

But Who May Abide the Day of His Coming?

Malachi 3:1-3

Introduction – It becomes more amazing each year the Messiah is sung, to consider the fact that unregenerate men come to sing or to hear this piece of music, while shaking their theological fists at the very words being sung. There is also an unbelieving ‘church’ culture that looks to the manger for sweet sentimental moments but refuses to submit to the very message they ‘adore’. The simple answer to the question posed by Malachi, of course, is “no one – no, not one”. And yet, this is the heart of the good news of Jesus Christ.

Malachi, Messenger, Angel – In both Greek and Hebrew, the word for ‘messenger’ and ‘angel’ is the same. In Greek it is *angelos*, and in Hebrew, the word is *malachi*. John the Baptist and Jesus Christ are both prophesied of here as angels of the Lord, and Jesus as the angel of the covenant. We see that Jesus is the Angel of the Lord (the only uncreated Messenger), the One who has always brought the Word of the covenant to God’s people. This prophecy declared that He was coming to do just that again.

“Suddenly” – Malachi’s message centers on the compromised lifestyles and cultures of God’s people. And this message is given in the context of the second temple built during Ezra and Nehemiah. The Lord is going to come to this temple as well. And though long foretold and expected, Christ came unknown and unexpected. When first brought to the temple, only Simeon and Anna recognize Him (Luke 2:25ff). At the age of twelve, Jesus is teaching at the temple, but no one knows who He is (Luke 2:41ff). The Lord later purges the temple with a whip of cords, but no one believes it is His temple (John 2:13ff). Finally, the Lord Jesus comes to that temple one more time in 70AD in His judgment upon that temple’s unbelief and rejection of Him as Messiah (Matt 24).

“But Who Can Endure” – He is the Messenger in whom you delight. But how many delight in the celebration of Christ’s coming and yet never deal with its significance? Some want to simply enjoy ‘the holidays’, like someone helping themselves to the trimmings without ever touching the main course. Others hope that celebrating Christmas might be a means of bringing world-peace. In a strange but similar way, that is what those in Christ’s day were hoping for in a Messiah as well – deliverance from foreign enemies and peace in their land. But all of this fails to deal with the greater and more grievous bondage to sin from which we need deliverance. When this Messenger comes, He does have ‘good news’ but only because He has such ‘bad news’ as well.

“And He Shall Purify” – His coming is anything but passive. Jesus does not come hoping to save the world. He came to save the world (John 3:16-17). In order to do so, He must cleanse a defiled race. A refiner’s fire penetrates the metal, searching, discovering, and consuming the dross. Similarly, the launderer’s soap breaks down the impurities and renews the soiled garment. Neither the gold nor the garment volunteer for the cleansing – the work is chosen and done by the Refiner.

Who are the Sons of Levi? – In the day of Malachi, the sons of Levi, those priests of the old covenant, were unfaithful ministers of the words and mercies of God (Mal 2:1-9). Their faces were defiled (2:3), and they had corrupted the covenant with God (v8), causing many to stumble. It is interesting to note that after Jesus’ ascension, Acts 6:7 records that “*a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith*”. It is good to remember that when the gospel goes forth, so many of those who were hardened to God and were a great detriment to a society are truly redeemed, reborn, and reinstated into beautiful and useful work for the kingdom.

The Messiah, in Whom You Delight – Jesus did come at a particular time in history. But in another sense, His coming is not restrained by that event. Wherever the gospel is preached, the Lord is come. He has come upon us again.

Face to Face with Your Judge and Savior – God brought judgment many times to Israel for not remaining faithful to Him, and many times poured out His mercy in great revivals and deliverances. But in refusing to bow to the Messiah, in rejecting and crucifying the Son of God, they rendered their case helpless and hopeless, because there is no other name but His given among men by which we may be saved (Acts 4:12). This is the Person we acknowledge who came in the flesh to this earth some two-thousand years ago. There is glorious mystery in this, but each one of us must contend with the message. Jesus Christ came and died for sinners. Was His appearing for your judgment only, or for your salvation as well?

The ‘Suddenness’ of Ongoing Refining – Why should Christians celebrate Advent? Hasn’t Jesus already come? Yes, of course. And in Christ your salvation is secure – and there is such glory to celebrate simply in that. But He continues to come to us by His Spirit through the Word and sacraments. Each time we gather to worship we will find this Refiner’s Fire once again working upon our flesh, making us more and more into the image of Christ. The work is often ‘sudden’ because we are so often blind to our own shortcomings. But in our worship, in our submission to the Word, and in our relationships to one another, we will find Him ‘coming’ again and again, completing in us what He has begun.

An Offering In Righteousness – By the work of Christ, and only by His work, we can fully satisfy the requirement in Romans 12:1, presenting our bodies as living sacrifices, holy, acceptable to God. This is your reasonable service. And for those who long for His final coming, it is their delight.