

Pastor Don Nelson

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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“THE WORD”**  
**John 1:1-9, 14-15**

- Would a volunteer find Malachi 1:1 and read it in a strong voice? **“An oracle [or, “A prophecy”]: The word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi.”**

There should be a footnote there. What does the Hebrew name Malachi mean? It means **“my messenger.”**

**“The word of the LORD”** comes **“through”** his messenger. Everything that follows is a remarkable dialogue. YHWH repeatedly speaks directly to Israel, then he either quotes or implies their anticipated response.

{Mal 1:2} **“I have loved you,” says the LORD. “But you ask, ‘How have you loved us?’”**

{Mal 1:6} **“‘You priests ... show contempt for my name.’ But you ask, ‘How have we shown contempt for your name?’”**

{Mal 2:17} **“You have wearied the LORD with your words. ‘How have we wearied him?’ you ask.”**

And so forth. It gets intense! The Living God vents his disappointment, his hurt, his anger. Still, he is engaged with his people in a lively give and take. He is fully present.

Then, bam! He suddenly stops talking.

Malachi concludes the Hebrew Scriptures. And while a lot of books do not appear in chronological order, many scholars contend that this one does. Along with Nehemiah, it was written around 433 B.C.

Others assert that Joel is the last book but the evidence is open to interpretation, and even they admit it could not have been written any later than 430 B.C. If Joel is newer, it is by 3 years at the most.

YHWH is at his most interactive in Malachi. He doesn’t just speak to his people, he gets in their faces – and then he hits the mute button.

God is silent for 433 years. Forty-three point three decades! Four and one-third centuries!

Chew on that number. Let it sink in. Feel the sheer weight of it. Four hundred and thirty-three years!

‽ How many people were born and died in the silence? How many prayed and wept into the silence? How many sought guidance or sustenance or mercy or rescue and were answered with silence?

Not that we have heard the audible voice of God ringing in our physical ears! However, if you are in Christ he has spoken into you. For me, it is generally a whisper; but at a few critical junctures it has been loud and clear.

{Heb 10:15; I Co 2:9-10; Jn 16:8, 13; Mt 10:20} That is the Holy Spirit talking. He **“testifies to us about”** God, “[revealing]” things that **“no eye has seen ... no ear has heard ... no human mind has conceived.”** He convicts us of sin and “[guides us] **into ... the truth.**” At key moments, he even “[gives]” us **“what to say.”**

It is not my intent to overstate the case. The Spirit’s voice can be thunderous or faint. He uses many words or few or none at all. His messages are unambiguous or puzzling. Nevertheless, since

Pentecost he has indwelt every member of the body of Christ.

But before then he descended only on select individuals for limited periods of time. Once the mission was achieved, he withdrew from them.

“**The word**” came “**through Malachi**” – then the LORD clammed up. No more prophets, no more whispers, no more inward nudges. Not a peep for 433 years!

☑ {J.G. Whittier; T. Hood; A. Bierce} It wasn't a companionable silence. God was, to borrow a simile or three, “**Silent as despair,**” “**Silent as a ghost,**” “**Silent as the slain.**”

■ Please turn with me to John 1:1-5 and absorb the impact of the Good News!

**<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was with God in the beginning. <sup>3</sup> Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and that life was the light of all people. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.**

■ And down to verse 14: “**The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.**”

? What is the Holy Spirit saying through John?

★ First, Christ “**the Word**” breaks the silence.

In the past, Messiah broke God's silence on a cosmic scale by his physical Incarnation, his illustrative actions, and his articulated words.

{Rev 3:20} Now he breaks silence at the personal level by his Spirit and Scripture. “**Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them, and they with me.**” This is not primarily about conversion (it was written to people who were already Christians!); it is an invitation to ongoing, intimate *conversation*.

? Are we opening the door to “**the Word**” who breaks the silence?

★ Second, Christ “**the Word**” communicates life.

☑ {“The Sounds of Silence”} Some words do not fill up; they hollow out. Some do not build up; they destroy. Some do not connect; they cut off. Some do not break the silence; they make it worse. We have got “**People talking without speaking / People hearing without listening**”.

{Jn 6:63} But not Jesus! “**The words** [he speaks] ... **are full of the Spirit**” (with a capital “S”) “**and life.**”

{Jn 6:68} Whoever has ears to hear confirms that this is true and real. We echo Simon Peter who declared, “**Lord ... You have the words of life.**”

? Are we receiving his communication of life?

★ Third, Christ “**the Word**” reveals the Speaker, the One who sent him.

{Luke 6:45} Words do not spring into being by themselves. They are generated by living beings. **“Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.”**

If we could have access to every word a person thought, spoke, and wrote we would know them, more or less. We could still easily misread them; yet if we listened humbly and with compassion, we would know them truly.

{Col 1:15} As human words reveal the human speaker, so **“The Son”** reveals the Father. He **“is the image”** ({Amp} **“the exact likeness,” “the visible representation”**) **“of the invisible God.”**

? Are we getting to know God through the intellectual, spiritual, and relational study of his **“Word”** Jesus?

Silence kills, but the Word breaks the silence! He communicates life and reveals God to us.

■ That isn't all the Holy Spirit is saying. John 1:6: **“There was a man sent from God whose name was John.”** (To clarify, the human author of this Gospel is John the Apostle. The man he is describing is John the Baptist.)

■ Verses 7-9: <sup>7</sup> **“He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. <sup>8</sup> He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. <sup>9</sup> The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.”**

■ And v 15a: **“(John testified concerning him.)”**  
John was not **“the Word”** with a capital “W.” He could not be. He was a created being, like us. Even so, YHWH made him to be **“a witness”** to that **“Word.”**

Did you know that baptizing people was not John's reason for being? His purpose was to help Israel receive the Messiah.

John **“came as a witness.”** The Gospels vividly depict his lifestyle and his work of baptism, yet they devote considerably more text to his proclamation.

{Mt 3:2} **“John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness ... saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’”**

{Mt 3:7-10} He alerted to religious leaders **“produce good fruit”** or **“be cut down and thrown into the fire.”**

{Lk 3:11} He urged those who had **“two shirts [to] share with the one who [had] none, and anyone who [had] food to do the same.”**

{Lk 3:13} He exhorted tax collectors, **“Don't collect any more than you are required to.”**

{Lk 3:14} He warned soldiers, **“Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely.”**

{Mk 1:7-8} He announced, **“After me comes the one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie ... he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”**

{Jn 1:32, 34, 36} He testified that **“the Spirit [came] down ... and [remained] on”** Jesus. And he proclaimed, **“Look, the Lamb of God!”**

How do the synoptics summarize his mission? All three quote Isaiah 40:3, identifying him as **“a voice of one calling in the wilderness.”** In addition, Mark

{1:2} quotes Malachi 3:1: **“I will send my messenger ahead of you.”**

Who was John? He was **“a witness,” “a messenger,” “a voice.”** He was not **“the Word,”** but he broke the silence, communicated life, and revealed God in service to the Word.

There will never be another John the Baptist, and that is fine! Our neighbors don't need him. They need *us*.

Most of them have heard of Jesus; but have they heard his voice? Have they understood what God is saying to them through the Word made flesh? Are they in real conversation with him? For many, the answer is No.

The Sovereign One has put you and me here in 2017 to fulfill his good purposes.

Silence kills. It kills when it is outright, and it is killed when it hides beneath cacophonous noise.

? Will we give **“voice”** to **“the Word”**? Will you be his **“messenger”**? Will I be his **“witness”**?

If we are in Christ, his Spirit is equipping us to break the silence, communicate life, and reveal the Living God. We can do this in word and in deed.

- **<sup>1</sup> In the beginning was the Word ... <sup>4</sup> In him was life, and that life was the light of all people. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.**

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**concerning that light, so that through him all might believe.**

**<sup>14</sup> The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”**

**<sup>15</sup> (John testified concerning him. ....)**

John 1 is the word of the Lord.