

GETTING YOUR HEART READY FOR GOD'S FREE GRACE - Malachi 3:1-3 - "Behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. [2] But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap.[3] He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord."

Last week we studied the kind of people who weary God. As great and almighty as He is, God actually told the people they were making Him weary - causing Him angst and heaviness (2:17). It's in the face of these stubborn realities rooted in godless hearts that a new day is announced. True, it won't come for about four hundred years, but it will come. And the people must *prepare* for this manifestation of God's redeeming grace.

1) GOD ANNOUNCES THAT AN OLD AGE IS ABOUT TO CLOSE AND A NEW ONE IS ABOUT TO OPEN

A messenger will come to prepare the way - Malachi 3:1 - "Behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts."

The idea here is the gospel era requires preparation. It requires preparation because people - like the people to whom Malachi prophesied - won't *embrace* God's mercy and grace until they first learn to take their own sin seriously. Our lives must be *prepared* for Jesus Christ. Malachi serves notice in these verses.

Malachi says there will come one more advance voice - one more messenger - and the message will be the same - to be ready for the Redeemer, the Lamb of God. People must prepare the way for God's wonderful grace. Room must always be made for the coming of Jesus into our lives and into His church. He doesn't come because He's requested. He comes because He's prepared for. And the problem is much like it was in Malachi's day. They wanted to *pray at the altar* (2:13) and still *lie and commit adultery* (3:5). In fact they had convinced themselves that those two parts of their lives were *totally unrelated*.

So after Malachi 400 years pass in silence. Then suddenly, out in the desert, a fresh voice is heard once again. People recognize that God has returned to do a new, great work. And yet, as the new message sounds out, it picks up right where the old one left off:

Luke 3:4-14 - "As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. [5] Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways,[6] and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.'" [7] He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? [8] Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. [9] Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." [10] And the crowds asked him, "What then shall we do?" [11] And he answered them, "Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise." [12] Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" [13] And he said to them, "Collect no more than you are authorized to do." [14] Soldiers also asked him, "And we, what shall we do?" And he said to them, "Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages."

Don't miss the straight forwardness of the point. Preparing for Jesus has to do with whether or not you are *content with your pay* or *greedy for more money*. It has to do with *sharing extra clothes and food*. It has to do with *not cheating on your taxes*. It has to do with not using positions of power to take advantage of the weak. Jesus just gave those few examples. But this is what it *means* to prepare a way for the Lord. The whole life has to be ready for Jesus. It effects your job, your friendships, your retirement, your wallet, your family life, the way to think about your enemies. If you're going to make room for a big encounter with Jesus you have to make massive space in your heart.

No wonder God doesn't answer that prayer. And then the petitioner will come to the conclusion that God isn't fair - "*Where is the God of justice?*"(2:27). But the problem isn't with God at all. The person has prayed the prayer but his life isn't anywhere near ready or prepared for God's answer. Revival isn't a mystery. But it does take more than prayer. It takes *preparation*. And on the whole, the church is much more willing to pray for revival than to prepare for it.

2) SUDDENLY, THE LORD WILL COME - Malachi 3:1-3 - "Behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.[2] But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap.[3] He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and

silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord.”

I want to close talking about a *warning* and then a *promise*:

- a) **First, the warning - Malachi 3:2** - “But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?” God has always had to tell His own people not to skip too lightly over the event of His coming in judgement. It's easy to doctrinally pretend you're expecting Him but still not be ready for Him at all.

God has constantly had to remind His own people of this - **Amos 5:18** - “Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord! Why would you have the day of the Lord? It is darkness, and not light...”

This is the danger of mystically *wishing* for a visitation from the Lord without actually *preparing* for it with the kind of demolition/reconstruction process described by the prophets as “*preparing a highway for the Lord*” right through the middle of our lives. This can produce a shallow, empty whining for God that produces nothing healthy. Look at Amos’s words. It's ironic that people who clearly weren't ready for the coming of the Lord would long for it.

- b) **Second, the promise - Malachi 3:1** - “Behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.

Malachi is careful to describe *two* messengers. There's a *messenger*, and there's a *messenger of the covenant*. Malachi was a messenger. John the baptist was a final Old Testament messenger. Jesus is the messenger of the covenant. He establishes the *new* covenant with His own blood. It's the difference between Jesus and every religious prophet, teacher and messenger who has ever lived.

All John the baptist can do is announce. Plead. Urge. Jesus Christ can cleanse and forgive and create a new heart. A messenger can call for repentance - call for reform - call for holiness. And all of that is needed so we can open up our own deceptive hearts to the truth. We need outside help.

Jesus can establish people in new life in God's kingdom. He can forgive the repentant. He can sow grace into the soil broken up by the preparing work of repentance. And we need this great sower of the new covenant every day. Repent every day. Till your heart every day. Be a restless repentor. And bring it all to Jesus Christ every day of the week.

This is keep you *real* before God rather than *wearying* Him.