

The Lord Will Come

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[0 : 00] Please turn with me again to Malachi chapter 2 verses 17 through 3 verse 5. The Lord will come, the messengers of the covenant.

Some things never change. Every generation thinks that it's completely different from the generation which came before. But the truth is that some things never really change at all. You can look at old photographs of people taken while Queen Victoria was still on the throne and the British Empire was at its very height. And you're looking into the eyes of people who were asking the same basic questions that we're asking today on Facebook.

Go back another couple of thousand years to the people of Malachi's day and you've got the same fundamental questions being asked. We really shouldn't be surprised that young people today are asking the same questions young people in 500 BC asked.

Because some things really never change. One of these things which never changes is the question, when is God going to do something about this world?

[1 : 19] When is God going to do something about this world? We see violence and oppression. We see economic and environmental chaos. We see political and social anarchy.

And we wonder how and where it's all going to end. Oppressive nations get away with murder and children pay the price of rich men's pleasures. When is God going to do something about this world?

For some like King David who wrote Psalm 13, that question forces him to his knees in prayer.

Pleading with God and asking, how long O Lord?

For others like the priests and the people of Malachi's day, this question doesn't force them to God, but pushes them away from him.

Actually, rather than pushing them away from God, perhaps we could rephrase that. It provides them with an opportunity to leave God behind. Because in their minds, if God is not going to deal with evil here and now, why should we bother pursuing holiness and self-denial and humility?

[2 : 34] What is the God of justice, the priests of Malachi's day ask? Not with the attitude of David, pleading and longing for God to come. But with the arrogance of those who, because they don't see God's hand at work in immediate justice, cast off all moral and spiritual restraint.

Some things never change. Has that thought ever crossed your mind? Has mine? That because this world seems to get away with all kinds of evil behavior, there's no point in us pursuing faith and holiness and humility.

If they can sin and get away with it, then why can't I? That's the way the priests of Malachi's day thought, and that's why they were divorcing their wives and polluting the temple of God with offerings which cost them nothing to give.

They taunted Malachi with the question in verse 17, where is the God of justice to put it another way? What's he going to do about it anyway?

As we learn from our first study in Malachi, Malachi 1 verses 1 through 5, these priests don't believe that God is speaking anymore, or that God even cares for them anymore.

[3 : 56] So what's the big deal if having done their jobs and performed their religious duties, these priests live in an immoral way? Notice what impact this defiant attitude has upon God in verse 17.

It wears him out. It wears him out. Now, of course, this is symbolic language because God remains infinitely powerful no matter what we think or do. Nevertheless, this unbelieving attitude wears him out.

It tires him out just as we feel tired after a long day's work. Some things never change, and I guess God is entirely as weary with today's unbelief as he was with that of the priests of Malachi's day.

Weary with this attitude. What's the big deal? If having come to church and performed my religious duties, I choose to live whatever way I like from Monday through Saturday.

Some things never change. Whenever you read the word, behold, in the text of the Bible, you are immediately to hear these words going through your mind.

[5 : 10] things are not what they seem to be. Behold equals things are not what they seem to be.

Malachi chapter 3 verse 1 contains as its first word, even though it's not translated in our Bibles, behold, I will send my messenger. In other words, to the priests of Malachi's day who thought that God couldn't care less about their sin, God begins by saying, you know, things are not what they seem to be.

Because I'm going to do something in, among, and for the nation of Judah, which once for all will answer the questions you're asking and the accusations you're making.

God's going to do something amazing and earth-shattering to demonstrate his justice. And so we see this, this violence and oppression in our world right now and this economic and environmental chaos and this social and political anarchy with Brexit.

And we ask, when is God going to do something about this world? Some things never change. And trust me, things are not what they seem to be.

[6 : 28] Listen to Malachi as he tells us about the coming and the cleansing and the charging, about how God has, is, and will demonstrate his justice.

I've always thought of the words of Malachi 3 verse 1 being rather like the first rays of the dawning sun coming up over the horizon and bringing light into the darkness.

Behold, I will send my messenger who will prepare the way for me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking, the Adonai you seek, will come to his temple.

The messenger or angel of the covenant whom you desire will come, says Yahweh of hosts. Into this world of violence and hypocrisy and deceit, the light of God's righteousness will shine.

Listen carefully. The light shall not come from within the world with its enlightened technology, philosophy and science.

[7 : 29] It will come from outside the world. It shall come from God. The ultimate answers to the question of evil and suffering and injustice won't be found within this world or from this world.

They shall come only from heaven and not by way of abstract notions or ideas but personalized and embodied in God himself.

Look at the text very carefully. It speaks of two comings. In the first instance that is the coming of the messenger of God who will prepare the way before me.

This is most definitely a reference to John the Baptist who is the voice crying in the wilderness prepare the way from the Lord. This is the manner in which John the Baptist is constantly presented in the New Testament as the as the as the preparer of the way of God.

That last great prophet of the Old Testament who embodying the message of all the prophets points his finger to Jesus and calls out behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

[8 : 39] In the world of Malachi's day if a king wanted to visit a certain town or city he would send out representatives before him to ensure that the roads to the city and the city itself were ready for his arrival.

And the role of John the Baptist was to clear the way to get rid of the obstacles as the Lord comes. But it's the second coming spoken of in Malachi 3 verse 1 which is the true dawning of the light the sun rising above the horizon.

Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple the angel of the covenant in whom you delight behold he will come. You know we could spend hours weeks and months working our way through this text what God is telling us here about Jesus.

The Jesus who is the Lord Adonai who is the me of the previous clause who is the messenger or angel of the covenant.

There's this mysterious phraseology here where God himself is identifying with this figure that he himself is the one whom John the Baptist is preparing their way for that he is the Adonai Lord who comes to his temple that he God himself is the messenger of the covenant.

[10 : 08] Who says that the doctrine of the Trinity is not taught in the Old Testament when here in Malachi 3 verse 1 we have this this wonderful conflation of the identities and names for Jesus.

from Genesis 1 the very beginning of the Old Testament where God confers with himself as a plurality concerning the creation of man saying let us make man in our image to Malachi 3 the very

end of the Old Testament where God speaks of himself coming and says the Lord Adonai will come to his temple we're left with tantalizing glimpses all the way through the Old Testament of the truth that God exists as one in three Father Son and Holy Spirit this also of course in verse 1 confers such dignity honour and glory upon the Jesus who we're studying in the Gospel of Matthew on a Lord's Day morning that this Jesus so hated and rejected by the religious leaders of Israel is the same Lord rejected belittled and mocked by the religious leaders of Malachi's day such glory such majesty in this man

Christ Jesus our Adonai the messenger of the covenant who gave himself upon the cross to bear the curse of our shame but the point in context is that God is answering the priests of Israel in Malachi 3 verse 1 and their accusations by pronouncing to them things are not what they seem to be I am not pleased with those who do evil I the Lord of justice I myself am coming oh the priests of Israel in Malachi's day because they thought that God was never going to hold them accountable for their spiritual and moral immorality had taken the opportunity to leave God behind and given how much grace and love God had shown them in the past and having had it thrown back in his face how much they had wearied God with their unbelief we might think

God would be justified in abandoning Israel and saying never again but even though they were proving unfaithful to him he would never prove unfaithful to them he says I myself will come the angel of the covenant some things never change you know of which this is central for Malachi the coming of Jesus was in the future whereas for us it is in the past but the central truth is this almighty God knows all about us and holds us accountable for all that we have said and thought and done it is an unpleasant thought indeed that we may have wearied God it is not just unpleasant it is fearful terrifying but this is the gospel of the grace of God rather than condemning us like we deserve God has done something God has come the messenger of the covenant has come to his temple Jesus is God's answer to the problem of our hypocritical deceit and our selfish hypocrisy the logic of Malachi 2.17 3.1 it runs something like this these people are sinfully denying me they are breaking the terms of the covenant I made with their fathers the answer to the problem of their sin does not rest with them though they may have given up on me I will never give up on them I will send no one else to sort this problem out for them I myself will go to them there's a sense in which these verses frighten us but an even greater sense in which these verses fill us with a sense of profound gratitude and awe because in these verses we have the patience and the grace and the mercy of a [14:42] God who himself came to deal with the problem of our sin and guilt what we could not have done for ourselves he has come to do for us the awesomeness of this passage lies in this point and this is why I need you to tune in your brains this evening okay tune in your brains the steadfast determination of God not just to keep his side of the covenant but ours also that this is the grace of the gospel that on the cross Jesus our mediator the messenger of the covenant was dying not to fulfill God's side of the covenant but ours the central truth of the Lord the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is the central truth of all history and all of God's dealings with humanity it is the demonstration of his love for us not only that he shall be unchangeably faithful to the covenant but that he also shall fulfill our obligations to the covenant that he shall be faithful where we have been unfaithful that he shall be holy where we have been sinful that he shall be righteous where we have been unrighteous but sure do you say this is preposterous nonsense a deal is struck between two parties money is given in exchange for services

I clean your windows and you give me ten pounds the deal is only kept if your windows are cleaned and ten pounds is paid I would be outraged if having cleaned your windows you did not pay me ten pound and you would be right to be outraged if you gave me ten pounds and I did not clean your windows because that's the way our covenants our deals work now that's the way human religion works also you do certain things for God he shows you favour and gives you gifts like for example eternal life but consider Malachi 2 17 and 3 1 here's a covenant a deal between two parties God who is always faithful the priests of Israel who are always unfaithful on account of their sinful hypocrisy and unbelief they do not keep their covenant with God but rather than breaking the deal the wonder of the

Christian gospel is that God himself steps in and keeps their side of the deal not to be irreverent he pays us ten pounds having cleaned his own windows he treats us as though we have kept the covenant with him even though it was he who kept it on our behalf and that is the wonder of grace that is the awesomeness of the cross the beauty of Jesus Christian salvation rests in this fundamental truth not that God owes us something on account of our faithfulness to him but that on

account of our unfaithfulness to God and our inability to be faithful to him he because he loves us sent the angel of the covenant Jesus Christ God himself to keep our side of the broken covenant to pay the price of our unfaithfulness if any should doubt that this is the correct interpretation of this passage then consider with me again the words of Malachi 3 verse 1 the Lord will come to his temple what happens at the

Jerusalem temple what happens there let me tell you what happens there sacrifice happens there the Lord comes at the sacrifice of his people the Lord against whom the priests have sinned will come and pay the price for their unfaithfulness they will spill his blood on the cross but his blood will wash their hearts whiter than the snow how wonderful how marvelous this is Christian salvation in a nutshell God has done it all we have wearied him with our sinful unbelief and hypocritical pride he himself comes to keep the terms of our broken covenant and to pay the price we could not pay some things never change you know like this amazing truth of the faithfulness of God expressed to us in the cross of his son that there on that wooden cross the angel of the covenant was in his temple being offered on account of my sin but as we close

I want us to understand the impact of the coming of Jesus Malachi's understanding of how Jesus coming will impact the world of men in other words how will the gospel be received and what will this do a gospel which in a nutshell tells us that we're more sinful than we could ever imagine but in the cross of Christ we are more loved than we could ever dream what impact will this gospel have well there's two listed for us very briefly there is cleansing and there is condemning God's judgment will always contain these two elements salvation for some condemnation for others there is cleansing first of all in verses two through four we have some of the most beautiful words found in the book of Malachi that as a function of his forgiveness forgiving refining cleansing work the angel of the covenant who has come to his temple will so purify his people that once again as we read in verse three they will draw near to the

[20 : 47] Lord with offerings of righteousness and then in verse four the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord as in days gone by as in former years the people will be clean again the people will be treated as though they always had kept the covenant they will be acceptable to God it will not be because of anything they have done after all if you read in verses two and three it's the Lord who's going to refine them like silver it's the Lord who's going to wash them whiter than any earthly laundered or could it will be entirely a work of the grace of God in that what the people of Malachi's day could not do God did for them until now in the book of Malachi God has told people their offerings are unacceptable to him but now he says because of something I'm going to do because I'm going to come I shall so change you

I shall so change your hearts and situations that your gifts shall be acceptable I hope you can see this from the text not the condemning threat this passage could so easily be treated as but as the promise of purifying grace the coming of Christ to his temple and his sacrifice on our behalf will have this impact upon us it will cleanse us on the inside it will wash us whiter than the snow it will sanctify us it will make us holy unto the Lord we could never have done this ourselves all we would have done was run further away from God and take every opportunity at our disposal to leave him behind but because of what God himself has done for us through Christ we are now a people in whom he takes pleasure and what have we done to merit such a transformation in our status before God nothing nothing absolutely nothing we are saved by grace through faith and not by our own good works some things never change one of which is the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus Christ that blood he shed on the cross remains entirely as powerful today as it did back then that if anyone here anyone or anyone in Glasgow having found themselves where the priests of Malachi's day were living as though they were unaccountable to God should come by faith to Jesus Christ for forgiveness and righteousness they shall have it freely they shall be purified not not by their faith but by the blood of the angel of the covenant who spread out his wings and died on the cross for us cleansing but then secondly very briefly condemning verses 5 why would anyone stay away from such a gracious offer of salvation that everything has been done for us by God through Christ Jesus one could not imagine a better deal than someone comes to your door and says hey I'll clean your windows and give you ten pounds as well and yet there are some who steadfastly and with determination refuse to accept the gracious terms of Jesus rather than coming to him for forgiveness and cleansing they maintain their unaccountable attitude thinking somehow God does not care how they live or what they think the sordid list in verse 5 are those by whom the verbal forms Malachi uses they continue in these sins there's no repentance there's no faith there's

no forgiveness available for them in the Lord who comes to his temple because they choose to remain in their sinful lifestyles thinking back to chapter 2 verse 17 that somehow God's not going to hold them accountable these sorcerers and adulterers these perjurers these people who defraud laborers and widows and orphans of their wages and interestingly this verse in our own society those who turn away aliens they do not fear God they do not believe that he will hold them accountable for the way they have thought and behaved the question of Hebrews 2:3 springs to mind how shall we escape if we ignore such great salvation because there is only one thing waiting for those who ignore the

Lord who comes to his temple the angel of the covenant the great salvation of God in Christ Jesus condemnation condemnation and that is scary and yet this need not be the way it is for us in 1st Corinthians chapter 6 and verse 18 the apostle Paul's apostle Paul having having listed an equally ugly litany of sinful lifestyles he says to the Christians in Corinth that is what some of you were that you were washed you were sanctified you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of God there's forgiveness even for the worst of sinners through Christ the Lord who has come to his temple to be the sacrifice for our sin there's forgiveness here for me and there's forgiveness for you and the consistent teaching of the

[26 : 36] Bible all the way through is that all we must do to receive that forgiveness and transformation is to actively put our faith and trust in him to delight in the God who has done it all the God who has done it his way this is the unchanging gospel for the Victorian for the generation Xer for the post-millennial this is Malachi's offer let us weary God no longer with our unbelief but come to the angel of the covenant Jesus Christ in faith and trust we're going to sing now as we close and we're you too if you should see