Title: Between Two Advents

Date: 11/23/25

Subject: We can have hope, peace, joy and love while waiting for Christ's second Advent.

Scripture: Malachi 4

In my office I have a framed jigsaw puzzle hanging on the wall. It shows Snoopy sitting on his doghouse with his typewriter. He has typed seven words which form the opening for his various novels: "It was a dark and stormy night."

I think many people in the Bible felt they were enduring a dark and stormy night, especially as the Old Testament period was drawing to a close. Those who followed the Lord were familiar with the promises he'd made since the beginning of time and were looking forward to their fulfillment. They had endured slavery, from which God had delivered them. They been taken into captivity, from which God had again delivered them. They had repeatedly been attacked by ruthless enemies, from which God had also delivered them.

But that was all in the past. One source describes the mood: "Several discouraging factors brought about a general religious malaise: (1) their land remained but a small province in the backwaters of the Persian Empire, (2) the glorious future announced by the prophets...had not (yet) been realized, and (3) their God had not (yet) come to his temple (3:1) with majesty and power to exalt his Kingdom in the sight of the nations" (NIV study Bible intro to Malachi).

Years, decades, centuries had passed. Then came the last recorded prophet. We're going to see what he says in the last chapter he wrote.

Read Malachi 4.

Some general observations. Old Testament prophets prophesied but not all prophesying was the same. Some of it was foretelling future events but most of it was forth-telling what God had told the prophet to relay to people. Secondly, when Old Testament prophets were foretelling about the Son of God who would come to earth and establish his kingdom. It was like they were looking at a 2D picture. It wasn't 3D as it didn't have depth. The events of the 1st and 2nd comings of the Promised One were often written and spoken as if they were separated by a breath. It was like they were looking at a mountain range where it seems the mountains come one right after another. The reality is the vast valleys that separate the mountains can't be seen.

The book of Malachi serves as a bridge between the Old and New Testaments. Sometimes it seems like it's a bridge to nowhere… as there was 400 years of silence after Malachi's ministry. It was eerily quiet as there were no more words from the Lord. Nothing but crickets. What little eager anticipation remained was squelched. It seemed like It had all been a dream.

The apostle Peter wrote (1 Peter 1:10-12) that the prophets wanted to know about the coming of the Messiah/Christ and the salvation he would bring. They searched intently and with the greatest care trying to

find out the time and circumstances but it was revealed to them that they weren't serving themselves but those who to whom the good news of the gospel Jesus Christ was preached.

The last words of the Old Testament are a curse for those who don't turn to the Lord while the last words of the New Testament are a blessing as it speaks about Christ's coming and heaven. Actually, the opening words of the New Testament are also a blessing as they reveal the coming of the Son of God. "Christ" is the title coming from the Greek language. It's the equivalent of Messiah from the Hebrew language. Both mean Anointed One or King, the Promised One.

Malachi 4:1 talks about a day that was coming. Prophets often spoke of the day of the Lord. It's the time when God will bring his work to completion. The day of the Lord began when Jesus came to earth the first time and continues through the end times when the day of the Lord will be revealed in its fullness.

Malachi points to a forerunner who would prepare the way for the Lord. In this chapter he's called the prophet Elijah who would turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers. People were aware of this foretelling and 400 years later saw someone who was Elijah-esque. They first asked if he was the Christ. He denied this. People then asked if he was Elijah because Elijah hadn't died (2 Kings 2:11) and many Jews believed that Elijah would be sent by God back to earth to announce the end times. The man also denied being Elijah. The man in question is John the Baptist.

Jesus made a connection between Elijah and John. He said John was fulfilling his mission in an Elijah-like manner (Matthew 11:13, 14; 17:9-13). Like the Old Testament prophet Elijah, John would turn people back to the Lord leaving behind their disobedience.

Malachi describes the day of the Lord that's coming as great and dreadful. It brings both judgment on the wicked and evil as well as rewards for the righteous. The emphasis in verses 1 and 5 is the judgment that will come upon those who don't follow the Lord. Furnace and stubble set on fire are pointed allusions to hell with its tormenting fire. Those who pridefully think they can achieve heaven by themselves, independent of God, and disregard the Lord by remaining opposed to him, will be judged with fire.

Jesus is the one who will judge by fire. John the Baptist said of him, "The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. I baptize with water. He will baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire. He will gather the wheat into the barn and burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:10-12).

Malachi 3:1 speaks about the appearance of the Lord in his temple. The Lord Jesus took most people by surprise by the way he came into the world though he is the lamb slain since foundation of the world. He broke the silence, not with an earth-shattering roar, but with a whisper in a manger. He brought the light of God, not with lightning bolts that lit up the sky, but with one small match that would bring light, his light as Light of the World.

People could have been aware, but most weren't. They didn't notice him when he came as a servant. Jesus' first coming initiated everything and brought everything to completion. Though all the actions hadn't yet

been done, they were as good as done. In that sense, judgment has already been given. In the end times, Jesus Christ will also suddenly return to set up his eternal physical kingdom.

There's good news for those who follow the Lord. The sun (s-u-n) of righteousness in 4: 2 is the Lord. In 3:1 it was foretold he would suddenly come to his temple. God the Son showed himself to be the light of the world. Even as the sun rises in the morning to mark the start of a new day, so Jesus Christ's appearance was the rising sun (s-u-n and S-o-n) of a new day that will continue for all of eternity.

The response of the righteous is compared to calves that have been released from the stall. My dad raised his own replacement cows. Each spring when the calves who'd been cooped up indoors during the winter were released outside the first time, they burst into the open barnyard and did their best to imitate the jump around at Wisconsin football games. They jumped, twisted, and turned, glad to be outside in freedom. Nothing but joy. We had to stand around the fence around the barnyard to make sure they wouldn't crash through the wire.

The day of the Lord brings joyous freedom for those who are his. This image of the sun of righteousness was used by John the Baptist's father when he rejoiced over the birth of his son: "The rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace" (Luke 1:79).

The sun (s-u-n) of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. It's a mixed metaphor which says he would bring restoration, renewal, salvation - what God had intended for people. They'd be whole, complete, sound. They'd be free from sin, death and the devil. Jesus will make everything right.

The people of Malachi's day experienced times of revival and refreshing under Ezra and Nehemiah. However, the spiritual excitement rapidly wore off. They hadn't received the promised glorious and prosperous future. The Lord hadn't returned to his temple. They were still surrounded by enemies. The book speaks of the spiritual condition of the people: they doubted God's love; were apathetic and indifferent; robbed the Lord of his rightful worship; engaged in ritualistic and routine forms of worship; engaged in sin and were permissive in their moral behavior; were faithless, careless, disillusioned and so spiritually cold they barely registered a temperature about freezing.

There was a remnant that was waiting and anticipating. Malachi writes about those who feared the Lord had their names written in a scroll of remembrance (3:16-18). The Lord Almighty says of them, "They will be mine in the day when I make up my treasured possession." He would have compassion on them

There had always been a remnant who had been faithful to the Lord. These stood out among the masses who suffered from spiritual malaise and lethargy.

The reality is even the most faithful had times of questioning, longing, searching; where they felt they were in the dark and desperately seeking some light; were experiencing a deafening silence wanting the Lord to say something, anything, even a barely audible whisper; felt they were standing at the edge with the world

around them falling apart - "beneath life's crushing load, whose forms are bending low, who toil along the climbing way with painful steps and slow." Prophets, kings, ordinary folks wondered "How long, O Lord?"

They needed, longed for and desperately wanted hope, peace, joy and love.

Us. What about our longing and searching and desire? There are times we ask God, "How long will it be that I …… how long must I endure…..?"

We're in good company. These kinds of questions were asked by Job, Habakkuk, the sons of Korah. David, the sweet singer of Israel, the king selected by the Lord, the one from whose family line the Messiah would, often cried out to the Lord.

Here's one instance: "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I wrestle with my thoughts and every day have sorrow in my heart? How long will my enemy triumph over me? Look on me and answer, O Lord my God. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death; and my enemy will say, "I have overcome him," my foes will rejoice when I fall" (Psalm 13:1-4).

Sounds like David was in a bad way. Some feel he wrote this Psalm when he was suffering from a prolonged serious illness. Maybe. But this wasn't the only time he cried out to the Lord. He did it when he was attacked by enemies, when family members rebelled against him to take the throne and in other situations when he felt God was standing far off from him (Psalm 10:1), had forgotten him, spurned him, was hiding. It seemed like God wouldn't show his favor again, his unfailing love had vanished, when he wondered, "How long, O Lord?"

We don't know how often David had these thoughts and questions. But we do know in that same Psalm where he questioned how long, he concluded by saying "But I trust in your unfailing love; My heart rejoices in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord for he has been good to me."

The scripture read earlier stated, "I will remember the deeds of the Lord; Yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds. Your ways, oh God, are holy. What God is so great as our God? You are the God who performs miracles; You display your power among the peoples. With your mighty arm you redeemed your people the descendants of Jacob and Joseph" (Psalm 77:11-15).

David cried out to God and in doing so got historical, not hysterical like what some do in moments like these. He recounted how the Lord had worked in the past.

What are we as followers of Jesus Christ to do when we feel like God has forgotten us? Spurned us? Is standing far off? Is hiding? When it seems like he won't show his favor again? That his unfailing love has vanished? When we wonder, "How long, O Lord?"

As followers of Christ, we can look back to see what God has done throughout all of time beginning with Adam and Eve, through the people of Israel, in the New Testament. God's people in the scriptures serve as illustrations for us.

Most importantly, we can look at the One who was promised. We live between two advents. We look back to Christ's first Advent. The Son of God took came to earth and took on human flesh and bone. We can see how he brought hope, peace, joy and love to people – the blind man, the demon possessed, those whose love one's had died, children who were to be seen but not heard and not really seen as they were viewed as not being worth much.

We also look forward to Christ's second Advent, to the day when he'll return to get his people and usher in all that God has in store.... He will fulfill all hope, peace, joy and love. The apostle Paul wrote, "Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror…Now I know in part…then we shall see face to face…then I shall know fully" (1 Corinthians 13:12).

I checked other translations: "Now we see things imperfectly, like puzzling reflections in a mirror…All that I know now is partial and incomplete…but then we will see everything with perfect clarity…but then I will know everything completely" (New Living Translation). "For now we see through a glass, darkly" (KJV). "For now [in this time of imperfection] we see in a mirror dimly [a blurred reflection, a riddle, an enigma], but then [when the time of perfection comes, we will see reality] face to face. Now I know in part [just in fragments], but then I will know fully, just as I have been fully known [by God]" (Amplified).

That will be quite something. All questions will be answered. All mysteries will be unraveled. All hidden and obscure things will be revealed and as plain as the nose is on our faces. Suffering will come to an end. Emptiness and despair will be things of the past. All tears will be wiped away. All things will be forever new.

Fanny Crosby who wrote thousands of hymns and was blind wrote "And I shall see him face to face and tell the story saved by grace" and "Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine. Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine."

In the meantime, while waiting, we look to the Lord Jesus Christ as the source of hope, peace, joy and love for the present. We'll explore these themes over the next 4 weeks - how we find them in Jesus, how they'll help us now, including when the tyranny of the urgent demands of the season descends on us like a plague of locusts.