

XI. Covenant Purification

11-Feb-07 Malachi 2:17-3:6

Theme: Jesus Christ, our immutable God, comes to purify His people and to judge the wicked for their sins.

Key Verses: Malachi 3:1-2 ¹“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, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” says the LORD of hosts. ²“But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like launderers’ soap.”

Review

Last week, we looked at the central section of Malachi on covenant infidelity in 2:10-16. Malachi condemns the practice of intermarriage with pagan women. This happened in one of two ways: either direct marriage outside of the covenant to “daughters of a foreign god,” or even worse, by divorcing their Jewish wives and remarrying younger, heathen “trophy wives.”

Throughout this passage, the twin themes of marital infidelity and spiritual infidelity are intertwined. The man who engages in marital infidelity is a covenant breaker, not only of his marriage vows, but also of God’s holy covenant. Thus, God strongly condemns the one who violates his marital commitment but still believes he can offer God acceptable worship. God declares that the worship offered by such a covenant breaker is unacceptable and will be rejected.

We need to realize that God has quite a high view of the covenant of marriage. After all, He established it! But even more than that, the marriage relationship between a husband and wife is a picture of the relationship between Jesus Christ and the church. To break the one is to do violence against the other. This is why God speaks here quite strongly against marital infidelity, because it is a picture of covenant infidelity. God views both kinds of infidelity as treachery and will not accept worship offered by the unfaithful. Therefore, we are called to guard our spirits; to guard ourselves against any violation of a covenantal relationship – whether with a spouse or with God.

Introduction

In the third section of Malachi (2:1-9), our prophet indicted the priests of Judah for failing to live up to their calling. Although God had made a covenant with Levi at Mt. Sinai in the aftermath of the golden calf incident, the Levites no longer guarded purity of His worship. Although God had made a covenant with Phinehas the Levite at Baal Peor (Num. 25:11-13), the priests were no longer zealous for the holiness of God. Although God had called the priests to be His messengers (2:7), they did not keep the Word of God or respect it.

The fifth section of Malachi (2:17-3:6), the passage before us today, is the chiasmic parallel to this indictment of the priests. Because the Levites had failed in their responsibilities, God says that He is going to send another messenger of the covenant, a messenger that is everything the Levites were not. The messenger that Malachi speaks of is the Messiah, Jesus Christ the Lord. The ministry of Jesus is two-fold, according to Malachi. First, He comes to purify His own people through the refiner’s fire and with the launderer’s soap, so that they are made acceptable to a holy God. Secondly, He comes to judge the sins of the wicked. This double-edged sword of Jesus’ work is guaranteed by the immutability of God: “I am the LORD, I do not change.”

Exposition

A. Wearying the LORD (2:17)

¹⁷You have wearied the LORD with your words; yet you say, “In what way have we wearied Him?” In that you say, “Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them,” or, “Where is the God of justice?” (Malachi 2:17).

The section starts out with another statement of God that is disputed by His people. Previously they had questioned His love (1:2), questioned how they despised God’s name (1:6), and questioned how they defiled His worship (1:7). Now God says that they have wearied Him with their words, and their immediate response is: “In what way have we wearied Him?”

It’s actually quite a scary thing for God to say that He is wearied by His people. God is patient and long-suffering, but His forbearance has limits; it is not inexhaustible. There will come a day when the cup of God’s wrath is full and the entire weight of His just and righteous anger will descend upon sinners. God expressed this sentiment when He explained why Abraham’s descendants had to wait 400 years in Egypt before entering the Promised Land: “for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete” (Gen. 15:16b). But when their sin was complete, the Israelites came in and wiped them out. Thus, when God says He is wearied by the constant carping and complaining of His people, they should sit up and take notice.

God gives two examples of the “words” of Judah which weary Him. The first complaint is an accusation against God: “Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them.” This accusation against God is rooted in two factors.

First, their discontent lay in their relative poverty. The glory days of the kingdom of Israel under David and Solomon were long gone, only distant memories. About 100 years before Malachi, Haggai had addressed this relative poverty (Hag. 1:5-6). It was due to their neglect in rebuilding the temple of God. In Malachi’s day, the temple has been rebuilt, but their worship there was unacceptable, and so did God did not bless them. Meanwhile, the nations around Judah appeared more prosperous and better off. They were not being richly blessed; in their eyes, the pagan nations were better off than they were. Thus, the “the-grass-is-always-greener” syndrome led them to be dissatisfied with their own situation and envious at the prosperity of their neighbors.

The second factor which contributed to their murmuring against God was their own self-righteousness. They believed that they deserved to be blessed by God. They felt that they had earned God’s favor. They expected that God was required to prosper them; that He was obligated to do so. The problem was that the reality did not match their preconceived misconceptions. Rather than evaluate the situation and realize that they were to blame for their sorry state, they reached “the monstrous conclusion” (Moore) that God was unjust for withholding His blessing.

But they go even further than blaming God in their self-righteousness for not blessing them. They accuse God of going against His nature – of choosing to bless those who do evil and to delight in the wicked. In this accusation, they are denying the righteousness of the LORD. No wonder God was weary with them and their words!

The observation of blessing upon the wicked and relative poverty of the righteous is not unique to the people of Malachi’s day. Asaph, Jeremiah, and Habakkuk all struggled with the same problem:

Minor Prophets: Obadiah, Jonah, Malachi

²But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped; ³for I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked” (Psalm 73:2-3).

¹Righteous are You, O LORD, when I plead with You; yet let me talk with You about Your judgments. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are those happy who deal so treacherously? (Jeremiah 12:1).

²O LORD, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear? Even cry out to You, “Violence!” And you will not save. ³Why do You show me iniquity, and cause me to see trouble? For plundering and violence are before me; there is strife, and contention arises. ⁴Therefore the law is powerless, and justice never goes forth, for the wicked surround the righteous, therefore perverse judgment proceeds (Habakkuk 1:2-4).

What is the difference between the complaints of Asaph, Jeremiah, and Habakkuk with that voiced here in Malachi? The answer is in the way they responded to the questions they asked. Asaph understood the end of the wicked when he worshipped God in the temple (Ps. 73:17-20); Jeremiah had confidence in the ultimate justice of God (Jer. 12:14-17); and Habakkuk learned how to be content until God rights all wrongs: “the just shall live by his faith” (Hab. 2:4b). They all maintained “their faith in God’s ultimate righteousness. Malachi’s contemporaries, by contrast, had become cynical and unbelieving” (Baldwin).

The second complaint that wearied God was their question, “Where is the God of justice?” This is always a very dangerous question to ask. God’s people should never ask for His justice; rather, they should plead for His mercy. Because we are all sinners we deserve God’s just punishment, but in His sovereign mercy He showers His love on His people. Never ask for justice; you just might get it.

This second question is rooted in the apparent absence of God’s glory in their daily lives. God’s Shekinah glory had filled the tabernacle (Ex. 40:34) and the temple of Solomon (1 Ki. 8:10-11). However, the presence of God’s glory in the rebuilt temple was noticeably missing. The restoration temple was a small and mean edifice compared to the glory of Solomon’s temple, and the people of God felt that lack (Hag. 2:3). Even though Haggai had promised that God’s glory would fill the temple and would be greater than the temple of Solomon (Hag. 2:7-9), so far it had not seemed to happen. In fact, combined with their relative poverty compared to the prosperity around them, it seemed as if God was AWOL; He was missing-in-action. “Where is the God of justice, and why doesn’t He seem to care about us?”

Benton points out two lessons from these questions that wearied God and accused Him of injustice.

First, it is *horribly arrogant*. It demands that the only wise, holy, omniscient, sovereign God of the universe come down to our level and defend Himself before our petty human standards of justice. Second, accusing God of injustice is *distressingly frequent* (cp. Gen. 3:11-12). Adam blamed the woman and then with characteristic male arrogance hinted that the whole thing was God's fault: “the woman you put here with me” is to blame. Like the people in Malachi's time, Adam was arguing that the current evil state of things, which was actually the result of his own sin, was God's fault.

God’s people have a long history of complaining. It seems like the people of Malachi’s day had learned nothing from their ancestors in the wilderness (Ex. 14:11-12; 16:3-4; 17:3; Num. 11:1, 4-6; 12:1; 14:1-4). The question is: have we learned from these examples (cp. 1 Cor. 10:6-11)?

B. The Coming LORD (3:1-5)

1. My Messenger (3:1)

¹“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, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” says the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 3:1).

We serve a great and gracious God. Despite the complaining of His people, despite their wearying of Him by their words, God deigns to respond to their complaint, particularly the second one – “Where is the God of justice?” His answer in 3:1 is: “Get ready; I am coming!”

There are two messengers described in verse 1. The first messenger prepares the way for the second messenger. The second messenger, described as the “Messenger of the covenant” is identified with God Himself, the Lord who comes to His temple. But before God Himself comes, He will first send “My messenger” to prepare the way. Malachi is obviously building upon the prophecy of Isaiah:

³The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God” (Isaiah 40:3).

The Hebrew for this forerunner – “My messenger” – is *malachi*. The prophet Malachi is saying that God will send one last “malachi” before the LORD Himself appears to His people. Like the preparations made for a royal procession or a presidential motorcade, this “malachi” will announce the coming of the LORD and prepare the people for His presence. The New Testament makes clear the identities of both messengers described in Malachi 3:1.

John the Baptist is clearly identified with the first messenger. All four evangelists apply Isaiah 40:3 directly to John (Mt. 3:3; Mk. 1:3; Lk. 1:76; 3:4; Jn. 1:23), while the three synoptic gospels also quote Malachi 3:1 and apply it to John (Mt. 11:10; Mk. 1:2; Lk. 7:27). Malachi’s announcement of the advent of John the Baptist is appropriate, since he is another Phinehas, a Levite who is zealous for the LORD and His holiness. Moore describes the ministry of John:

When John took up his abode in the wilderness, he presented to the people a vast and silent symbol of their condition. He came, clothed in a garb of penitence, like the older prophets, and eating a diet of penitence, to present a symbol of the great duty of the people, *repentance*. He then proclaimed the near approach of the Messiah, thus gathering up the three great topics of prophecy—sin, repentance, and salvation—and presenting them for the last time before the coming of the expected One.

The “Messenger of the covenant” is of course, Jesus Christ, the Messiah. He is the One sent by God, yet is God Himself. Boice comments on this astonishing development:

It is one thing for God to send a messenger. Indeed, that is what God had been doing for many hundreds of years. The prophets were all great messengers, great gifts to God’s people. But they were men after all. It is not all that extraordinary that God should communicate with His people by this means. But now the truly incredible thing is that God is promising to dispense with the messengers and come Himself.

The background for Malachi’s prophecy of God as messenger is from the exodus, where the “angel of the LORD” led the children of Israel by cloud and pillar of fire through the wilderness. Remember that the Hebrew word for “angel” and for “messenger” is the same: *malachi*.

Minor Prophets: Obadiah, Jonah, Malachi

²⁰Behold, I send an Angel before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. ²¹Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions; for My name is in Him. ²²But if you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries (Exodus 23:20-22).

In Exodus 23, the text moves easily between the “Angel” or “messenger” and God Himself, “so that one is identical with the other. God’s name is in this messenger, He has the authority to forgive sins, and the messenger says what the Lord commands. While distinctive in its designation of the Lord, this messenger of the covenant is the Lord. Though sent by the Lord, he is the Lord” (Robertson). The connection with the “Messenger of the covenant” or “Angel of the covenant” here in Malachi 3:1 leads many to believe that Jesus Christ is the Angel of the LORD described in the exodus and other places in the Old Testament.

The people of God had been waiting for many hundreds of years for God’s Messiah to come. He had first been promised in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:15), and through the centuries, the prophets of God had given many wonderful promises about His birth, His life, His death, and His work. It is clear that the contemporaries of Malachi were expecting the advent of Messiah, since they “seek” and “delight” in the coming One promised by Malachi. However, these designations are likely ironic or sarcastic, because although they thought they wanted to see the LORD come, they were not prepared at all for His coming. Moore describes their state of mind as “delusion and not doubt.” They did not doubt the advent of the Messiah; but they were clueless as to what He would actually do once he arrived.

Malachi dedicates the next verses to a description of the Messiah’s work: 1) to purify God’s people; and 2) to judge God’s enemies.

2. Purified People (3:2-3a)

²“But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like launderers’ soap. ³He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver ... (Malachi 3:2-3a).

Although he does not call this manifestation of God the “day of the LORD,” nonetheless Malachi is using “day of the LORD” language. Just as the people of Malachi’s day awaited for the LORD’s coming, so did the people of an earlier generation; but Amos warns them that the day of the LORD will not meet their expectations (Amos 5:18-20). Obadiah describes the day of the LORD as just retribution upon sinners (Ob. 15). Zephaniah describes the day of the LORD in cataclysmic terms (Zeph. 1:14-16). Joel describes the day of the LORD as an awesome event; like Malachi he says, “Who can endure it?” (Joel 2:11). What is the “day of the LORD?” Essentially it is any period in history, culminating with the second advent of Jesus, in which God draws near to inspect and evaluate His people.

What happens when the LORD God of heaven and earth suddenly appears in the midst of His people? Well, many things, but the one that Malachi chooses to focus on is *purification*. When the holy God comes into the midst of His unholy people, He purifies them. That is what the people of Judah in Malachi’s day most needed. They needed to be reformed and refined, to have their sinful tendencies driven out of them so that their worship and their conduct would be acceptable to the LORD.

Minor Prophets: Obadiah, Jonah, Malachi

Although Malachi focuses primarily on the priests and Levites here, all of God's people need to be purified from their sin. Purification is what the people of God need in every generation. We constantly need to be reformed and refined, made more and more in the image of Christ and perfected in our obedience. Our purification comes in two steps. The first phase is when we are saved. We are declared not guilty by the God of justice and have the perfect righteousness of Christ applied to us. Our natures are changed and we are made a new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5:17). This *justification* is made possible because of the atoning work of Christ upon the cross in His first advent.

The first phase of our purification is the initial act of our salvation in justification. However, there is an ongoing aspect to our purification – this is our *sanctification*. Once we are saved, we are called to walk in faithfulness and obedience to our Savior. We are to become more and more conformed to the image of the Son (Rom. 8:29). We are to put off the works of the flesh and to put on the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23). Having died to sin, we are called to live for righteousness (1 Pe. 2:24). We are to “work out our salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13-14). Thank God that He helps us; our sanctification is not left in our own hands, for “He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6).

Malachi uses two images to describe the purification of God's people that results when the LORD comes into their midst. One image is that of launderer's soap or lye. The purpose of soap, of course, is to wash dirty garments and make them clean. Although the priests and Levites were required to wear clean garments to come into God's presence (*cp.* 2 Chr. 5:12), their many sins catalogued by Malachi had soiled their vestments. They were unclean and unworthy to come before the LORD.

But this condition of uncleanness was not isolated to the Levites of Malachi's day. All humanity, since the Fall of Adam, has been clothed in sin and unrighteousness. Isaiah writes:

⁶But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away (Isaiah 64:6).

What sinners need most is to be cleansed of sin and purified from unrighteousness. The first advent of Jesus Christ did exactly this, bringing about purification and cleansing for many. This cleansing is pictured by Zechariah as the exchange of our filthy, sinful garments for rich, clean robes of righteousness:

³Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the Angel [*malachi* or messenger]. ⁴Then He answered and spoke to those who stood before Him, saying, “Take away the filthy garments from him.” And to him He said, “See, I have removed your iniquity from you, and I will clothe you with rich robes” (Zechariah 3:3-4).

The second image Malachi uses to describe the purification of God's people is that of the refiner's fire. This is a rather common illustration amongst the prophets (Is. 1:25; 48:10; Jer. 6:29-30; Ez. 22:17-22). In this metaphor, God's people are pictured as lumps of unrefined precious metals, either silver or gold. The raw ore is intermixed with dirt, rock, and other metals, which need to be removed in the refiner's fire. Once the ore has been melted in the fire, the dross can be poured off, leaving the purified precious metal behind. Several commentators remark how in this process the purified gold or silver can be used as a mirror to reflect the image

Minor Prophets: Obadiah, Jonah, Malachi

of the refiner. In the same way, we are image bearers of God and should reflect His character and conduct in our lives.

Of the two pictures of purification, Malachi focuses primarily on purification by fire. I don't think this is an accident. The process Malachi describes is a painful one for God's people: "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears?" (3:2a). Their old nature, character, and conduct must be destroyed in the crucible of God's furnace in order for Jesus Christ to create in us a reflection of His image. Benton points out that "it is through many troubles that Christian character and faith are developed (Rom. 5:4-5)." I know that is certainly true in my own life. It has been through the periods of greatest testing, struggle, and disappointment that I have experienced the greatest growth in my Christian faith and walk.

3. Purified Offering (3:3b-4)

³“... that they may offer to the LORD an offering in righteousness. ⁴Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant to the LORD, as in the days of old, as in former years” (Malachi 3:3b-4).

What happens when Jesus comes to purify the sons of Levi, when He purges them of their dross and refines them into His image? Their worship, which has been unacceptable to this point (1:13), once again rises as a pleasant aroma to the LORD. Their offerings, which had been thus far rejected by the LORD (2:13), are now accepted because they are offered in righteousness.

The offering which Malachi describes here in verses 3 and 4 is the *minəchāh*, or the grain offering (1:10, 11; 2:12, 13). Remember from our previous studies in Malachi that the grain offering symbolizes human effort or work and thus the offering up of ourselves to God. We are to give Him the best works of our hands, anointed by the Holy Spirit, offered in prayer, and seasoned with the fidelity of our covenant relationship. It is only through the purifying work of Christ that our worship is made acceptable; that we can come into His presence and be received by Him.

Notice the reference to the “days of old, as in former years.” This is another reminder of God's covenant with His people made at Sinai. We are called to be faithful to God's covenant, just like we are to be faithful to the “wife of our youth” (2:15). What Malachi is describing is covenant renewal – the ongoing process of returning to God after we sin. When we fall into sin, God will bring His refining fire into our lives to purge us and make us pure.

Thus, Malachi reminds us that we are to be faithful to God and His calling in our life. When we stray, when we err, when we fail to give Him all of ourselves, He will purge us of our sins and refine us into His image, just as He did with Jonah in the belly of the great fish. The process of being reformed and refined may not be physically pleasant, but God guarantees it to be spiritually profitable.

4. Judgment (3:5)

⁵“And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness against sorcerers, against adulterers, against perjurers, against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, and against those who turn away an alien—because they do not fear Me,” says the LORD of hosts (Malachi 3:5).

Coming in the midst of His people to purify them and to make them acceptable to God is a major aspect of the work of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. But there are always two aspects to the Day of

Minor Prophets: Obadiah, Jonah, Malachi

the LORD, the day in which God draws near. The first aspect is positive – in this case the purification of His people. But the advent of Christ also has a negative aspect, for He also comes to judge the unrighteous. The same heat of Jesus’ refining fire that purifies His people also destroys the wicked in their sins.

“Where is the God of justice?” they complained (2:17). Well, He’s coming to administer justice! The God of justice will not allow the sinful to prosper forever. There comes a day of accounting, when the wicked will have to stand before the Judge and pay the consequences for their sin:

⁷Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap (Galatians 6:7).

Malachi lists five sins which will be judged particularly by God. The first three sins are connected with the adultery Malachi has already condemned in the central section of his book (2:10-16). The first crime – sorcery – is often associated with spiritual harlotry (*cp.* 2 Ki. 9:22; 2 Chr. 33:6-7; Is. 47:8-15; Mi. 5:12-14; Nah. 3:4). When you marry the “daughter of a foreign god” (2:11) you will inevitably wander down the path of pagan practice. The practice of sorcery is linked with spiritual adultery because it is an attempt to gain power apart from God. The second sin in Malachi’s list is physical adultery, which many Israelites were guilty of. The third crime of perjury is associated with covenant-breaking – breaking the covenant of their fathers established by God, and breaking the covenant of marriage with the “wife of his youth” (2:15).

The last two sins in Malachi’s list are crimes against the unprotected – exploiting workers, widows, orphans, and aliens. How did they exploit these groups of people? Jordan explains:

The context of “those who exploit wage earners” is not immediately obvious, but it must have been a common sin in Malachi’s day for him to include it. We’re about to find out how they oppressed widows, orphans, and turned away aliens. They did that by withholding the tithe (3:8). The tithe went in part to care for the widow and the orphan and the sojourner in the land (Dt. 26:12-13). They were oppressing the widows, orphans, and sojourners by withholding the tithe.

What is the difference between those whom Jesus purifies so that they offer up themselves in righteousness to be received by God, and those whom Jesus judges swiftly and completely? Those who are judged “do not fear Me,” says the LORD of hosts.” The difference is in how they respond to God’s fire. Those who pass through God’s refining fire and are formed and reformed into the image of God’s Son are saved; those who refuse to bow the knee, refuse to submit to Christ, refuse to come to Him in worship, are the one who are destroyed.

C. The Unchanging God (3:6)

⁶“For I am the LORD, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob” (Malachi 3:6).

Our concluding verse is a classic definition of one of God’s attributes: His *immutability*. The passage began with the people accusing God of changing – of favoring evil as good against His nature (2:17). However, it is not God who has changed; it is the people of God who have not been consistent. While they have strayed from their covenant commitments, God has not wavered. He cannot waver, He cannot change. If He did so, He would cease to be God:

Being perfect, God cannot and does not change. In order to change, a moral being must change in either of two ways. Either he must change for the better, or he must change for

Minor Prophets: Obadiah, Jonah, Malachi

the worse. God cannot get better, because that would mean that He was less than perfect earlier, in which case He would not have been God. But God cannot get worse either, because in that case He would become imperfect, which He cannot be. God is and must remain perfect in all His attributes (Boice).

The LORD our God is a “consuming fire” (Dt. 4:24; Heb. 12:29). His consuming fire is connected with His jealousy (Dt. 29:20; Ps. 79:5; Ez. 36:5; 38:19; Zeph. 1:18; 3:8). The spiritual adultery which Malachi has described provokes the LORD to jealousy. “In context, the provocation to jealousy calls upon the LORD to consume the wicked. And yet, paradoxically, since the LORD does not change, the sons of Jacob are not consumed. God is faithful to the covenant” (Jordan). It is the very fact of God’s immutability – His unchanging nature – that guarantees that His people are not destroyed by their faithlessness. Even though “we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself” (2 Tim. 2:13).

Conclusion

In summary, this passage describes the covenant purification that occurs when God the Son comes in the midst of His people to refine them and to make them acceptable. He will purge out their covenant faithlessness and their adultery, both physical and spiritual. He will eliminate their sorceries and false worship so that their grain offerings – the sacrifice of themselves and their work – will be a sweet savor and a soothing aroma to the LORD. Although Jesus will draw near in judgment, because He does not change He will not utterly destroy them for their sin. Instead, He will refine and reform His covenant people. Jesus Christ is our immutable God who does not change: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8).

Jesus Christ is the Messenger of the covenant who comes to purify His people and to judge the wicked for their sins. This fiery work of Jesus began at His first advent. Benton explains:

This great ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ is easily discernible in the Gospels. His penetrating corrections of the Pharisaic deviations from the plain commands of God ring through the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. He pointed plainly to their sins, calling them hypocrites, blind guides and whitewashed tombs. The refining fire of our Lord's scorching teaching was at work among the Jews, bringing forth the pure gold of sincere folk whose hearts belonged to God, but consuming the hypocritical rubbish. It is interesting to realize that plenty of such fiery teaching was given just as Malachi pictures it, within the confines of the temple courts (*cf.* Mt. 23:1-39; 24:1).

This work of Christ to purify His church will continue until He returns a final time. Make no mistake about it; Jesus will put us through the crucible of His refining fire so that we will become beautiful reflections of His glory. Jesus, the Messenger of the covenant, comes to His temple, the church (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 6:19; 1 Pe. 2:5) in order to purify us. “God’s first concern is always the state of the church. That is why when God moves in refining He always begins at the church (1 Pe. 4:17). What is God looking for in His refining process? He is looking for much more than just outward purity. He is looking for sincere worship and adoration” (Benton).

Next week: Lesson 12 – Covenant Robbery – Malachi 3:7-17

Close in Prayer.