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A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

Reading: Malachi 1:1-14

40. THE BOOK OF MALACHI

President Grover Cleveland came home from church one Sunday and his wife asked him what the message was about. He simply answered, “**Sin.**” His wife asked, “*Well, what did the preacher say about it ?*” He answered, “*I don’t remember, but he was against it.*” Did you notice that Malachi’s ministry was called a “*burden,*” ? (1:1) The word that is used was used to speak of an animal carrying a heavy burden for its master. The message that Malachi delivered was heavy was on his heart. Moreover it was “*the word of the Lord.*” It was not Malachi’s message. Malachi was but the delivery boy. His name means “*My messenger.*” Notice again, it was God’s message to **Israel**, for after the captivity ended, the nation was called Israel once again. *Now the message that Malachi brought was not sent to comfort but to convict. It was not a message of commendation, but one of condemnation. It was not a message that delighted the people, but discomfited the people.*

Malachi was called to perform a difficult and dangerous task. It was his duty to rebuke the people for the sins they were committing against God and against one another and to call them to return to the Lord. *Now the book of Malachi is a small book with a big message. The prophet*

Malachi is a minor prophet with a major message. Now by way of introduction let me say some things about the book of Malachi.

1. It is a Closing Book: It is the last book of the Old Testament. It is the 39th book of the Bible, but the last of the Old Testament. It is the last book of the Old Testament era and it’s the beginning of a four hundred period in which God gave no fresh revelation. With this last work in the Minor Prophets God closes the Old Testament canon.

2. It is a Connecting Book: The Book not only concludes the Old Testament but also connects the Old to the New. The book tells us of the messenger that would prepare the way of the Lord and in the New Testament we see that messenger, John the Baptist.

3. It is a Coexistent Book: The prophecy of Malachi sits side by side with the history of Nehemiah. The book of Ezra is all about the rebuilding of the Temple, the book of Nehemiah is all about the rebuilding of the walls. Things progressed rapidly under Nehemiah. The walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt and spiritual renewal took place. But Nehemiah was called back to Persia on business and was absent from Jerusalem from 432-425 BC (Neh 2:6 5:14 13:6) And it’s probable that Malachi conducted his ministry during those years. The sins described in this book are certainly found in (Neh 13:10-30) *So the burden of Malachi and the building of Nehemiah should be considered side by side.* Nehemiah sought to rebuild a city and Malachi sought to recall a people. Nehemiah focuses upon the condition of a place, whereas, Malachi

focuses upon the condition of a people.

4. It is a Contemporary Book: A prophet preaching to people who lived 2400 years ago surely has no meaning or value for us, but it does. Yes, Malachi's message is dated, but it is not out of date. While times have changed many things have not. Are we living in an age of crippling doubt ? So it was in Malachi's day. Are we living in a time when God's people are careless and casual about the commands of the Lord ? So it was in Malachi's day. Are we living in a day when divorce is rife ? So it was in Malachi's day ? Are we living a day when God's people treat stewardship lightly ? So it was in Malachi's day ? This message may have been first delivered by an Old Testament Prophet but it still needs delivering by a New Testament preacher. For it is a contemporary as the day it was given.

5. It is a Challenging Book: You see, the voice of the prophet was only heard in Israel in times of national apostasy. The prophets were sometimes foretellers who give glimpses of thing to come. Always they were forthtellers inspired by the Lord to denounce prevalent sins and call God's people to repentance. Malachi is a call for God's people to examine the realness of their spiritual life and the sinfulness of their personal life. Malachi predicts a returning Lord and a ready people. Now having said all that I want you see here six pictures of the people and the priests. Notice here they are,

(1) DENYING GOD'S LOVE (1:1-5)

“ I have loved you, saith the Lord,” (1:2) “ Oh,” they respond *“ Wherein hast thou loved us,”* prove it. Denying God's love is the beginning of unbelief and disobedience. One of the features of this book is the expression *“ Wherein,”* (1:2 6, 7, 2:17, 3:7, 3:8, 3:13,) You see, Malachi sets forth his prophecy in the form of a dispute employing the question and answer method. So the Lord's accusations against His people were met by cynical questions. Their answers reveal that they felt they were doing what was right and doing nothing wrong. Their answers said in effect, *“ What do you mean ? We are not guilty of these things.” “ Wherein hast thou loved us ?”*

Prove it. Oh, here they were. They had come back from Babylon and with blood, sweat, and tears rebuilt the temple, Jerusalem and other cities. They had turned their backs on centuries of idolatry and reinstituted the worship of God. But had God rewarded them ? No. Had He restored the kingdom ? Had He fulfilled the glorious promises of many a prophet ? No Had He sent the Messiah whose coming had been prophesied by Isaiah and Zechariah ? No. Then how could it be said that God loved them. You see, they denied God's love and so the Lord points to three phases of His love for them. Notice,

(a) ***GOD'S LOVE IN THE PAST:***

Look if you will at (1:2-3) That statement has troubled some people. Paul quotes this in (Rom 9:10-13) to prove God's electing grace for both Israel and all who trust Christ for salvation. But the verb *“ hate,”* must not be defined as a positive expression of the wrath of God. You

see, God's love for Jacob was so great, that in comparison His actions toward Esau looked like hatred. Do you remember that Jacob loved Rachel so much that his relationship to Leah seemed like hatred ? (Gen 29:20, 30-31 Deut 21:15-17) Do you recall what Christ said to would be disciples ? “ *If any man come to me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also he cannot be my disciple.* ” (Lk 14:26 Matt 10:37) Christ was using the word “ *hate*, ” in a similar way. You see, our love for Christ may move us to do things that appear like hatred to those we love. Someone said to Dr. Arno C. Gaebelein, the gifted Hebrew Christian leader of a generation ago. “ *I have a serious problem with Malachi 1:3 where God says, Esau have I hated.* ” Dr. Gaebelein replied, “ *I have a greater problem with Malachi 1:2 where God says, Jacob have I loved.* ”

My centuries have come and gone since the Lord spoke to Israel through Malachi, but God says to us the church today, “ *I have loved you.* ” The words are in the perfect tense meaning that God had loved them in the past and He loved them in the present. Are you denying God's love for you ? Are your circumstances such that you wonder if God truly loves you ? Is the devil telling you that He does not ? My will you think hard and long about the “ *I*, ” and the “ *you*, ” ? I mean the “ *I*, ” is none other than the all powerful, all knowing, all present God. And the “ *you*, ” refers to people who are undeserving, unclean and unworthy. Will you listen to it again and marvel, “ *I have loved you.* ” How ? By choosing us in Christ before the world began. (Eph 1:4) But we cannot

peer into the councils of eternity to see the everlasting love of God so where do we look ? To the Cross of the Lord Jesus. And as we look there, we must exclaim, God loved me so much that He nailed His Son to the cross to bear the penalty for my sins. “ *Amazing love how can it be that thou my God shouldst die for me.* ” (a)

(b) GOD'S LOVE IN THE PRESENT:

You see, God had delivered both Edom and Judah into the hands of the Babylonians. The Jews he brought back and blessed. As for Edom God had laid “ *his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness.* ” Still Edom showed pride and self will, “ *Edom saith, we are impoverished but we will return and build the desolate places.* ” The result was God's curse “ *They shall build built I will throw down.* ” Was this not what the prophecy of Obadiah was all about ? Why when the Babylonians came to take Jerusalem the Edomite's cried “ *Hooray the Jews are finished.* ” (Ps 137:7-9) Since that day Edom was under God's judgment, but Israel was under God's protection. I mean do you not experience the tokens of His love every day ? The truths of His Word, the fellowship of His people, the wonder of His worship, the guidance of His hands, the provision of His strength, are these not simply expressions of His ongoing love ? (a) (b)

(c) GOD'S LOVE IN THE FUTURE:

For look at (1:5) Israel was God's chosen instrument by means of which He intended to be magnified in the sight of all mankind. No doubt there is a hint here of millennial

glory when the Lord will receive pure worship throughout the world and His name will be honoured everywhere.

(1:11 Is 2:24 Micah 4:1-3) But what love is this. He loved us in the past, He loves us in the present but He never will cease from loving us. He will love us throughout the unending cycles of eternity. My do you think I should ever stand up and say “ *Wherein hast thou loved me ?* I’m one of the folk chosen by the Lord in Christ before the foundation of the world. Why did God choose a thing like me ? Because He loved me. And He sent His Son from heaven to the cross of shame to bear my sins because He loved me. And He came through His Word by His Spirit and met me on the road of life and saved me because He loved me. “ ***He loves me so, He loves me so, He died because He loves me so.***” (1)

(2) DESPISING GOD’S NAME 1:6-14

The Lord now turns to the priests who should have been the spiritual leaders of the land and He accuses them of despising His name. (1:6) But the priests still did not get it. So the Lord explains in (1:7) “ *Bread,*” speaks of the animal sacrifices offered to God. The “ *table,*” speaks of the brazen altar on which these sacrifices were offered. Do you see that Malachi uses the word “ *polluted,*” twice ? It means to “ *desecrate or defile.*” You see, they will were,

(a) *Giving the WORST not the BEST:*

Look at (1:8) Do you recall God’s Word in all of this ? God said speaking of animal sacrifice, “ *But whatsoever hath a blemish that shall ye not offer, for it shall not be*

acceptable for you. Ye shall not offer unto the Lord that which is bruised or crushed or broken or cut,”

(Lev 22:20-25) Still again God said, “ *And if there be any blemish therein, as if it be lame, or blind, or have any ill blemish, thou shalt not sacrifice it unto the Lord thy God.*” (Deut 15:21) Yet these priests were ignoring what the law said and offering animals that were “ *blind, lame and sick,*” those the owners were glad to get rid of. John Benton says, “ **Sacrifice is the giving up of something we genuinely value in order to express our devotion to God. But the ‘sacrificing,’ of diseased animals was like offering someone as a birthday present the contents of our dustbin.**”

Giving the worst not the best. (Mk 14:8) Now tell me, what are you offering the Lord ? What are you giving to the Lord ? In what way are you worshiping the Lord ?

G. Campbell Morgan says, “ *Sacrilege is centered in offering God something which costs nothing because you think God is worth nothing.*” My are we giving our best to God in worship ? Do you arrive with a heart that is prepared and eager to worship ? Do you concentrate on what you are doing in public worship ? Do you allow your thoughts to wander ? Do you give the ministry of God’s Word a careful hearing ? Or have we allowed our familiarity with the things of God to dull our appreciation of them ? Have we just lost the wonder of it all ? (a)

(b) *Giving the LAST not the FIRST:*

God was just getting the leftovers. That’s why He says in (1:8) If they had offered these defective beasts to their

governor he would have rejected them but anything will do for the Lord. *Is the Lord coming in for the leftovers in your life ?* If you have money left at the end of the week you'll tip the Lord. If you have energy left you might decide to serve Him. If you have time left you might come out to worship Him. My we should give the Lord the best in terms of quality. The Lord only wants unblemished lambs on His altar. If it's a reject it is not good enough for the Lord. (a) (b)

(c) Giving the *CHEAP* not the *COSTLY*:

The people would bring an unblemished lamb to offer as a sacrifice at the temple and the priests would reason, “ *Its does not make sense to slaughter this perfectly good lamb. After all it's just going to be burned on the altar. Let's sell it for a decent price and substitute a slightly blemished lamb that's cheaper. Good stewardship demands it.* ” But do you see what God thought of it all ? (1:10) As far as God was concerned it would be better that the doors of the temple were shut and the fires of the altar put out than this charade continuing. Do you remember what David said ? “ *Neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing.* ” (2 Sam 24:24) My are you giving to the Lord your best ? Are you striving to give Him the first ? And does your giving cost you something ? They were (1) (2)

(3) DEFILING GOD'S COVENANT 2:1-16

Now remember a covenant is an agreement between two or more people in which each pledges to do or not to do

certain things. In (2:1-9) there is brought before us,

(a) *THE LEVITICAL COVENANT*:

In the Old Testament priests were descendants of Moses brother Aaron who was from the tribe of Levi. They were called Levites and their job was to serve in the Tabernacle. (Ex 6:16-20 Num 26:59) They were to be set apart for two primary purposes to sacrifice animals and to serve the Lord. If you at look at (2:5 Deut 10:8-9) God gave Levi a wonderful covenant “ *of life and peace,* ” because he feared the Lord. But the fear of God was conspicuously missing in the awful priests of Malachi's day. In (2:5-7) we have the ideal priest. He fears the Lord and obeys Him. He receives the Word and teaches it. He seeks to turn others from sin. But the priests in Malachi's day actually led people astray (2:8) and defiled the holy covenant. (Deut 17:9-11) In Moses day the Levites had a belief that behaved. In Malachi's day their ministry had degenerated into a well paying job with fringe benefits and social security.

My as John Phillips says, “ *professionalism in the things of God nearly always degenerates into dead orthodoxy or faith denying liberalism.* ” So what was God going to do with them ? Well, look at (3:2) for He says “ *I will curse your blessings.* ” The word simply meant “ *to ban.* ” They would be banned from being blessed of the Lord. In fact the Lord would remove them from His service. (2:3) Isn't it wonderful to realize that Christ bore the curse for us at Calvary ? (Gal 3:13) I believe I will never be cursed yet the Lord can cast me away. I don't

mean that I will be lost again. I will never be lost again, for I am eternally secure in Christ, but He can set me aside. He can remove His blessing. The Lord can get on without you or me. Do you recall that sad refrain in the book of Judges ? A warning about Samson, who lost his power. The Bible says “ *And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before and shake myself. And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him.* ” (16:20) Is that where you are spiritually ? Under the discipline of God ? The blessing of God is being withheld from your life because your heart is not right with Him. (a) But notice there was,

(b) THE MATRIMONIAL COVENANT:

The question “ *Why be faithful to God ?* ” soon became “ *Why be faithful to your wife ?* ” especially when your wife gets older and loses her appeal. Why not trade her in for a newer model ? Well, this is what they were doing in Malachi’s day. Men were divorcing the wives of their youth for newer Canaanite models. And this practice was an abomination in God’s sight. (2:11) Do you notice the word “ *treacherously,* ” ? It appears five times in the passage . (2:19, 11, 14, 15, 16) It means “ *to betray a trust, to be unfaithful to a commitment.* ” (Deut 7:3 Neh 13:23-26) Is that not what is happening all around us today ? According to the latest polls in the United Kingdom the percentage of Christian marriages that are ending in divorce is around 50% about the same as the national average. Someone has said that fifty years ago “ *Parents were apt to have lots of kids but nowadays kids are apt to have lots of parents.* ” My over these past

few years the Western World has witnessed an epidemic of divorce. Probably most of us here have family or friends who have gone through divorce. And I have no desire to heap guilt or condemnation on those who have already been traumatized by divorce. We cannot undo the past. We cannot unscramble the egg. But what is the truth concerning marriage ? It is this. **That God hates divorce.** Do you see what (2:16) says “ *He hateth putting away.* ” Why ? Because marriage is a covenant. (2:14) The major characteristic of a biblical marriage involved the parties obligating themselves to an unalterable and permanent relationship for life. Now what makes this covenant so serious is this. God is the witness of it. Do you see what (2:14) says ? “ *Because Jehovah was witness between thee and the wife of thy youth.* ”

His Hebrew wife was the one with whom he stood before the priest and covenanted to be faithful and true and God looked on as a witness. Do you remember when Diana Princess of Wales was recounting Prince Charles adultery with his future wife, she said these words in a television interview, citing the reason for the failure of her marriage. “ *There were three in our marriage.* ” Do you remember that ? Well, there are three in every true marriage, and the third person is not the mistress, the third person is God. Because God takes this covenant seriously and views it as lifelong. The sentiment that so often we hear, “ *I don’t love her or him anymore,* ” is not valid. For God says, “ *learn to love each other as I have commanded you.* ” I

Do you know what a lasting marriage is built on ? Not on romantic love, it’s built on commitment. Love in the best

and highest sense is not a feeling but a commitment to a person through thick and thin, the good times and the bad times, in sickness and in health, from good looks to not so good looks. *Commitment is the glue that holds the marriage together during the inevitable times of stress.*

What about your home ? What about your hearth ? What about your heart ? (1) (2) (3) Something else,

(4) DOUBTING GOD'S JUSTICE 2:17-3:6

You see, when Judah returned to the land, she expected to experience prosperity, and glory just like the days of Solomon. But this was not to be the case. In fact she found just the opposite. Her wicked enemies lived in prosperity while Judah suffered privation and this caused the people to question whether God was holy and just. Their cry was “ *Where is the God of justice ?*” And Malachi's response was “ *He is coming.*” Look at,

(a) THE COMPLAINT OF THE PEOPLE:

They said “ *every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord,*” the leaders reasoned that God prospered the wicked and left His own righteous people in poverty, therefore the wicked must be considered good in God's eyes. They even questioned whether God was available to take action against the wicked. They asked “ *Where is the God of justice ?*” I mean their words were cynical and skeptical, “ *We came back to the land, rebuilt the temple, and restored the worship,*” they said, “ *but look at the difficulties we're experiencing. Why isn't God keeping His*

promises ? Where are the blessings He promised through the prophets ? Where is the Messiah who was to come ?”

They had become disappointed with God. He had not done for them what they had hoped. They thought that God had let them down. Now I trust that you've never said such things, but I know that you have thought such things. We all have. You thought that when you trusted Christ, He would give you an abundant life and relief from some major problem's, instead you seem to have more problems that you did before. You didn't use to struggle against sin, but now it's a daily battle that you often lose. You didn't use to worry about pleasing God about your use of time and money but now you feel guilty about squandering those things.

In fact, now you feel guilty about things you didn't even know where sin before you became a Christian. *Have you prayed a lot about that situation, about that unsaved one ? But rather than things getting better, have they got worse ?* Are you wondering, “ *Does it pay to serve God ? What difference does it make if I follow the Lord or not ? Where is the God of justice ?*” (a) But notice,

(b) THE COMING OF THE LORD:

The word “ *behold,*” indicates that something startling and unusual is on the verge of taking place. God promises to send His messenger John the Baptist who will announce the Messenger of the Covenant, the Lord Jesus. Do you recall that Christ did come into the temple and expose its sins and purify its court's ? (Jn 2:13-21 Matt 21:12) Why in His ministry He revealed the sins of the

religious leaders so much so that they finally crucified Him. *So this prophecy was partially fulfilled in His First Coming but it will be ultimately fulfilled at His Second Coming.* For do you see that word “*suddenly*,” ? It is found 25 times in the Old Testament and in every case except one (2 Chron 29:36) it is connected with disaster and judgment. My do you know what that equates to ? Another occasion spoken of in Jeremiah as “ *the time of Jacob’s trouble*,” (Jer 30:7) Jacob of course being Israel, a day when Israel will be troubled and judged, and it’s referred to in the New Testament as “ *the day of the Lord*,” or “ *the tribulation*.” (Matt 24:21) My after the church has been raptured, there will be seven years of tribulation, through which the nation of Israel will be purged and refined (Ezek 20:33-38) then the Lord Jesus will come in His second advent and judge the world, slay Israel’s enemies, and begin a reign of a thousand years of righteousness on the earth.

“ *Where is the God of judgment ?* ” sneered the scoffers. “ *Here He is*,” says Malachi as he declared the word of the Lord. (3:5-6) The only reason the skeptics of Malachi’s day were not destroyed was the immutability of God. “ *For I am the Lord*,” God was simply being true to His righteous character, true to His covenant promises. If God had not been unchanging He would have given the skeptics what they asked for, judgment. My could it be that you are mocking God ? Disobeying God ? That you are saying, “ *Where is the God of judgment ?* Can I tell you, “ *He is coming*,” coming to bring you to judgment.

(5) DISOBEYING GOD’S WORD 3:7-12

You see, they were robbing God of the tithes that were due to Him. (3:8) “ ***Will a man rob God ?*** ” What a question. My are you robbing God ? Are you failing to give to God that which He requires ? Have you never leant the blessing of giving to God ? Are you among the many believers who are takers but no givers ? Look here at,

(a) ***THE PRINCIPLE OF GIVING:***

Someone says “ *But this is Old Testament.* ” (Matt 23:33) Are you not happy with the tithe ? Are you saying “ *there is no express command to tithe given to the church in the New Testament ?* ” My are you suggesting for one moment that the “ *grace giving*,” that Paul talks about in the Corinthian letter is less than ten percent ? Actually, the law of Moses prescribed several tithes that would have amounted to somewhere between 20 to 25 percent. (Lev 27:30-33, Num 18:20-21 Deut 12:17-18 14:22, 28, 29) One thing is sure when a Christian grows in grace, he grows in giving. Yet I wonder is God saying to us, “ *Ye have robbed me.* ” (3:8) William McDonald has made this very piercing statement regarding the lack of stewardship in the church of Jesus Christ today. “ ***We rob God in this sense, often times the Lord’s own money is not available to Him.*** ” (Deut 8:18) Can you imagine the possibility that God’s own money is not available to Him, because the believers in Malachi’s day, our day are so tight fisted that they won’t let go of it and allow the Lord to use it. (a)

(b) ***THE PROMISE OF BLESSING:***

For God says “ *Prove me now herewith,*” this is the only time in the Bible when God says, “ *prove me, put me to the test.*” God says that when we open up our wallet He opens us His window. You see, giving is not only God’s way of raising money. It is God’s way of growing Christians. My tithing is not God’s way of getting something from you. It is God’s way of giving something to you. But let me hasten to add that God’s blessing is to be the result of tithing not the reason for tithing. It pays to give but if you give because it pays it won’t pay. Mary Crowley, who founded Home Interiors, Inc., was a devout Christian who used her wealth as well as her talents to extend the kingdom of God and help others. At one time she had very little materially. She did not even have an car. She and her two children walked faithfully every Sunday to the services at the First Baptist Church of Dallas in Texas.

Members of the congregation often picked them up and gave them a ride to church. During those years, she faithfully tithed her meager income to the Lord. In time, her home decorating talents and business mind resulted in exceeding wealth. When prosperity came she continued her faithful stewardship. She wore around her neck two small gold shovels. One was larger than the other. When people inquired about their meaning she would answer, “ *The little shovel is mine. I can shovel it out. The big one is God’s. He shovels it in ten times faster.*” But can you see the state Israel were in ? (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

(6) DISREGARDING GOD’S CHARACTER 3:13-4:6

You see, they were always questioning what God said. “ *Wherein, wherein, wherein.*” And now they are at it again. You see, there is

(a) THE QUESTION OF DEVOTION:

They were saying it’s vain to serve God but the proud are blessed and happy. Bless God there was a minority who encouraged one another by saying, “ *Don’t listen to these scoffers. Don’t give up serving the Lord. He will reward those who serve Him and He will judge those who scorn Him.*” Who are you with ? Have you said “ *Serving you Lord, is a waste of time ?*” Is this why you are no serving Him ?

(b) THE QUESTION OF DISTINCTION:

Malachi mentions the word “ *day,*” 4 times in six verses. He describes this day in (4:5) as “ *the great and dreadful day of the Lord.*” *A day of burning for the rebellious* (4:1) and *a day of blessing for the remnant.* (4:2) But there is another distinction here. Do you see the title ? Look at it in (4:2) When He returns visibly to the earth Christ will be like the noonday sun breaking through the gloom of the dark night of the world. But before the sun arises, the morning star will appear. And Christ says, “ *I am the bright and morning star.*” Today we know the morning star as the planet Venus, second planet from the sun and the brightest object in the night sky. Depending on where it is in its orbital path, the morning star can be seen to rise as much as three hours before the sun. My there will two stages of the appearance of the Lord Jesus.

First He will appear as the morning star coming for His own. Then He at a later period He will appear as the shining sun coming in all His power and glory visible to all the world. Now here's the question, *how do we get ready for a Coming Lord ?*

(c) THE QUESTION OF DUTY:

How are we to live in the light of these cataclysmic events ? Well, according to (4:4) *God's Word should regulate our thinking* and according to (4:5) *God's Work should dominate our living*. (Rev 11:1) Thus the Old Testament ends. At the end of the first book of the Old Testament we read of a "**coffin,**" and at the end of the final book of the Old Testament we read of a "**curse,**" indicating that until then all was failure. But at end of the New Testament we read " *And there shall be no more curse.*" (Rev 21:3) Who makes the difference ? Jesus Christ. And we need to " *Occupy, serve till He comes.*"

**Perhaps today, the clouds will part asunder
Reveal a glory, brighter than the sun
And we shall view with transport, joy and wonder
The Hope of Earth, and Heaven's Beloved One**