

The Lord is Coming to Clean House

Malachi 3:1-4

¹ Look! I am sending my messenger! He will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord, whom you are seeking, will come to his temple! The Messenger of the Covenant, in whom you delight, will surely come, says the LORD of Armies. ² But who can endure the day when he comes? Who will remain standing when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire, like launderers bleach! ³ He will be seated like a refiner and a purifier of silver. He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and like silver. They will belong to the LORD and bring him an offering in righteousness. ⁴ Judah and Jerusalem's offerings will be pleasing to the LORD as they were in the days of old, in years long ago.

These words were written four hundred years before Christ was born. They tell us of a messenger who would come, namely John the Baptist. They also tell of another messenger, the Messenger of the Covenant. This messenger who "will come to his temple" is Jesus. So these words are mostly about Jesus, not about John. But John wouldn't mind. It was John who said of Jesus: *He must become greater. I must become less.* (John 3:30) The first messenger, John the Baptist will have an important job of preparing human hearts for the Savior. But what the Savior Jesus will do for human hearts is far greater. So we see from this prophecy, the Lord is coming to clean house.

Malachi prophesies about two messengers. The first is the messenger who prepares the way for the Lord. He clears the way for the Lord by preaching a baptism of repentance. John the Baptist knew how to prepare people to meet their Savior. You don't meet him with your own righteousness, with your own obedience. You meet him with your guilt, your sins, with every wrong thing you ever did, think, or say. John's message would ring out loud and clear: Repent! Turn from your life of sin. Turn to the only one who can save your soul. Turn to Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. (John 2:2)

As important as that message is for all to hear, the prophet mentions a second, more important messenger. The prophet says, *"Then suddenly the Lord, whom you are seeking, will come to his temple! The Messenger of the Covenant, in whom you delight, will surely come, says the LORD of Armies."* Do you think God's people were ready for their Savior to come? Caesar Augustus would issue a decree that everyone return to their hometown for a census, and while they were at it for a special tax. How many in Palestine were thinking: Finally, this was the time for God to bring to our world our only Savior! Hardly any thought that way. People, like people today were thinking about themselves and making any inconvenience of being away from home a bit more bearable. Who was willing to give up their room at Bethlehem's inn, when Joseph and a very pregnant Mary came to town? She's having labor pains? Are you kidding? No innkeeper wanted to clean up that mess. No room here. Need shelter? Try our stable.

Even when he was grown up and ready to begin his ministry, who was ready to receive him? Did he come with a fool-proof plan to drive the Romans out of the holy land? If not, sorry, not interested. But he was the man for the job. He was the God-Man. He came to clean house. And the people would be ready for him, made ready through the preaching of John the Baptist.

We need to take to heart John's message of repentance if we're going to be ready meet our Savior. He wasn't coming to our world just to show us how to make wise choices in life. WWJD (What would Jesus do?) is not the reason he came to us. But we need him. We desperately do. Your Lord demands a pure product: You shall be holy because your God is holy. 99 and whatever percent clean is not good enough. So who can endure? Who can stand before the Judge of all the earth. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. There is no one who does good, not even one.

Who can possibly endure the day of God's judgment? Some impressive cleaning must be made. That way you and I can stand pure and holy before his throne. The righteous God of justice brings righteousness to us sinners. The first time he appeared, he came to purify the whole world. Fire destroys all that is impure. God's wrath would burn against him when he took our place on a cross. Like a launderer he gets the dirt out. He washes us clean of sin. He uses his precious blood to wash us clean.

Who can stand? God's people can. The sacrifices of God are a broken and contrite spirit... *Judah and Jerusalem's offerings will be pleasing to the LORD as they were in the days of old, in years long ago.* The heart that is scrubbed and scoured clean by the blood of Jesus stands. *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me"* (Psalm 51:10).

In order to refine his people into people willing to do his will and submit to him, the Lord promises to purify their spiritual leaders as well: *He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and like silver. They will belong to the LORD.* How comforting for us in the ministry, that the Lord in his mercy will purge us rather than destroy us. Those God calls into ministry, he also purifies by the gospel. We cling to the righteousness provided by Christ. We are purified for service. When he purifies us by faith, we can help our people see how God has washed them clean and even purified the whole world.

Then we are ready for his second coming. The earth will melt with intense heat at his coming. In his fire of judgment he will destroy all sin, evil, and rebellion. But we are safe and secure in his love and forgiveness. The flames won't harm us as we begin eternal life with our Lord. Those who reject the righteousness won by Christ and offered freely to all by faith, cannot stand in his presence. Those who appear before the Lord dressed in their own righteousness will be gathered like chaff to be burned in the fire.

Can you see how we need our Savior? We sin daily and need his constant cleansing. We always need to take to heart the message of the Baptist: Repent! Jesus is the only way to heaven. His blood cleanses us of every sin so we can stand holy and pure before our God. Yes, our Lord is coming to clean house. Let's stay ready with pure hearts trusting solely in him.