

The Messenger of the Covenant

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Psalter 395:1, 3, 4

Scripture: Malachi 3

Text Malachi 3:1 Advent Sermon

Psalter 186

Psalter 217:2, .3

Psalter 249:4-6

Congregation, the words of our text may be found in Malachi 3:1, where we read as follows: “And the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant.” This text speaks about “The Messenger of the Covenant”:

1. The Messenger of God to man, and
2. The Messenger of man to God.

Malachi 3:1 must be viewed in light of the preceding verse, Malachi 2:17. Malachi, we know, was a prophet who labored in Israel during the time of Nehemiah. One of the great sins that the Israelites were committing at this time was unbiblical divorce. They were putting away their wives for pagan women. Thus Malachi is called by God to reform the church. He is called to reform Israel. Not only were the Israelites breaking the marriage covenant instituted by the Lord, but because the Lord did not immediately bring the threatened judgments upon this sin, a spirit of practical atheism took root.

Many of the priests of Israel as well as the people acted as if there were no God, because the Lord did not come with His judgments. In their blindness they convinced themselves that it was as if there were no God of Israel, no God of their fathers, namely, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob.

We can see this negative attitude in Malachi 2:17 where we read, “Ye have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him?”

When ye say, “Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them; or, where is the God of

judgment?” What the people were really saying is: “Where is God who has said that because of sin He will come with His judgments and destroy us? It seems like He does not exist because we are still allowed to go on in our way of life.” Israel had lost sight in the first place of the holiness of God. They had lost sight of the fear of God, that He is to be revered, and that He is a God of majesty and greatness. They had also lost sight of the fact that God is a God of justice who in no wise can clear the guilty.

Now we would think that Malachi actually begins to speak in the verse that we have before us, but it is Christ, through the mouth of Malachi. Christ says: “Behold,” and literally that means: take heed, stop, and consider because I will come with my judgments. I will perform that which I have determined regarding you as a wicked and adulterous generation. I will not allow you to think lightly of sin. You will have to give an account of all you do.

When Israel says, “Where is the God of judgment?”, Christ now says as it were, “I will give a very clear explanation regarding your question.” In answering the question that the Israelites ask in self-boldness, the Lord Jesus says: “Behold, give attention, listen to what follows.” He says not only, “Behold,” but He says, “Behold, I will send my messenger.” Christ says: Give good attention, those of you who live as practical atheists, who live as if there were no God of judgment, who will pour out His wrath and His indignation on you. But how wonderful, that the Lord Jesus Christ also says, “Behold,” to those who seek Him. “Behold,” to you that enquire after me.

There are people who say, “Where is the God of judgment?” There are people who doubt My existence, but at the same time there are people who are poor and needy, who seek Me *not* because they doubt My existence, but because they desire to live with the God of grace and mercy.

When we hear the words, “Behold, I will send my messenger,” that can be said in different ways. It can mean, “Behold, I am sending,” or it can mean exactly what it says, “Behold, I will send,” but it can also mean in the Hebrew, “Behold, I will in a short time send my messenger.”

Who is now that messenger that the Lord Jesus is speak-

ing of, boys and girls? Who was the forerunner of the Lord Jesus? Well, I think you all know that it was John the Baptist. What did John the Baptist preach when he began his ministry? He said, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2). Did he mean that the judgment and the wrath of God was going to come? Did He mean that the last day of man's existence was going to come? No, when John the Baptist preached, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," he was, as it were, opening the door to reveal unto the people that the Messiah would come forth. This text which says, "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me," first, clearly reveals that it is Christ speaking; secondly, it reveals that it is John the Baptist being referred to; and thirdly, this text affirms the harmony of the Old and the New Testament since it is fulfilled in Matthew 11:10.

Christ says, "And he shall prepare the way before me." John the Baptist is the messenger who begins to preach: Repent and turn from your sins, ye wicked and perverse generation! He also preaches that there is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.

Christ testifies that John the Baptist will begin to preach of that everlasting covenant that is ordered in all things and sure. He will unfold the great mystery of godliness, that God will be manifest in the flesh. He will reveal that Jesus Christ will come from the courts of heaven and descend into this world to bear the sins of His people. Then the Lord Jesus speaks unto those who are earnestly and diligently, fervently and prayerfully, as well as anxiously seeking after Him, and declares, "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me."

Our text begins, "And the Lord;" notice that the name, "Lord," begins with a capital letter "L," but the other letters are all lower case. This refers literally to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It refers to the Messiah, to Christ, the anointed of the Father that shall come forth.

What sweet words follow the text! Christ encourages those who are anxious for their souls. He encourages those who have been waiting upon the Lord with fervent prayer and who are ready to perish. He speaks to a people who are spiritually in

the land of darkness. He says, "Behold, the Lord shall come, whom ye seek." Oh, He shall come for you who see nothing but the mountain of your sin. He shall come for you who have to complain that your sins rise up against you prevailing day by day, but who also cry, "Oh God, wilt Thou in Thy mercy take them all away?" Jesus Christ has a word for His poor and needy ones. He shall come for that soul who cries like Bartimaeus, "Thou Son of David, have mercy on me" (Luke 10:47). "And the Lord," whom you've come to realize you cannot do without, shall suddenly come to His temple. Oh, what words from the very lips of Christ for a weary soul! What words from the lips of Christ for a heavy-laden and burdened soul! What words from the lips of Christ, "And the Lord" whom ye seek shall come! Christ says as it were, "Fear not, sinner, for I know that ye seek Me. Fear not, poor, burdened, and struggling soul, I am Jesus whom ye seek. I shall come in the manger in Bethlehem and your eyes shall behold the King in His beauty. You shall indeed be refreshed and revived. You shall be raised up from the pit of self-made destruction, because you are seeking Me. And why are you seeking Me? Because I have first sought you. You are seeking Me because of the covenant of grace that was made in eternity. My Father has revealed that He has loved you with an everlasting love. In that covenant made in eternity, you are one of the jewels that I have seen displayed before Me by My Father, and so I have come to redeem and to deliver your soul."

Fear not, those of you who seek Jesus. He is the messenger of the covenant, "and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple." What temple is being referred to? The second temple rebuilt by Zerubbabel and Joshua of which you can read in Ezra 3. The rebuilding of the second temple points to Christ as the only sure foundation for a sinner.

The messenger of the Father comes with glad tidings and says, "And the Lord whom ye seek!" He comes with glad tidings to your soul and declares by His angel, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:11)."

Our text says, "Whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple." What does that mean, congregation? It means liter-

ally that Mary and Joseph would present the Lord Jesus on the eighth day in the temple. Jesus' coming would be sudden, when no one was expecting Him. Is it not the same in the life of a child of God who is seeking, when he experiences that the way of hope from his side seems to be cut off?

Is it not the true seeker, who complains with holy complaints of what we read in the Scriptures: My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is past over for my God? Oh, my God has forgotten me and He has forsaken me, and that rightfully so, because I have sinned against Him? I have broken that covenant between God and myself, and I find that I am utterly unable to repair it.

But congregation, there is a Testator, there is a Surety, there is the Man of a better covenant. There is that covenant Head, Jesus Christ Himself, and He shall come suddenly. His name is, "the messenger of the covenant," or the ambassador of the covenant, but also the angel of the covenant. It will not be a messenger who comes to you, dear trembling soul, to deceive your soul; oh no, but a messenger who has loved you with an everlasting love. He is the messenger who is faithful and true. This messenger, Christ Jesus, is one who shall never lead his people astray, but shall lead them in the path of life and righteousness. He shall lead them by His Spirit to Himself as the messenger of the covenant, the messenger in whom is all their delight. You shall be led to the messenger to whom your heart is going out, to the messenger before whom you are expressing all the needs of your soul. You shall be led to that messenger who knows that you have a broken and a contrite heart, who knows that you have been humbled under a sense of your sin, and have a sense of the wrath of God. You shall be led to Him who, as the messenger of the covenant, is a messenger of mercy. He is the messenger of pardon and the messenger of peace, because His Father has set Him as the Head of that covenant, just as Adam was the head of the covenant of works.

Have we ever realized that in the covenant of works there were three things set forth? In the first place, there was the condition of obedience. If Adam obeyed perfectly, the Lord promised eternal life. Upon obedience, Adam, after a probationary period, would have attained to eternal life. But as in all

covenants, there is also a penalty. Upon disobedience or upon breaking of that covenant, the Lord also said that there would be a threefold death: temporal, spiritual, and eternal. The Scriptures reveal our breaking the covenant of works in Hosea 6:7 where it says, "But they like men," or literally it says, "And ye like Adam have transgressed the covenant." Thus every single one of us is a covenant breaker. But here in this text is set forth One who came to repair the breach, Jesus Christ Himself, and He is the Head of that covenant of grace. In the covenant of works Adam was our head and representative with the Trinity. But in the covenant of grace, which is spoken of in our text, God the Father represented the Trinity and Christ represented His elect. And so we find here the elect of God who are members of that covenant, and they shall seek Him with all earnestness and diligence.

Congregation, do not think that election is a doctrine to discourage you. Rather, acknowledge the Lord that there is an election, because how just and righteous He would have been to cast us all away and to leave us to perish in our misery! Election ought to be an encouragement for a seeking soul. Rather than looking at it as an obstacle, they view it as a wonder that there is an election. And why? Because with election there is the possibility to be saved. Election is therefore the friend of sinners. Election is not an obstacle, nor a hindrance. Do you know who makes it an obstacle and a hindrance? Our own evil heart, and Satan, who wants to turn the very character of God upside down. He wants us to view God as being harsh and cruel through His doctrine of election, rather than seeing God's election as something that should encourage us to seek. The devil darkens that sweet, gracious and comforting doctrine of election.

Now this doctrine of election, congregation, is part of the covenant of grace, because Christ, as the covenant Head, through the shedding of His blood, has also sealed the very benefits of this covenant so that nothing shall fail for those who seek after Him.

Therefore, seeking soul, "The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple."

In examining this covenant of grace as found in the text, in

the first place, it is a covenant *of old*. In the heart of God the Father there was contemplation about how He may get His Hephzibahs back, the people in whom is all His delight. What a blessed thought! God the Father in eternity already considered how to secure the redemption of those whom He had loved with everlasting love.

We see not only that it is a covenant of old, but we see secondly, that it is a *sure* covenant. The covenant of works was broken by us through Adam, because of our disobedience, but this covenant of grace is sure in Jesus Christ and it shall endure to all eternity. It is called in Isaiah 55, “the sure mercies of David.” It is signed, sealed and ratified by Christ and His perfect work. It is so well-ordered that not one part of that covenant can ever fail.

In the third place, it is also a covenant that is *immutable* or unchangeable. The covenant of works was a covenant which God made with Adam. There was nothing in that covenant that Adam could say was ever against his flesh. The Lord sought Adam’s happiness, advancement, and the glory of His own Name in the covenant of works. That covenant was broken, but the covenant of grace is an unchangeable covenant. Neither time nor eternity can change it; neither life nor death can change it; neither things present nor things to come, nor angels nor principalities, nor powers shall be able to change or violate the covenant of grace. The covenant of grace is as old as eternity, and as everlasting as its Head, and therefore, the covenant mercies shall come unto those who seek the Lord in truth.

In the fourth place, it is also a *full* covenant. It is a full covenant because God is the portion of that covenant for His people. Christ is the Head, the meritor as well as the communicator of the covenant, by the Holy Spirit. The covenant is complete, and therefore the Holy Spirit is ready, willing and able to perform that which is in that covenant.

In the fifth place, the covenant of grace is a *gracious* covenant. It is a gracious covenant in contrast to the covenant of works which required you and me to perform something. The covenant of grace is a gracious covenant because everything is done already, and freely given to a sinner. There is nothing that a fallen sinner has to do. It is a covenant wherein

grace is the basis, grace is the condition, grace is the foundation and grace is the top stone. Therefore, congregation, it takes out of the hands of man what man would still try to do for his salvation. It is a gracious covenant, and therefore nothing of man's work is of value. What a hard lesson for a sinner to learn! Here is revealed the very covenant of grace which is so complete, so enduring, so gracious that David had to say, "God...hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire" (2 Sam. 23:5).

Oh congregation, what a rich covenant! It is this covenant which is the only foundation for a sinner's salvation. It is this covenant which is the hope of a lost sinner. It is this covenant, with Christ as its Head, that is unbreakable.

Finally, this covenant is *one-sided*. It is not a covenant that the Lord has made with man because man broke the first covenant. It is a covenant made from God's side with His only-begotten Son, and now for the fulfilment of this covenant, Jesus Christ had to come in the flesh. "The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant."

Our text says, "Even the messenger of the covenant." Congregation, that covenant is only solid, sure, everlasting, and full, because of Jesus Christ. He is the messenger of the covenant who comes with the gospel of peace. He is a messenger who excels all other messengers, namely, His undershepherds. Who can ever stand in the shadow of this holy, harmless, and undefiled Head of the covenant? He is that messenger who is worthy. He is that messenger who has favor with God and with man. He, as the Scriptures say, is that blessed potentate, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords.

Jesus Christ is not only God's messenger to sinners, but as we shall examine in our second thought: "The Messenger of man to God." Before we go further let us sing 217, all stanzas.

Christ is full of wisdom, for all the foolishnesses of those who seek Him in earnestness and truth. Christ as the Head of that covenant is the One who has all the skill to lead a bankrupt and broken hearted sinner unto Himself, by the drawing love of His Father and the drawing work of the Holy Spirit. He

is the messenger to a sinner, declaring that He is the repairer of the breach and the restorer of paths to dwell in. Therefore, Paul could write in Ephesians 2:13-14, "But now in Christ Jesus ye who were sometimes afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace."

The messenger of the covenant, Christ Jesus, is called in the Bible the one who is faithful and true. He shall never disappoint His Father. He shall never fail in His work. He shall seek, and He has sought, the glory of His Father. Because He is faithful and true, He is also desirous that no sinner miss the pardon that there is in the covenant of grace. Jesus as the messenger of the covenant has made it possible that God might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. His word is faithful and true, seeking soul in our midst, because He has said, "I come." I come to seek and to save that which was lost. I come for seeking souls who see every other way cut off. He is faithful and true and therefore can say unto you, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

But maybe you say, troubled and burdened soul, "Is He so qualified, is He so fit as to bear all my sins, all my guilt, all my failures, all my backslidings, take away all my enmity, and remove my rebellion? Is He so fit?" Oh yes, this messenger of the covenant, Christ Jesus, has been chosen by His Father. He is therefore qualified as the one anointed of His Father to perform all that a poor and a needy sinner needs. And how qualified is He? Hear His own word, "Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." He came to fulfill that law of love, but also that law that condemns you. He has fully satisfied. He has paid the price with His own blood and therefore He is the messenger who seeks your welfare this moment. He is the Lamb that was slain from before the foundation of the world. This messenger is fully qualified, able, willing and ready to perform what you cannot perform. So desirous was this messenger to glorify His Father and to save the elect that He came in the rags of wretched humanity, that He might put an end to the war that rages between lost sons and daughters of Adam, and His gracious and holy Father. Christ is desirous to repair the breach between a holy God and a guilty sinner.

Christ, as the messenger, is also the one who, as the covenant Head, offers gracious terms of peace. He is that covenant Head who comes as the messenger of the gospel, through His undershepherds, declaring that He desires the return of enemies and rebels.

As the messenger of the covenant, Christ has an instructive word for us through Jeremiah who says in Jeremiah 3:13: "Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God." The Lord says to us: Acknowledge thy guilt, acknowledge thy vileness and lay down your weapons of enmity, for in Me there is fullness of mercy, in Me is fullness of pardon, in Me is fullness of peace. It is this messenger who seeks the welfare of sinners in the offer of the gospel. This messenger says, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth" (Isa. 45:22). This messenger also declares, "Repent ye, and believe the gospel," and shall this messenger of the covenant prevail with a sinner? Yes, He shall prevail because He is God and man. He is endowed with power, wisdom, and skill. He is righteous in all His ways, and therefore was obedient unto His Father. He has fully satisfied for the sins of all His people. He shall prevail as the representative of His church in the holy courts of His Father.

Thus we may say that He is not only the messenger of God to man but He is also the messenger of man to God. Why is He the messenger of man to God? Because Christ has said, "My Father heareth me always." The messenger whom ye seek shall not fail you. The messenger whom you are seeking with all your heart shall give an answer. And why? It is because He is the gracious, loving, and tender Head of the covenant. Christ not only had thoughts of peace for you in eternity, but He has also seen you in time as you have been agonizing upon your knees in prayer. He witnesses your walking under the load of sin and your crying both night and day, "God be merciful to me a sinner." He shall hear your cries because He has ascended as messenger of the covenant to the right hand of His Father. He is touched with the feelings of all the infirmities of His poor and His needy people. Shall the sighs, the groans, the fears, the doubts and the troubles of such seekers go unanswered? No, the messenger of the covenant has given the answer, "For the

oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord; I will set Him in safety from him that puffeth at him." He will set the troubled, terrorized, and fearing soul in safety. The messenger of the covenant, Christ Jesus, ever liveth at the right hand of His Father to make intercession for you, dear child of God. The messenger of the covenant shall not fail, because, even as He is before the throne of His Father, He hears your cry as He also heard the cries of the Israelites when they were in Egypt. What was their cry? Listen, "And the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them" (Exod. 2:23-25).

Oh, poor trembling soul, who in this advent season cries out from the heart, "Oh, when shall He come unto me, for I seek Him, but I cannot find Him"? He shall come whom ye seek, and He shall come with the message of peace. He shall come with a word of comfort. The word from the messenger for your soul is, "Pour out your heart before Him, God is a refuge for you." Poor trembling ones who stand afar off and see that salvation is so impossible, Christ, the messenger of the covenant says, "Pour out your heart unto Me. Let Me hear your sighs. Let Me hear your cries. Let Me hear your groans." He hears the needy when they cry, He saves their souls when death draws nigh.

Congregation, for the needy ones in our midst, Christ shall never tire of the thousands of petitions that you lay at His feet, because he is a messenger that never slumbers and never sleeps. He wrestles night and day for His poor and His needy church. He knows about the sins that cling to you. He knows you desire grace. Christ knows you long for Him, and shall not the messenger of the covenant speak unto you and make it well? He is the one who takes your poor prayers, puts His own incense upon them, washes them in His blood and presents them unto His Father. We may say as one of our forefathers has said,

*He sweetens every humble groan,
He recommends each broken prayer.*

*Recline thy hope on Him alone,
Whose power and love forbids despair.*

This greater Boaz shall not be at rest until He hath finished the thing this day. Therefore my dear son and daughter of Jerusalem, sit still and wait upon God. He will surely come. He will not tarry.

Oh congregation, what a messenger is to be found in the covenant Head! "And the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come." He will come with His word of salvation and speak peace unto your soul. He will declare, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." He will say, "I am thy salvation." Therefore, not one thing shall fail that He has spoken to you.

Congregation, we read in verse 2 of Malachi 3: "But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth?" Christ tells those who mock with Him, who do not believe on Him, who act as if there is no God, that there is a day coming that all who count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing shall perish. All your life you continued to set up your weapons of enmity against Him. Therefore, His message shall not fail regarding His enemies. What is that message? "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." The message from the covenant Head to every unbelieving and unrepenting sinner who hears the gospel shall be, "It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for thee." The apostle Paul has so clearly defined what shall be the end of those who obey not the gospel in Hebrews 10:26-29: "For if we sin willfully after that we have received knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.... Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"

Congregation, these are the words of the messenger of the covenant: If ye fight against Me, your weapons shall never prevail. Oh, therefore, surrender at His feet, fall at His feet as a

guilty sinner and say, "Lord save me, else I perish." This messenger is God's provision for the salvation of fallen sinners. This messenger desires the ingathering of thousands of souls because He sees eternal torment approaching. He sees approaching everlasting wrath, and so He says, "While it is yet today, hear My voice. This is the day of your salvation. Now is the acceptable time."

One last word for the struggling, seeking soul who with all his heart says, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" What is your prayer? Is it not comprehended in this precious hymn:

*Pass me not, O gentle Savior, hear my humble cry,
While on others Thou art calling, do not pass me by.
Let me at a throne of mercy, find a sweet relief;
Kneeling there in deep contrition, help my unbelief.
Trusting only in Thy merit, would I seek Thy face;
Heal my wounded, broken spirit, save me by Thy grace.
Savior, Savior, hear my humble cry!
While on others Thou art calling, do not pass me by.*

Did the Messenger of the covenant pass by Bartimaeus, pass by Manasseh, pass by the Jerusalem sinners, pass by Saul on the way to Damascus, pass by Lydia, pass by the Philippian jailor? No, and He shall not pass by you. "He which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." AMEN.