

# Malachi 3-4

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 07 December 2014

Preacher: David MacPherson

[ 0 : 0 0 ] to read in the Bible from the Old Testament in the book of the prophet Malachi, and then we'll turn to Luke's gospel and chapter 1. In Luke chapter 1, as we'll read in a moment, we find the angel speaking to Zechariah and speaking to him about his son who will be born, John the Baptist, and describing him. And in so doing, he makes use of language that is found and prophecies that are recorded for us in Malachi. So, we'll read, first of all, in Malachi, and then turn to see how in some measure what we read in Malachi finds fulfillment, or the fulfillment in any case is announced in Luke chapter 1. So, our reading in Malachi will be from chapter 3, verses 1 to 5, and then we'll jump to chapter 4 and read the whole of the chapter, which is a very short chapter. It's on page 961, the very final book of the Old Testament. Malachi chapter 3, reading from verse 1.

See, I will send my messenger who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple, the messenger of the covenant whom you desire will come, says the Lord Almighty. But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver. He will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord as in days gone by as in former years. So I will come near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers, and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice. But do not fear me, says the Lord Almighty.

And then turning to chapter 4 on that same page from the beginning, 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. Then you will trample down the wicked. They will be ashes under the soles of your feet. On the day when I do these things, says the Lord Almighty. Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel. 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. And then turning to the gospel of Luke chapter 1. Luke chapter 1, and we'll read from verse 5, page 1025 in the church Bible. Luke chapter 1, reading from verse 5 and through to verse 17. And as we read, particularly as we come to the end of our reading and the final verse, in fact, notice the very evident manner in which the message that is relayed to Zechariah makes reference to, clear reference to the words that we've read in the prophet

Malachi, very particularly the final words of that prophecy. So Luke chapter 1, reading from verse 5. In the time of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah. His wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. Both of them were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations blamelessly.

But they had no children, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well on in years. Once, when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, he was chosen by lot according to the custom of the priesthood to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense.

[ 4 : 58 ] And when the time for the burning of incense came, all were assembled worshipers, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside. Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him, do not be afraid, Zechariah, your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from birth. Many of the people of Israel he will bring back to the Lord their God, and 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, the Word of God. Let's bow our heads again and pray.

Heavenly Father, we do thank you that you are a God who has prepared for us a way of salvation.

We thank you for that perfect plan designed in eternity and brought to effect in time through the person of your Son, Jesus. We thank you that he is the one prophesied from of old. He is the long-awaited and sought-after and desired Messiah, the one who brings together in one person all that it is to be a prophet and a priest and a king, the one whose reign endures forever, the one who has secured for his people a cleansing and forgiveness. We thank you for Jesus. We thank you for the manner in which he secured these things for us, and the offering up of himself, of his own life in our place to die on Calvary Street. We thank you that as we give particular attention at this time of year to the remarkable manner in which Jesus came into the world, the eternal Son of God who became man, who became flesh. We thank you that that was but his introduction into this world, to then grow and become the man that he had come to become, that he might offer himself for us as our Savior. We pray that you would help us to understand these things and to grow in our understanding of who Jesus is and what he has done for us. We thank you that as we turn to the Bible, in both the Old and the New Testament, we are given light and insight into who Jesus is and what he has come to do. We pray that even this morning you would help us to have a greater insight and a greater understanding, and that what we hear would resonate with us and would ring true, and that we would know how we are to respond to it. Heavenly Father, as we pray for ourselves and your blessing on our gathering together, we look further afield to the world that we are part of. We pray for those who are suffering times of difficulty and trouble. We're conscious of the typhoon in the Philippines that we've heard of and seen about on the news, and we do pray for all who have been affected by it, the many thousands who have had to be evacuated from their homes, and those who are still in fear of what may come as a result of this phenomenon. Lord, we do pray for those affected.

Heavenly Father, we pray for our own nation and pray your blessing upon us. We read of the nation of Israel that was so unprepared for the coming of Messiah Jesus, a nation that stood in such need of being brought back to the Lord, a nation that stood in need of being brought back to the ways of God, and we look around our own nation and we see that we are not so different. We pray that you would deal with us graciously and mercifully, and that we pray every effort that is made to make known the good news concerning Jesus would be owned and blessed by you, and very particularly at this time of year as there are so many opportunities to do so. We pray for our own congregation and the different activities that are programmed and planned for the weeks ahead. We commend to you tomorrow evening as there is opportunity to invite folk around the neighborhood to services that will be held here and in other churches where the gospel is also proclaimed. We pray that there would be those who would respond to that invitation.

Heavenly Father, we do commend to you at this time those who perhaps are far from home, as we maybe look forward to a time spent with family members. We pray for those for whom that will not be possible, who for reasons of work or study find themselves distant from their loved ones. And we pray especially for them and pray that we would be hospitable and that our homes would be open homes where we are able to extend affection and love to those who are far from their own loved ones. Heavenly Father, we do commend to you all of these things. We pray that you would continue with us now and help us and bless us as we turn to your word this morning. And these things we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[ 10 : 58 ] Well, before we do turn to the passages that we've read already this morning, let's sing again. And we're going to sing from Psalm 84 on page 339. On page 339, Psalm 84, we're going to sing from verse 8 through to the end of the psalm. We'll sing these verses to the tune.

And we'll stand to sing.

Psalm 84, we're going to sing.

Psalm 84, we're going to sing.

Psalm 84, we're going to sing.

[ 13 : 07 ] Psalm 84, we're going to sing.

Psalm 84, we're going to sing. Psalm 84, we're going to sing.

Psalm 84, we're going to sing. Psalm 84, we're going to sing. Psalm 84, we're going to sing. In the annual Christmas ritual, we've now entered into the phase of preparations.

Maybe some of you are saying, oh, that phase began a long time ago. But for many of us, this is the phase of preparations. As I commented to the children a few moments ago, yesterday in the manse, the tree went up.

Then we have to start thinking about presents, though that can wait. And apparently, though I know very little of these things, apparently Christmas dinner can also profit from meticulous preparation.

[ 15 : 01 ] I was in the car on Friday, and there was some program that I was listening to, and some expert was chiding unsuspecting listeners across the country for not having their red cabbage prepared and in the freezer already.

Now, I don't even like red cabbage, but apparently that is something you can do if you want to be well prepared for the 25th. Well, in the gospel narratives that relate the birth of Jesus, there is also talk of preparation, but not in the first instance for the birth of Jesus, but for his ministry.

John the Baptist is introduced to us as one called to prepare the way for the Lord. There in verse 17, at the end of our reading, indeed, even limiting ourselves to the final words of the verse, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.

And I want to use this verse and the language that we find in it as our starting point to consider three matters. And the three matters are as follows.

First of all, the reality of an unprepared people, simply making reference to what is said concerning the ministry of John the Baptist here in the message that is relayed to Zechariah, the reality of an unprepared people.

[ 16 : 34 ] But then, secondly, we also want to consider the identity and the mission of the one for whom the way is being prepared.

And it is here that we will concentrate our interest and attention, the identity and mission of the one for whom the way is being prepared.

And in focusing on this matter, we will turn from Luke to the prophet Malachi and concentrate our attention on what is said there by the prophet and that finds fulfillment and is recorded.

Fulfillment is recorded for us in Luke's gospel. And then, finally, and very briefly, the third matter that we want to consider is the task of the one called to prepare the way.

So, the reality of an unprepared people, the identity and mission of the one for whom the way is being prepared, and then the task of the one called to prepare the way.

[ 17 : 37 ] First of all, then, let's think briefly concerning the reality of an unprepared people. And in the description that is given of John the Baptist's ministry, it is implicit that the people to whom he would minister were indeed unprepared.

We read in verses 16 and 17, many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God, and 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.

The description given by Gabriel of the task awaiting John the Baptist provides a telling and accurate diagnosis of the spiritual and indeed social conditions that prevailed on the dawn of the birth of Jesus.

John has spoken of performing two tasks. First of all, we notice that one of his tasks is that he will turn or bring back the people of Israel to the Lord their God.

And if we just think for a moment what is obviously implied by this task that he is assigned to bring or turn back people to God, it is implicit that that can only happen if these people have previously turned away from God.

[ 19 : 12 ] And Israel as a nation, for here the reference really is to the nation as a whole, as a nation, it had indeed turned away from God.

Despite all the outward trappings of religion, they were a people who largely, with notable exceptions, had drifted far from God. Hence the need for John the Baptist to bring them back or turn them back or certainly some of them who would respond to his message.

Then we're also told in these two verses that we've read that John would be instrumental in turning the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous there in verse 17.

Now this expression that is used, and having read from Malachi, we see how it is taken from Malachi, this expression, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, is generally understood in one of two ways, both of which have a case that can be made for them.

First of all, it may simply be reflecting the reality that Israel's drift from God was most evident in the absence of unity and harmony in the family, in the multiplicity of families that made up the nation.

[ 20 : 39 ] Fathers were not carefully and lovingly fulfilling their God-given duties with regard to their children, and children, perhaps as a consequence, were not honoring and obeying their parents as they ought to have done.

And perhaps this is simply a reality that is being revealed by this task that is assigned to John the Baptist, to turn things around, as it were, in the matter of the family in Israel.

Others suggest that the language that's employed here is to be understood somewhat differently, and that the reference to fathers is rather a reference to the patriarchs.

We know how often in the language that we find in the Bible, concerning the people of Israel, when the fathers are spoken of, it's not necessarily a reference to the literal, immediate, physical father of a given individual, but it's looking back to those who had come before, perhaps several generations before.

And if you speak of the fathers of Israel, then you're speaking of the patriarchs, of Abraham and Moses and David and others, those who had been used of God and in considerable measure had been faithful to God.

[ 21 : 54 ] And so it suggested that here, this is who are being referred to when we read of the fathers. And if that is the case, then the children, well, they would be the current generation, current at the time at which the dialogue is taking place.

Those who lived in Israel at the time that John the Baptist was born, they are the children, and the fathers are the patriarchs. And so if we understand it in that way, then the purpose that John has, the task that he has given, is to bring the children back to the faithfulness of the patriarchs.

They had drifted from that place, and so the call was for them to return. The fathers or patriarchs are presented as estranged from their children, as a consequence of the rebellion or the drifting of the children who have trodden underfoot, the wisdom of the righteous that is also spoken of here.

So the crying need is for the children to return to the ways of the fathers. Well, however we choose to understand that particular phrase, the overall picture, the big picture is clear enough.

The people in Israel are far from God. They're living in a way that is far from the ways that God had laid out for them.

[ 23 : 19 ] The need of the hour was for repentance and a return to the Lord. They were a people unprepared for the coming of Messiah.

And if we fast forward a couple of thousand years to Scotland in 2014 as we come to the end of this very momentous year in many ways for our nation, as we approach our annual celebration or remembrance of the birth of Jesus, are we so different?

We too, in great measure, are an unprepared people, unprepared to meet our Maker and unprepared for the return of the Messiah.

And so we have here in the ministry of John the Baptist an implicit diagnosis of the reality of an unprepared people.

But moving on to what particularly concerns us, and it is this, the identity and mission of the one for whom the way is being prepared by John.

[ 24 : 28 ] And here, as I commented a few moments ago, we will largely leave Luke behind and turn to the prophet Malachi, a prophet that Gabriel clearly identifies as having prophesied some 400 years before the events the coming of Messiah and the preparatory ministry of John the Baptist.

And it is telling that the word from God, the final word from God, before a silence that would last four centuries, concerns the coming of the one who would break that silence and usher in the long-awaited Messiah.

Let's just read again the very final verses of the prophet Malachi from verse 5 of chapter 4. See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the 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.

Very clearly, words that find their fulfillment and very explicitly referred to in the passage in Luke's gospel. But Malachi does not begin to prophesy concerning the coming of John the Baptist and indeed of Jesus in these final two verses of his prophetic word.

[ 25 : 58 ] If we turn back to chapter 3 that we've read and focus on the very first verse, what do we read? See, I will send my messenger who will prepare the way before me.

Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant whom you desire will come, says the Lord Almighty.

And as we spend some time considering the identity and mission of the one for whom the way is to be prepared, we'll refer to these two passages that we've read in chapter 3, very especially verse 1, but also the verses that follow, and then chapter 4.

Let's begin by considering the identity of the coming one. We want to think of his identity and his mission, but we'll begin with his identity. And we begin, or we return, to that verse, verse 1 of chapter 3 in Malachi.

And in this verse, we are presented with three characters that we need to identify. First of all, we have the I who is speaking. There at the beginning of the verse, see, I will send my messenger.

[ 27 : 08 ] Who is it that is speaking? Who is the I of that sentence? Well, he is clearly identified as the quote is attributed to him.

At the end of the verse, says the Lord Almighty. Who is the I who is speaking? Who is the I who declares that he will send his messenger? Well, we're told very clearly, it is the Lord Almighty.

God is the one who is speaking here at the beginning of the chapter, and his words recorded by the prophet Ephoros. But then we have a second character in this verse, and that is the messenger.

See, I will send my messenger who will prepare the way before me. The messenger, who is he? Well, in the light of how Malachi and this prophecy is employed in the Gospel of Luke, and indeed in other parts of the New Testament, it's very clear that this messenger is to be identified with John the Baptist.

So the first character is the Lord Almighty who is speaking. The second character in the verse is the messenger who is to be identified with John the Baptist. Then we have a third character in the verse, because the verse continues.

[ 28 : 20 ] Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple, the messenger of the covenant whom you desire will come. The Lord who will suddenly come, and who intriguingly seems to be identified with the me of our first character.

Notice there at the beginning of the verse, See, I will send my messenger who will prepare the way before me. And then we're told that the one who will come, whose way has been prepared, is the Lord, the messenger of the covenant.

So in some intriguing way, it seems that the one who is sending is also the one who is sent. How are we to understand that?

How are we to relate these characters identified in the verse? Well, the explanation is just that, that the Lord is both the one who sends and the one who is sent.

And the one who sends is also distinguished from the one who is sent. And this can only be understood. It can only be fully understood, well, perhaps not fully understood, but reasonably be understood in the light of Jesus and the coming of Jesus, the one who is both God and sent by God.

[ 29 : 35 ] Indeed, as we explore a little further this verse, we find that this identity and especially the distinction between the two characters there in Malachi chapter 3 and verse 1 is hinted at by the use of two different Hebrew words that are both translated Lord in our version of the Bible.

The one who speaks, the Lord Almighty, God the Father, He is named as the Lord Almighty, where the Hebrew name translated Lord is Yahweh or Jehovah, God's covenant name.

While the one who is to come, the Lord for whom the way is being prepared, the Hebrew word that lies behind the English Lord is a different word.

It's Adonai. But both Yahweh and Adonai are words or names of God, but by using different names, Malachi, indeed God Himself, is able to distinguish between the two characters who are both divine.

And again, this can only be understood in the light of the fuller revelation we have from God and of God in the New Testament where we meet God the Son sent by God the Father, both divine and yet distinct.

[ 31 : 02 ] The verse, this first verse of chapter 3 also speaks of the coming one, the Lord, as the one who is sought and the one who is desired. Notice there, then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to His temple, the messenger of the covenant whom you desire will come.

And this language, the language of the one who is sought, the language of the one who is desired, points to the one coming as being.

It identifies Him as the promised Messiah, the long sought after a deliverer and king who would definitively and finally save His people and rule over His saved people.

The verse also identifies the one to come or describes Him as the messenger of the covenant. And this title that He's given, one that we don't find really elsewhere in the Bible, this title highlights His prophetic role as the one who would bring a message from God for God's people.

But with the coming of Jesus as the messenger of the covenant, we discover that He is not only a word from God, but the word of God.

[ 32 : 20 ] Not only a messenger, but the message. So the one for whom the way is to be prepared by John the Baptist.

Who is He? He is Jesus the Christ. Jesus the Messiah. The Lord of Malachi chapter 3 with the divine status and attributes that the title carries within it.

The sought and long desired Messiah. The messenger of the covenant who is not only a word from God, but the word of God. This is the one for whom John was to prepare the way.

This is the identity of the babe born in Bethlehem. But as we consider this second matter, we're concerned not only with His identity, remarkable though that is, but also we're concerned with the mission of the coming one.

And as we think about the mission of the coming one, the mission of Messiah Jesus, two questions we want to try and answer. First of all, when will the mission be undertaken?

[ 33 : 32 ] This mission that He has been given, when will it be undertaken, and what will the mission involve? Beginning with the when of the matter, when will His mission be undertaken?

Well, let's turn to Malachi chapter 4 and verse 5. It's the part of the prophecy that most coincides in terms of an identification of vocabulary with the fulfillment in Luke chapter 1.

And there we read, see, I will send you the prophet Elijah before, there's a time reference there, before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes.

Now, the prophet Elijah points to John the Baptist, who Gabriel tells us would go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah.

It's not that John the Baptist is Elijah, but that his ministry would be of a nature similar to that of Elijah, hence the identification that is used.

[ 34 : 36 ] And he would usher in, what would he usher in? Well, the great and dreadful day of the Lord. We could describe that day in ways that would somewhat great, perhaps, with our sensibilities, the great and dreadful day of Jesus.

This is when the Messiah will fulfill the task that he has been given on the great and dreadful day of Jesus. His mission will be undertaken on his great and dreadful day, to use the language of Scripture.

Now, I know that language isn't very Christmassy, but that is the language that we find that the prophet employs to identify when it is that what he is prophesying will take place on that great and dreadful day.

Now, what does that mean? How does that help us to identify the when? Well, in the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy in the New Testament, we repeatedly discover that what in the Old Testament is spoken of as the day refers to what we might call an era.

In this case, all that is involved in the coming, life, death, resurrection, ascension, and indeed, reign and return in glory of Messiah Jesus.

[ 35 : 57 ] all of these events come under this description of the day, the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

But what will this mission involve? The one who is coming, the one whose way is being prepared, what will his mission involve? What did he come to do?

Well, we return to Malachi chapter 3 and verse 2 where the prophet speaks of that day and of the mission of the coming Messiah. And he speaks of that day and he speaks of that mission as a day and mission that will involve fire.

Let's just read the verse. Verse 2, But who can endure the day of his coming? This is the same day that in chapter 4 is spoken of as the great and dreadful day. Who can endure the day of his coming?

The coming of the messenger of the covenant, the coming of Messiah. Who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap.

[ 37 : 09 ] So this day and this mission is connected to or is described by the use of this language of fire.

His coming, his mission connected to fire. Not the cute candles that we might employ at a cattle service.

Beautiful and welcome though they are. But blazing fire is associated by the prophet with the mission of Messiah. Why is that?

What does that say? What does that tell us about his mission? What will be accomplished by the messianic fire? Well the fire very clearly in Malachi is identified as serving two purposes.

The fire is to purify and the fire is to destroy. First of all think of this fire as fire that purifies. Now the need for God to do the purifying and this is purifying of men and women of you and me.

[ 38 : 17 ] The need for God to do that work of purifying is made so starkly evident by the rhetorical question posed at the beginning of verse 2.

Who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? And the answer that is anticipated is deemed to be by the prophet almost self-evident.

He doesn't need to give. The answer is well no one. No one can stand. No one can endure before the glory and blazing holiness of God.

No one can stand. All would be consumed if we were to stand or seek to stand in our own strength and merit.

No sinner can remain standing before the purity of God. But what Malachi makes very clear is that there is an answer to this great problem for you and me as sinners.



[ 39 : 13 ] And the answer is that God is declaring that he will send one to purify a sinful and contaminated people. God himself through the one he sends will transform and prepare men and women able to bring him offerings of righteousness that will be acceptable to him as the prophet goes on to declare or as God goes on to declare through the prophet.

Men and women will be purified by this fire that the Messiah brings or that the Messiah is represented by. And then what we're told is the outcome in verse 3.

Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord. And why will they be acceptable? Because the ones who bring them have been purified by the one sent by God.

And of course this is what Jesus came to do. This is the gospel. This is the good news that God has sent his Son to deal with our sin.

God has sent his Son to secure for us forgiveness of sin as he died in our place on Calvary's tree as he bore upon himself and endured the fiery anger of God the just anger of God upon himself in our place that he might then be able to purify and to cleanse and to forgive us.

[ 40 : 43 ] This is the good news. And this is the work that Messiah Jesus is doing to this very day purifying men and women who come to him and making them acceptable before a God.

God. We hear how this language of Malachi is echoed by the Apostle Paul as he writes to the believers in Ephesus in chapter 5 of his letter to the Ephesians and from verse 25 in the context of speaking concerning wives and husbands listen to what he says about the work of Messiah Jesus.

Husbands love your wives just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy cleansing her by the washing with water through the word and to present her his church his people to himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish but holy and blameless able to stand before a God.

This is the mission of the coming one that is represented by fire fire that purifies and the question for you this morning is this have you been purified or cleansed or forgiven by Jesus?

This is something that only Jesus can do. This is why he came. You can stand before God only in Jesus and clothed in his righteousness.

[ 42 : 16 ] The mission of the coming one represented by fire fire that purifies but also fire that destroys. You see having spoken of those who would be purified in chapter 3 of Malachi we read on in verse 5 so I will come near to you for judgment.

I will be quick to testify against sorcerers adulterers and perjurers against those who defraud laborers of their wages who oppress the widows and the fatherless and deprive aliens of justice but do not fear me says the Lord Almighty and what will be their fate.

Well chapter 4 gives us in very vivid and frightening language what their fate will be at the beginning of chapter 4. Surely the day is coming this same great and dreadful day. 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.

The mission of the one whose way is prepared by John the Baptist the mission of Jesus is to save but it is also to judge. Now given that his day this great and dreadful day as we have already suggested is to be identified as that period of time that began with his coming but that only concludes with his return given that that is so some have suggested that this aspect of Jesus' mission to judge is to be limited to his second coming when we are indeed told that he will come among other things to judge the living and the dead.

Now it is certainly true that this mission of Jesus this task of Jesus is indeed one that will be fulfilled in its fullness as it were at that time.

[ 44 : 13 ] But to suggest that it is only at that time that Jesus is judging would be to contradict the very words of Jesus himself. In John chapter 9 and in verse 39 Jesus himself describes why he has come or certainly one of the reasons why he had come.

We read there in that verse for judgment I have come into this world. These are the words of Jesus himself describing his own ministry and the serious reality for us today for men and women anywhere who are confronted with the person of Jesus the reality is that when men and women are confronted with the person and work of Jesus the Messiah there will be one of two outcomes salvation through faith in Jesus as the one who forgives and purifies or condemnation as Jesus and his gracious invitation to be saved is rejected.

Jesus has come to save and he has come to judge to purify and to destroy. But let's move on and just very briefly comment on the third matter and that is the task of the one called to prepare the way.

Now the picture that is employed by Malachi and that we find also in Luke of preparation being made for the coming of Jesus is the picture of preparations that would be made for a king who is to visit some outpost of his kingdom.

An advanced party would be sent and delegated the task of preparing the way the route ensure that the route is free of any obstacles the logistics the reception and so on.

[ 46 : 05 ] The king is coming and so preparations need to be made for his arrival. That's the picture that's being employed. And John the Baptist we're told is called to perform this task for King Jesus.

But the preparations required are not physical but spiritual as we've already seen as we've considered the people as an unprepared people.

Now John's ministry in preparing the way for Messiah was in one respect unique and unrepeatable. For the Son of God became a man in a way that is unique and unrepeatable.

And yet there is in this matter of preparing the way for Jesus there is an abiding challenge for us as believers. We too are called to prepare the way for Jesus by the lives that we live and the good news that we share as we with John the Baptist of old point to Jesus point others to Jesus and announce behold the Lamb of God behold the one who is the Savior of the world.

The call to prepare the way for Jesus and this call that is an abiding challenge for us is seen in all its urgency as we are reminded as we have been even this morning that Jesus has promised that he will come again.

[ 47 : 35 ] He will come again to judge the living and the dead and in the light of this reality and surrounded by so many who as in the time of John the Baptist are unprepared there is no time to waste.

Let us be up and doing preparing the way for the Lord. Let us pray. Heavenly Father we do thank you for your word we thank you for the Bible we thank you for the manner in which we are presented with the person of Jesus the eternal son of God as the one who stands at the very center of human history all that came before leading up to his coming and all that has transpired since related to and grounded in his coming and in the work that he has performed.

We pray that you would help us to see him for who he is that we would indeed be persuaded as to his identity as the very one promised from of old to be the Messiah that we would be persuaded as to his identity as the eternal son of God that we would be persuaded also as to the mission that he has come to undertake to purify to cleanse and to procure forgiveness for sinners such as we are and as we see him as the one who has achieved all of this so we would turn to him and put our trust in him as the one who can save us.

Help us also to recognize those of us who have been enabled to put our trust in Jesus  
help us to see the task that we are also given to prepare the way for Jesus to point others  
to Jesus that they might not be unprepared in the light of his imminent coming and all of  
these things we pray in Jesus name Amen of the