



TEEN TREE OF LIFE GOD DOES HIS BEST WORK IN IMPOSSIBLE SITUATIONS

Part 2

August 16, 2020

Before you begin, ask yourself a very important question: Do you believe that Jesus Christ died on The Cross for all of your sins? If you answered yes, you will need to be sure that you are filled with The Holy Spirit. How do you do this? You name your sins to God The Father in His Son's Name. This is called Rebound. As a Christian, you must rebound any time you sin. This is taught in 1 JOH 1:9: *If we confess [name] our sins [directly to God], He [God] is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* Now, if you have never believed that Jesus Christ died on The Cross for all of your sins, all you have to do is say to yourself that you believe in Him and you are saved! The Bible verse which teaches us this is ACTS 16:31: *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved."*

As we learned last week, **The Book of Malachi** is the last book of the Old Testament. The prophet Malachi (whose name means messenger) wrote about the Jews who were suffering drought, famine and destroyed crops and how their reactions to these conditions were indifference and spiritual inaction. They had forgotten God! They treated Him with dishonor. Does this sound familiar to what you're seeing around you today in 2020? Malachi's message is filled with accusations and warnings. He also criticizes the Jews for doubting God's Love.

Remember, **The Book of Malachi** is the last time God's voice is heard for the next four hundred years. Israel would have to wait for the arrival of John the Baptist for the next message. Before his pen was silenced, Malachi wrote: ***"I will send the prophet Elijah to you. He will come before the day of the Lord arrives. (MAL 4:5 The New International Reader's Version)***. This message refers to John the Baptist, which we'll learn in detail in this week's study.

Malachi begins his book with a blistering criticism of apostate Israel's profane priests and backslidden people. They were committing blasphemous acts of sacrilege and denying the Holiness and Justice of God. They robbed The Lord of the tithes and offerings they had promised to give Him, under the Mosaic Law. Moses had warned

them that severe judgement would fall on those who broke their covenant with God. They did not listen.

Malachi's unique position as the final book of the Old Testament offers a glimpse into the hearts of Israelite men and women, members of a nation that had been specially chosen by God, descendants of Abraham, and inheritors of the rich tradition of the Jewish people. Their history told of glories like the exodus from Egypt and the faithfulness of God to King David. But they had also experienced the judgment of wandering in the desert and the shame of exile from the Promised Land.

At the time of Malachi, well over a thousand years after Abraham's era, the Israelites had the advantage and weight of history on their side; they could see the shining rewards of faithfulness and the punishments associated with judgment, even to the point of being uprooted from their land. But even then, with all that perspective, the book of Malachi teaches us that they still strayed from the Lord's Path. They needed God's intervention as much as ever, so this book (as a final statement of judgment in the Old Testament) anticipates God's saving work through the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

The people of Judah began to be exiled from the Promised Land in 605 BC, returning from Babylon seventy years later. By the time of Malachi, they had been back in the land for more than a hundred years and were looking for the blessings they expected to receive when they returned. Though the temple had been rebuilt, the passion of those early returning Israelites gave way to a thorough apathy for the things of God. This led to rampant corruption among the priesthood and a spiritual lethargy among the people.

Malachi came along at a time when the people were struggling to believe that God loved them. The people focused on their unfortunate circumstances and refused to account for their own sinful deeds. So, God pointed the finger back at them, and through Malachi, God told the people where they had fallen short of their covenant with Him. If they hoped to see a change, they needed to take responsibility for their own actions and serve God faithfully according to the promise their fathers had made to God on Mount Sinai all those years before.

All of this was the precursor to the joyfully anticipated coming of the promised Messiah: ***"But for you who [respect] fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings..." (MAL 4:2)*** Malachi's writing was done 450 years before Jesus Christ's birth and is full of expectation that the Messiah would be coming. ***MAL 3:1*** tells us: ***The Lord who rules over all says, "I will send my messenger. He will prepare my way for me. Then suddenly the Lord you are looking for will come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant will come. He is the one you long for."*** The Gospel of Mark begins by declaring John the Baptist as this messenger: ***Long ago Isaiah the prophet wrote, "I will send my messenger ahead of you. He will prepare your way. A messenger is calling out in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord. Make straight paths for him.'" And so John the Baptist appeared in the desert. He preached that people should be baptized and turn away from their sins. Then God would forgive them. (MAR 1:2-4 New International Reader's Version)***

The words **"He will prepare a way for me"** back in **MAL 3:1** refer to an ancient royal procession in which the messenger went before the King to announce his arrival, to indicate the route, and to remove any obstacles in the road. John the Baptist fulfilled this exact ministry for Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

God speaks this message in **MAL 4:2**: **"But for you who fear [respect] My name, the sun of righteousness [Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ] will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall.** The wings of the sun are the sunbeams it sends out. They bring healing, joy, and wholeness. When the Sun of Righteousness shines, we do not need any other light or warmth! Imagine trying to light a candle on a sunny day to help the sun! Duhhhhhhh!

So, The One called **"the sun of righteousness"** in **MAL 4:2** – The Lord Jesus Christ – would be preceded by a forerunner with the "spirit of Elijah." This prophet, John The Baptist, who would come ahead of the Messiah, would come in the Spirit of Power, and he would turn the disobedient back to God and His Righteousness. This is how the story of John The Baptist's amazing life began: **Then an angel of the Lord appeared to Zechariah. The angel was standing at the right side of the incense altar. When Zechariah saw him, he was amazed and terrified. But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah. Your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will have a child. It will be a boy, and you must call him John. He will be a joy and delight to you. His birth will make many people very glad. He will be important in the sight of the Lord. He must never drink wine or other such drinks. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will prepare the way for the Lord. He will have the same spirit and power that Elijah had. He will bring peace between parents and their children. He will teach people who don't obey to be wise and do what is right. In this way, he will prepare a people who are ready for the Lord.** (LUKE 1:11-17 The New International Version)

In those days, no one would have expected God to begin His Process of Change through an old couple – especially one who could never have imagined being all that significant in God's Plan. The other surprising factor was that Zechariah and Elizabeth lived in the days of Herod which is taught in **LUK 1:5 (The Message Bible)**: **During the rule of Herod, King of Judea, there was a priest assigned service in the regiment of Abijah. His name was Zachariah. His wife was descended from the daughters of Aaron. Her name was Elizabeth.**

Herod the Great was the one who murdered all the male children, who were two years of age and under, in Bethlehem and its suburbs. This is taught in **MAT 2:13-18 (New International Reader's Version)** where we read about what took place after the Wise Men had visited the manger, in which Jesus Christ had been born: **When the Wise Men had left, Joseph had a dream. In the dream an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph. "Get up!" the angel said. "Take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you to come back. Herod is going to search for the child. He wants to kill him." So Joseph got up. During the night, he left for Egypt with the child and his mother Mary. They stayed there until King Herod died. So the words the Lord had spoken through the prophet came true. He had said, "I brought my son out of Egypt." Herod realized that the Wise Men had tricked him. So he became very angry. He gave**

orders about Bethlehem and the area around it. He ordered all the boys two years old and under to be killed. This agreed with the time when the Wise Men had seen the star. In this way, the words Jeremiah the prophet spoke came true. He had said, "A voice is heard in Ramah. It's the sound of crying and deep sadness. Rachel is crying over her children. She refuses to be comforted because they are gone."

Herod was a horrific tyrant and a political savage. Who would have ever expected that God would step in and bring fulfillment to the words of Malachi at a time when such violence, cruelty, and craftiness was the norm for the political authorities over the Jews? No one did! Yet, in the midst of the darkness, discouragement, and depression when it seemed to the Jews that God would be silent forever, He chooses an aging priest who is married to a woman who is unable to conceive children and who many Jews believed had been cursed by God.

Zacharias and Elizabeth were childless, which was a tragedy for a married couple at that time. According to the Jewish Rabbis, there were seven kinds of people who were excommunicated from God. Their list began: "A Jew who has no wife, or a Jew who has a wife and who has no child." Can you imagine that?? In our day and age, it is hard to. However, despite having to endure this excommunication, along with their inability to have children, we learn some incredibly admirable things about Zacharias and Elizabeth in **LUK 1: Together they lived honorably before God, careful in keeping to the ways of the commandments and enjoying a clear conscience before God.** That says a great deal about their faith!

{to be continued}