

**Malachi 4: 1-6; “The Hearts of the Fathers”, A Father’s Day Sermon**  
**prepared by Pastor Paul Rendall, and Delivered on**  
**June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2012, In the Morning Worship Service.**

I have chosen this text for Father’s Day because it speaks to us of the great need that we have as a society, and even in Christian families, for God to come to the hearts of both fathers and children and turn them to each other. When the hearts of children are turned toward their fathers, God is honored, and fathers are honored also. God literally and spiritually did this great thing through John the Baptist during the time of his ministry. We should pray that God would come in reviving power and do the same thing for us in our generation. What does it mean for us today when it says, “He will turn the hearts of fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers”? I believe that it means these three things. 1<sup>st</sup> of all – It will mean that the hearts of children will have understood more of the hearts of their fathers in relation to prophecy being fulfilled. (verses 1, 3, and 5) 2<sup>nd</sup>– It will mean that the Sun of Righteousness will have risen upon both fathers and the children with healing in His wings. (verse 3) 3<sup>rd</sup>– It will mean that the hearts of both the fathers and children will together remember the law of Moses so that God’s curse will be averted and great blessing will come. (verses 4-6) In each of these points we will look at this in terms of what happened in the days of John the Baptist, and think about how we can apply them to our own day.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – It will mean that the hearts of children will have understood more of the hearts of the fathers in relation to prophecy being fulfilled.**  
(verses 1, 3, and 5)

“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble.” “And the day which is coming shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, that will leave them neither root nor branch.” “You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this, says the Lord of hosts.” “Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the dreadful day of the Lord.” The heart of a wise Christian father, like Elijah of old, and like his successor John the Baptist, has a dream to see the prophecies related to Christ’s kingdom, and its advance, come to pass. Where does he get this vision of Christ’s kingdom? He gets it from reading the prophetic passages of the word of God. And if he is walking in the Spirit and he is sensitive to what God is doing in and through the Church of Jesus Christ, He will attempt to turn his children’s hearts that direction also. Prophecy is given us in two senses in the Bible; foretelling of future events, and forth-telling of the will and word of God as to what we should do. Prophecy is given in relation to both past and future promises which God gives, and the judgments which God brings. The hearts of Christian young people ought to be in tune to this. But often they are

not. But the prayer of every father, sensitive to these things, will be that his children will catch the vision; that he would be like an Elijah to them. Elijah acted as a father in Israel in his days. He said to them, "If God is God, serve Him." "But if Baal is God serve him." He challenged the conventional wisdom of his day. People in that day thought that they were wise when they worshiped false gods. They thought that they were wise when they were sensual and proud and worldly. Elijah would tell them the truth about themselves and where their false notions would lead. It would lead them to God's judging them, both in this life and the next. Fathers, you must not be afraid to speak of these things to your children. Tell them that there is a judgment coming.

Every generation of fathers and children has its place of importance, in the history of redemption. That is why it says in Psalm 145, verse 4, "One generation shall praise Your works to another, and shall declare Your mighty acts." I hope that each of you who are Christian fathers has a vision for what God and Christ are doing in the world today. I hope that you will pass on this glorious vision of Christ's kingdom and His glory to your children. Praise the mighty works of God, fathers. Read to your children the Bible, even the prophetic parts. Show them that Christ's kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and that His truth endures to all generations. Give them the vision of what God is doing in the world today through missions and evangelism. Show them your heart for this glorious cause. Tell them that Christ's kingdom will come to reign on the earth someday, and that they can have a part in fulfilling this vision if they will be godly in their hearts, their speech, and their behavior. That is how Christ's kingdom advances. We shall speak of this more in the second point. But right now, I must attempt to explain to you some principles of prophetic interpretation so that both fathers and children might understand.

The wording of this first verse might lead some to conclude that what is being referred to here is the coming Day of judgment. Certainly it does have its ultimate eternal fulfillment in that great Day when all men shall be raised from the dead and stand before the Lord Jesus Christ. That will be the Day when the world as we know it now shall come to an end, and eternity shall begin. That will be the Day when all men shall be raised from the dead and face either the eternal wrath or eternal the blessing of Christ. He is the One who has been appointed by the Father to judge the world when He returns again. And that Day will certainly be "an oven" to all the proud and wicked men, for they will be cast into the oven of God's judgment forever. But the context of these verses does not lend itself to the conclusion that this Last Judgment is what is being spoken of here in the first and primary sense. We need to understand that in the Old Testament prophetic Scriptures that when "the day of the Lord" or even "the day", as it was written here, is mentioned, that it may be referring to the Lord's coming in judgment upon a nation or society, in that day in which the prophecy was written, or it may refer to a great judgment of God coming upon a society or a nation in a future

generation, or it may refer to the Last Judgment. But in each case, the context must be examined and a conclusion drawn concerning when the promised judgment took place, or when it is going to take place sometime in the future.

In the context of what we are studying here this morning, the judgment that is being spoken of, the day that was coming, appears to me to be the destruction of Jerusalem and the nation of Israel in 70 A.D. after their rejection of their Messiah Jesus Christ. Let me show you why I think this is so. The 1<sup>st</sup> verse says, “The day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble.” Now if we were to only focus on the words, “burning like an oven” and the words, “all the proud” and “all who do wickedly”, it would appear to be speaking of those who will be cast into hell at the Last Judgment. But first of all, the word “all” does not always mean all and every person in the Scripture. It often means “all” of a certain and specific category. And secondly, when it says, “all who do wickedly will be stubble”, it cannot possibly mean hell. For at the end of verse 1, it says, “the day which is coming will burn them up”. And everyone knows that hell is a place of unending, unceasing, unquenchable fire. Those unrepentant sinners will have certainly have resurrection bodies then, and they will be burning, but they will never be consumed, or “burned up”, or become “stubble”. So we must distinguish between earthly judgments of God upon nations and His eternal damnation of sinners in hell.

But the description of verses 1 and 5b of our text agrees very well with what happened to Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Titus and the Roman armies came and laid siege to the city, destroyed it, and burned it with fire. In, that mighty judgment, predicted here in this place, Israel was left neither root nor branch of their theocratic kingdom. Their branches were broken off and the Gentiles were grafted in to the kingdom of God after that cataclysmic destruction of Jerusalem. All of those the proud Pharisees and Sadducees, the chief priest and the scribes, who were still living, who had helped see to it that the Lord Jesus was put to death on the cross, were utterly destroyed in that judgment. All those Jews who were Christians, and who had been persecuted by those proud and wicked men mentioned in verse 1, were told by the Lord Jesus in Matthew 24 that they should flee the destruction. They took heed to that injunction, and they went away to live at Pella just before the destruction and for some years after. There was no doubt a time when some of those same persons came back to the city to see its desolation, and the fulfillment of verse 3 took place. “You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this,” says the Lord of hosts. They literally walked over the ashes over their persecutors.

When it says in verse 5, “Behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord, we tend to think that surely this must refer to a literal Elijah coming to turn people back to God before the Day when Christ returns and judges the world. But we have every reason from the Scriptures themselves to think that this was fulfilled in the time just before the

Lord Jesus began His earthly ministry, and that the “Elijah” who is the fulfillment of these words is really John the Baptist. Let me show you this from the Scriptures. Turn with me over to Luke Chapter 1, verse 13. “But the angel said to him, ‘Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.’ “And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.” “For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink.” ‘He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb.’ And he will turn many of the children of the Israel to the Lord their God.” “He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” So you see how much these verses help us to understand the prophecy in Malachi. John the Baptist was “Elijah the prophet” who came before the “dreadful day of the Lord,” in 70 A.D. The “day of the Lord” has a historic earthly fulfillment in 70 A.D., but it also has a coming eternal fulfillment when Christ returns at the day of judgment. Jesus Himself said that John the Baptist was the “Elijah” of this passage. You can see that if you will turn over to Matthew 17, verse 10. “And His disciples asked Him, saying, ‘Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?’” “Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Indeed Elijah is coming first and will restore all things.’ “But I say to you that Elijah has come already and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished.” “Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands.” “Then the disciples understood that He spoke to them of John the Baptist.”

This is also the reason why the prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures can have a successive or double fulfillment. God has so given the prophecies of the Old Testament Scriptures to be written down, that they received a fulfillment in that time and that day, and also may possibly have a fulfillment farther along in the New Testament times and New Testament Day. “Elijah is coming first and will restore all things.” Is there yet a future fulfillment of this prophecy either before the day of the destruction of the Antichristian powers or the Day of our Lord’s return? Only time will reveal whether it is so. There is yet to come the great and terrible day of the Lord for Antichrist, and also at the time of the end of the world when Christ returns. If there is a future fulfillment it will not be the literal Elijah who was caught up to heaven in a chariot of fire, for the same reason that it was not the literal Elijah who was sent before Christ began His ministry and before the destruction of Jerusalem. There may indeed, in the future, come a mighty preacher to turn the fathers among the Jews, with their children, to Christ. It seems to me that it would be more likely to be a group of preachers who are raised up by the Lord at the time of the conversion of the Jews, who will preach Christ as though they have one prophetic voice like Elijah’s. (This would not take a reinstatement of the gift of prophecy, but it would take a great pouring out of the Spirit’s power)

Whatever the case will be, we know that the culmination of all of these earthly judgments of societies and nations will be fulfilled when Christ returns and the Last Judgment takes place. My appeal to you today is that these truths of the father's having their hearts turned toward their children would have their fulfillment in the hearts of fathers here today. Those efforts which fathers make to teach their children to flee from the wrath of God because they love their children should be done out of the deepest love for their eternal souls. What was true then is true in our own day. "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." (Proverbs 14: 34) Let fathers thoroughly instruct their children in what is right and wrong, good and bad, profitable and unprofitable, precious and vile. The righteous vision that a father has, is that his children's hearts would be turned to him, the one who speaks to them of eternal truths; heaven and hell, sin and righteousness and judgment. Your weeping over your children, because you see the hardness of their hearts, and their resistance to the truth that you are trying to bring to them; that Christ will one day judge the world, or that their sins and unbelief will contribute to the downgrade of everything that is right and decent and God-honoring in our society; this will be the means which God may use to turn their hearts to you, and to Him. John the Baptist preached straightforwardly and turned the heart of the fathers to the children, first, by the power of the Holy Spirit. And then the children responded to the good teaching of the word of God to them by believing it, and their hearts were turned to love their fathers. Let us speak more of the particulars of this.

**2ndly - It will mean that the Sun of Righteousness will have risen upon both fathers and the children with healing in His wings.** (verse 2)

"But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed cattle." This verse can be speaking of no other than the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Sun of our whole moral and spiritual universe. He is the light of the world. When He was born into this world, His light began to dawn upon all of us who sit in darkness. We are born into this world with darkened souls because of Adam's fall at the beginning of the world. By nature we love the darkness more than the light, for our deeds are evil. But listen to John 12: 46 – "I have come as a light into the world, that whoever believes in Me should not abide in darkness." Listen also to John 3: 18. "He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God." "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. "For everyone practicing evil hates the light, lest his deeds should be exposed." "But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God." Let me apply this from my own experience. For this is exactly what happened in my own life in 1976. Before I came to Christ I was in darkness; the sin of Adam and the sin of my own making. I loved darkness and

was at a number of points practicing evil. I did not want Christ or His great salvation. I wanted my freedom to sin.

But here is where I must honor my own father this morning in the midst of the great assembly. My father's heart was not turned to Christ until May of 1970. He was 58 years old. He had gone to church all of his life, but he had never understood his need to be saved from his sins. When he was converted, it was evidenced in this great truth; his heart toward his children was changed. He had loved us before, by providing for our physical needs and doing many good earthly things for us, but now he undertook the mighty task of praying that God would change our hearts, and turn them to Him. He became an Elijah to my soul, to see if by his witness he could bring me to Christ. He wrote me 15 page papers, filled with Bible quotes; reasoning with me as to why I needed Christ and why I should trust Christ. He spoke to me of heaven and hell, but I did not fear the Lord. I didn't like his sharing the word of God very well at all, but I could see that it was being done in love. I would come home from college, full of my own ideas of the meaning of life. None of them was right. My dear dad would try so hard to tell me about Christ that he would break down crying right in front of me. The father's heart was turned toward the son, just like the father's heart in the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15. At first I thought that he had a problem. Later, as Christ began to shine His light into my heart, I realized that I was the one who had the problem. Why would he cry over someone like me? I would have thrown someone like me out of the house. I loved the darkness rather than light. I loved what was false instead of what was true. I was full of pride and selfish ambition and sensuality, but I thought that I was wise. But dad just kept on praying. And one day the Lord began to shine His light into my dark heart, and it wasn't too long before He showed how empty my life was without Him. He came to me with healing in His wings. He let me find refuge under the shadow of His wings. He did not leave me to myself. He shined His light into my heart so that I could see the glory of God in the face of Christ. I saw His excellency, His desirability; for He was pure and I was impure. He was righteous and I was unrighteous. He was strong and I was too weak to change my own heart.

**And then finally – Elijah's turning the hearts of the fathers to the children and the children to the fathers will mean that the hearts of both the fathers and children will together remember the law of Moses so that God's curse will be averted and great blessing will come. (verses 4-6)**

When Christ comes to your soul, and when your heart is turned to Him to allow Him to be your Master, then you switch yokes. A yoke is what the ox wears when it is harnessed to go out to plow or tread grain. It is something placed upon its neck so that the ox can do a work for its master. When you do not have Christ, sin is your master. And a hard, cruel master he is. Sin brings you into bondage to your pride, your foolishness, your anger, your envy, your hatred of people you do

not like. You are yoked to your own sinful way of thinking and doing things. And you cannot break it off your neck. You don't want to live to God's glory. You don't want to obey His law. You don't want Christ to rule over you. And you are deceived into thinking that the yoke of sin is better than that of Christ. But when you come to Christ, He frees you from this wrong thinking and takes away all your sins; the guilt of them, and the shame of them. You are given a robe of Christ's righteousness to wear. The robe of righteousness was purchased for the believer by Christ's fulfilling of the law in relation to all its holy requirements. All this former bondage you are thereby released from, because Christ obeyed God's law perfectly in your stead, and He died in your place at the cross, and He rose again so that He could come to you with healing in His wings. He flies through the skies to your help, and through the skies in His majesty. You find the eternal God to be a dwelling place and underneath are the everlasting arms of Christ. As you begin to live your Christian life, you begin "take His yoke upon you and you learn from Him. You find that He is gentle and humble of heart. You find rest for your soul. You find that His grace has set your heart free. You now are beginning to understand the truth that is found in the Bible, and in believing it, the truth has set you free. You are now able to go out of the stinking barn of worldly thinking and live your life unto God. He makes you to lie down in the green pastures, and you begin to grow fat from spiritually feeding upon His word. You grow fat like a stall-fed calf, as it says in verse 2, because you have seen your need to come to church and learn the way of the Lord in connection with other Christians. You remember the Law of Moses. You remember that you should love God first and foremostly, and then love your neighbor as yourself. You begin to think about your family and your children and what you can do to show them the love of Christ, and to help them. (Leviticus 19: 17 and 18)

I hope that you now see, that if your heart has been changed and turned to God, your heart will then begin to yearn for the salvation of your children and grandchildren. You will begin to pray regularly that Christ might save them. And you will know that God has answered your prayers for their conversion when their heart is turned toward you. Children and young people who are here today listening to me, let me be the Elijah which you may need here this morning. A prophetic word is appropriate from the Scriptures. A great and dreadful day is coming when God will judge the world in righteousness. Will you be ready to face the Lord on that Day? Let me turn you to the truth of your need of Christ. You cannot save yourself; you cannot change and turn your heart to God or to your father, but if you will believe that Christ can do so, and you are willing to have Him save you, surely your heart will be turned, and the curse of a barren, useless, sinful, God-dishonoring, father despising life will be avoided. Fathers, when your children are young, do not be afraid to tell them that the Lord has changed your heart. And don't be afraid then to ask of them, "My son, give me your heart." "I am praying that your heart will be turned to me so that we might learn Christ

together. Before I was converted to Jesus Christ, I saw my own father as an enemy to what I thought was my freedom. I was actually a slave of my own corruption. When I came to Christ, my father became my best friend. His heart had been turned to me before I ever knew that I wanted to be saved. In reading my father's Bible the other day, I happened to come across Proverbs 4: 20 where it says, "My son, attend to my words; incline thine ear unto my sayings." "Let them not depart from thine eyes; keep them in the midst of thine heart." "For they are life unto those who find them, and health to all their flesh." "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." And written in pencil in the margin underneath these verses were these words: "November 14<sup>th</sup>, 1972 – 'Paul's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday." "God bless him and may he come to Christ and be saved." I was not to be saved for almost 4 more years, but the father's heart was turned toward the son, and eventually God would be merciful to the prodigal son. What had turned his heart toward me was that he was converted by reading Spurgeon sermons, and Spurgeon became dad's Elijah to speak to him the word of God and turn his attention to pray for me and to seek my salvation. When the Lord finally opened my eyes to my need of Christ, then my heart was turned to him as well. Children honor your fathers today, but remember, the greatest honor you can ever give to your godly Christian father is for him to know that your heart has turned to Christ for salvation. And then secondly it would be to love and to honor your father, because he loves and honors Christ.