

**"The Lord's Last Words  
Before Christ's Coming"  
Sermon on Malachi 4:5-6  
Weekend of December 12, 2004  
Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI  
Pastor Karl Walther**

John the Baptist said in his day—and his message still fits these days: *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near!* Amen.

God's Word to us today is the Lord's last word before Christ's coming—the final two verses of the Old Testament—Malachi chapter four, verses five and six:

**"See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."**

This is the Word of the Lord.

### **Introduction: Malachi Awaited Christ's Coming**

Dear fellow Christians—who now await the second coming of Christ:

Some Sundays ago I was privileged to preach to you on Jesus' last words to us in the final few verses of the New Testament. He said: "Yes, I am coming soon!" And you and I got to realize that our whole lives are preparation for the moment that Christ returns.

And so, you and I can relate very well to God's Old Testament people—especially people at the time of the Prophet Malachi and afterward. They were awaiting, above all things, Christ's first coming. And the way God directed them to prepare themselves is exactly the way God directs us to prepare ourselves.

### **Theme: The Lord's Last Words Before Christ's Coming**

So let's look at: \* THE LORD'S LAST WORDS BEFORE CHRIST'S COMING at Christmas. These words will help us prepare for Christ's second coming on the final day....

### **Exposition: Malachi Spoke the Lord's Last Words Before Christ's Coming**

It was the four hundred thirties before Christ. For a thousand years, God had addressed his people by way of his written Word in the Old Testament. God was now drawing that set of documents to a close. So, the Lord was speaking his final official words to his people before the coming of the Christ—some four hundred thirty years later. And he was speaking in Judah, to the people of Judah, by way of the Prophet Malachi, whose name means "my messenger".

Now, how dramatic is that? This is the last thing God is going to say for four hundred thirty years! And what does he say?

Well, he begins: *See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes.*

Now, first of all, what's the *great and dreadful*, or probably better the *big and fearful, day of the Lord?* Well, we immediately think of Christ's second coming on Judgment Day. And that's in the picture here. But we also know that this Elijah arrived right before Christ's first coming. So, both Christ's first and second comings are in the picture.

And now, who is this *prophet Elijah*, whom God will send? Well, four hundred thirty years later, the Angel Gabriel said to Zechariah in regard to John the Baptist: “He will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of *Elijah*, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” And on two occasions, in Matthew chapter eleven and Matthew chapter seventeen, Jesus himself also identifies John the Baptist as the *Elijah* who was to come. So, clearly, this *Elijah* we’re reading about is John the Baptist.

Now, what’s he going to do? How is he going to prepare God’s people for Christ’s coming? And what does he have to say to us today? The final words of the Old Testament declare: ***He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse.***

That word for *curse* is an interesting one. It’s the word used for when the people of Israel entered the Promised Land and devoted every tenth city to the Lord by completely destroying it—killing people and animals, and then burning the city.

God says here: that’s what’s going to happen—apart from repentance: unless *the hearts of the fathers turn to children and the hearts of the children to their fathers*—or as Gabriel put it: unless “the hearts of the disobedient turn to the wisdom of the righteous”.

So, what does that mean? Does it mean that the hearts of adults need to become like the hearts of children, and the hearts of children need to become like adults? Or does it mean adults need to be concerned with children and children need to be concerned with adults?

Yes! The answer is “yes”. And therein lies the message of God’s Word to us this morning. So, let’s take each message separately....

### **Appropriation: We Apply These Words to Our Hearts**

Message One: Christ was coming. John the Baptist was telling the people that adults’ hearts had to become like those of children. And now, Christ is coming again. And the message to us is the very same.

So, adults—no, everyone: your hearts need to become like the hearts of little children! How? Two ways....

Have you ever noticed how the very littlest children, when confronted with something they’ve done wrong—they don’t have much of a capacity to lie very well; they don’t have much of a capacity to blame others very well; they don’t have much of a capacity to make excuses very well; they just look sad?

We need to imitate that! When you’ve cursed, when you’ve failed to listen to the Lord’s Word, when you’ve disobeyed, when you’ve hurt somebody else, when you’ve lusted, when you’ve looted, when you’ve lied..., don’t lie about it; don’t blame somebody else; don’t make an excuse; just ‘fess up!

But there’s another thing.... Have you ever noticed how very little children, when you tell them something—they don’t doubt it; they don’t take into account your ulterior motives; they don’t wonder; they just simply believe you?

We need to imitate that, too! When I tell you, “Because of Jesus, it’s as if God didn’t hear that curse word of yours; it’s as if you have always listened carefully to him”—when I tell you that, don’t doubt it, just believe it! When I tell you “Your rebellion against your superiors, the harm you’ve done to others—it’s covered by straw from Baby Jesus’ manger!” don’t doubt it, just believe it! When I tell you, “Your lusting, your looting, your lying—it’s been forgiven and forgotten, ever since angels sang and the shepherds ran!” don’t doubt it, just believe that!

## **Application: We Apply These Words to Our Lives**

And Message Two: Christ was coming. John the Baptist was telling the people that children's hearts had to become like those of adults. And now, Christ is coming again. And the message is the very same.

So, children—no, everyone: your hearts need to become like the hearts of adults! How? Two ways again....

Have you ever noticed that adults – I mean: at least healthy, mature, Christian adults – adults have learned that they're not living for themselves? They're living to serve others—their neighbors, their friends, their customers, their communities. They're living to serve their spouses. They're living to serve their children.

We need to imitate that! Jesus didn't forgive you your sins, just for you to wallow in them again. Jesus didn't give you his righteousness, only for you to deny it by the way you live. No! You live for him now! Nothing matters more than Christ, more than your relationship to him, more than getting others into a relationship with him. And nothing matters more than others—loving them, serving them, benefiting them, and especially getting the gospel of Christ into their lives.

And there's another thing.... Have you ever noticed how mature, Christian adults have learned to take life as it comes? If they're sick, they know they'll either get well, or they'll get to be with Christ. If they're sad, they know they'll either get happier, or eventually they'll be blissfully happy in paradise. If Satan assaults them, they know where to flee; only in their Rescuer, Christ Jesus, can they find refuge.

We need to imitate that! Jesus didn't enter this cold, dark world as warm, bright Light only to abandon you. No! There's nothing – nothing! – the two of you can't handle together, until you reside together in glory.

## **Conclusion: We Await Christ's Coming**

So, those are The Lord's Last Words Before Christ's Coming. Just the way Old Testament people had to lay out their sins and look to the Lord for forgiveness, we New Testament people need to do that—in view of Christ's Second Coming. And just the way Old Testament people were led to live for Christ and for others, relying completely on the Lord, we New Testament people need to do that—in view of Christ's Second Coming.

And who knows on which dark, cool, and unexpected day – just like today! – that might happen? Amen.

John the Baptist said in his day—and his message still fits these days: *Every valley (of despair) shall be filled in, every mountain and hill (of pride) made low.... And all mankind will see God's salvation! Amen.*