

**Green for Hope**  
**Mal 3:13-4:6 (GNT)**

**West Baptist Church**  
**27<sup>th</sup> November 2016**

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So, the three festivals: God the Father,  
God the Son,  
God the Spirit  
(the Holy Trinity)

And for this season the first Sunday after Pentecost  
is call Trinity Sunday.

Now to go through all that  
From today, the first Sunday in Advent,  
to Pentecost and Trinity Sundy  
takes about half the year 26 weeks.

The remaning 26 weeks are called ordinary Sundays  
through June, July, August, September,  
and they bring us back to today  
Advent,  
the last Sunday in November,  
or the first Sunday in December  
the beginning of the new Christian year.

So here on the first Sunday in Advent, 2016

We light the first of our four candles,

The candle of Hope,

to be followed by next week by the candle of Peace,

And then the candles of Joy and Love.

Next Sundy I will speak about Peace.

On the following Sunday I will continue to speak about Joy  
and on the fouth Sunday of Advent about Love.

But today we're on about "Hope"

So, let's hear the Scripture. Our reading comes from the very last book in  
the Old Testament the book of the prophet Malachi and from the very end  
of his book chapter 3 verse 13 into chapter 4 and to the end.

Today is the beginning of a new year.

The Christian new year.

The Christian calender begins,

not with the 1<sup>st</sup> of January

but today,

four Sundays our from Christmas Day

with what we call Advent.

Advent is a Latin word that means "Coming"

and the "Coming" we are about is the coming of our Saviour,

the "Coming" of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Advent is the countdown to Chritmas,

one, two, three, four Sundays

and so we arrive at Christmas Day.

n our Christian year, there are three significant festivals:

Christmas,

Easter,

And Pentecost.

Christmas, the festival of the God the Father,

who send the Son

Easter, the festival of God the Son,

who dies and rises again.

Pentecost, the festival of God the Holy Spirit,

who drives the purposes of God towards their consummation.

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**Firstly**, and right the beginning of today’s Scripture  
whom do we meet?  
No hopers.  
People who have lost hope!

Listen to them.

*<sup>14</sup> You have said, ‘It’s useless to serve God.  
What’s the use of doing what he says  
or of trying to show the LORD Almighty  
that we are sorry for what we have done?’*

*<sup>15</sup> As we see it, proud people are the ones who are happy.  
Evil people not only prosper,  
but they test God’s patience with their evil deeds  
and get away with it.’*

Know the feeling?

What’s the use of coming to church,  
trying to do what God wants?

Look at them out there. Hundred, thousands of them, right now  
shopping in the mall,  
paying sport,  
watching movies,  
partying with friends,  
doing odd jobs at home.

They don’t care about God.

You don’t see them coming in here and saying ,  
“Lord, we’ve stuffed up (again),  
we’re sorry for all the wrongs we’ve done  
please forgive us

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and clean us up from the the mess we’ve made.”  
Oh no!! They care nothing for Christian faith,  
and yet thry’re successful.

They get good jobs,  
they make lots of money,  
they live happy and fulfilled lives.  
And often, they’re proud of the fact they can manage on their own  
and don’t need God.

“Church?” they say. “Not for us.”  
“Church is for wimps and weaklings,  
people who need a crutch to get along.”

Some of them even try God’s patience,  
they lie,  
they cheat,  
they steal,  
they rip people off,  
and go laughing all the way  
to the bank.

And get away with it.

So what’s the use of trying to serve God?  
People who’ve given up.  
People with no hope.

**Secondly**, “No hope?” says God

“Don’t you believe it. Get way with it they won’t.”

Look at chapter 4 verses 1 and 2:

*<sup>1</sup> The LORD Almighty says,  
“The day is coming when all proud*

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*and evil people will burn like straw.  
On that day they will burn up,  
and there will be nothing left of them.*

And in that day

<sup>2</sup> *But for you who obey me,  
my saving power will rise on you like the sun  
and bring healing like the sun's rays.  
You will be as free and happy  
as calves let out of a stall.*

Saying “What’s the use?”

Is a terrible thing to say?  
There is hope.

Hope, indeed.

But when we start talking hope we have to be careful.

A Tricky word “Hope”

Listen to our over-the-fence conversation.

“We’re going to have a picnic next Saturday.  
I hope the weather will be fine,”

Will the weather be fine?

We hope it will, but who knows.  
It may be, it may not be.

Or, after an exam:

“I didn’t manage to answer all the questions  
but I’ll still get Merit, I hope.”

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Will I get a Merit?

Well, maybe, but then again, maybe not.  
In our everyday talk hope is an uncertain thing.

Sometimes “I hope” is nothing more than wishful thinking.  
Sometimes we hope when the odds are 80-20 against.

At best, our ordinary sort of hope is 50-50.  
maybe, but then again, maybe not

Bible hope is quite different.

Bible hope is not maybe/maybe not.

Bible hope is hope in God,  
and because hope is in God and his promises,  
it’s not 50-50,  
it’s a sure thing,  
100% certain.

The great example of hope in Scripture is Abram.

“I will make you a great nation” says God.  
“Your descendants will be like the sand of the seashore.”

Which is all very well

but Abraham’s now an old man,  
his wife Sarah is well past the age  
for having children, and there’s no son.

And without a son how can there be descendants?

But, says Paul in Romans

“Abraham believed and hoped against hope,”  
 that is, he kept on hoping  
 when there was no reason for hoping  
 when the ordinary maybe/maybe not kind of hope had given up.

And he was able to keep on hoping  
 because his hope was in God,  
 in whom there is no 50-50.

So if God says,  
 as he does here in Malachi,  
 “*A day is coming.....*”  
 that is a hope certain and sure.

It’s not a maybe/maybe not.  
 It’s guaranteed, one hundred percent.

**Thirdly**, so between now  
 with it’s “What’s-the-use?”  
 Hopelessness between that  
 and the certainty of a coming Day  
 What to do?

Look at verse 16 of chapter 3 of Malachi.

<sup>16</sup> *Then the people who feared the LORD  
 spoke to one another,  
 and the LORD listened and heard what they said.*

*In his presence,  
 there was written down in a book  
 a record of those who feared the LORD*

*and respected him.*

The people who feared the Lord spoke to one another.  
 They even wrote down their names in a book.  
 That is to say they encouraged one another  
 to stop saying “What’s the use”  
 and to hang in there.

Between now and the coming Day  
 they strengthened each other in hope and trust.

And that’s what we’re doing here today:  
 speaking to one another,  
 encouraging one another,  
 Micheal, and Jacob, and Andy, and Wayne,  
 and Thomas, and Aaron, and Libby.

On this first Sunday of Advent 2016,  
 we are encouraging one another to a sure and certain hope.

And to those who do that  
 do you hear what God says? In Malicahi 3:17,  
*They will be my people  
 On the day when I act, they will be very own.  
 I will be merciful to them, as a father if merciful  
 To the son who serves him.*

**Finally**, well, that’s Malachi.  
 But we know more than Malachi.

For him the Day of the Lord,  
 the Day when God would break into the world  
 and set everything right  
                                           was still somewhere down the track.

For us it's different.  
 400 years after Malachi  
 God did break in.  
 Not quite in the way that Malachi thought  
                                           but in the form of what we call Christmas.

Jesus is God breaking into the world,  
                                           God with us.

And when God comes, said Malachi  
                                           his saving power will rise on you like the sun  
                                           and bring healing like the rays of the sun.  
 We who trust Jesus  
                                           Know the sunshine of that salvation  
                                           and the healing and freedom Jesus brings.

But something has changed from Malachi.  
 Malachi thought that the Day of the Lord  
                                           would be a point in time.

But for us, in his mercy,  
                                           God has delayed that final judgement.  
                                           Instead of a point in time,  
                                           he has stretched the point out to a period time,  
                                           a very long period of time,

2000 years and counting  
 to give us opportunity to turn and believe the good news.

Yes, at that first Christmas God broke into the world.  
 The Day of the Lord began,  
                                           and already we know the saving power of God.  
 But there is much more to come.  
                                           And as we come again to Christmas,  
                                           what we hope for  
                                           it is for the fulfilment of all the promises of God.

A story to finish!  
 A pastor is preparing his sermon for Sunday.

In Bounces little daughter,  
                                           "Daddy, can we play?"  
                                           "Not just now, darling.  
                                           I'm right in the middle of working on this sermon.  
                                           How about in an hour or so?"

"Okay," she says.  
 "And when you're finished, Daddy,  
 I'm going to give you a great big hug."

"Oh," says he, "that'll be nice.  
 I'd like that."

The little girl goes to the door,  
                                           does a sudden U-turn,  
                                           comes back

and gives her father a bone-crushing hug.

“Darling,” says the pastor,

“I thought you were going to give me a hug after I finished.”

“Daddy,” she replies,

I just wanted you to know what you have to look forward to.”

That’s it.

In the coming of Jesus

God has hugged us.

And in Jesus, we look forward

To God’s earth-shaking hug to come.

That’s our hope which will rise again.

Sure and certain. Amen!!