

Chapter three begins with God speaking of sending His messenger to prepare the way before Him, of Himself coming to purify His people and to judge the wicked. But why has that not already happened? Why must it come later, and the people of Malachi's day have to wait? God had made a promise, but here they are waiting. Oh, they are back from exile, returned to the land of their fathers, but they are still under a Persian thumb, the land has been ravaged by weather and raiders. What gives, Lord? And so it is with man in his sinful nature, we find the situation less than ideal, waiting for the good things God has promised instead of enjoying them right now, and so God is put in the docket, He must answer our questions and explain Himself.

Through Malachi, God shows us it's the other way around. God first says, it's not Him. He has not changed His mind, has not reneged on His promise. It is the people. Sure, they have returned, would have hopefully learned their lesson, and to be sure, from the exile on, beginning with that stellar example of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, they have stood firm against the crass worship of other gods. Idolatry such as the worship of Baal, Asherah, Molech, all the hosts of heaven adored by the Canaanites, no longer a problem.

But as we've heard already, idolatry, the affections of the heart for things other than the true God, remains a perpetual problem. The priests are selfish and lax. The people bring forbidden offerings. Their lives are falling out of step with God's will when it comes to marriage. Yet again we hear of the business of the temple. Just as they don't really care what types of animals they bring as sacrifice, so they don't put much thought into the broader care of the temple. From the book of Nehemiah, we learn that for a time, a man had turned part of the sanctuary into his house. Nehemiah throws the furniture out, and cleanses the temple. The portions of offerings for the Levites had been withheld, they were having to go out into the fields to work in order to eat, rather than live from the generosity and care of the peoples' offerings as God had designed.

God delays His coming, because His people are not ready. They have turned away from Him, and so should He come, it will not be a day of joy for them, but a day of judgment, of utter destruction. This is why God delays. Not because He has changed His mind or because He has forgotten His people, it is because they, not being ready, need to be made ready by repentance, by being convicted of their sins that they might turn and receive forgiveness from the Lord.

That is why God's Word preaches the Law to us. Because like then in Malachi's day, like today, so often, those who had been called by His name have turned away from Him after other, lesser things. God desires that all would be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. He waits not in laziness or because He is fickle, but because in loving forbearance He would correct us, call us back to true faith in Him.

So the text today, like all the others we have heard the past two weeks, it's not just about offerings, tithes, or marriage. It is to expose our self-idolatry, that whether it's in the realm of money or marriage, massing power or more possessions, whatever it is at any given time, we recognize our hearts cling all too easily, all too often, to things and even people more than our Lord. And we need to repent. The day of salvation is now, turn and repent. Confess your sins and receive God's forgiveness, now clearly and concretely shown in His Son, the perfect sacrifice for all sin.

We cling to Him, for He has indeed promised to return. That day will be for those who will not repent, and who harden their hearts, it will burn like an oven, all arrogant and evildoers will be burnt up like stubble.

But for you who fear the name of the Lord, who turn in contrition and repentance, and in faith live by His forgiveness, the day of His coming will not be one of dread, but a day of joy. The brightness of His glory will be like the sun rising after a long dreary winter, we shall go out to Him as the wise virgins, as calves leaping from the stall to delight in the blossoming new life of spring.

So, Malachi says, remember the law of Moses. Hear and be convicted by the Ten Commandments. Now see Elijah the prophet, hear John the Baptist, not just him, but every preacher since, announce unto you the Lamb of God who has come and taken away the sin of the world. Let your heart be turned in repentance from whatever false idols it would cling to and lay hold of the Christ, that it be as a manger for Him to lie in.

He is coming. He has promised so and He does not change. He delays in mercy, that you, and yet others, would turn and believe. That the final day would be a day not of dread but of joy.

Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!