

Advent 2
December 9, 2012

Malachi 3:1-4
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*CW-S – “Prepare the Royal Highway”

Jesus Is Coming – Are YOU Really Ready for Him?

- I. He sends His messengers to get us ready.
- II. He will come – He’s promised!
- III. Now is the time to get ready – and it will hurt!

Dear Christian friends,

The book of Malachi records a **series of conversations** between God and His OT people. **Unfortunately** the Israelites were not in a VERY GOOD MOOD. They were fed up with God – wondering if it **really paid** to be a child of God. Their attitude was “**why bother**” with God anymore. They accuse God of NOT LOVING them – of being UNFAIR with them. God responds, “**You have said harsh things against Me. You have wearied Me with your words.**”

In the verses right before these the Israelites had accused God of NOT KEEPING His promises. After all, WHERE was the Savior they had been **waiting so long** for? God here assures them, “He WILL come – but are you really ready for Him?” “**But who can endure the day when He comes? Who will remain standing when He appears?**” As we continue our **Advent preparations** consider well this thought, “Jesus IS coming – Are YOU really ready for Him?” 1) Jesus sends His messengers to **get us ready**. 2) Jesus will come – He’s **promised!** 2) Now is the time to **get ready** – and it will hurt!

I. He sends His messengers to get us ready.

The Israelites had accused God of being ALL TALK and **no action**. God answered their charge by REAFFIRMING His **plans**. Through Isaiah 300 years before this God had promised, “**A voice of one calling: ‘In the desert prepare the way for the LORD.’**” God reassures His IMPATIENT people, “**Look! I am sending My messenger! He will prepare the way before Me.**”

This is a prophecy of John the Baptist. Note how God calls John, “**MY messenger.**” John didn’t come ON HIS OWN. God sent John to His people. John didn’t make up his message – “You know, people, I really THINK you should do this. **If YOU ASK ME** it would be nice if you **changed your ways.**” GOD gave John His message and as John proclaimed GOD’S **message** he did so with GOD’S backing and **authority**.

HOW did the people receive John? Some took John’s message TO HEART. **Others went** to “**check out**” John. They saw John as AMUSING – **entertaining** – but not someone to TAKE SERIOUSLY. **Others simply refused** to **listen** to John. GOD SENT John to get people ready for Jesus – but by not listening to John they WEREN’T READY for Jesus.

The epistle reading reminded us that God STILL SENDS His messengers to **get people ready** for BOTH a proper celebration of Christmas AND for when Jesus comes again in glory on the Last Day. LIKE JOHN these messengers don’t come on their own – they don’t make up the message – they don’t preach their **own ideas**. GOD sends them – **God tells them** what to say and as they faithfully pass on what God says LIKE JOHN they do it with God’s full backing and **authority**.

JESUS is coming – are YOU really ready for Him? Are **you** TAKING TO HEART **what God says** or shrugging it off – in one ear and out the other? Are **you** ACTING ON **what God says** – or picking and choosing what you like in God’s Word? How you respond to **God’s messengers** will determine if you REALLY ARE ready for Jesus or not.

READY or not...

II. Jesus will come – He’s promised!

The Israelites were impatient. “COME ON, God, **get moving!**” God reassures them, “***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.***”

THEY needed have no doubts – WE **need have** no doubts. God has promised and God ALWAYS keeps His promises. It's not a question of WHETHER OR NOT **Jesus is coming** – the BIG QUESTION is rather are you really ready for Jesus to come?

Jesus came and He will come “**suddenly – unexpectedly.**” That almost sounds like a **contradiction**. How can Jesus come “**suddenly – unexpectedly**” – when He's PROMISED to come and people are waiting for Him to come? The people waiting for Jesus to come will be taken BY SURPRISE at His coming.

So it was at Jesus' **first** coming. Zechariah and **Elizabeth** – Mary and Joseph – the shepherds – the **chief priests**, etc. – they ALL KNEW God's promise of Jesus and His **forerunner**. But they were all taken BY SURPRISE when God **finally kept** those promises.

So too it WILL BE at Jesus' **second** coming. That's so clearly promised in God's word – God has even given us signs of Jesus' coming. But we're also told that Jesus will “**come like a thief in the night – at an hour when you do not expect Him.**” So we have the call to ALWAYS “**watch – be on guard!**”

We get ready by clearly understanding WHO Jesus is. He is “**the Lord**”-yes, “**the LORD of Armies.**” Get ready TO GO to Bethlehem and kneel at the manger and worship the **very God** who created you and has kept you alive to this very moment. That TINY, **seemingly HELPLESS** Baby is the almighty Son of God “**with whom nothing is impossible**” – who simply by speaking the word created this world out of nothing – healed sick people – raised the dead back to life. Don't go to the manger and say, “Oh, HOW CUTE!” Go kneel at the manger and with HUMBLE AWE joyfully confess, “**My Lord and my God!**”

We get ready by clearly understanding WHY Jesus came – and is coming again. Jesus “**comes to His temple.**” He is “**the Messenger of the covenant.**” The temple pictured God dwelling among His people. We are not glorified animals. God made people a SPECIAL CREATION – **gave** us a body and soul – **created** us to enjoy a very SPECIAL – PERSONAL – INTIMATE relationship with our Creator that no other creature enjoys – **not even** the holy angels in heaven.

God created us to **enjoy** a LOVING, FAMILY relationship with Him - God our **loving Father** – **we** His loving, obedient children. But sin ruined it all. We rebelled against our **almighty Creator**. We bluntly told our **loving Father**, “I DON'T CARE what You say. This is my life and I'LL DO whatever I want.” That's the attitude BEHIND EVERY sin. “TAKE A HIKE, God! You can't boss me around!”

Despite that our Creator STILL WANTS to have that special relationship with us. God cannot ignore or **excuse** our sin but in **amazing grace** God took it UPON HIMSELF to do everything to **repair** and **restore** our shattered relationship. So Jesus came that FIRST time – “**born a Savior.**” In our place Jesus lived the life of the PERFECTLY **loving, obedient** child. Then Jesus took the blame for the sins of the whole world and was punished in our place. Jesus endured God's righteous wrath at our rebellion – Jesus suffered the death and **hell** we had coming. BUT LOOK! Jesus rose triumphant from the dead and lives nevermore to die! IN JESUS God has made a “**new covenant**” with us – forgiveness full and free for **all** our sins. TRUSTING in Jesus we have God's forgiveness of **all** our sins – we enjoy a **new, restored** relationship with our Creator – we are the redeemed, beloved children of God.

That Jesus IS COMING again to bring to completion God's **plans** and **promises**. GET READY for Jesus is coming to take us to “**be with Him**” in that place He has “**prepared for us in His Father's house.**” He's coming to take us to live forever with Him in that “**new heaven and new earth**” where

we'll have a **glorified** body and soul. There will be no more sin – temptations – sickness – sorrow. Death will be conquered forever. We have that to LOOK FORWARD to because we have Christmas. Are YOU really ready for that **glorious** day?

III. Now is the time to get ready – and it will hurt!

God doesn't mince any words. ***“He will be like a refiner's fire, like launderers' bleach! He will purify and refine them like gold and like silver.”***

God uses pictures of stuff DIRTY – IMPURE. The one is of ***“gold and silver”*** – so precious but NOT PURE gold or silver. There's only one way to ***“refine”*** – WITH FIRE heated so hot that the silver and gold melt and separate from the **dross**. You don't refine gold or silver with a temperature setting of LOW heat. A ***“refiner's fire”*** is BLAZING hot!

The other picture is of DIRTY CLOTHES. Forget today's fancy washing machines and soap. BACK THEN washing dirty clothes meant beating them with **sticks** – pounding them with **rocks** – ringing them out **again** and again. The **soap** was usually a lye – CAUSTIC – strong and **biting**.

All this pictures that GOD IS PICKY. God has standards and He won't lower them to **accept us**. God never said, “TRY to **be good**.” God has said, ***“Be holy for I am holy.”*** God has even spelled out EXACTLY what He means with the 10 Commandments. ***“Holy”*** covers every area and **minute** of our lives.

Are YOU READY to be cleaned up – ***“refined”*** and ***“purified”***? PRAISE God that we already have perfect cleansing – the ***“blood of (Jesus), God's Son, purifies us from all sin.”*** Trusting in Jesus – clothed by faith with Jesus' own holiness – we stand pure and **holy** in God's sight – we pass GOD'S **inspection!**

Through faith in Jesus we STAND HOLY before God even though our **daily Christian lives** are FAR FROM perfect. Here too God works to **clean** us up and **purify** us. God's forgiveness is NOT HIS OK to **keep on** sinning. If I try using God's forgiveness AS AN EXCUSE to **keep on** sinning then I'm definitely not ready for Jesus to come again!

Here's where it can **really get painful** as God TURNS UP the **heat** to ***“purify”*** us – as God SCRUBS hard to get the sinful ways and **habits** out of our daily lives. Isaiah called it the ***“furnace of affliction”*** – pains – problems – setbacks – sufferings – hardships – hassles – WHATEVER IT TAKES to ***“purify”*** us. God acts IN LOVE but it sure can HURT as God seeks to straight out our PRIORITIES in life – to clean up our MORALS or ATTITUDE, etc. God doesn't want us **simply** NODDING our heads ***“Yes”*** to Him. God wants us ACTUALLY LIVING our lives to Him and for Him and under Him.

It's NOT FUN going through **God's wringer** but it's necessary. IN LOVE – for our eternal good God will do that TO us and FOR us. We may think **we're ready** for Jesus. God wants us to REALLY BE READY for Jesus. Amen.

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