

**Preaching Christ....
...by the power of the Holy Spirit
...and the authority of the Word of God**

Date: 27 August 2023
Services: *Across the Diocese*
Series: All about Jesus
Title: Where is hope?
Books: Ezra, Nehemiah and the Minor prophets
READING: Malachi 2:17-3:3a; 3:6-10a; 3:13-4:6

Outline

1. **Recap – how we got to where we are**
2. **What happened then?**
3. **Where is hope?**

INTRODUCTION

- Are you getting the feel for the Old Testament and why it's important?
- I hope so!
- Again today – we're covering a wide range of material...
- But rather than just passing on information and informing our minds... I hope also to show you the heart of God!
- So – after that briefest of all introductions, let me show you where we are heading today...
 1. **How we got to where we are**
 2. **What happened then?**
 3. **Where is hope?**

1) HOW WE GOT TO WHERE WE ARE

- Here is a reminder, of the story line of the Old Testament
 - Creation
 - Rebellion
 - God's regret + the flood – judgement – yet mercy
 - One man – one nation – Abraham + Israel – SO THAT – all nations would be blessed
 - Abraham – Isaac – Joseph – who saves Israel from famine in Egypt
 - BUT – Israel ends up enslaved
 - Redemption – Moses – a picture of our saving God
 - Commissioning of God's people; place of the law
 - Into the promised land – but FAILED to rid the land of the inhabitants.... Which led to failure to remain God's distinctive people...
 - Judges and many cycles of rebellion
 - We want a KING – you don't want a King – yes we do!
 - They got what they **wanted**, but lost what they **had**
 - Failure of **Kingship**... exile – Northern Kingdom in 722BC – Assyria – Southern Kingdom – Babylonians – finally 586BC

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- Now – Israel – **out** of the promised land – and the **city** and the **temple** lay in **ruins!**

- **Disaster!** //
- But God never gave **up** on his **people...**
- He remained absolutely **committed...**
- There **WILL** be a **good KING** – a **perfect KING** in the line of David – whose **Kingdom** will last **forever!**
- There **WILL be a remnant of people** who will **follow** and serve him **faithfully...** ///
- But with God's people **out** of the promised **land...**

2) WHAT HAPPENED THEN?

- Let me share ever so briefly... what we see in Ezra – Nehemiah and then in those books known as the “Minor Prophets”.
- **Ezra:** in the rise and fall of ancient kingdoms, the Persians overran the **Babylonians** who had exiled the **southern** kingdom of Israel in **538BC**.
- So Cyrus - King of **Persia** – turns up in **Babylon** and discovers there's a bunch of **Jews** there in **captivity**.
- So he issues this proclamation in Ezra 1 - *"This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and he has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Any of his people among you may go up to Jerusalem in Judah and build the temple of the LORD, the God of Israel...."*
- Wow!!
- God using Cyrus King of Persia, to overrun the Babylonians, to set God's people free!
- Not only would God's people return to the promised land – but Cyrus would facilitate the rebuilding of a temple... AND see to it that Babylonians help **FUND** the rebuilding! Have a look at this... *And in any locality where survivors may now be living, the people are to provide them with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with freewill offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem."*
- Well – all that started to happen – and yet there were tears from those who remembered (or read up on) the first Temple. For it had none of the glory of the first temple!
- **Nehemiah:** The walls of Jerusalem rise again, providing defence and a sense of identity for the people of God in the City of God – Jerusalem – and yet the former grandeur of the city itself was missing!
- **...and if you read those books, it will be obvious to you...** that the exile had **NOT** resulted in the **transformation** of God's people...
- ...there was **STILL REBELLION**... still mixing of **religions....** Still **sacrificing** to **idols...** still **not listening** to the **prophets...** still a **failure** to **trust God** and his **promises ...!**
- where is **hope** in all **this?**
- well I want to come back to that at the end... but first - I want to give you a very brief outline of those books known as the “minor prophets”
- there are **twelve** of them
- they are not called ‘minor prophets’ because they're less **important** than the major prophets such as Jeremiah, Isaiah and Ezekiel... but simply because they are **shorter...**
- AND they are not organised **chronologically...** some are set **BEFORE** the exile, some set **AFTER...**

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- So let me show you the list...

(Additional information on each book at the end of the message proper.)

1. **Hosea (755-715 BC)**
 2. **Joel (Unknown, possibly 9th century BC)**
 3. **Amos (760-755 BC)**
 4. **Obadiah (586 BC)**
 5. **Jonah (8th century BC)**
 6. **Micah (740-700 BC)**
 7. **Nahum (7th century BC)**
 8. **Habakkuk (7th century BC)**
 9. **Zephaniah (640-609 BC)**
 10. **Haggai (520 BC)**
 11. **Zechariah (520-518 BC)**
 12. **Malachi (5th century BC)**
- But **two** things I want you to note...
 - all is **not well**... there's **dissatisfaction**... there's **suffering** and **injustice**; there's **corruption**.... There's a failure to **worship God** as he **intended**... There's a grief that things were not what they once were in the great days of David or Solomon!
 - the time in exile has **not** changed human hearts...
 - you wonder if Israel had learnt any lessons at **all!**

 - BUT what we see here and throughout the post-exilic prophets, is that there is **reference** to – **hope for** - something **better coming**...
 - Whether that be the **Day of the Lord** and an eventual outpouring of the Spirit of the prophet **Joel**...
 - ...or the prophet **Micah's** foretelling of a ruler emerging from Bethlehem...
 - or **Zephaniah's** warning of the impending Day of the Lord... and a promise of restoration.
 - Or **Zechariah's** visions that promise hope and a future king, evoking messianic expectations.
 - or **Malachi's** promise of God's faithfulness and the coming "Elijah"!!!
 - **dissatisfaction** – all is **still not well** - AND all the time -an **urging** – an **expectation** – that we are **pressing forward** for something **more**... something **better!**
 - So in our final section this morning I want to ask:
- 3) WHERE IS HOPE?**
- let's dive into a specific case study from the book of Malachi where we see these themes.
 - Turn with me to Malachi 2:17, where the prophet says to God's people, *"You have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet you ask, 'How have we wearied Him?' By saying, 'Everyone who does **evil** is **good** in the Lord's sight, and He delights in them,'"*
 - Does this sound familiar?
 - Right up until today, various people associated with church must be wearying God with the very same sentiment... claiming that what we've understood the Bible to be saying is **evil** for 2,000 years or more, is **NO LONGER evil**... and God is very **happy** with **them!**

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- And yes, God must be **weary!**
- I am **weary!**
- In these words, we see the **heart** of a people who are still **disobedient...** and **disheartened**.
- They've **returned** from **exile**, they've **rebuilt** the **Temple**, but they're still grappling with moral **decay**, **corruption**, and **injustice**.
- Where is **hope??**
- Jump ahead to Malachi 3:1-3, "*See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.*"
- **THIS** is where **hope** is.... a **promise** that a **messenger** is coming to **prepare** the way for the **Lord**—the **Messiah**.
- A promise that **one day** - **justice** will **prevail**, and that there's a **future beyond** the present **dissatisfaction**.
- And that's the **heart** of the **message** of many of the **Minor Prophets**.
- Amidst the **turmoil**, the **doubts**, the **longing** for something **better**, there's a **hope** that **lies beyond what is happening right now**.
- It's a hope rooted in the **promise** of a **Saviour**—the **Messiah**—who will bring **true justice**, **true renewal**, and **true and lasting transformation**.
- But it is **clear**, that true **justice**, true **renewal**, and true **transformation** will come through **fire** – which **refines...** have a look with me at 3:2 – this messenger – the Messiah will come - *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. ³ He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver*
- So the coming of the Lord will call people to **account...**
- Because Malachi 3:7 *Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. **Return to me, and I will return to you,**" says the LORD Almighty.*
- I'm **committed** to you
- I **love** you
- I want to see you **reformed** and **restored**.
- Please – please **return to me** the LORD cries out! And if they return to **him**, he will return to **them**.
- Did the brother of our Lord Jesus have this passage in mind when he wrote in 4:7-8 - *Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Come near to God and he will come near to you.*
- Same **message** isn't it!?!?... Not surprising; because the Lord does not **change!** /
- But I wonder if there are any here today who need to hear this...?
- **Return** to the Lord – **flee** the **evil one**... come **near** to **God** and he will come near to **you**...
- Isn't that a glorious **promise???**
- Is this an **exhortation** for **YOU**? DO **YOU** need to return to the Lord today? – to draw **near**?
- OR is this a **promise** for you...?
- Do **YOU** need to know that if you **have** drawn near – **or returned** – **he will or has** drawn near to **YOU**...! ///
- The Messiah will **come**... but his very coming – **demands repentance**... demands people **return** to **God**...

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- Now fast forward to Malachi 4:2, *"But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays. And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves."*
- Return to me – **revere my name** – and **here's the future** – the sun of righteousness will rise with healing – that is – with **restoring power** – **remaking** us in the image of God – and the result will be **great and lasting joy**
- Have you seen a well-fed calf frolic **lately**?
- What a description of **God's people** who have **returned to him** and are being **restored** – **re-made** – **perfected!**
- This **hope**, this **promise**, is not just for **ancient Israel**. It's for **us** today. It's for those who **revere** the name of the Lord, who **return** to him!
- "Where is **hope**?"
- **Only** in the **coming** of the **Lord Jesus...**
- In his **first** coming – which showed us the **way**
- And in his glorious **second** coming when everything will be put right.... !
- Look to **Jesus**.
- He is the fulfilment of **Malachi's prophecy**—the **Messenger**, the **Messiah**, the **Sun of Righteousness**.
- For ultimately – **all the promises of God** – of complete **restoration** – of the **end of evil and injustice** – of **hope everlasting**... will find their **fulfilment** when Jesus **returns** and ushers in the **new creation**.

Let me close

- There's a lot to take in in these sermons covering such large sweeps of God's word!
- Noah was saved in the ark – but there's more!
- Joseph saved **Israel** from **famine**... but there's **more**
- Moses saved Israel from **slavery** in **Egypt** – but there's **more**
- **Joshua** saved Israel as they entered the **promised land** – but there's **more**
- The **Judges** saved Israel from the Philistines time and time again – but there's **more**
- **David** saved Israel from her enemies – time after time - – but there has to be more... indeed – **ONE promised** in the **line of David!** – but whose **reign will never end!! //**
- The return to the promised Land offered **SOME** hope – but there has to be **more!! //**
- After this book of Malachi we've spent a **little** time in today – there was **400** years of silence from **God**.
- **No word**
- **No prophet**
- **Nothing**
- **Silence**
- But **Malachi** – tells us to look to one coming like **Elijah**... (4:6) a **messenger** who would **prepare the way** of the **Lord**... **////**
- And the day John the Baptist starting **urging repentance** and **baptising** for **forgiveness**.... **That** promise was **fulfilled** – that promise was **delivered**... and God's **great work** of restoring **humankind** is then brought to focus in the **coming** – the **life** – the **teaching** – the **death** and **resurrection** of the **Lord Jesus**.... **////**

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- But we are still **waiting** aren't we?
- We still wait for the coming of the Messiah – HIS **return**...
- And we keep our eyes **peeled** and our hearts **expectant**... because the whole sweep of the Scriptures – both Old Testament and New – longs for that **new creation** where God we will dwell with us **perfectly** – and we with **him** – and we will be God's people – in God's presence – enjoying God's peace – for all eternity!
- Live expectedly for that day!
- Remain faithful to the Lord until that great day
- ...and put your hope in Jesus alone. Amen.

Further information on the Minor prophets

1. **Hosea (755-715 BC):** Addressing the Northern Kingdom, Hosea conveys God's unrelenting love for an unfaithful Israel, likening the relationship to a marriage marred by infidelity.
2. **Joel (Unknown, possibly 9th century BC):** Its precise timeline is debated, but Joel's locust plague and subsequent call for repentance has timeless relevance. He speaks of the Day of the Lord and an eventual outpouring of the Spirit.
3. **Amos (760-755 BC):** A shepherd-turned-prophet addressing the prosperous Northern Kingdom, Amos demands social justice and genuine worship amidst growing complacency.
4. **Obadiah (586 BC):** Written after the fall of Jerusalem, Obadiah condemns Edom (a nation southeast of Judah) for capitalizing on Judah's downfall.
5. **Jonah (8th century BC):** Jonah's reluctant mission to Nineveh, the Assyrian capital, underscores God's compassion for all nations, even Israel's enemies.
6. **Micah (740-700 BC):** A contemporary of Isaiah, Micah addresses both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, condemning injustice and foretelling of a ruler from Bethlehem.
7. **Nahum (7th century BC):** Written after Jonah and during the reign of the Assyrian Empire, Nahum prophesies Nineveh's fall, the capital that once repented at Jonah's message.
8. **Habakkuk (7th century BC):** Distinctive in its format, this Southern Kingdom book is a dialogue between the prophet and God over the problem of suffering and injustice.
9. **Zephaniah (640-609 BC):** In the Southern Kingdom during King Josiah's reign, Zephaniah warns of the impending Day of the Lord but ends with a promise of restoration.
10. **Haggai (520 BC):** Post-exile, Haggai motivates the returned exiles to prioritize rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem, emphasizing its spiritual significance.
11. **Zechariah (520-518 BC):** Also post-exile and contemporary with Haggai, Zechariah offers a series of visions that promise hope and a future king, evoking messianic expectations.
12. **Malachi (5th century BC):** The last voice before 400 years of prophetic silence, Malachi addresses a post-exilic Judah, confronting a lax priesthood and the people's waning faith while promising God's faithfulness and the coming "Elijah."