

THE PROMISE OF HIS PRESENCE
MALACHI 2:17-3:5
SERMON

In the summer of 1976 I worked as an intern with the high school group in my home church in Carmel, California. We made arrangements to take our group to an Inter-Varsity Camp called “Campus by the Sea” on beautiful Catalina Island, 26 miles off the coast of southern California. I know it’s 26 miles off the coast because of the song! The camp was a very primitive camp: it had no phones, electricity or showers. We asked two men to be our camp speakers. One man, Warren Simandle served as the Young Life Area Director in Santa Barbara. The other man served as the pastor of my church in Carmel. We arrived at the camp on Sunday and got everything set up. We expected our pastor to be late since he had to preach that morning at home. We waited and waited and he never showed up! Remember, this was the era before cell phones so we had no way to communicate with him. The next morning we started praying, believing he must have been detained somehow. But Monday came and went and he still hadn’t arrived. We remained mystified as to his whereabouts. By Thursday we were making jokes about it and a couple of the kids even wrote a song about it. Do you know that it wasn’t until we returned to the mainland on Saturday that we discovered that our pastor had actually made it to Catalina Island but couldn’t find a way to get to the camp so he had given up and returned home! Have you ever had this kind of thing happen? A person you were counting on just didn’t show up!

In today’s lesson, Malachi assures the Jews that the Messiah will come, He will show up at his appointed time! He arrived some 450 years after Malachi but he did arrive! Look in the text in **3:1**:

“See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant whom you desire will come” says the Lord Almighty.

Malachi lets us know that we can **count on the Lord coming!** He will not forget, get lost, give up, or change his mind. He will come!! Jesus will come at God the Father’s appointed time.

The messenger Malachi speaks of initially is John the Baptist, the man God sent to prepare the way for Jesus. After his arrival, the “Lord you are seeking” will come suddenly to his temple. The word “suddenly” doesn’t mean quickly. It means unexpectedly. Malachi doesn’t want to give the impression that the Lord will come soon after him. He wants the Jews to understand that He will come unexpectedly. As we know, Jesus did arrive in an unusual manner for a king.

Malachi states that the Lord will come to his temple. We can understand the temple literally and figuratively. Literally, Jesus entered the Temple in Jerusalem on several occasions and ministered to his people. Figuratively, Jesus came to enter our individual lives, where God has established a temple of his Holy Spirit. Jesus enters our bodies, our lives as a living being through his Holy Spirit.

Malachi also refers to Jesus as “the messenger of the covenant”. A covenant is an oath. God established several covenants or oaths in the Old Testament with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and David. These covenants were covenants of promise and grace. For instance, in the covenant established with Abraham, God promised Abraham that he

would be the father of many nations and that he would be a blessing to others. Jesus introduced a *new* covenant, a covenant which found its focus in his shed blood on the cross. Jesus' covenant reveals the incredible depths of God's love as Jesus died for us.

Jeremiah wrote of this new covenant in **Jeremiah 31: 31-34:**

“The time is coming” declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them” declares the Lord. This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time” declares the Lord. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor or a man his brother saying “Know the Lord because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest” declares the Lord. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more”.

The Jews who heard these words spoken by Jeremiah and Malachi could **count on the Lord coming!** Jesus entered human history and established a new covenant with humanity. Turn back to our passage in Malachi for Malachi prophesies not only of Jesus' coming but also of what he will do when he comes.

1. Jesus purifies the impurities and cleanses the sin from our lives.

Vs.2 Malachi's question-answer format continues. He poses the question “who can stand when he appears?” Why will it be so tough to stand before him? The Lord will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. The main reason Jesus came to earth was to die for our sins on the cross and be raised so that we could inherit eternal life. When Jesus died on the cross he cleansed us from our sin. The Apostle John states **“the blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin.” (1st John 1:7)**

Vs.3 Jesus operates like a refiner and purifier of silver. Silver's rarely found in a pure state. It's usually extracted from sulphide ore of lead. The lead's heated to a very high temperature. As the ore melts, dross rises to the top and the workman scrapes off the dross. The dross is the scum that forms on the surface of the molten metal. The workman keeps working, peering into the crucible, removing dross until he can see his face clearly reflected in the remaining molten metal.

Jesus refines our lives just as a worker of silver refines silver. Jesus gets rid of the dross: the scum, waste, foreign matter that doesn't belong in our lives so that our lives can reflect his image, his glory and his power. Malachi states that the Lord will purify the Levites, the priests. Luke informs us in **Acts 6:7** that a “large number of priests became obedient to the faith”. These priests in Jesus' day were refined just like silver!

Jesus also functions like a launderer's soap. Just like soap removes dirt and makes you clean, so Jesus cleanses sin from our lives!

Let me ask you: what scum does Jesus need to extract from your life today? What's the dross that needs to be removed so that you can more accurately reflect the image of the Lord Jesus Christ in your life? Does Jesus need to cleanse you from a greedy heart, rampant selfishness, an addiction of some kind, the inability to forgive people who have hurt you? Perhaps Jesus needs to get rid of certain impurities such as impure thoughts, motives, or ambition? Listen carefully: *Jesus wants to purify you and*

me, to cleanse us from all the impurities that distort his image in our lives. When we turn over the impurities of our lives to Jesus through sincere repentance, the image of Jesus will be seen much more distinctly in our lives!

Jesus came to purify our lives, to cleanse those who chose to follow him but we also learn from Malachi that:

2. Jesus inspires genuine worship of God!

Vs.3b-4 Malachi foresees a day when the Levitical priests will live lives of obedience and faith. I mentioned the passage in Acts where Luke reports that many of the priests were obedient to the faith. This represented a huge shift from Malachi's day because many of the priests in Malachi's day were corrupt. "Righteousness" refers to right relationship with God. The offerings Malachi describes will be pure because they will be offered in the name of Jesus, the perfect lamb of God. Thus, they will be "acceptable to the Lord".

These acceptable offerings signified genuine, authentic, sincere worship of God. The people of Malachi's day struggled with worship. Their hearts were tuned to worldly goods. Many of the men had married foreign women. They disregarded the Sabbath, and simply paid lip service to their faith. But when the Lord comes, sincere, genuine worship of God will occur.

We live in a day and age in which the Lord has already come! Are you able to offer genuine, authentic worship to God? Or, does sin interfere and taint your worship?

I remember visiting my grandparents one summer in Colorado when I was seven years old. We went to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. They lived in a house that had a well. The first night we arrived my dad insisted I take a bath. I'll never forget looking at the water coming out of the faucet and blurting out "dad, that's the dirtiest water I've ever seen!" He told me it wouldn't hurt me and that I better get in, which I did. As it turned out, that bathtub hadn't been used for sometime and not only did certain minerals make the water look brown, there was actually some dirt present too! The water was impure, tainted and smelled bad.

Like that impure, brownish water, our worship of God can be impure and tainted. It's easy to be present physically in a worship service but have our hearts and minds elsewhere, far away from God. We can be wishing we were home, watching a football game, or sleeping or playing golf or whatever. We can be daydreaming about a certain boy or girl in our Biology class at school. We can be wondering when enough snow will fall so that Mt Ashland will open. How would you describe your worship of God: attentive and engaged, lukewarm, distant or pretty much non-existent? Do you struggle to stay focused and attentive to the Lord through out the worship time?

The Lord wants our worship offerings to be acceptable to him! This means we should offer our lives to him in worship, heart, soul, mind and strength as we sing, pray, interact with each other, listen and respond to God's word, give our offering of money and receive God's blessing on our life.

I want to challenge you: ***present offerings that are acceptable to the Lord!*** We do this by worshipping the Lord with a sincere, genuine heart. When distracting thoughts interfere, pray and ask the Lord to keep you focused! The Lord will help you as you seek to worship him in spirit and truth! Jesus inspires true worship of Him! He will help us worship with all of our hearts if we ask him.

3. Jesus judges our actions.

Vs.5- Malachi lists seven sins. Seven is the number of completion in the Bible. Malachi tells us that *sin completely devastated humanity*. It affected all of our being, mind, soul, and body. This is what theologians mean by the term, “total depravity”. The Lord looked at our sin and judged it. He despises sorcerers, people who practice sorcery and witchcraft, who give undue, positive attention to the Evil One. The Lord condemns the sin of adultery, married people who violate their marriage vows and engage in sexual relations with someone of the opposite sex. The Lord will testify against perjurers. Perjurers are liars, people who tell lies. The Lord loathes those who defraud laborers of their rightful wages. He hates those who oppress widows, orphans and deprive aliens of justice. Please note the final phrase “**but do not fear me**”. This particular word for “fear” means respect, honor. Some people spend their whole lives exploiting others for selfish purposes with no thought of God.

The Lord judged us when he first came as a babe in Bethlehem. He judged our sinful actions and knew that we desperately needed a Savior! Since he loved us, he came to die for us.

But the scriptures also teach of a final judgment that will occur. At this final judgment we will have to give an account for our actions, thoughts, words, dreams, everything! We will have to give an account of our stewardship, the way we have used the time, spiritual gifts, and material resources God has given us. Have you ever thought about the fact that you will have to give an account of your life to God someday?

Steve Winger from Lubbock, Texas wrote about his last college test- a final in a Logic class known for its difficult exams. Steve reported that the professor told them they could bring as much information to the exam that they could fit on one piece of notebook paper. Most students crammed as many facts as possible on their 8.5”x11” sheet of paper.

But one student walked into the class, put a piece of notebook paper on the floor and had an advanced student in logic stand on the paper. The advanced student whispered answers to the student throughout the exam. He was the only student to receive an “A”.

The ultimate final exam will come when we stand before God and he asks, “why should I let you in?” On our own we cannot possibly pass the exam. But we have an advocate in the Lord Jesus Christ, who will stand for us!

The Lord has come! Praise God that he showed up when he was supposed to! The Jews could count on Jesus and we can count on him today! Jesus has power to purify our impurities, cleanse us from sin, inspire genuine worship and judge our actions. Jesus chose to draw near to us. In response to his love initiative, I challenge you to draw near to him this Advent season! We can draw near by letting him purify our impurities, cleanse us from sin and inspire a deeper, more focused worship of him. Let us pray.