

2—Advent—Malachi 3:1-4—The Messenger of the Covenant

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I. Introduction

- A. Have you ever heard of purgatory? Do you believe there is such a place? A place between heaven and hell by which a person can be purged of their sins before entering into heaven?
 - 1. It's not hell which is eternal. It is described as a temporary place that gets one ready for heaven.
 - 2. Furthermore, it is described as a place some people go AFTER death. If you were not completely ready, God would send you there to finish what he began in you.
 - 3. Is there any evidence from Scripture that such a place exists?
 - a) And the answer is.....? Yes. But not after death.
 - b) This life is meant to be the place in which God purges sin from our lives.
 - c) In fact, the church is the place where that is supposed to happen.
 - (1) In 1 Cor. 5:13—Paul tells the Corinthians to purge the evil person from among you.
 - (a) This is an act of church discipline in this life.
 - (b) That person has the opportunity to repent and turn back to the Lord.
- B. Last week's message began with the all important part of redemption—the coming of the Righteous Branch.
 - 1. That branch was to sprout from the stump that had been cut down in exile.
 - a) As you know, exile was necessary but it did not change the people.
 - b) However, if they could be righteous then the tree would live forever.
 - c) Therefore, if a branch comes from the righteous branch then that person would be righteous and live forever—saved!
 - 2. All of that is possible because God sent his Son—the Righteous Branch—to accomplish salvation for us.
 - a) Salvation can be summed up in three words—justification, sanctification, and glorification.
 - (1) Last week we discussed the means by which God would accomplish justification—declaring us righteous by faith.
 - (a) Justification does not make us righteous. Jesus is our righteousness.
 - (b) However, we should know that God justifies us with every intention to also sanctify us.
 - (2) This week's text focuses on the refiner who makes what has been declared righteous to be righteous.
 - (3) In other words, Jesus will purge the sin from our lives as we wait upon his coming.

II. Main Point

- A. God also refines us and makes us righteous.

III. Outline

- A. God Disputes
- B. God Sends
- C. God Refines

IV. Exposition

- A. This first point reveals the need for God's people to be refined. I think we are all aware of this but it necessary to see the context of Malachi. Through Malachi, God contends with and for his people. This will lead us to the necessity of the Refiner later.
 - 1. There are 6 disputes presented by Malachi against God's people after the exile. (Just for a reference—these disputes have a similar flavor as the seven letters to the churches at the beginning of Revelation. Those who repent and give evidence of faith will be saved.)
 - a) First, in chapter 1 verses 2-5 the LORD says, "I have loved you." But you say, "How have you loved us?"
 - (1) We recognized a few weeks ago when talking about giving thanks that it must come from seeing things God has done for you that you didn't deserve that brings about praise.
 - (a) Gratitude is that feeling in your heart from seeing how God has loved and that spills over into the act of praise.

- (2) Here, God's people seem to look back on all that's happened throughout Ezra-Nehemiah and they are not satisfied with how things have worked out.
 - (a) They want security and freedom from Babylon. They want their King ruling and reigning over them.
 - (b) They surely see some things that God has done for them but like many of us, if we didn't get all of it we just simply dismiss all of it and question God's love.
- (3) God's response is basically—Well, you are still here aren't you?
 - (a) I mean, I chose Jacob but rejected Esau.
 - i) I love you but I hate Esau.
 - (1) The way I have loved you is by correcting you.
 - (2) The way I have hated Esau is by not correcting him.
 - ii) With Esau, verse 4 says, I am angry forever.
 - iii) But with Jacob, you will see my salvation verse 5.
 - (1) In other words, I will complete what I began in you.
 - (b) They are still there because God continues to show covenant love towards them and that covenant love expresses itself through judgment now rather than later.
- b) The second dispute is there in 1:6 through 2:9 where the priests have despised God's name by offering polluted offerings upon God's altar.
 - (1) The law described exactly what those sacrifices were to be but God's people brought blind, lame or sick animals for sacrifice.
 - (a) It seems that they feared the governor more than God by bringing him their best and not God.
 - i) In other words, they did not trust the Lord and we know that by the offerings they brought to him...their fruit.
 - c) The third dispute begins there in 2:10 which points out AGAIN that God's people were marrying pagan women.
 - (1) The indictment is there in verse 11—Judah...has married the daughter of a foreign god."
 - (a) Not only that, God reminds them that he hates divorce.
 - i) Some are marrying women who worship foreign gods.
 - ii) And some are divorcing the woman of their youth without cause.
 - (2) The indictment is simple—your unfaithfulness at home is an expression of your unfaithfulness to God.
 - (a) Or to say it differently, "Those who do not love Yahweh find it impossible to love their neighbor." (House 395)
 - d) The fourth dispute is the one leading up to God's response in our text today which begins there in 2:17.
 - (1) They have wearied the Lord by saying in verse 17—Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delights in them." Or by asking, "Where is the God of justice?"
 - (a) They somehow think that God will never carry out his plan of judgment against unrighteousness.
 - (b) They have questioned God's love for them and now they question his character, that is, his justice.
 - (c) What they are saying is this—"You do not merely ignore right and wrong behavior but you favor the wicked." (House 395).
 - e) Two more disputes—the next is there in 3:6-12 where Malachi points out that they themselves "withhold their tithes and offerings from the Lord. If they gave to God, he would abundantly bless their land." (Sailhamer 436)
 - f) The last one is found there in 3:13-4:3. "Israel was tired of waiting for God's blessing, but those who did (the remnant) would have a part in the divine blessing to come." (Sailhamer 436)
 - (1) However, a remnant among them turn from their arrogance and corrupt worship.
2. As we've seen these disputes unfold, the evidence against God's people is overwhelming.
 - a) We must see this as comprehensive. It's not just evidence against Israel but all of humanity.

- b) Mankind needs something significant to set things right with God and the answer is not found within ourselves.
 - c) I imagine that we find ourselves indicted by these disputes.
 - (1) We all become vulnerable and doubt God's love sometimes.
 - (2) If not withholding our offerings, we don't always consciously give cheerfully.
 - (3) There are more applications we could make. Many Christians have divorced for wrong reasons. Many have married unbelievers.
 - (a) That's not the end but those are clear signs someone has turned away from the Lord and they must repent.
 - (b) God will restore us. He is merciful.
 - (4) I'm sure we've all questioned God's justice by thinking or saying, "Where is God in all of this?" "Why does he allow this to happen?" "When is he going to do something?"
 - d) Let's consider—how do you respond to these indictments?
 - (1) Give up? Throw up your hands—What's the use in trying?
 - (2) Or do you go running back to the merciful God that he is?
 - (3) Do you want to be different? Are you longing to not only be declared righteous but be righteous?
- B. Well, the next point shows us how God responded to his people who were not seeking his righteousness. He responds not by sending judgment again but by sending a messenger or better yet, two messengers.
1. Essentially, he is sending these messengers because he's going to visit his people in an extraordinary way.
 - a) First the Righteous Branch to justify the unrighteous.
 - b) And then on the Day of the LORD to punish all unrighteousness.
 - c) But in between those events, God will make his people righteous.
 - (1) In other words, the promise of the new covenant was that he would cause us to walk in his ways.
 2. Verse 1 is a little more complicated and amazing than you might have noticed at first glance.
 - a) Let's be reminded that what we have here is God's response to what God's people said in dispute #4—Where is the God of justice?
 - (1) What if God comes to execute justice, will these who are asking survive his coming?
 - (2) Would they pass the test of being right with God?
 - (a) They doubt his love. They fail to offer the appropriate sacrifices. They steal from the LORD by withholding their tithes. They have married pagan women. They divorce without cause.
 - (b) What will happen if God visits them like this? When God visited Korah or Achan, what happened? What about Ananias and Sapphira? Or Judas?
 - (c) That's important to think about because even our text asks the question in verse 2—who can endure the day of his coming?
 - b) With that reality in mind, let's figure out how God is responding to the questioning of where the God of justice is by sending his messengers.
 - (1) He responds there in verse 1 by promising to send his messenger.
 - (a) This messenger will prepare the way before me.
 - (b) So, we must conclude that this YHWH speaking—I send my messenger before me, says the LORD of hosts—there at the end of the verse.
 - (c) The second part of the verse says that the Lord (which is not the same as the person speaking) will suddenly come to his temple.
 - i) But this one is also described as a messenger—a messenger of the covenant.
 - (1) I do not think this messenger is the same messenger that will prepare the way.
 - ii) Verse one we understand that YHWH is speaking but it ends by saying this first messenger will come before "me."

- (1) But the next sentence says the the Lord is coming to his temple (this could be messianic language referring to the King's Palace).
 - (2) The next sentence says, "He is coming" not "I am coming."
 - (2) Both of these sentences require some thought. Just for ease of explanation—I believe we're talking about three persons here.
 - (a) The first messenger is identified in the New Testament as John the Baptist in Mark chapter 1 where he quotes this text.
 - i) But Malachi identifies him in chapter 4 verse 5—Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.
 - (1) Jesus explains later in Mark that John the Baptist was Elijah.
 - (b) The second person is the Lord who comes to his temple.
 - i) This temple is not Elijah's or John the Baptist's temple. It is the Lord's.
 - ii) That's why I think this is YHWH but a distinctly different person than the Father.
 - (1) It is said that the trinity isn't explicitly taught in the OT like the NT but here we have some pretty amazing statements being made about it.
 - (2) So, we would understand that the Father is speaking.
 - (a) However, he says this first messenger who will prepare the way before me.
 - (b) Yet, the Lord—the messenger of the covenant is coming.
 - (c) This second messenger, I believe, is the divine Son of God.
 - (d) That's why YHWH who is Father, Son, Holy Spirit can say both "before me" and "he is coming."
 - (e) Both are God but distinct. YHWH is coming and it is the Son, not the Father.
 - (3) Now that you are thoroughly confused let me see if I can restate verse 1 with all the persons plugged in.
 - (a) Behold, I (YHWH) send my messenger, and he (Elijah who is John the Baptist) will prepare the way before me (YHWH). And the Lord (the Son of God) whom you seek will suddenly come to his (Christ's) temple; and the messenger of the covenant (Jesus) in whom you delight, behold he (the Son of God—Jesus) is coming, says the LORD of hosts.
 - (b) The Father sent his Son. That's the promise of Christmas.
 - i) This is the basis of our faith. We believe in one God in three divine persons—Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
 - (1) It matters that you believe this.
 - (a) You may not completely understand it but by faith you must acknowledge these truths.
 - (b) It's important because this is who God is. Any other God cannot save. It must be this one.
- 3. So how is God responding to where is his justice?
 - a) I'm coming to you in the Righteous Branch to accomplish justification but I'm also coming to make righteous those I declare righteous by faith.
- C. We've seen the disputes between God and his people. We've seen God's response by sending two messengers and we've identified who they are. Now let's consider what these messengers will do to refine his people.
 - 1. The emphasis is on the messenger coming to refine with fire but let's acknowledge the purpose of the first messenger was to clear the way before the LORD.
 - a) This act has been demonstrated in almost every culture and time throughout history.
 - (1) If the king is coming through, someone would clear the road for the king to pass through.
 - (2) Even in our day, this is done for the president or even a funeral procession.
 - b) This messenger's task was like that of the angel in 1 Thess. 4:16. (Angel and messenger are the same word)

- (1) The cry of the archangel will sound the trumpet of God and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, so we will always be with the Lord.
- c) I want to focus our attention on this second messenger but we need to see that this happened just as God promised in the coming of John the Baptist to prepare the way for the LORD.
2. Now, what is the second messenger coming to do?
 - a) There in verse 2 we hear his appearing to be like that of a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap.
 - (1) I think we can conclude that God's people need sin purged out of them.
 - (a) I'm a welder by trade, not a refiner. But there are some similarities.
 - i) To weld two pieces of metal together requires a great amount of heat (fire).
 - ii) It's also required that the metal be clean.
 - (1) You cannot weld paint but the welding rod will burn it off and the flux around the welding rod will clean the metal while you melt it all together in a tight bond.
 - (2) Even with a mig welder, the heat and the flux inside the wire or the shield gas cleans the metal in order to have a proper joint that is durable.
 - (3) If the metal is too dirty you can't even strike an ark. For example, you cannot weld through dirt or thick rust.
 - (b) If you want to be joined to God, you must be clean. But as we've seen throughout the Bible man is not clean. Especially here in Malachi, the indictments are numerous.
 - i) They need the refining fire of God to make them clean.
 - (1) If God somehow declared you to be rich but did not actually make you rich I imagine you wouldn't care too much about God's declaration.
 - ii) It might surprise you but metal can be turned into liquid. Gold has a melting point at around 1,700 degrees.
 - iii) The point is this—the refining process comes through fire.
 - (1) Fire is not a pleasant image because it's extremely painful.
 - (2) Done properly, the impurities are exposed and removed and you are left with pure gold.
 - (3) That's what they need and that's what we need too.
 - (c) The imagery of fullers' soap has the same basic idea.
 - i) Soap is actually lye here. If you know anything about lye, you know it's not soap.
 - ii) Lye will burn your skin pretty bad. You would not want to take a shower with lye.
 - iii) The word fullers' means cleansing. There's an old English verb "to full" that means to clean.
 - (1) But this Hebrew words literal meaning is to tread which makes sense.
 - (2) If your electricity has ever been off for very long, and you have put your cloths in the bathtub with some detergent you will tread on them to push the soap through the cloths and the dirt out.
 - (3) This is the image we are after.
 - (2) But do not miss the fact that this is a refiners' fire to purify, not to consume.
 - (a) Gold and silver are not consumed but purified.
 - (b) Now, if you try to refine wood, hay or stubble what happens to it? It burns up.
 - i) The gold here in Malachi represents Jacob whom God loves. He is refining those who are his.
 - ii) There's no mention of refining Esau. He will be consumed not refined.
 - (1) In 3:5 God says he will draw near to to you for judgment—that is a consuming fire. Even among God's people there are those who were actually like Esau.
 - (2) They would not turn from their wicked ways like there in verse 5—sorcerers, adulterers, those who swear falsely, those who oppress the hired workers, the widow and the fatherless, those who thrust aside the sojourner (immigrant), and those who do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.

- (3) This messenger of the covenant will not come to execute justice but he will first come to purify his people so that when he comes on the Day of the LORD, they will be ready.
3. So, I want to end this message by asking how is God's refining fire and cleansing lye working itself out in our lives now?
- a) First, who will God refine?
- (1) He will refine those who trust him.
- (a) How do you know if you are trusting him? By the fruit on the tree.
- (b) If I'm grafted into the Righteous Branch then I will bear fruits of righteousness.
- (c) The Righteous Branch declares me righteous but the pruning of the Vinedresser makes me bear more fruit.
- (2) Those who trust the Lord in Malachi are called those who fear the Lord.
- (a) There at the end they repent and turn back to him when Malachi speaks to them.
- (b) When John the Baptist came, his message was to repent.
- i) Those who turned back to God were preparing room in their hearts for the Righteous Branch to come.
- ii) Those who abide in the Righteous Branch will also be purified by the Refining Messenger who is the same person.
- iii) Both are necessary. If there is no fruit of righteousness then we are not abiding in the Vine.
- (1) To abide in the vine is to obey Jesus—the Vine.
- (a) I will end with this—(John 15:1-6 ESV) ¹“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser (gardener). ²Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. ³Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.”
- (b) (John 15:12-13 ESV) ¹²“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”
- b) The desire to be justified—declared righteous by faith must also desire the refining fire of the Messenger—by faith.
- (1) We are new creations in Christ. He not only counts us righteous through his Righteous Son but he also changes us. Praise God that he makes us like himself and with that—(John 15:11 ESV) “that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”
- (2) Why wouldn't anyone want that? Do you have it? If not repent and believe in Jesus Christ.