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Malachi 3:1-12 “Who Shall Endure His Coming?”

Intro. Much of my text today actually refers to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Christians believe in the return of Jesus Christ. Just as surely as He came the first time from heaven, even so He will come the 2nd time. Malachi probably did not understand that the Messiah would have 2 separate comings to earth, but now we know that that is the case, for there are yet many prophecies to be fulfilled, and only the 2nd Coming of Christ will complete the promises of the OT. The fact that Jesus will someday return has practical implications for our lives. It should motivate us to live pure lives as we look for His coming, and that is the primary thrust of my message today. 1 John 3:3 says, “And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” A thoughtful Christian does not want the Lord to return and find him in a backslidden condition (cf. 1 John 2:28).

Folks, Jesus is coming again. He may come again in your lifetime. Either way, you are going to meet Him either in the air, on the ground, or at the judgment. I suggest that you make preparations for that all-important meeting. Speaking of the 2nd Coming of Jesus, let’s see first of all:

I. THE PROMISE OF HIS COMING

In v. 1 God promises, “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.” This promise is in response to the question asked by the people in 2:17, “Where is the God of justice?”¹ They wanted to know why God seems so remote, so uninvolved. Wickedness seems to be winning. Well, here we see that God’s justice may not be swift, but it is sure, and He promises to personally make things right some day. The apostles received the promise of the return of Christ. Acts 1:9-11 says, “Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”

There are over 330 prophecies in the OT predicting the first coming of the Messiah. All of these prophecies were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. But there are many others that are yet to be fulfilled. Malachi gives some prophecies here that were partially fulfilled during the days of Jesus, but others have yet to be fulfilled.

A. His Coming Will Be Preceded by the Messenger of the Lord (v.1a) - This promise of a messenger rests on this prophecy & the prophecy of Isaiah 40:3-5. John the Baptist fulfilled this prophecy, and all four of the Gospels affirm this (Matt.3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23). It was John who presented Jesus to Israel (John 1:29-31). His responsibility was to “prepare the way.” The image is that of people preparing a way² for the king to come, leveling the roads and removing the

¹ The phrase in 3:1, “whom you seek” points back to this.

² “Preparing the way” is an expression peculiar to Isaiah (40:3; 57:14; 62:10).

obstacles so that the king might enjoy easy access. John prepared the way for the ministry of Jesus by preaching the Word to the crowds, urging them to repent of their sins, baptizing them, and then introducing them to Jesus.

I believe there is a dual fulfillment in reference to the Second Coming of Christ. In Rev. 11 we see that God will raise up two witnesses, one of whom will be Elijah. They will rebuke sin, and warn of judgment. They also will prepare the way for the return of the Lord.

B. He Will Suddenly Come – When he says in v.1a that the Lord “will suddenly come to His temple,” it means that He will come unexpectedly. There was a partial fulfillment when Jesus came the first time, and He came suddenly to the temple, and cleansed it. But all of the language here was not fulfilled. This mixing of the first & 2nd Coming of Jesus is not unusual. For many, Jesus will come again unexpectedly. Messiah’s return will be sudden and unexpected, as a thief in the night (1 Thess. 5:2). Its purpose will be the judging of sinners and the establishing of His kingdom on earth. “But of that day and hour, no one knows, no, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only” (Matt. 24:36, NKJV). “For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman” (1 Thess. 5:3).

II. THE PURPOSE OF HIS COMING

Malachi asked, “But who can endure the day of His coming?” They thought the coming of Messiah would only bring salvation and victory for the Jews. But for many, the return of Christ will not be pleasant. Many will not be able to stand before Him.

So what will the Messiah do when He comes? Well Malachi tells us He is coming again:

A. Jesus Will Purify His People – This is indicated in the last part of v.2 – v.3. This is especially true in reference to the Jewish people, but it has application to all who profess to be God’s people. The nation had no ground for murmuring at the delay of the manifestation of divine glory (2:17), for their own sin had to be dealt with first. 1 Peter 4:17 says, “For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?” Indeed, with the coming of the Lord the judgment will begin, not with the heathen, for which the ungodly nation was longing, but with the godless members of the covenant nation!

It is God’s purpose for your life to cleanse and to purify you. In the Law of Moses, God provided three ways for people and things to be cleansed and made acceptable to God: water, fire, and blood. There is no mention here of blood because Jesus Christ died for sinners at His first coming. So here he uses the remaining 2 figures of speech. Fire is used for purifying metals of impurities. The purpose of the silver smith is not to destroy the silver, but to refine it. I have heard it said that the silver smith has completed his work when he can see his image in the silver. Until, then, he keeps the silver hot, and he keeps skimming off the impurities. As Israel is put through the fire of Tribulation, the impurities will rise to the top, and the Lord will take those away. God can do the same thing in our lives. We can go through the fire of trials and persecutions, and God can use such trials to purify sin from our lives even now. Right now, some of you may be going through the fire. Allow God to use this experience to purify your life. Soap and water is also used here of cleansing. God wants to cleanse away the filth of sin from your life. Ephesians 5:26 says that God’s purpose for the church is “that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.”

B. Jesus Will Judge the Ungodly - V. 5 says, “And I will come near you for judgment....” He will not judge only the heathen, but even those among His people who refuse to repent, and be purified. God judged sin at the Cross, but for those who do not accept Jesus, He will judge the sinner. This will especially take place around the time of the 2nd Coming of Christ. My friend, if you will not have Him as your Savior, you’re going to have Him as your judge whether you like it or not.

This list of sinners gives us some idea of the kind of practices that were going on in Malachi’s time and will be going on in the end times. Notice whom in particular that Jesus will bring judgment against:

1. The Sorcerers - Again through these mixed marriages, sorcery, the occult, and demon worship were brought in. Sorcery is forbidden because it means trafficking with demons (Ex. 22:17-18; Lev. 20:10, 27; Deut 18:14; 22:22). The occult seeks to influence spirit beings for selfish ends. This is still going on today in the cults, and in new age religions. And in order to fill the great spiritual vacuum that is in our country, multitudes are turning to the occult today. I sure hope no one in my audience is dabbling in the occult. Halloween can be innocent enough, but on the other hand, it is the highest holiday among those involved in the occult, and we believers should stay clear of anything that is occultic.

2. The Adulterers - This is probably a reference to those who had made the mixed marriages by divorcing their wives and marrying these foreign heathen women. Adultery is a violation of the marriage covenant. The 7th Commandment says, “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Ex. 20:14). This is still in the Bible no matter what the marriage laws permit.

3. The Purjurers – This literally refers to those who swear something to be true, when they know it is a lie. The 9th commandment says, “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor” (Ex. 20:16; cf. Lev. 19:12³). Truth is the “cement” that holds society together, and when that cement crumbles, society fails apart. If we can’t trust one another’s words and promises, then how can we live and work together safely? In a 1990 sample of 422 sexually active 18-25 year olds, 34% of the males and 10% of the females said they had lied about their sexual history in order to have sex (#C-44). Not only that, but the authors of the book, *The Day America Told the Truth*, estimate that 91 percent of people regularly lie. The new Fox series, *Joe Millionaire*, brags about lying to European women. Folks, lying is wrong, and God will judge those who resort to lying.

4. Those Who Exploit Others – He will also judge those “who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, And against those who turn away an alien....” God has a special concern for widows and orphans who are exploited and laborers who don’t receive their wages (Ex. 22:21-24; Lev. 19:10, 13; Deut 10:17-19; 24:14-15, 17-22; 27:19; Ps. 68:5; Isa. 1:17, 23; Jer. 7:6; James 5:1-8).

The Lord would judge these moral and ethical sins. The root cause of their action was clear; they did not fear the Lord. When this respect for the Lord is gone, there is no restraining force against evil. There are two kinds of people in the world, those that fear the Lord and those who don’t. Which group are you in? (cf. v.16).

III. THE PROPER RESPONSE TO THE MESSAGE OF HIS COMING

This is stated in v.2a, “But who can endure the day of His coming?”⁴ If Jesus were to come

³ “And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.”

⁴ The next phrase, “And who can stand when He appears?,” is an example of Hebrew poetic parallelism.

again today, would you be ready to meet Him? Would He call you up to be with Him? This is especially relevant in light of v. 7a, “Yet from the days of your fathers You have gone away from My ordinances And have not kept them.” Will not such people shrink away from Him in shame? The unbelieving skeptics will not be able to stand under the judgment that will include them.

Because of our sinful natures, we are so prone to wander away from the Lord, aren't we? Well, there are two important lessons that we can draw from these verses:

A. Return to God Now Before Its Too Late – God said in v.7b, “Return to Me, and I will return to you....” Yet, in spite of repeated chastisements from the Lord, Israel had not truly returned to the Lord. But the main problem was they denied that they had ever left God! In the last of v.7 they asked, “In what way shall we return?” They played the part of being highly offended and with a wave of the hand, they dismissed the charges as unworthy of them. They seem to be saying that they are not aware of any area of their lives that they are lacking in. They are say to God, “You say that we should return to You. We didn't know that we had gone away. We've been going up to the temple to all the services. We're doing this, that and the other.” I would say that this is the condition of a great many folk in the church today. Ritualism has been substituted for reality. God says you may be going through the ritual, but your heart is far from Me.

I heard of a church where one of the officers got up and suggested to the board who was finding fault with everything, including the pastor, that he felt the officers needed to repent. Do you know that they rebuffed that man and insulted him so that it apparently brought on his death? That was the way he was treated for even *suggesting* to a group of church officers that they needed to repent. Israel said, “We don't need to repent. That crowd outside needs to repent”.

What does He mean by returning to Him? It means to turn from sin and turn to God. It means to be walking in one direction, you find out you're going the wrong way, and then you turn right around and go the opposite way. This begins with repentance. We do not get the full meaning of repentance until we come to the New Testament. *Metanoia*, the Greek word, means “to change your mind.” There are a lot of believers who need to come home. And when we come back to him, where do we come? Well, where did you leave him? At some point, you turned away from God. What are you doing committing adultery? What are you doing lying? What are you doing dabbling in the occult? God says, “Turn around, and come on home.”

But the sins mentioned in v. 5 are not the only sins that they needed to repent of. When the people acted like they didn't need to return to the Lord, the prophet added another sin to the list beginning in v.8:

B. Stop Robbing God (v.8a) – The prophet uses a strong word that is used only here & in Prov. 22:23. It means to spoil, defraud, to rob. To rob one's fellow man is a great sin, but to rob God should be unthinkable. So they want to know in what way they have robbed God. He explains. They were robbing God in failing to give tithes and offerings. The word “tithes” comes from a Hebrew word that means “ten.” Lev. 27:30-33 teaches that all the tithes of the land or the herds belonged to the Lord (cf. also Num. 18:20ff; Deut. 14:22ff). Tithes and offerings freely given are acknowledgements of that ownership and of man's stewardship. To keep for yourself what belongs to God is the same as robbing God! Beside, the people under Nehemiah had vowed to bring their tithes (Neh. 10:34-39), but they hadn't kept their vow. McGee pointed out that instead of having the benediction at the end of the church service, they ought to have somebody yell out, “Stop, thieves!” Why? Because they have robbed God.

When you withhold tithes you are saying 2 things to God. First, you saying, “God, I don't

love you enough to give you this.” Isn’t it true that among other things, your giving proves your love for Christ? He says, “If you love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15). But even more you’re saying, “I don’t trust you to take care of me.”

C. Start Obeying God by Giving Him the Tithe - In v.10a God says, “Bring all the tithes” - not just a part of it which would further defraud the Lord, but all of it. In fact, the Hebrew scholar Keil says that emphasis lies upon the Hebrew word *kol*: the *whole* of the tithe they are to bring, and not merely a portion of it.

Recent research has indicated that there has been a significant decline in tithing. Barna reported that the proportion of Christian adults who tithe has dropped by 62% in the past year (Reported by Barna, May 21, 2003). Also, just 6% of born again households tithed to their church in 2002 (#C-621). He reported that 8% tithed in 2001, so that would be a 25% decline.

Now I will acknowledge that the church is not under the tithe system as a legal system. We are not under the law, but under grace. But please remember that the principle of tithing preceded the law. Abraham commenced it, giving the tithe to Melchizedek. Jacob committed it to the Lord. Moses codified it. Malachi commanded it. Jesus commended it. He said, “These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone.” The tithe is certainly a yardstick by which you could measure yourself, but I don’t think that it is binding upon New Testament believers.

The epistles do not teach tithing, but notice what the New Testament does teach, and notice the examples of giving that we find in the New Testament. Let’s notice the way the early church gave, for though they did not follow tithing as a law, they did follow the underlying principles of tithing. First of all, they gave:

1. Proportionately - I Cor. 16:2 says that we are to give, “storing up as he may prosper.” Tithing is a form of proportionate giving. So the New Testament supports the concept that the more you make, the more you should give.

2. Generously - Through very poor, the Macedonians gave generously. They gave way beyond any tenth. I think that most Christians in this affluent society ought to be giving more than a tenth. You see, giving is fellowship (2 Cor. 8:4). It is a part of the fellowship and part of the worship of the church (2 Cor. 8:5). Why would a Christian give less under grace than the Jew under law? The tithe is the beginning point of giving in the New Testament.

3. In Store (I Cor. 16:2) - Notice where they were to bring the tithe. V. 10 says they were to bring “the tithes into the storehouse.” You see, the storehouse was part of the temple. When people brought their tithe of grain or other commodities, it was stored away in these storerooms.⁵ God gave a certain part of the animal to the priests, and He always said that they were to eat it right there. But the produce was stored until it was needed.

Likewise, in the book of Acts, the early church brought their offerings, and “laid them at the apostles’ feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need” (Acts 4:35; cf. 4:37; 5:2). I believe that most of our giving should be undesignated to the church, and the church is responsible to distribute those funds according to gospel priorities, and needs.

4. Cheerfully - 2 Corinthians 9:7 says, “So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver.” Paul says that you should give hilariously, joyfully. The offering ought to be one of the most joyful parts of the worship service. Giving a compulsory tithe, unwillingly and reluctant, is contrary to this New Testament principle. If you can’t give a tithe gladly, then you need to examine your heart to determine why not.

⁵ It may not have been until the later kings that these were added to the temple.

D. Be Motivated by the Reasons Given – Malachi tells us why many of use are glad to give a tithe or more to the Lord. Two primary reasons are given:

1. The Curse Will Be Removed - V. 9 says, “You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me.” When we rob God, we rob ourselves. And robbing God puts you under a curse. There are many, many indications that this nation is crumbling from within. Do you think we can make a case that this nation is cursed with a curse of our own making?

Part of the curse is described in v.11. Notice what God promises will happen when you stop robbing God, “I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, So that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field.” The devourer would for them include the locust and hail, and drought, and mildew (cf. Amos 4:9, Hag. 2:17), anything that could injure the fruits of the land. Their crops had already been ruined by devouring insects (see Hag. 1:3-11), but things could get worse. Now it is not that God brings these things upon people. These are the results of living in a sin-cursed, fallen world. The only difference is that when you trust God and tithe, He promises to “rebuke the devourer,” to protect you from many of the losses that would otherwise occur.

I hear people say, “I can’t afford to tithe.” Well based on this principle, I want to ask you, “Can you afford not to tithe?” I have heard many testimonies of tithers who say that they are actually better off financially. Here is one of the reasons. When you give generously to support the Lord’s work, and with the right attitude, God generally puts a hedge of protection around you to minimize your financial loses. The money that rightfully belongs to God that we keep for ourselves never stays with us. It ends up going to the doctor, the auto repair shop, or the tax collector.

2. The Blessing of God Will Begin – God says in the last of v.10, “And try Me now in this,” Says the LORD of hosts, “If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it.” In robbing God, the people were not fulfilling the covenant they had made with the Lord; therefore, God couldn’t fulfill His promise and bless them (Lev. 26:3ff). “The Lord will command the blessing on you in your storehouses and in all to which you set your hand, and He will bless you in the land” (Deut 28:8). So if we do our part, God will do His part, by giving abundant blessing. The Lord summons and challenges us to measure faith with deeds. God makes it clear that our giving is something that He looks at. If a church or an individual is not giving, God has not promised to bless them at all. If we open our heart to him, He will open His heart to us. “If you prove, I will pour.” God promises to meet your needs if you will give generously and cheerfully to him. As the recipients of the Lord’s favor and His gracious beneficence, they would enjoy the praises of the nations, for their land would be a delightful land.

God made good His promises to His people. In the time of Hezekiah, there was a period of revival. In 2 Chronicles 31:10 we read; “And Azariah the chief priest of the house of Zadok answered him, and said, Since the people began to bring the offerings into the house of the Lord, we have had enough to eat, and have left plenty left: for the Lord has blessed his people; and that which is left is this great store.”

The spiritual principle behind this promise is echoed in Luke 6:38, which says, “Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.” 2 Cor. 9:6 says, “He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.” Paul says that what holds true in the realm of farming holds true in the realm of giving. So Malachi 3:10 applies to believers today.

Giving requires faith in God & His promises, but such faith will be rewarded. The founder of the Hershey Chocolate company was a Christian who was very regular in giving to the Lord. The J.C. Penney Stores were started by a preacher's son whose father died when he was a boy. There were no arrangements made to care for his mother. He said, "When I grow up, I'm going to make money and see to it that no preacher's widow had to work like this." He was faithful in giving, and God was faithful in blessing.

Conclusion: I have followed the prophet Malachi in preaching against sin, and calling upon us to repent. God is a God of grace and mercy. He is willing to forgive. In v. 6 God said, "For I am the LORD, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob." The reason why Israel had not been absolutely obliterated was because of His grace. It was because God is gracious, and He keeps His covenant. Israel will never perish because their existence rests upon the promise of the unchangeable God (cf. Rom. 11:28-29). And He is still gracious because He never changes. The writer of Hebrews wrote, "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever" (13:8). God today is still a God of judgment. But He's also a God who never change in reference to His grace - and that is a comfort to anyone who will accept the grace of God. You can depend on God. He will never change. 1 John 1:9 states that God is "faithful and just to forgive our sins." God is faithful to His promises and just toward His Son who died for our sins that we might be forgiven.

If you are in the service this morning and you haven't given you heart to Him, then God does not want your money, but you. The Bible says, "They first gave themselves to the Lord." On the other hand, if you are a believer, you may need to make things right with the Lord. Return to Him. Come home to Him. Whether your sin is in the area of not tithing, or lying, or adultery, or dabbling with the occult, or defrauding someone, or whatever, God will forgive you if you only confess that sin to Him, and turn from it. Do it today!

Sources: Homer Hailey, *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972); C. F. Keil, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes, Minor Prophets, Vol. 10* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena: Thru The Bible Radio, 1982); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Dr. Frank Pollard (notes from his sermon on 3:7-18 dated 5/6/94); Dr. Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on this text-1989); Warren W. Wiersbe, "Be" Series: *Old Testament, Malachi: Be Amazed* (Wheaton: Victor Books/SP Publications, Inc., 1996). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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This document has not been transcribed from an audio recording, but is the result of the sermon preparation process. Most outlines are original to the author, but much of the content of the notes are taken from commentaries, other sermons, and Bible study aids (see sources above). Sermons are preached without notes, and thus the content of the "live" sermon is in the author's own words. To get an audio recording of this message, you may send \$1 for each audio cassette tape ordered, plus \$3 shipping & handling for each order mailed in. Up to 2 messages come on each cassette. Make checks payable to Swift Creek Baptist Church, P.O. Box 235, Colonial Heights, VA 23834.