

Treasures from Our Heritage: God Gives Us Hope

Text: Malachi 3:13-4:6

By Bob Young

Introduction

Hope in the midst of the storm. At the end of his prophecy of doom, gloom, and despair, Malachi gives an inspiring message of hope: “But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings, and you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall” (4:2). Hope says there is a better day coming. Our world needs hope.

“The Christian hope is not wishful thinking or utopian fantasy. It is a divinely enabled passion for the possible. And with God, the possibilities are incredible.” When life is at its worst, hope is the fuel that feeds our faith to keep believing. Our hope goes beyond death. Paul said, “If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men” (1 Cor. 15:19).

In our text, the people of God have lost hope. Listen to this interesting dialogue between a long-suffering God and His people:

“‘You have said harsh things against me,’ says the Lord. ‘Yet you ask, “What have we said against you?” You have said, “It is futile to serve God. What did we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the Lord Almighty?”’” (3:13-14).

The need for a strong faith and hope in God is presented by revealing a people who are lacking. This is why faith and hope cannot be separated. Even when the circumstances of life are against us and our faith becomes weak, a strong hope in God for the future compels us to keep going. As we keep going our faith begins to grow. That is why hope is at the very core of our belief system. Hope serves as the feeder of our faith.

Hope Is Based on the Past

Twice in today’s passage the prophet used the word “remember” to reiterate the origin of our hope. Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel (4:4). God is the source of all we are or ever hope to be. He has a plan and purpose for our lives. Don’t forget it! Hope based on the past.

The other reference in the text to a hope based on the past talks about “a scroll of remembrance . . . written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored his name” (3:16). This reinforces the matter of free will. We always have a choice to make. We have opportunity to choose where our hopes will be directed: to this world, or to God? The implications of our choices result in ultimate judgment:

“‘They will be mine,’ says the Lord Almighty, ‘in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as a man spares his son who serves him. And you will see again the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not’” (3:17-18).

Hope based on the past means we have been given the knowledge to make right decisions. However, just because we have the information of what is right and required, does not mean we are given a free pass. We are people of free will. We are responsible and accountable. We have the ability to make proper decisions based on what we have learned from the past. When difficult times are all around us, we choose to hope in the Ancient of Days!

Hope Based on the Present

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble” (Psalm 46:1). The amazing thing about Christian hope is its eternal quality. The origin of our hope is in the past, the best is

yet to come in the future; the result is a power for present living. “Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging” (vv. 2-3). The reason for confidence in the midst of the proverbial storm is the hope we presently have in our God.

The prophet Malachi consistently preached one theme again and again: ultimate judgment based on choices. The people of Malachi’s day are much like those to whom Jesus spoke in the Sermon on the Mount. If you are trusting (hoping) in the things of this world to satisfy, you are like “a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash” (Matt 7:26-27).

The grace of God, the positive message of hope, is introduced with a simple conjunction: “BUT for you who revere (choose) my name” (Malachi 4:2). The result: “is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock” (Matt 7:24-25).

The hymn says, “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus’ name. On Christ the solid rock I stand; all other ground is sinking sand.”

Hope Based on the Future

The last chapter of Malachi begins, “Surely the day is coming” (4:1). We have a marvelous hope that originates in the past, and that has power for present-day, victorious living. This hope gives us victory beyond the grave. “Death has been swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor. 15:54). Because of Christ’s resurrection we need not fear death. Because He lives we can face the tomorrows of life with hope and confidence.

Malachi’s prophecy ends the same way it begins—with a call to repentance. There are decisions to make that will result in one of two future possibilities:

“‘Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire,’ says the Lord Almighty. ‘Not a root or a branch will be left to them. But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings and you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall’” (4:1-2).

We hope for the future when we choose to worship God and live for Him.

The final word of this prophecy comes from God: “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” (4:6). The next 400 years heard silence from the heavens.

Conclusion

The people of Malachi’s day were in desperate need of renewal and revival. Commitment to God had been compromised. Through this prophecy they are challenged to return to the God of their fathers by loving Him and worshiping Him the “right way.” No shortcuts. “Sick cows” are not acceptable. Leadership and relationships are of utmost importance. In the pulpit and the pew, we must model integrity.

In the closing verses of Malachi we are reminded that faith is the way to victorious living. We are admonished to be good stewards of everything we have and everything we are. The test of stewardship is putting our trust in God for every outcome of life. The message of hope enables us to walk away on higher spiritual ground than that on which we started.