

Malachi 2:17-3:5 – Look! He is Coming!

The text that we're looking at this morning is Malachi 2:17-3:5. The passage that we're looking at this morning is probably the most exciting passage that we're going to see in the book of Malachi – which is a good thing especially after the passages that we've been looking at for the last couple of weeks. And the reason why this passage is so exciting is because this passage contains a prophecy about Jesus that was written over four hundred years before he was born.

But the interesting thing about this prophecy isn't the details about the prophecy and how they match up with Jesus – the interesting thing about this prophecy is what it tells us about who Jesus really was and what he came here to do.

Now that's completely different from the way that things normally work. Normally if you want to find out who a person really was and find out what the significance of their life was you have to look later on in their life or to way after they're gone. But Jesus was the only person in history – except maybe John the Baptist – where you have to look way back into the past to see the significance of who they really were. And this passage is going to help us to do that.

So what we're going to do this morning is we're going to take a look at this passage and we're going to see what it has to say about who Jesus really was and what he came here to do. And we want to make sure that our beliefs match up with *that* picture of Jesus rather than with anything else that other people might have to say about Him outside the Word of God.

So let's start off by looking at the reason for why God gave this prophecy in the first place.

In verse 17 it says:

Malachi 2:17 – You have wearied the LORD with your words [in other words, God is getting pretty sick and tired of some of the things that you're saying]. But you ask, “How have we wearied him? By saying, “All who do evil are good in the eyes of the LORD, and he is pleased with them” or “Where is the God of justice?”

So the reason why God gave this prophecy about Jesus is because the people that Malachi is talking about here were complaining that God wasn't doing anything about the wickedness that they were seeing all around them. They were basically saying that God didn't care about sin because if God did care about sin he would do something about it. Well the prophecy that we see here about Jesus is God's answer to that complaint – if you want to know what God is going to do about sin, then pay attention to the prophecy that he's about to make about Jesus.

But before we get into the details of the prophecy, there's already something here that we can learn about Jesus and that's this: the main problem that Jesus came to deal with was the problem of sin. And that's important for us to understand because when we're sharing the gospel and when we're trying to tell people about Jesus we need to make sure that we point out the right problem that Jesus came to solve. Jesus didn't come to fix your finances, Jesus didn't come to secure your success, and he definitely didn't come so that you could find the champion in you – Jesus came to deal with the problem of sin. And if that's not at the very centre of what we're talking about when we're sharing the gospel then we're not really sharing the gospel. Jesus came to deal with the problem of sin.

So with that in mind let's take a look at the actual prophecy that we see in verses 1 to 5. So beginning in verse 1 it says:

Malachi 3:1a – “See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way for me.”

Notice that God is the one who is speaking – you can see that at the very end of the verse. And he's saying that before he himself shows up to take care of sin that he's going to send someone else ahead of him to get the way ready for him. Now when you look at the New Testament it's clear that the person that God is talking about is John the Baptist.

In Matthew 11:10, speaking about John the Baptist, Jesus said:

Matthew 11:10 – This is the one about whom it is written: “I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.” – which is a quotation that comes right from Malachi 3:1.

But why would God have to send someone in front of himself to get things ready before he could come back and take care of the problem of sin? Why doesn't he just come down right away and take care of the problem of sin?

Well, the answer to that one is that if God came down right away and took care of the problem of sin that there would be absolutely no chance that anyone would be able to repent and be saved. Because when God came down he was going to come down in judgment and there wouldn't be any chance for anyone to be saved. And that's the final judgment that we see in verse 5:

Malachi 3:5 – So I will come near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice, but do not fear me,” says the LORD Almighty.

But before *that* judgment came God was going to send a messenger so that the people would have a chance to repent. In 2 Peter 3:8-9 it says:

2 Peter 3:8-9 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

And that's exactly the message that John the Baptist came with – Repent, because the day is coming when God is going to come back in judgment and when God does come back in judgment there won't be any chance for repentance after that. So repent and make things right with God now.

And then in the next part of verse 1 it talks about someone who would come after John the Baptist. And from the New Testament, of course, we know that that person is Jesus. But the interesting thing is what it has to say about who Jesus really is. So in the second part of verse 1 it says:

Malachi 3:1b – “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.

This part of the verse tells us two things about who Jesus really is. First of all, it calls him the Lord. But notice that the word *Lord* isn't spelled with all capital letters, which means that Jesus isn't being referred to as Yahweh here. The word that's used here for *Lord* means “ruler” or “master” and it can even be used as a title that's used for a king. And that's probably the way that it's being used here. So it's saying that after John the Baptist came, Jesus would come as king.

But even though Jesus isn't being referred to as Yahweh here, it's still clear that he's being referred to as God. And there two reasons for that.

(a) Notice, first, that it says that the Lord in this passage would come back to *his temple*, which is clearly talking about the temple that it's in Jerusalem. Now the only one who could say that the temple belongs to him is God himself.

(b) But notice second that it calls him the *Lord you are seeking*. That has to be a reference back to 2:17 when they ask the question, “Where is the God of justice?”

So even though Jesus isn't being called Yahweh it's clear that Jesus is still being referred to as God.

Now the second title that Jesus is given is a little bit more difficult to deal with. **It says that Jesus is the messenger of the covenant.** And the reason why that's a problem is because the word *messenger* here is the same word that's used for angel. So is it saying that Jesus is an angel? That's what Jehovah's Witnesses say. Is that what the text is actually saying? Let me give you three reasons why that can't be what the text is actually saying.

First of all, the word *messenger* can be used in a number of different ways and it doesn't always refer to an angel. In fact we just saw the word messenger at the beginning of verse 1 and in that case the word is referring to John the Baptist. So the word *messenger* doesn't mean angel by itself – it simply means someone who brings a message from God – angels happened to do that but there were a lot of

other people who carried a message from God as well. So the word *messenger* doesn't necessarily mean angel.

The second reason why this text isn't referring to Jesus as an angel is because this is probably a reference back to the angel of the LORD in the book of Exodus. Now that's a really unfortunate translation because it makes it seem as if the angel of the LORD is an actual angel. But when you look at the way that the book of Exodus actually talks about the angel of the LORD it's clear that when it talks about the angel of the LORD it's talking about God Himself.

Just take a look at Exodus 3:1-6 and notice the way that it talks about the burning bush:

Exodus 3:1-6 – Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the *angel of the LORD* appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush [so we're talking about the angel of the LORD in the burning bush]. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight – why the bush did not burn up." When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" [So now it's God in the bush]. And Moses said, "Here I am." "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God. [But I thought it was the angel of the LORD in the fire! That's because the angel of the LORD is God Himself].

So it can't be calling Jesus an angel because it's probably a reference back to the angel of the LORD – who *actually is God Himself*.

And the third reason why it can't be calling Jesus an angel is because it calls him the messenger of the covenant *whom you desire*. That's an exact parallel to the line that comes before when it calls him the Lord you are seeking – which tells us that we're talking about the same person. Again, it's a reference back to 2:17 when they ask, "Where is the God of justice?" God is saying, "If you're looking for the God of justice, this is the one that you're looking for."

So in verse 1 we see a clear picture of who Jesus actually was – he wasn't just a human being, he was the same God who appeared to Moses in the burning bush, he was the same God who led the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt, and he's the same God that the people were looking to take care of the problem of sin. So you don't have to go to the New Testament to prove that Jesus was God – it's right here in a prophecy that was given 400 years before he was born.

So we know that Jesus was God and that he came here to take care of the problem of sin. And there were basically three different ways that Jesus could have taken care of the problem of sin.

- ▶ First, he could have come right there and then and given people the final judgment that they were waiting for. That's what the people wanted God to do. But if he came back and gave the final judgment right there and then then there wouldn't be any chance for anyone to be saved.
- ▶ The second option that he had was that he could have come and simply ignored the problem of sin. Or maybe he could have just dealt with the big sins and not worry about the little sins that everyone else does. That's what people today wish God would do – we want him to take care of the big sin and big sinners but we don't want him to take care of our sin. But if Jesus came and simply ignored sin or if he was selective in terms of how he dealt with sin then the accusation that the people were making back in Malachi 2:17 would have been true – he would have been a God who treated evil people like they were good and he wouldn't be a god of justice because sin can't be ignored – it's something that has to be dealt with, whether we're talking about big sin or small sin.
- ▶ The third option is the one that we see in verses 2 to 4. It says:

Malachi 3:2-4 – But who can endure the day of his coming [talking about the coming of Jesus]? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. 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, and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years.

Notice that in these verses God singles out the Levites as the people whose sin needs to be dealt with. And there are two reasons for that: first, because the priests and the Levites were at the forefront of a lot of the wickedness that was going on back then and, second, because the priests and the Levites were representative of the rest of the people. So even though the focus here is on the Levites it's actually talking about everyone else as well.

And it says that when Jesus came he would be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap.

When it talks about a refiner's fire it's actually talking about a smelter's fire, which is a little bit different from a refiner's fire. The reason why you needed a smelter's fire was because when you got gold and silver out of the ground it was always mixed with other kinds of metals and you couldn't just separate them mechanically.

So what they would do was that they would put the gold into a special kind of clay pot and they would add lead and salt and sometimes other things as well to help in the smelting process. And then they would put the pot in a smelter's fire, which would heat up the gold to about 800 degrees Celsius and they would leave it there for about five days. And when they took the pot out of the fire the only thing that was left in the pot was pure gold (or at least as pure as they could get it back then).

The reason why you needed to smelt silver and gold was because they were always mixed together with other kinds of metals. So back in the ancient world they would put the gold into a specially-made clay pot along with some other things like lead and salt to help in the process. And then they would heat the pot till about 800 degrees Celsius for about five days. Now that's not hot enough to make the gold melt but it's still pretty hot. And after the five days was over you would look into the pot and there would be nothing but pure gold – or at least as pure as they could get it back then. The rest of the metals that they didn't want to have either got evaporated or got sucked into the pot.

Now this is a picture that's used quite a bit in the Bible and normally the smelter's fire refers to God bringing us through suffering so that he can make us into the kind of people that he wants us to be. But notice that in this case the fire isn't suffering – the fire is Jesus himself. It's saying that when people encounter Jesus, there can be

one of two different effects - they can either end up being purified or they can end up being destroyed.

You see the same thing in the second picture that you see here. This time it says that Jesus was going to be like the soap that a launderer uses. Now when we think of soap we shouldn't be thinking about the kind of soap that you use to wash your hands or the kind of soap that you use when you take a shower. It's actually talking about lye, which is kind of like soap but it's extremely corrosive and can do a lot of damage to your skin. I read a blog this week about a mother who uses lye to make homemade soap and her two-year-old son got into the lye and poured it all over his body. His eyes were bleeding, his skin turned red, and he was absolutely screaming.

Why on earth would anyone want to use lye? It's because back then that was the best way to get rid of the grease on wool when you got it from the sheep and it was the best way to get your clothes really clean – because it breaks down grease so you can wash it off. God is saying that when Jesus came he was going to be like lye. And just like the smelter's fire, the lye that the launderer used was meant to do one of two things – it could either purify you or it could destroy you.

And that's how Jesus came to deal with sin – when people encountered Jesus it could either purify them of their sin or it could end up with them being destroyed.

Now what's interesting about this text is that it doesn't tell us how Jesus would purify people from their sin. But in the New Testament it says that Jesus would do that by doing two things: by dying on the cross and taking the punishment for our sin and by sending the Holy Spirit to transform us and make us into the kind of people that he wants us to be.

So if you look at all of the sins that we've been looking at in the book of Malachi, if someone repents of their sin and puts their faith in Jesus they can be purified from all of those things. If you look at the sins that we just saw in Malachi 3:5, if a person repents of those sins and puts their faith in Christ they can be purified from those sins as well. And God can transform you to be a different person so that you actually fear God and want to live a life that's pleasing to Him.

Now that's a way better plan than the other two options that we looked at. If God came back and judged sin right away then no one would survive. And if God simply left sin unpunished we would be in big trouble because sin needs to be dealt with. So God's solution was to send Jesus and save some people from their sin. But we have to keep in mind that the day is coming when Jesus will come back – but this time it's not going to be to save – it's going to be to judge. And that's going to be a good thing for us because sin is finally going to be completely destroyed and God is going to make everything right. But for the person who doesn't believe in Jesus, whose sins haven't been purified, it won't be a good thing.

So let's go back over what we've learned:

1. First of all, God sent Jesus to take care of the problem of sin. And if we're sharing the gospel and we don't talk about sin then we're not sharing the gospel. That's what Jesus came to deal with and that's the message that we need to bring to people.

2. But we also need to tell them about God's unparalleled love. Because instead of coming down and judging us for our sin, He came down Himself to save us from our sin. God was the one who came down so that we could be purified from our sin through faith in him. And when a person encounters Jesus there are one of two things that can happen – they can either be purified or they can be condemned to judgment.

3. Third, there is a day when God will finally put an end to sin. But we need to make sure that we're ready before that day comes because today is the day that God has given for us to be saved.

Is that the message that we're telling people when we're sharing the gospel? And have we been purified through faith in Jesus so that when we do have to stand before God to give an account for what we have done, we'll be able to stand.