

Malachi 3:1-4

Malachi was the last of the Old Testament prophets. For 4,000 years God's people had been waiting for their promised Messiah Who would come to crush the head of Satan and free mankind from sin and its curse. Through the ages God sent His prophets to say, "Your Savior is coming. He is coming, He is coming." Now 9/10 of the watching and waiting was over. Though 400 years still remained, Malachi's words were to sustain the hope for the Savior and to prepare God's people for that coming. The Word of God that Malachi spoke said, "*Look, here comes the Lord.*" He comes to condemn and He comes to save.

The verses preceding our text reveal that the Jews of Malachi's day were whining and grumbling against God. They said the Lord was unjust, that they deserved better. They, the ones obedient to God's Law, suffered while the wicked prospered. We hear similar grumbling and scoffing today when people say, "How can a just God allow so much trouble in the world."

The prophecy of Malachi told the people that the Lord would indeed come and set things straight but they might not like what happened when He came. You see the people had lost sight of their real need of a Savior from sin. They imagined the Lord was to come to reward them for being good and that He would come to punish their enemies, the gentiles and make Israel a world power. They failed to see or accept the seriousness of their sin and the terrible guilt that they had before God. Their lack of repentance and lack of desire for forgiveness showed itself in their complaining. The Lord would come but because of their unbelief and self-righteousness He would come to condemn.

The Lord says, "See I will send my messenger before my face, who will prepare the way before Me." This messenger was John the Baptist. Before John's birth, his father Zechariah was told that John would go before the Lord to "make ready a people prepared for the Lord." When John began preaching his message was "prepare the way of the Lord." How should they prepare? John said, "Repent." Stop being self-righteous and see yourself as you really are, a lost sinner. All of your supposed good works are nothing but shameful, filthy rags for they do not measure up to God's standard of perfection. Confess your sins and mourn over them. See how you have angered God. Grieve over the sins you have so loved and turn from them.

Listen to what Malachi says, "Because the Lord you are seeking will suddenly come to His temple." You want the Lord to come and set things straight? Look out or you will be caught in His righteous judgment. He will come unexpectedly. We know how these words were fulfilled. At God's chosen time suddenly an angel appeared to Mary. Suddenly Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Suddenly the angel appeared to the Shepherds.. Suddenly John appeared in the desert to announce the coming of the Lamb of God. Suddenly Jesus appeared preaching repentance and forgiveness.

The Lord would come to His temple. Yes, He came to the temple in Jerusalem but the expression "temple" was also used to refer to God's people, His church.

In the Old Testament the Lord revealed Himself as both Savior and punisher of sin. He revealed Himself to Moses with these words, "The Lord, the Lord God, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin. Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished; He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.

He who was to come would be the Lord, the one who keeps His Word. He keeps His threats and He keeps His promises. The great promises that He made were in His covenant which stated He would bring forgiveness and provide righteousness for His people. The prophecy of Malachi was a word of warning to the hardened, self righteous sinners and a word of comfort to those who mourned their sins and longed for forgiveness. The Savior would come. The Almighty God declared it. Nothing could be surer.

Addressing the self-righteous, grumbling Israelites the prophet said, “But who can endure the day of His coming?” Who can stand when He appears?” For He will be like a refiners fire and a launderer’s soap. Metal workers use extremely hot fire to separate metal from impurities. They even introduce extra oxygen to cause the fire to burn hotter than usual. What would happen to the dross of their works when tested by the fire of God’s judgment? What would happen to the filthy rags of their righteousness when tested by the lie soap of the Lord’s judgments? These puffed up people would be revealed as sinful and unclean and they would be without excuse. Who of them could stand when the righteous Judge appeared? Their silver and gold would be revealed as dirt and the robes of their righteousness would appear full of holes and stained under the light of God’s inspection.

God sent this warning to His people because He is merciful. He wanted them to turn from their evil ways and live. Besides saying that the Lord would come to punish Malachi’s prophesy also spoke of Him as Savior.

Yes, He would smash the stony heart. He would sit as a refiner and purifier of silver. He would reveal the sins of men so that He might give them a new heart. He would plant in them the silver and gold of faith. He would take away the filthy rags of their own righteousness and give them the robe of righteousness purchased with His blood.

In the prophecy the Lord states He will purify the Levites, the priests. The priests who were to be the religious leaders of the people had actually led them astray and provided horrid examples for them. The Lord would change the priests, refine them with His law and work faith with His Gospel so that the people would bring offerings out of gratitude.

In the New Testament all believers are called priests before the Lord The Lord likewise would cleanse them and give them a new heart so that they might serve Him with gladness. When He would come, the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem would be acceptable to the Lord as in days gone by, as in former years. The sinful, unbelieving Israelites of Malachi’s time had lost their moorings. They were not repentant, nor did they believe in the forgiveness the Messiah would bring. The coming Christ would change that. It was said of Jesus that He was set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel. He would take the place of all mankind. He would pay for their sins and provide righteousness for them that would stand before God. His preaching would work repentance and faith so that people would again serve the Lord out of a loving and grateful heart.

The Gospel about Jesus, the Savior, would have the same effect on the hearts of gentiles. In New Testament times both Jewish and gentile Christians are called the New Jerusalem. Not the city in Palestine, but the church would serve the Lord with offerings

of praise and good works. These things would arise from hearts made new by the coming Lord.

Israel of Malachi's day was corrupt. He pointed them to those Old Testament believers who truly worshipped God. Abraham was an example. He believed God's promises and his faith was counted unto Him as righteousness. David trusted in the Lord's forgiveness. Job said, "I know that my redeemer lives." The reason that the Lord sent Malachi was that His people might turn from their wicked ways, believe in the coming Lord and live.

This is the Advent season. We are preparing to celebrate the Savior's birth. We cannot really understand or appreciate Christmas unless he understands the lesson taught by Malachi. You and I cannot hold to our pet sins they will destroy us. We cannot place our trust in our good works. Only when we want to be free from sin and lay aside all self-righteousness can we truly appreciate the message of the angel, "Unto you is born a Savior.

These words we have heard today also are meant to prepare you and me for the Second coming of our Lord. He comes to judge the nations. That should strike terror in the hearts of all those who reject His Word. But for those who confess their sins and trust in the forgiveness He earned He is coming as loving deliverer. Prepare your heart to receive Him. Listen to the call and invitation. Repent and believe the Gospel.