



**It Takes a Great God to Make a
Great Christmas**
Sermon – Greg Holmes
ADVENT – 11 December 2022

Malachi 3:1-5; 4:5-6

"...suddenly the Lord You are seeking will come..."

The Passage

Malachi 3:1-5; 4:5-6

3:1 "I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty.

2 But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. **3** He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, **4** and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years.

5 "So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me," says the LORD Almighty.

4:5 "See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. **6** He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction."

I notice that one of our larger Department Store chains has run with the slogan:

THE SEASON IS THE REASON

Which of course is a clever twist on the idea that *Jesus is the Reason for the Season*. Myer of course is implying that it is the season for gift giving (preferably purchased from them). And of course, many of us do that. Finding 'the right gift' can be one of the great stresses of Christmas – How are you going????

In its ancient (and modern) traditional, calendar the church speaks in the lead up to the celebration of Christ's Birth, not of gift giving and family gathering... It calls this first part of the church year **Advent**, which is a word to do with beginnings... new beginnings.

ADVENT is a Word with Latin roots, meaning 'coming'. Christians of earlier generations spoke of "the advent of our Lord" and of "His second advent." The first phrase refers to God becoming incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. The latter phrase speaks of Jesus' second coming.

In this period, the four weeks before Christmas, Christians look forward to the Advent of Jesus in Bethlehem just of 2000 years ago and to the Advent of Jesus that is yet to come. It is a time of looking forward. A time of renewal of hope based firmly on the foundation of the fact that God fulfills his promises.

Advent is about Expectancy... real expectations - one fulfilled and one, as yet, unfulfilled.

Last week Rod Harding gave us an excellent overview of how this is viewed in the whole scope of the Bible. This week I want us to look at the sort of conceptual middle of this flow...

So we turn to the last book of the Old Testament - to Malachi...

And to the fact that it takes a great God to make a Great Christmas under four headings:

EXPECTANT EXILES

EXPECTANT DISCIPLES

EXPECTANT CHRISTIANS

EXPECTANT LIFE

We will spend most time on the first and last.

EXPECTANT EXILES / The Returning Exiles Expectations.

The book of Malachi is the last book in our arrangement of the OT. Its setting is in the post exilic era when a portion (a remnant) of the people of Israel have returned to Jerusalem and surrounds to take up life as God's people again in the land of promise under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah.

However, it is not long before they fall into their 'old ways' and the prophets Haggai, Zecariah and finally Malachi are sent by the LORD to call them back to faithfulness to the covenant.

We take up Malachi's prophecy just before the end as Malachi turns his attention to the future and what their Great God will do.

We will look at two short sections from chapters three and four.

Malachi 3:1-5; 4:5-6

3:1 "I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me.

God is working his purposes out.

In response to the charges of 2:17 - where they doubt and interrogate God – "Where is the God of Justice they ask?" - the LORD speaks. He has a 'perfect finished plan' and he will send his messengers to proclaim it.

Malachi was one of them and then, more importantly in NT terms, these is John the Baptist who was the messenger sent even if he was not sure of that himself (**John 1:21 They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?"**)

Jesus says,

Matthew 11 ⁹ Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. ¹⁰ This is the one about

whom it is written: “ ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’”

A way is to be prepared - opened up. As Isaiah 40 had said:

³ A voice of one calling:

***“In the wilderness prepare the way for the LORD;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.***

***⁴ Every valley shall be raised up,
every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain.***

***⁵ And the glory of the LORD will be revealed,
and all people will see it together.***

For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

***Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple;
the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,”
says the LORD Almighty.***

Then, after the messenger the LORD himself comes. The messenger of the covenant come to fulfill what the covenant promises - God with his people, in his place, under his rule.

2 But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears?

Are we ready? - are God's people ready for such a thing? This is the question, if you like, that the season of Advent - this time leading up to Christmas - is asking. Are you ready? Can you endure the scrutiny of the one who is come and is coming.

For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. ³ He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver.

The one who is coming is not just an 'infant Jesus', gurgling and crying in a scratchy straw filled manger, but the one who brings the gospel of

renewal and salvation. This one who is coming will seek to bring men to himself and then bring them to purity and this fits them to live in his kingdom. Strong deep cleansing soap and purifying fire is what he brings.

The picture of the refiner is a persistent one in the prophets (Isa. 1:25; 48:10; Jer. 6:29, 30; Ezek. 22:17–22). ‘The beauty of this picture is that the refiner looks into the open furnace, or pot, and knows that the process of purifying is complete, and the dross all burnt away, when he can see his image plainly reflected in the molten metal.’

This is illustrated by his interactions at the temple as we heard / see in John 2.

¹⁶ To those who sold doves he said, “Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!” ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it is written: “Zeal for your house will consume me.” And Mark 11 ¹⁷ And as he taught them, he said, “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’

He comes to set things right! The Great God will not be taken lightly or be ignored or shoved into some comfortable corner.

Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness,⁴ and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years.

Fit for the Kingdom.

5 “So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me,” says the LORD Almighty.

And this is no mere pie in the sky or so called ‘spiritual’ feeling - it issues in right actions... actions based in love, faithfulness and justice.

Nor is it those who seek the spiritual through superstition or deny God by their unfaithfulness, their greed, and their abuse of power.

Now we move, just briefly to the end of the next chapter ...

4:5 “See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.

This is to the last couple of verses of our Old Testament.

(It is worth just noting that in the Hebrew arrangement of the OT the book 2 Chronicles bring the OT to a close.)

Again here we have the messenger who comes before the ‘Day of the Lord’... Again probably John the Baptist who begins the work of the one who is to come.

6 He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents;

A message of reconciliation and hope... The healing of harms...

or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.”

And the alternative is not worth considering - God WILL rule.

And then the next verse in the English arrangement of the scripture is Matthew 1:1:

Matthew 1:1 This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham:

EXPECTANT DISCIPLES / The Early Disciples Expectations

And this Jesus comes as a messenger and more

Matthew 4:17 From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

And then he calls disciples to learn from him. Their expectations at this advent of the one all Israel was waiting for were diverse and mostly about getting rid of the Roman occupiers but Jesus slowly and patiently teaches them that the Kingdom of God is found in trusting and obeying his word and in entering into the salvation offered by this one, this messenger who has come to conquer, not Roman oppression, but sin

and indeed death itself.

Such was Jesus Advent... The Great God has come!

Application

EXPECTANT CHRISTIANS / Our Expectations

The reason for the season. Or the season is the reason.

What is our expectation of Christmas? How has God through His Holy Spirit, been preparing you? How has God in the last year been refining, cleansing purifying him to be fit at the final advent for his Kingdom?

EXPECTANT LIFE / Living the Expectant Life

Are you prepared? How has God through His Holy Spirit, been preparing you?

So are you... am I... ready for CHRISTmas - for the coming of the Lord? For this season is not just about a baby, a manger, an overawed mum and dad, some shepherds and some enigmatic wise men... This season will always ask the question, are we ready for the coming of God into our world, and into our lives?

For this Advent season is not just about Jesus earthly birth it also calls us to consider the immanent return of Jesus not merely as a little baby but as the King, and Judge, of all creation.

*The Savior's second **advent** will be personal and physical (Matt. 24:44; Acts 1:11; Col. 3:4; 2 Tim. 4:8; Heb. 9:28), visible and triumphant (Mark 8:38; 2 Thess. 1:10; Rev. 1:7). Jesus comes to end history, to raise the dead and judge the world (John 5:28–29), to impart to God's children their final glory (Rom. 8:17–18; Col. 3:4), and to usher in a reconstructed universe (Rom. 8:19–21; 2 Pet. 3:10–13).*

So what do we do about it?

Patience

2 Peter 3:8 But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some

understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

We may wonder at God's patience with evil people. But of course we praise him for his patience with ourselves! And we must remember that, as Peter tells us,

10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.

Obedience

11 Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹² as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming.

Trust

That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. ¹³ But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.

Like the people in Malachi's day, we are called to look back and look forward. We look back to the coming of Christ, and to his incarnation, life, death, resurrection and ascension; and we look forward to the coming of Christ in glory, when he will save his people, judge all people, and restore all things.

We have a Great God! We have a Great Expectation!

Thus we can have a Great Christmas looking back at what the baby in the manger will grow to be, and forward to his final Advent when his full grace power and majesty will be revealed.

And to that we say

Revelation 22:20 He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon."

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.