

Dec. 18, 2016 Rev. C. Bosch

Preparation for Christ's Coming

Hello Dear Listeners;

“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins.” 1 Peter 4:8

Those words were addressed many years ago to a people scattered throughout what today is called Asia Minor, including the country of Turkey. Written as part of the writer's instructions that they be “*clear-minded and self-controlled*”. Since, as he said, “*The end of all things is near.*” (1 Peter 4:7)

The apostle Peter, who, wrote these words, had certainly been far from clear minded and self-controlled, in his younger years. But Jesus Christ had made him a faithful instrument to proclaim the gospel far and wide.

Now even in ancient times, when a king was about to make his entrance into a city he was preceded by a herald who would announce his coming. That people might prepare to honor that king and welcome him home.

About four hundred years before Jesus was born, God sent the prophet Malachi to his people Israel. He had returned them from captivity and they had rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem.

Yet that didn't mean that their relationship to God was as it should be. It appears they had forgotten the Lord and what he required of them.

Their family life left much to be desired as divorce was prevalent and the sacrifices people brought to the temple were often blemished, rather than being the best they could offer.

Not only that but the people did not have a forward-looking perspective that looked to the coming of the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

The prophet had to teach the people all over again that not only was Christ coming but so was a day of judgment in which the Lord would punish the arrogant and every evildoer.

Malachi prophesied, speaking these words,

See I will send you the prophet Elijah before that dreadful day of gather Lord comes. he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse Malachi 4:5, 6

Now it is so that all God's Words are true and so his prophecies come true. So it was that some four hundred years later, the angel Gabriel appeared to the priest Zechariah while he was busy with the burning of incense at the temple in Jerusalem. That angel told Gabriel some astounding news. Zechariah and his equally elderly wife Elizabeth would receive a son!

A son, and a special one at that. One who would go on as the angel said, "*Before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah*". For the very purpose as Malachi had said those many years before. That many people might be brought back to the Lord and that the hearts of

fathers would again be turned to their children, and, as the angel went on to say, “ *The disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous*” And all this “ *To make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*”

Said Gabriel, This son, who would be named John , which means, The Lord is gracious, “ *Will be great in the sight of the Lord.*” (Luke 1: 14). His greatness would not be found in his wealth or his conquests but in the fact he would be the herald of the Christ, the Son of God, who was preparing to come into the world. He, John would commit his whole life to that Son’s service.

It would not be easy for also in Zechariah’s days, the level of obedience and service to the Lord had fallen very low. Though God’s people had their leaders and the service in the temple went on unhindered there was a lot of corruption and many went only through the motions of joyfully serving the Lord. Family life as well as life in every other segment of society was not something of which the Lord would be proud.

Yet God had not forgotten his people. How could he? Though they were so often undeserving he had made a *covenant* with them in which he promised to be their Father and to send His One-and-Only Son to save so many of them. So He saw to it that there were still some, be it not many, who lived a God-fearing, righteous life. Zechariah and Elizabeth, says Luke in ch. 1: 6 were such blessed people. Not that they were faultless for when Zechariah had received the promise of this Jesus-heralding son he didn’t believe the angel. As a result the Lord took his ability to speak away until their son was born. (see Luke 1: 64)

No, John, or John the Baptist, as he came to be known was not the incarnation or duplicate of the prophet Elijah. When Malachi had spoken of the Lord, sending the prophet Elijah God meant that the one who was coming would, like Elijah, be a forthright, dedicated, courageous prophet. Elijah had once confronted king Ahab who had consented to the murder of his neighbor Naboth while grabbing his vineyard, So John the Baptist would speak to king Herod about his adulterous affair with his brother Philip's wife Herodias.

Now when God the Son was about to appear as the Redeemer, he required that people should "prepare" themselves for his coming. "People" yes of course, *His* people, with whom he had entered into that special relationship of promise and obligation called covenant. Yet not only them but all who would hear the gospel. All whose lives could certainly be changed by the amazing grace of God, that precious gift whereby God generated faith in hearts of men, women, children, rulers, paupers, the world over yesterday and today.

That instead of having lifeless, broken, proud or just plain morose families, without a spark of Christianity whatsoever, there might be hope. Hope, and joy, and obedience to the Lord that bows before his Word. Families, Christian families, where a father recognizes and honors his leading position. Families in which children are embraced as gifts from the Lord . Nurtured, brought up in godliness and disciplined in patient love.

It was necessary in Malachi's day. It was essential in John the Baptist's time. And it was Jesus, the Christ who could "*Turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous.*" That too is the work of

God the Holy Spirit and it is also for this that Jesus died and was raised and lives.

For we are not there yet! He comes again, to judge the living and the dead and to make all things new. Look around, consider the confusion concerning the right and blessed way of raising children and taking care of a family today. How many broken homes, how extensive the confusion regarding gender. How much bending and changing God's good rules for healthy, Christian authority in the home and the community. How much foolishness that passes for wisdom but isn't.

Soon it will be Christmas, D. V. Soon there will be bells jingling and mistletoe beckoning. Yet all the "Ho, ho, ho's" in the world can't hide the fact there is much brokenness and injustice and loneliness in the world.

But, "*God so loved the world that he sent his One and Only Son.*" The herald John went before Him. Apostles's followed, after him. Today there are still those churches which honor Him and families that are bound together in Christian love and faithfulness. Children who delight to do God's will and fathers and mothers who set the right God-fearing tone in their families.

Dear listeners, do you find yourself removed, far off, from the Lord and His Word as well as from Christ and His church? May you be brought back, brought near to Him who has not removed his love from the world, nor his desire to draw you close.

Seek him today. Find him in his powerful Word. Find him there where he is proclaimed in truth, in faithfulness and in wisdom that comes

from above. Yes, seek him while he may be found and go on your way, rejoicing! For Christ's sake. Amen. And thanks so much for listening!