

## Peace requires preparation.

Text: Malachi 3:1-4 for 12/9/2018 by Pastor Bolwerk

<sup>1</sup> "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. <sup>2</sup> But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. <sup>3</sup> He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, <sup>4</sup> and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years.

Christmas Day is coming fast. Are you feeling peaceful about the approach of Christmas, or are you feeling more than a little stressed out? The amount of peace we feel in connection with an upcoming event really depends on how prepared we are. If your Christmas tree is up, your house is cleaned and decorated, and all the presents are bought and wrapped you are most likely feeling a good deal of peace about Christmas coming. If you do not have any of those things done, especially the presents part, you may not be feeling so peaceful right now. The more prepared you are with anything in life – a test, a job interview, party plans, your retirement – the more peace you can have when that event takes place.

This truth also applies to Jesus final return. When Christ comes back on Judgment Day, he will be judging the entire world. The problem is we do not know exactly when he is coming. So, the more prepared we can be for that Final Day, the more peace we will have when it happens. That is why God sends us his word through the prophet Malachi. Malachi is helping us prepare because ...

Theme: Peace requires preparation.

- I. A messenger helps prepare.
- II. The LORD purifies.

This message from Malachi that the Lord was coming was a message of hope to the people of Israel, because the Messiah was coming to save them. To prepare the people for their Lord's coming, a messenger was sent ahead of him. Malachi wrote, **"See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me"** (v. 1). Yet it was not just one messenger that God sent to prepare his people, but there were many. God's messengers were his prophets: Men to whom God gave his words so they could prepare the people for the coming Savior. Men like Moses, and King David who wrote about the Lord's Anointed One. Prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and even Malachi all prepared the way for coming Messiah. Yet there was one special messenger who Malachi announced: John the Baptist. He was the messenger who was to go before the Lord **"to make ready a people prepared for the Lord"** (Luke 1:17b). God gave his words to these men so they could get the people ready for the coming Savior.

But people didn't always listen to those messengers. Many didn't listen because they didn't like the message. Prophets often spoke of repentance: of turning away from sin and sinful lifestyles. Some didn't listen because they did not think they were sinful. Others believed that because they were God's chosen people they did not need to repent. They felt God would accept them simply because of who they were. Others didn't listen because they didn't think the Messiah was coming any time soon. They figured they would have plenty of time to hear and respond to the message. So when the Lord arrived many people were caught off guard. They had not been listening to the message, so they were

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not prepared for the Lord's coming.

We know about our Lord's first coming. Jesus has already been here. He has completed the work God the Father sent him to do. Yet, God still sends messengers to us today to prepare us for our Lord's second coming. God uses the messengers of parents and family members, people who brought us to the Lord when we were little. They worked to share that saving message with us as we grew. God uses pastors and teachers who continue showing us the narrow path that leads to salvation.

Do we always listen to those messengers? Perhaps not. If we are honest, we have to admit we don't always like the message they proclaim. We don't like to hear that we need to repent of our sins every single day. We may think, "I am a Christian. I don't have to worry about the sins I commit. I'm a good person so God will accept me." In our self-righteousness, we shut out the message because we do not feel we need help being right with God. Sometimes we don't pay attention to the message because we don't feel like there is any hurry. We think, "Jesus hasn't come back in over 2000 years, so he is probably not coming any time soon." Sometimes we even stop listening because we feel like we've heard it all. We hear the same message year after year, and we begin to feel like we do not need to pay attention to it any more. In our sinful apathy we stop listening to the message. When that happens, we may end up unprepared for our Lord's return, we may end up spiritually dead. How can we have peace if we are not prepared?

Now is the time to listen to God's message, because we don't know when Jesus is coming back. Christ could come back today! The only way we can be right with God is if we have faith that trusts in Jesus' saving work. And scripture is very clear about where that faith comes from: **"Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ"** (Romans 10:17). This is why those messengers are so important. If we want to have peace with the almighty God, we need the messengers to help us prepare. It is the messengers who make it clear: Christ lived and died and rose again, destroying death and freeing you from your sins. That message of forgiveness applies even to your spiritual apathy. That forgiveness applies even to our lack of desire to listen. Yes, the Lord is coming, and a messenger prepares the way for him. Listen to the messenger because he is helping you prepare so you can have peace.

This messenger is preparing you for more than just Jesus' return. The messenger also prepares you for Christ to work in your life. When that messenger speaks God's holy word to you Jesus is able to work in your life through the power of his Holy Spirit. Christ is working in your life to give you peace. That peace requires preparation. So, as the messenger prepares, the LORD purifies.

Malachi spoke of the purification that the coming Messiah would perform. He said, **"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. **But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap."** (vs. 1-3). The LORD would come with fire and water to purify his people from their sins.

John the Baptist shared that same preparing message. He told the people to repent of their sins because the Savior was coming with a purifying fire. John the Baptist said, **"I baptize you with water. But one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire"** (Luke 3:16). To baptize means to make something clean by washing. The Refiner will come and make people clean with the fire of his Spirit.

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When the words of God's message enter our minds through what we read or hear, the LORD begins his purifying process. His Law burns red hot, melting our stony hearts, moving us to confess our sinfulness before God and asking for his mercy. Our Lord then becomes the Launderer, washing away our sins with his holy, precious blood; cleansing us with his Spirit through his gospel.

Jesus' Apostle John speaks of that purifying process in his first letter. He says of Jesus, **"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9)**. Christ purifies us to give us peace! As the Spirit of the Messiah works in our hearts, we confess the guilt of our sins to him. In his faithful mercy Jesus forgives us our sins because he has already paid for them all on the cross. He purifies us from our unrighteousness, washing away our guilt and shame, and covering us with his own robe of perfection. Christ's righteousness gives us relief from our guilt, and it fills us with God's peace. Through faith in Jesus we are made pure in the eyes of our holy God.

Notice the reason why Jesus purifies us. Malachi says, **"Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness"** (v. 3). Christ didn't just save us, he gave us a whole new life. Through the forgiveness of our sins Jesus has given us a new life of faith now and an eternal life to come. Our new life is at peace with God, and that peace motivates us to want to thank and praise God for the salvation he gave us. We thank God with our offerings. Not just the offering of our money, but we offer him our entire lives. The Apostle Paul says, **"Offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness"** (Romans 6:13). We give to God of ourselves: our time and skills, our minds and words, our work and worship and praise. We use our bodies and lives to do what others have done for us: To share that life-saving, life-giving message of the gospel. We proclaim that message so that even more people can be prepared for the LORD's purification. We speak God's word of truth so that others can also enjoy Christ's peace.

The less prepared you are for something the more stress and anxiety you are going to have when the time of that event arrives. Procrastination can make us feel okay about our lack of preparation for a while, yet how much better to be prepared so that we can have peace. Peace takes preparation. That is why our Lord, Jesus keeps sending his messengers into our lives. Those messengers are preparing us so we can be ready for our Lord's purifying work. Our Lord, Jesus prepares and purifies us, so we can be ready for that Last Day.

Listen to the Lord's messengers so that you can be ready for his coming, and so that you can help other to prepare for his coming as well. Be prepared, so that you can be at peace knowing your Lord and Savior is coming to take you to a place of eternal peace. Amen.