fear the coming judgment. For you, the promise of reconciliation is there. Malachi 3:7, " 'Return to Me, and I will return to you,' says the LORD of hosts."

But, there is another response that these words generate, ...

b. a response of comfort

There were those in Malachi's day, who were becoming disheartened at the wickedness around them, seemingly without any repercussion. They saw others questioning the justice of God (Mal. 2:17). They saw others thinking that the LORD delights in those who do evil, calling them good (Mal. 2:17). They saw those who pondered whether it was profitable to serve the LORD or not (Mal. 3:14). When they saw the arrogant prospering and the doers of wickedness being built up

(Mal. 3:15), it was disheartening to them.

Perhaps that's where you are today. You are seeking with your whole heart to submit your ways unto Him, but you see nothing but difficulties come upon your life. Then, you look upon those who don't fear the LORD, and all is well with them. If you take hold of this promise of God to come and destroy the wicked, you will find comfort in your soul. In fact, you may be led to rejoice in the LORD.

In fact, as I preached this message of the coming judgment, I noticed that there were smiles on the faces of many. They were smiling, because they knew that they would escape the fire and the God would be glorified in that day. Thus, the comfort came.

Psalms 96 pictures the entire creation singing the praise of God, because of His return to judge the world and restore it to its original creation. Psalm 96:11-13 reads, "Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; Let the sea roar, and all it contains; Let the field exult, and all that is in it. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy Before the LORD, for He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in His faithfulness."

This is how it is with the LORD's return. As we anticipate that day, some will be unbelieving, and thus apathetic, thinking that their destruction won't come. Others will rejoice, because they know that they will be vindicated in that day. This leads us perfectly to our next point this morning. We have seen, (1) The Coming Heat (verse 1). Now, let's look at

2. The Coming Hope (verses 2-3)

This point comes from verses 2 and 3, where Malachi writes, "'But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall. You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing,' says the LORD of hosts."

Here we see the promised victory of those who fear the LORD. As verse 2 begins, you can detect the contrast with verse 1, which describes those who will be destroyed. Verse 2 describes those who be saved when the LORD returns again on His day. Those who will be destroyed are identified in verse 1 as the "arrogant" and "evildoer." Those who will be blessed are identified as those who "fear My name."

It's a simple fact that when God returns, the result will be different, depending upon the character of people. The sun that melts the wax also hardens the clay. Imagine yourself in a home in Iraq, which is surrounded by U.S. troops, with guns pointed toward the house. Then, you hear a voice coming through a portable loudspeaker, "We have you surrounded, come out with your hands up!" If you were a well-known Iraqi terrorist, you would be shuddering in your boots. But, if you were an American journalist, being held captive in the Iraqi home, you would be rejoicing that your freedom is near. So also with the coming of the LORD. In verse 1, the coming of the LORD was bad news to the "arrogant" and "evildoer." In verse 2, the coming of the LORD comes with good news to those who fear the name of the LORD.

In verse 2, the LORD's coming is described as the sun rising. Malachi identifies the sun as "the sun of righteousness." This is the only time that this phrase is used in all of the Scripture, which makes it difficult to know exactly what Malachi talking about here. Some might say that it refers to the day of the LORD in general, when "righteousness will pervade like the sun." ^[1] Most say that it refers to Christ, in the sense that when He returns, He will bring that healing that we all are longing for. In the end, it doesn't really matter, as either way, it is a message of good news for those who fear the LORD.

When you hear these words, is there a hope that rises in your heart? I hope so, because that's what they are meant to communicate. These verses promise healing. These verses promise happiness. These verses promise victory!

a. When the LORD returns, there is healing.

For those of you who have believed in Christ, you have tasted of this healing, for you have been healed of your sins. Your sins, which you have committed, have been forgiven through faith in Christ. But, due to indwelling sin, you still have sinful longings in your soul. And it's painful to you as you see your continued sinful desires.

But, when the LORD returns, these things will be done away! Your sinful longings will be gone! Paul addresses the resurrected body that all believers will have in 1 Corinthians 15. He also addresses it in 2 Corinthians 4-5. Here is a sampling of the promise of a better body that will include complete healing, "For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life."

When the LORD returns we, who believe in Christ, will all be issued a new body that will never die. This is what Malachi refers to in verse 2, "the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings;."

b. When the LORD returns, there is happiness.

Verse 2 continues, "And you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall."

I don't know anything about cattle. Each year, I try to attend the Boone County Fair, where I look at the cattle in the stalls. In my lifetime, I have visited a few cattle farms. But, beyond that, my knowledge of cows is quite limited. So, I called up a friend of mine who has been in the cattle business for many years. I asked him about this verse, asking him to help me understand what this verse means. My friend told me that when the calves are first released from the confined stall to roam the open field, they go crazy. He said (and I quote directly), "It's like they enter a different world. For the first time they realize that their legs really work! They get all excited and will jump up and down. Sometimes, they are so excited, that they will fall on their sides. Sometimes, they will even run into fences, because they are so excited about skipping around, that they aren't even looking where they are going! It's comical watching their excitement and enthusiasm."

Though he has been on the farm for years, he said that about this time of the year, he (or others on the farm) will enjoy watching their behavior. There are times when he will see the calf races going on, with 3 or 4 of them racing along! Perhaps a good comparison of this might be a rainbow. How many times have all of you seen a rainbow? I trust that it is many times. And yet, there is something about the joy that a rainbow gives that compels many to say, "Look! A rainbow!"

God equates the enthusiasm of a calf frolicking about from the stall as the pure happiness and joy that will be experienced by those who fear the LORD upon His return. Just think about having a new body that's sinless and free of pain. Think about being truly free for the first time. It will be utter joy and happiness.

c. When the LORD returns, there is victory.

This is detailed in verse 3, "'You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing,' says the LORD of hosts." It is the righteous who will reign over the wicked. All of the wicked people that you see now, arrogantly hating the LORD, will someday be under your feet. Those who fear the LORD will be victorious on that final day. It's not because we are so strong or so mighty or so capable, but because our commander in chief will win the day.

C. S. Lewis captured this so well in his book, "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe." Shortly after the White Witch killed Aslan on the Stone Table, she called out to all of her followers, "Now! Follow me all and we will set about what remains of this war! It will not take us long to crush the human vermin and the traitors now that the great Fool, the great Cat, lies dead." ^[2] She and her followers were gaining the upper hand in the war against Peter and Edmund and the rest of Aslan's army. Until Aslan, having risen from the dead, came to the battle field. C. S. Lewis writes of what took place when Aslan arrived, "With a roar that shook all Narnia from the Western lamppost to the shores of the Easter sea the great beast flung himself upon the White Witch. ... The battle was all over a few minutes after their arrival. Most of the enemy had been killed in the first charge of Aslan and his companions; and when those who were still living saw that the Witch was dead they either gave themselves up or took to flight." ^[3]

This is how Satan and his army will be defeated when Christ comes back. Satan will be no match for Jesus and His army. The apostle John has been privileged to look into the future to see that battle field. He writes, ...

Revelation 19:11-21

And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "King of kings, and Lord of lords." Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, "Come, assemble for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great." And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.

Church family, that battle has already been won by our LORD. It just needs to be fought. Will you "volunteer freely in the day of [His] power"? (Ps. 110:3). Or, will you continue in your rebellious ways? I wish that you would cherish the hope that is coming to all of us.

3. The Coming Help (verses 4-6)

Malachi 4:4-6

"Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel.

Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse."

Before the LORD comes again, He will send Elijah to prepare the way. We saw back in chapter 3, verse 1, that Elijah would come and "clear the way before [the LORD]." Indeed, when Jesus came the first time, this is what took place. Three out of the four gospel writers quote from Malachi chapter 3 and verse 1 and identify John the Baptist as the fulfillment of these words (Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27).

In like manner, these prophecies here in chapter 4 are also said to be fulfilled in John the Baptist as well. Perhaps you remember when Zacharias, the high priest, was "chosen by lot to enter the temple of the LORD and burn incense" (Luke 1:9). He brought the incense offering, while the whole multitude of people were outside praying (Luke 1:10). As Zacharias was before the altar, "an angel of the LORD appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense" (Luke 1:11). As can be expected, Zacharias "was troubled ... and fear gripped him." Then, the angel said to him, ...

Luke 1:13-17

Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the LORD; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the LORD their God. It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, **to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children**, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the LORD.

What a wonderful prophecy for a father to hear! Just this past week, on Wednesday afternoon, my wife gave birth to a son. He is healthy and doing wonderfully well. We have named him David Andrew. We cannot help but to think of what he will be like in the future. One person spoke with me after our baby was born and said, "Wouldn't it be great if he was a missionary to some far off land?" My heart resonated with such words. I would love for our son to stand on our shoulders and serve Christ with more passion than we do. It means going to a far, distant land where the Lord would use him to see many converted through his toil and labor, we will praise the Lord! What will God do with Him? We don't know. We can only pray and hope and dream.

Well, when the prophecy that came to Zacharias, God was very clear what he would do with his son. Though his wife was barren, she would conceive and bear a son. Their son would be a great man in the eyes of the LORD (verses 13-14). He would be "filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in His mother's womb" (verse 15). This boy would be a preacher of repentance, who will see many respond to His message (verse 16). He would be the forerunner of the Messiah, who would come "in the spirit and power of Elijah." Through his preaching, he would "turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children" (verse 17). He would see many disobedient to the LORD submit themselves in righteousness to Him. He would prepare the people for the coming of the LORD.

Beyond the mere prophecy of a man, this prophecy was much larger than that. With this angelic announcement came the dawning of the Messianic age. In giving this announcement, the angel quoted from verse 6 of our passage this morning. This angel was prophesying of the one who would prepare for the day when the LORD would visit His people once again.

The sending John the Baptist was really the sending of help. And he was a great help to the people of Israel. He came and preached repentance to them (Matt. 3:2). He was flesh and blood, instructing people in the ways of God. When people had specific questions, he told them what they should do. He encouraged the crowd to share their possessions with those who were without (Luke 3:11). He encouraged the tax collectors to "collect no more than what [they] have been ordered to [collect]" (Luke 3:13). He encouraged the soldiers not to take money by force, nor accuse anyone falsely, but to be content with their wages (Luke 3:14).

Through his preaching, there was great revival in the land. He had such a great following that Mark could say that "all the country of Judea was going out to him, and all the people of Jerusalem; and they were being baptized by him in the Jordan River, confessing their sins" (Mark 1:5). As they did that, certainly their hearts were returned to their children and the hearts of the children were returned to their fathers. God had sent Him ahead of Jesus to be a help to Israel. And he was.

Now, clearly, the words of Malachi, chapter 4 apply to John the Baptist. But, in another sense, these words haven't yet fully been fulfilled. The LORD hasn't entirely consumed every evildoer as verse 1 promises that He will. The righteous haven't fully known the victory that will be theirs, as verse 2 prophesies. When Jesus came, it is difficult to describe it like verse 5 did of being a "great and terrible day." This is so typical of many of the prophecies made in the Bible. There is a sense where it was fulfilled during the days of Jesus. And yet, the full realization of the prophecy is yet to come.

And for us, the application is that God will send us help as well. Before the final day, I believe that Elijah will come, just as the LORD promised here. (Perhaps Elijah will be one of the two witnesses of Revelation 11?) Is there any greater need for us today to have someone come and "restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers"? (verse 6). In general, the condition of the families across our world are in a terrible state. Divorce rates are as high as ever (though there may be some leveling off of the divorce rates). Abortions are being performed often and with great regularity. What greater indicators are there of fathers and mothers who have no regard for their children than the voluntary slaughter of their children? Children are being neglected. Children are being abused. We need somebody to come and help turn our hearts toward home! (We could say much about this, but, for the sake of time, we go on).

I want to finish in my message this morning with verse 4, where Malachi says, ... "Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel." The promise of verses 5 and 6 is that God will send help. The promise of verse 4 is that God has already sent us help. He sent us the Scriptures! The Scriptures are a gift that keeps on giving. It's counsel is always

appropriate. It's lessons never become outdated. We need to turn to them and "remember" them.

The people of Malachi's day were instructed to "remember" the law of Moses. Throughout the entire oracle of Malachi, we have seen that the major problem that Israel faced was that they had forgotten the LORD. They had forgotten His love. They had forgotten His honor. They had forgotten His people, His justice, His faithfulness, and His ways. You can trace through the law of Moses and discover that fundamentally their problem was they had forgotten what Moses had said. For, Moses had addressed every area that they forgot.

Moses addressed the **love** of God. "The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD **loved** you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt" (Deut. 7:7-8). What doubt could Israel have after such a statement?

Moses addressed the **honor** of God. When Nadab and Abihu brought strange fire before the LORD, contrary to what the LORD commanded, "fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said to Aaron, 'It is what the LORD spoke, saying, "By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, and before all the people I will be **honored**.'" So Aaron, therefore, kept silent." (Lev. 10:2-3). It was clear that God would only accept the worship that came to Him that regarded his honor.

Moses addressed the **people** of God. The LORD gave Israel specific instructions about their behavior when they entered the land and destroyed all of the foreign nations, saying, "You shall **make no covenant with them** and show no favor to them. Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you and He will quickly destroy you." (Deut. 7:2-4). In no uncertain terms, Moses instructed Israel not to

Moses addressed the **justice** of God. In Exodus 34:6-7, the LORD proclaimed to Moses, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet **He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished**, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations." Surely Israel should have remembered these words. God was identifying Himself to Moses. Though He is gracious, He will surely punish the wicked (as His justice demands).

Moses addresses the **faithfulness** of God. In Exodus 3:16, the LORD told Moses to "go and gather the elders of Israel together [of His faithfulness by saying to them ... 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, "I am indeed concerned about you and what has been done to you in Egypt."'" With these words, the LORD was demonstrating that He would be faithful to His covenant established with Abraham. He would not forget, but would remember them (see also Exodus 2:23-25).

Moses addressed the **ways** of God. The story of Joseph clearly demonstrated that the ways of God were far different than the ways of men. Joseph's brothers sold him as a slave and then lied to their father about Him. Joseph spent years in prison, but finally was elevated to second in command in Egypt. The moral of the story is found in Genesis 50:20, "You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive."

Getting back to Malachi, we see that help had already come to them in the form of the law of Moses. Israel was called not to forget what the LORD had commanded. Also, in the words of Malachi 4:4, we see that the LORD was giving special attention to the ten commandments, "even the statutes and the ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel." This has reference to the ten commandments, which were given in Horeb (Deut. 5:2). This was a call for them to live righteously, loving the LORD with all their heart, soul, mind and strength, and loving their neighbor as themselves. And so, for Israel, help had already come.

For us, help has already come as well. We have the Bible. We have the Moses. We have Malachi. We have the New Testament. We have Christ! And indeed, our help and our hope are so much better than their hope. Our hope comes through the Scripture as it points us to Jesus, who is our living hope. He isn't dead words on a page. He is alive and well. We trust that He will protect us from the **coming heat** (shielding God's wrath through His blood on Calvary). His return someday is our **coming hope**. He is our **present help**.

In recent days, I have been spending much time in the book of Hebrews. One of the things that has really stood out to me is that Jesus is the great high priest. He holds His priesthood permanently (Heb. 7:24). "Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." Jesus lives forever. He is sinless (Heb. 7:26) and offered Himself for our sins (Heb. 7:27). Therefore, we are able to draw near with confidence to the throne of grace because Jesus is there and ready to give us mercy and grace to help in times of need (Heb. 4:16).

We need help and Jesus is that help!

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on June 3, 2007 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Edited by John Walvoord & Roy Zuck, p. 1587.

[2] C. S. Lewis, The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe, p. 153.

[3] Ibid., pp. 174-175.