

## I WILL SEND MY MESSENGER

I have had a life-long love affair with the movies. So, when the VCR, and later the DVD player, came out I began collecting a library of movies. However, these days hardly anyone watches movies in those formats. It's become possible to stream virtually any movie ever made on television, especially if you have several streaming services from which to choose. So, a couple of years ago I went through my entire library of DVDs and got rid of most of them. I kept only a handful of movies- just a few that were movies I might watch or movies that I couldn't replace for one reason or another. I previously had close to 200 movies in my library. Today, I have maybe one tenth of that number- maybe less.

A few weeks after going through the exercise of cleaning out the DVD collection, I discovered I had missed a movie. The movie I had missed was the movie "Lost" starring Tom Hanks. That isn't a movie that I would have kept. While I like Tom Hanks, and enjoy his work, I didn't particularly care for that movie. But it was just one DVD and getting rid of it would have been more trouble than it was worth, so I stuck it in my collection.

Now, if you haven't seen the movie, Tom Hanks is an executive for FedEx. His job is to fly all over the globe and consult with local FedEx branches to make them operate more efficiently. Like a lot of corporate executives, he lives his life around his daytimer-around his schedule. At one point in the story, he makes the statement that, "We must never commit the sin of losing time." Then he boards a FedEx plane to go to some country along the Pacific Rim, and while out over the Pacific the plane crashes during a storm. He soon discovers that he is the lone survivor of the crash on a desert island, living like Robison Crusoe. He has altogether too much time on his hands.

At first, he just tries to survive. He discovers how to make fire, learns to find food and fresh water, and makes simple tools to help him survive. Eventually he despairs. There is no way off this island. He determines they will never find him, and he has no hope of rescue. He can't even get off the Island because the he can't cross the reef. The waves are too much against him to cross. He's stuck, and he's going nowhere. He has no hope except to spend a meaningless life wasting away on a desert island all by himself.

Malachi is the last book in the Old Testament. He is probably the last true prophet in the Jewish Faith. Biblical scholars don't agree on exactly who Malachi was, nor do they agree on exactly when the book was written. It could have been anywhere within about a 100-year span. The most likely scenario is that he was a contemporary of Nehemiah and Ezra, which would place him at around the time of the building of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. That Temple was completed in the year 516 BC.

Now, if that's the time in which he lived. Those were difficult times in Palestine. The Jews had just come back from exile. They had been gone for fifty years. They were back home now, but they returned to a shambles. They had to start over with absolutely nothing. It's in this context that Malachi appears.

Malachi literally means my messenger. His message is to point to the Law of God and say, "Here is the path back to God. We should obey the Law." Malachi condemns the sins of the nation Israel. He points to places along the way where the Nation of Israel has strayed from the path. He offers a vision of their faith that is just as much a shambles as the nation around them. They are engaging in sin and not seeking righteousness. Surely things are just as bleak in the Palestine of Malachi's day, as they are on Tom Hanks's desert island. Things are chaotic. It seems like there's no hope. They're just going through the motions- one step at a time- one day at a time.

Now, there are two ways to understand the message that Malachi gives in these four verses I just read. First, as said earlier, the name Malachi literally means messenger. So, this passage may be about Malachi himself. It also could be a foretelling of the coming of John the Baptist. That's how it's been interpreted traditionally in the church. Or it could be a foretelling of the coming of Jesus himself. It may be a foretelling of the second coming of Jesus.

The truth is I don't think it matters who the messenger is. God sends messengers over and over and over throughout history. What matters is that in the midst of his criticism of the nation of Israel, Malachi offers a message of Hope to the people. God has a message for us today. Light is coming. It may be just around the corner, it may be months away or it may be years away, but it's coming.

In the movie *Lost*, the Tom Hanks character is idly sitting on the beach one day, when a large piece of plastic washes up on the shore. It occurs to him that he can fashion a sail from it and attach it to a raft and sail over the reef. If it works, he can get enough momentum to ride over those large waves and get out to sea and escape his dilemma. It's a desperate plan, he might die in the attempt, but at least he has a chance- he has some Hope. A miracle happened, a sail washed ashore and his Faith grew because of it.

In the midst of Malachi's world, Malachi arrives as a messenger to say, as bad as things are, all is not lost. God has sent me as a messenger. In fact, looking back over the course the History of Israel, God sent messengers again and again.

As Christians we look to Christ as the ultimate messenger. He came to tell us that God loves us. He came to tell us that whoever believes in him will have eternal life. He came to tell us that our sins were forgiven. He came to tell us that we should love God and love our neighbor. He came to tell us that it is more blessed to give than to receive. He came to tell us that the greatest among us must be a servant. He came to tell us that we have a future. He came to tell us that he wants us to make disciples. He came to tell us to spread the good news. He offered a message of Hope, and they killed Him for it. They crucified Him for it. But that hope did come three days later after the crucifixion. Three days later Christ rose again. Light came!

That message was continued by Paul and by other saints and even by Christian ministers down to the present day. God has a message for you today. Don't lose hope. The promises Jesus made 2000 years ago are still there today. If we believe in him, we will have eternal life. Our sins can still be forgiven. There's still time for us to love one another and to love our God. God still loves us. It's not too late for us grow in faith and discipleship. It's not too late for good things to happen. It's all still there for you.

Now in your personal life right now you may be feeling down. You may feel that your problems are insurmountable. God loves you. God will provide for you. If it's dark now, light will come. In the church, if you've lost hope. It's dark now, but life will come. In just a few days we will celebrate the birth of the savior.

I know that's what I want. I've learned that when I let my pride run away with me, I still have some growing to do. I'm working on that. I'm going to cling to the Hope in Jesus, because I need it. If you need too, Jesus won't disappoint you. I promise you that.