

# God is Coming to His Temple

6.22.25

Message 4

Malachi Series

Malachi 2:17–3:6 (CSB)

**17** You have wearied the LORD with your words.

Yet you ask, “How have we wearied him?”

When you say, “Everyone who does what is evil is good in the LORD’s sight, and he is delighted with them, or else where is the God of justice?”

**3** “See, I am going to send my messenger, and he will clear the way before me. Then the Lord you seek will suddenly come to his temple, the Messenger of the covenant you delight in—see, he is coming,” says the LORD of Armies. **2** But who can endure the day of his coming? And who will be able to stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire and like launderer’s bleach. **3** He will be like a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver. Then they will present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. **4** And the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will please the Lord as in days of old and years gone by.

**5** “I will come to you in judgment, and I will be ready to witness against sorcerers and adulterers; against those who swear falsely; against those who oppress the hired worker, the widow, and the fatherless; and against those who deny justice to the resident alien. They do not fear me,” says the LORD of Armies. **6** “Because I, the LORD, have not changed, you descendants of Jacob have not been destroyed.”

## Intro. More Accusations

A. Have you ever accused God of not loving you?

1. I love this quote:

2. Sometimes the circumstances of life can be so harsh and so contrary to expectations that the ungodly are led to an outright denial of the providence of God in the affairs of men and women.<sup>1</sup>

a. This has certainly been true to the history of Israel.

b. It would be easy for us to look at the war with Iran and Gaza, the Holocaust, the centuries of persecution throughout the world and deny God's favor or faithfulness upon Israel.

3. In Malachi, some of the Jews were thinking the same.

a. They were comparing their situation with those of their neighbors and accused God of either being absent or unfaithful.

b. It's the agnostic creed:

c. The evidence of evil means that there must be no God.

4. And, if there is a God, then He is rewarding the wicked more than the righteous.

a. They are wicked, and I'm righteous.

b. Why, God, are you punishing us for these little things and letting the heathens around us prosper?

B. It says God is wearied with the words.

1. Of course, God cannot be tired like we are, but He is worn down and seems ready to give up on them.

2. He's tired of the accusations, the disbelief, and the meaningless sacrifices.

3. The worship of Israel had become painful to God.

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<sup>1</sup> Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Malachi: God's Unchanging Love* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 75.

C. In response to all of these accusations, broken relationships, and contemptible sacrifices, God enacts a plan.

1. God's plan is part judgment and part redemption.
2. Some will experience God's plan as Good News, and others will experience God's plan as wrath.
3. This is true for us today and in the future.
4. When Jesus returns, that will be the greatest event of human existence.
  - a. For some, the appearance of Christ is glorious.
  - b. For others, the appearance of Christ seals their doom.

God's plan began with:

## 1. A messenger who clears the way

A. Picture this as a person whose job is to make a clear path for a head of state.

1. Several years ago, I was in Budapest, Hungary.
2. We were standing by the Parliament building (picture) and all of a sudden everything stopped and closed.
3. Out of nowhere came a motorcade, with officers and personnel ensuring that no one got in the way of whoever was in the main vehicle.
4. The importance of the person in the car mandated that the path was clear of obstacles, persons, and traffic.
5. God declares He is on the way and His messenger will clear the Way.

B. This clearing of a path is common in the OT, especially in Isaiah.

1. Isaiah 40:3 (CSB)

<sup>3</sup>A voice of one crying out:

Prepare the way of the LORD in the wilderness;

make a straight highway for our God in the desert.

a. Malachi is not the only prophet to have been given this message.

b. This isn't the first time I've read these prophecies.

c. But what I didn't notice until the study was the differences in the prophecies.

2. In the other instances, the foreign enemies of God were the ones being moved out of the way for the triumphal entry of the King.

a. Here, in Malachi, God's people were in the way.

b. It is God's chosen people who were hindering the arrival of God.

C. The New Testament fulfillment of the messenger is John the Baptist.

1. John's birth was not as miraculous as Jesus' but was still a miracle.

a. Zechariah and Elizabeth were older and without children.

b. But God moved and miraculously allowed them to have a child at an older age.

c. God did this for Abraham and Sarah at the beginning of God's covenant with Israel, and God does it again here as God's plans shift into a new stage.

2. Here is what is fascinating about John the Baptist's story.

a. His father, Zechariah, was working in the Temple when he had a messenger of God, the Angel of the Lord, interrupt his work and declare that he and his wife would have a child.

b. If Zechariah was working in the Temple, what tribe was he from? **LEVI**.

c. Who does Malachi address multiple times in his book?  
The descendants of the tribe of Levi, the priests.

3. Jesus couldn't have been a natural priest because he was from the tribe of Judah, but John would have been.

a. Had God not intervened, it was more than likely that John would have served the Lord in the Temple as a priest.

b. Instead, God made him a prophet and placed him in the wilderness.

Matthew 11:7–15 (CSB)

<sup>7</sup>As these men were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swaying in the wind? <sup>8</sup>What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothes? See, those who wear soft clothes are in royal palaces. <sup>9</sup>What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. <sup>10</sup>This is the one about whom it is written:

**See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you;**

**he will prepare your way before you.'**

<sup>11</sup>"Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one greater than John the Baptist has appeared, but the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. <sup>12</sup>From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has been suffering violence, and the violent have been seizing it by force. <sup>13</sup>For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. <sup>14</sup>And if you're willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who is to come. <sup>15</sup>Let anyone who has ears listen.

D. When John the Baptist was preaching and prophesying, who were the biggest obstacles?

1. The Jews would have said it was the Romans.

2. The Jews would have blamed King Herod or Pontius Pilate.

3. But it was the religious leaders that he called “Brood of Vipers.

- a. They were in the way.
- b. They were hindering God’s people with their limitless rules and yokes that were too heavy to bear.
- c. They were the ones teaching the people that it was impossible to serve God.
- d. They were the ones being pushed aside to make room for Jesus the King.

E. How terrible of a thing to think that we are God’s people, and we are in the way of what God wants to do?

- 1. How terrible to think that our leadership might be placing obstacles before the movement of the King to His house.
- 2. This doesn’t mean that holiness is a hindrance to God or that standards should be thrown away.
- 3. But it does mean that my heart, my worship, my relationships, and the way I view God could put me in opposition to God.

## 2. The Lord will suddenly come to his temple.

A. Notice the destination where God is heading.

- 1. He isn’t going to the throne of kings or princes.
- 2. He is in procession to His house, the place where He determined His glory to dwell.
- 3. The irony of the verse is that Malachi says, “then the Lord you seek” will come.
- 4. But they haven’t been seeking the Lord, so His return is sudden and surprising.

B. The CSB captures the significance of who this is with a capital “M” on the messenger.

Malachi 3:1 (CSB)

“See, I am going to send my messenger, and he will clear the way before me. Then the Lord you seek will suddenly come to his temple, the Messenger of the covenant you delight in—see, he is coming,” says the LORD of Armies.

1. If I understand this correctly, it means that the first messenger, John, cleared the way for the second messenger.
2. But the second Messenger is no ordinary prophet but the very Son of God.

- a. Jesus is the One whom John prepared the way for.
- b. Jesus is the One whom John the Baptist was not worthy to tie the shoes of.
- c. Jesus is the One who dramatically made His way to the Temple.

3. The Temple served as the backdrop for many of Jesus’ encounters.

- a. He healed the sick there.
- b. He taught truth there.
- c. He confronted religious leaders there.
- d. He cleared the courts of moneylenders and those seeking profit.

C. There will come a day when Jesus returns and will make His entrance known.

1. On that day, He will come to Jerusalem in power and authority.
2. On that day, Jesus sets all things to right and establishes His throne in Jerusalem.

D. This is why many Christians place such a strong focus on Israel.

1. Israel is not a perfect land or people, but my reading of Scripture leads me to believe that they are still a promised people and a Promise land.
2. When Jesus returns, Jerusalem and the Middle East are at the center.
3. This doesn't mean that the Israel-Iran conflict is the Battle of Armageddon.
  - a. There have been wars like this before in the past 80 years, like the 6-day war and the Yom Kippur War.
  - b. However, it is a good reminder that Jesus is still on His way.
  - c. The Messenger has been sent, and the path is clear and is being cleared.

And the Lord's return leads us to the third part of God's plan:

### 3. He will refine and purify, starting with the leadership.

Malachi 3:2-3 (CSB)

<sup>2</sup>But who can endure the day of his coming? And who will be able to stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire and like launderer's bleach. <sup>3</sup>He will be like a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver. Then they will present offerings to the LORD in righteousness.

A. The return of the Lord of Heaven's Armies will be like nothing ever experienced.

1. Who can endure and who can stand?



2. The presence and arrival of the Lord's Messenger is so great that "no one will be able to remain on his feet when the Lord's representative appears."<sup>2</sup>

3. When the men of old met the Lord, their response was to fall on the ground with their faces to the ground.

4. This will be the response of all the people when the Lord returns.

B. Two images/similes: a refiner's fire and a launderer's bleach.

1. By placing these pictures together, we capture what the purpose of God's return is.

2. He is coming to cleanse and purify what has been corrupted.

C. Not ordinary soap.

1. If I was preaching in a city church, they wouldn't know much about lye soap.

2. But most of you do, and that is what is referred to here.

a. Lye was used in the process of fulling cloth, that is, washing newly woven cloth in water or a chemical solution in order to make the fibers swell and fit together evenly. The person who carried out this process was called a "fuller."

b. Lye was also used to get out greasy and oily stains.<sup>i</sup>

3. Here, God is seen as preparing and cleansing cloth.

a. If the cloth was new, the fuller's soap would tighten the fibers to make them stronger and fit together.

b. If the cloth was stained, the fuller would remove the contaminants.

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<sup>2</sup> David J. Clark and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on Malachi*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 2002), 432.

- c. In Israel's case, not only is the priesthood and the people stained with sin.
- d. They have also pulled apart from the very fabric that binds them to God.
- e. They are coming apart at the seams, at worship, at home, and with their finances.

D. Not an ordinary fire.

1. A refiner's fire and a purifier of silver.
2. There are some surprisingly good information about this on YouTube and Instagram, but it based on a source dating back to the early 1900s.
3. The source says:
 

... "When the silver becomes molten it gives off some twenty times its own volume of oxygen with a noticeable hissing and bubbling. This phenomenon is known as 'spitting.' But the task is not yet finished. Unless the molten silver is treated with carbon (charcoal was used by the ancients), the silver re-absorbs oxygen from the air and loses its sheen and purity" (ibid. 189). ... that a refiner knows that his metal is pure when he can see his own image reflected in the mirror-like surface of the metal..... God will know that His work has been completed when he sees reflected in the Christian soul His own image" (ibid. 190;S. R. Driver 319–20).<sup>3</sup>
4. The refining of silver has several components:
  - a. Something valuable but impure is had.
  - b. A fire is made with enough heat to overwhelm but not consume the silver.

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<sup>3</sup> Ralph L. Smith, *Micah–Malachi*, vol. 32, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1984), 329.

- c. As the impurities break loose, they come to the top where they are scraped away and discarded.
- d. Carbon or charcoal is added to keep the purity in place.
- e. The silver is ready to be taken off the fire when the refiner can see his image.
- f. The silver is poured into a container or shape to be conformed to that image.

5. Does God not do the same for us?

- a. We are valuable, but far from perfect.
- b. He applies heat:
  - 1. Conviction
  - 2. Testing
  - 3. Difficulties and opportunities
  - 4. More conviction...and discipline.
- c. As we notice the impurities come to the surface, we bring them to the Lord in prayer and worship and watch Him scoop those away.
- d. When we think we are done, God keeps us on the fire even longer.
- e. And when we He can see Himself in us, He conforms us into the image (the mold) of Christ.

E. In all these processes, God is actively involved.

- 1. He does not put us in the fire and walk away carelessly.
- 2. He does not apply the lye and walk away to do other things.
- 3. He sits, engaged, paying attention to the process.
- 4. He is in the process, engaged in the work that is being accomplished.

## 4. The Messenger will judge, consume, and cleanse the unrighteous.

A. The refining by fire was prophesied by John the Baptist about Jesus.

Matthew 3:11 (CSB)

<sup>11</sup>“I baptize you with water for repentance, but the one who is coming after me is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to remove his sandals. He himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

1. Notice the fire of Jesus’ baptism.
2. Cleansing, purifying, and consuming are part of Jesus’ ministry.

B. Where does God start this work?

1. It was the people of God who were in the way in Malachi.
2. It was the religious leaders, the liberal Sadducees and the conservative Pharisees in Jesus’ day.
3. 1 Peter tells us that the cleansing and cleaning begin in God’s house.

1 Peter 4:17 (CSB)

<sup>17</sup>For the time has come for judgment to begin with God’s household, and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who disobey the gospel of God?

C. The more I seek God, the more aware of my sin I become.

1. The more aware of my distraction I become.
2. The more I seek God, the greater He becomes and the smaller I realize I am.
3. The more I’m in the fire, the more impurity that comes to the surface.

4. The more the fuller applies His soap, the more impurity that is revealed.

D. Please don't resist the work of Jesus in your life.

1. He Baptizes in and with the Spirit.
2. He Baptizes in and with the Fire.
3. He is wanting to do a work in all of our lives.
4. Will you submit to the fire?
5. Will you let Him apply the blood that washes white as snow?

## 5. He will heal and restore:

Then they will present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. <sup>4</sup> And the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will please the Lord as in days of old and years gone by.

A. Malachi is not all doom and gloom.

1. All throughout the prophets, God sews threads of hope.
2. Judgment is followed by redemption.
3. Hope follows doom.
4. There is hope in Malachi.

B. Our text tells of the restoration of holy worship.

1. There will come a day when blemished sacrifices are no longer offered.
2. There will come a day when tears on the altar will be counted as worship.
3. There will come a time when the worship of the man will be reflective of his true character at home.

C. Coming up in our next passages, we will see even more hope.

1. Families who have been broken are restored in 4:6
2. Fields and finances that have been devoured will be blessed once again.

## 6. God will sit and judge the sinful.

Malachi 3:5 (CSB)

<sup>5</sup>“I will come to you in judgment, and I will be ready to witness against sorcerers and adulterers; against those who swear falsely; against those who oppress the hired worker, the widow, and the fatherless; and against those who deny justice to the resident alien. They do not fear me,” says the Lord of Armies.

A. This is also good news.

1. It is not good for the unrighteous and sinful not to pay for their crimes.
2. We are given a third image of God in this passage:
  - a. God is the refiner, sitting by the furnace.
  - b. God is the fuller, sitting by the cloth and applying the lye.
  - c. God is the witness, testifying against those who have been sinful and unfaithful.

B. Israel accused God of being unfaithful and distant.

1. But the Lord shows He is active and faithful in all His ways.
2. Malachi 3:6 (CSB)

<sup>6</sup>“Because I, the LORD, have not changed, you descendants of Jacob have not been destroyed.”

C. How do we know God is faithful?

1. Because we are still here.
2. The people of Israel had violated the Covenant time and again.

3. They were unfaithful, but God kept His promises.
4. Today, one of the evidences that God loves you and is faithful is because you are still here

## Apply: Are we ready for His coming?

### A. Warning is not preparation.

1. We know Jesus will return, but are we prepared for his coming?
2. The Jews were warned of the Messiah's arrival, but they rejected Him.
3. We have been warned of His Second Coming, will we be ready?

### B. When the King appears, what will He find?

1. The Jews saw Him as an absent King.
2. They figured that He wasn't home and didn't care.
3. The stewards of the House became squatters.
4. Will Christ find us stewarding His Kingdom or squatting in it?

### C. Today's application is this:

1. How are you preparing for Jesus' return?
  - a. This could include having conversations with your friends or neighbors.
  - b. Discipling your kids.
  - c. Living life with eternity in mind.
  - d. Investing resources, not just spending them.
  - e. We don't live in fear of Jesus' return, but with hopeful expectation.
2. What is the Spirit purifying and cleansing out of your life?

- a. Most likely what God is dealing with you in is not a “salvation” issue.
  - b. It’s a very personal work.
  - c. For some, He’s dealing with our distraction.
  - d. Others, He’s dealing with our reactions and the root of those feelings.
  - e. He might be convicting you of a misplaced priority that has become an idol.
3. Whatever the Lord is teaching you, know that He’s right there in the classroom with you.

## Prayer



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<sup>i</sup> In some versions, such as njpsv and gecl, the technical term “lye” is used instead of **soap**. This is an alkaline liquid containing potassium hydroxide, obtained by percolating water through wood ash. Lye was used in the process of fulling cloth, that is, washing newly woven cloth in water or a chemical solution in order to make the fibers swell and fit together evenly. The person who carried out this process was called a “fuller.” Washing the cloth in a chemical solution such as lye was also an effective way of removing greasy and oily stains. Translators may not need such technical information, but they do need to realize that the text is not talking about ordinary soap. **Fullers’ soap** or lye is a powerful chemical agent with a strong cleansing effect. In everyday terms it may be more like modern bleach than modern soap.<sup>i</sup>