

The Second Sunday of Advent

December 6, 2015

Prayer of the Day: Stir up our hearts, O Lord, to prepare the way for your only Son. By his coming give us strength in our conflicts and shed light on our path through the darkness of this world; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day: Alleluia! Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him. All mankind will see God's salvation. Alleluia! (Luke 3:4,6)

Malachi 3:1-4

¹ "See, 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.

Sermon Text: Malachi 3:1-4

Are you good at waiting? I mean, you have only 19 days until Christmas. Can you wait for everything that festive day brings?

Maybe Christmas gifts already sit piled up under your tree—and you see them every day. Colorful, shiny paper wraps them in mystery; you have no idea what lies inside. Puffy bows rests on top, marking those gifts as special. Big presents hold big surprises and little presents hold expensive treasures. Yet, regardless of your age, there always seems to be that one gift that you really want to open because your curiosity is running wild. Every day you stare at it—considering its size, who gave it to you, and wondering what someone thinks you wanted. Is it easy to wait until Christmas to open that present?

Maybe your calendar has a Christmas party circled in red ink. You always enjoy that event. In fact, you look forward to that one day for most of the year. There is laughter, food, friends, games; it lasts for hours; countless memories are made. Are you able not to count the days until the party?

Maybe your sons and daughters and grandsons and granddaughters are going to fly in from all over the country. You have not seen them for months. Changes in jobs and schooling and family size have entered their life— and you are eager to see them all. Are you able to contain your eagerness?

What if, instead of waiting 19 days until Christmas, you had to wait 4,000 years? Could you wait that long? Would you make sure never to doubt that the day is actually coming? Would you make sure to wake up every morning and immediately remember that each passing day brings you one step closer to Christmas?

Sometimes waiting for events leave you feeling frustrated and impatient that the day has not arrived yet—and you might not feel that way only about Christmas. As a Christian, you look forward to meeting your Savior, but sometimes you might feel tired of waiting for Jesus' coming. That is why **THE MESSENGERS COME!** *to prepare hearts, to proclaim forgiveness.*

I mean, the people living in this land called “Judah” were tired of waiting. They had been living in their God-given land for about 700 years. Jesus had yet to arrive! In fact, it has been about 4,000 years since God first made the promise! Think of all that has happened in just the past 1,000 years (of your history)! The English Empire is founded in 1066. The world plunges into the medieval Dark Ages around 1400. Martin Luther stirs up the Lutheran Reformation in 1517. Columbus discovers America in 1492. British colonists begin moving into America around 1700. A Civil War erupts in 1861. World Wars I and II break out just a little under 100 years ago. All these world events happened in just the past 1000 years— and some of those events feel like ancient history!

Now, imagine waiting 4 times longer than that! Each day you wake up, wondering if today will be the day you hear or see something more revealed about the coming Savior. Each day you wonder if this Jesus is going to come and remove your consequences for sin. Each day you look up to the heavens and wonder if God's Son is actually going to make you able to enter there. Yet, those days of waiting can turn into months and months into years and years into decades, decades into centuries, centuries into millenniums. It would not be easy to wait for the coming Savior, would it?

In fact, many in Judah had already stopped waiting. They felt as if God never intended to bring Jesus into the world ([Malachi 1:2-5](#))! They even accused God of loving evil instead of loving them! ([2:17](#)) I mean, they had waited so long! So, why continue waiting? Why hold out hope that God would actually come to save them? Why bother holding onto a promise that felt so unreliable?

So, they stopped trusting in God. Yes, they went to the temple because they had to fulfill their duty. Instead of bringing their finest and best lamb to sacrifice, they brought a diseased, unwanted animal to get rid of ([1:6-8](#)). Instead of helping the orphans and widows, they cheated and squeezed money out of them. Instead of keeping their bodies free from immoral filth, they struggled with lust and adultery and stealing and cursing and lying. Instead of keeping their hearts on God's pure Word, they married people from other faiths, and began drifting away from God's teachings ([2:11-16](#); [3:5](#)). It was not as though they did not know these actions were wrong. Everything they did, they did intentionally, knowing that it was wrong, but not caring that sin had so conquered their heart.

It is not easy waiting for our Savior's arrival, is it? As you were reminded last week, you know that Jesus has already been born. He has already died and rose again. He already entered heaven. You know he will return. Yet, it is not easy to wait for. In fact, it is easier to stop waiting, to fall into the same mindset and habits as of old.

Understand, Judah knew they were fighting against God. Is that a problem? Is it dangerous to hold onto sin even though you know it is wrong? Is it dangerous to say cursing is simply “spicing up your language” or sex outside of marriage is acceptable in

“today’s society” or nights of excess is “something everyone does”? Is it dangerous to use words to cut down and gossip and backstab? Is it dangerous to allow hearts to pick and choose which parts of the Bible you will and will not obey?

At first glance, those actions do not appear to be that dangerous— after all, many other people do the same things and their lives look just fine. The devil would love to have you believe that living contrary to God’s commands is not really that dangerous. He would love to have you think that you can tell God how you will behave and how he must still let you into heaven. He would love to have you imagine that you can determine what is morally acceptable. He would love to have you stand with those people of Judah, grow impatient with God, and then reject his promise of forgiveness!

Yet, God does love you, he does care about you—and he demonstrates that care for you. He pulls back the veil on his saving plan and says: **“See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me.”** That messenger is none other than John the Baptist. Jesus himself identifies him as such ([Matthew 11:7-10](#)). See what John does. He prepares your heart for Jesus. No, not with his own words. No, not because he is a phenomenal preacher who makes really good points about living a better earthly life. He prepares your heart simply by restating God’s message.

While Malachi does not write down John’s specific words, he does explain the need for those words. Those who lived in Judah, those who believed that God would break his promise to them, would be wrong. **“...the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the LORD Almighty.** So, God sends out John to tell you to pay attention. Not just to focus on Jesus actually coming, but to understand what Jesus comes to do. If people see no need for a Savior, if the sheer ugliness of sin is not exposed, no one would even see a need for someone to remove that sin. Everyone would believe that they could stand before God! **“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.”**

So, **THE MESSENGERS COME!** John the Baptist comes *to prepare hearts*, to point out their need for a Savior. He comes to point out a greater Messenger, **THE MESSENGER WHO COMES** *to proclaim forgiveness!*

The messenger of God’s covenant does come. He comes to purify our hearts. God paints a strong picture. If you dug a gold nugget out of the ground, you would have gold, but you would also have different metals in it, you would have dirt and other unwanted materials. So, you put that gold into such intense heat that it melts. All that unwanted metal and grime floats to the top and you scrape it off. When the gold cools down again, it is pure gold.

Jesus comes to purify you. The impurities littering our hearts are not what God desires. So he sends Jesus into the world and he places your impurities, your imperfections, your unwanted sinful rebellion on him. For all the times our impatience leads us to doubt God’s promises, for those times our impatience leads us into wild rebellious living, Jesus’ his body melts under God’s fiery anger. He is crushed and washed with the washer’s soap, scrubbed to remove our filthy impurities.

He suffers such agonizing pain so that your sins could be removed— and they are! He rises from the grave, purified, refined, washed clean!

Do you see who you are now? Purified. Refined like gold and silver. No impurities, no immorality, no blemishes remain on you. Jesus the Messenger has come once before *to proclaim forgiveness*. Yet, Malachi does not just point out what Jesus has already done. He reminds you that the **Lord you are seeking will come to his temple**. Jesus will arrive again.

So, remain patient in waiting. See what Jesus has already done for you. As his dear child, bring thankful offerings to your God. Those thankful offerings are your joyful responses to God's love. You read God's Word; you shape your life according to that Word. You ask God for the strength and guidance to avoid falling into favorite pet sins. You ask God for strength to avoid caving into peer-pressure-actions you know are wrong. You ask God to help you find words to heal broken relationships and to end arguments.

You offer God thankful offerings as you take God seriously at his Word. You do not find reasons to excuse or defend God-forbidden behavior. Instead, when you know you disobeyed your God, you admit your action is wrong. You receive assurance that your God has indeed forgiven you. You continue thanking God for his undeserved love.

THE MESSENGERS HAVE COME. John has stood on the banks of the Jordan River, exposing sin and pointing to forgiveness in Jesus. Yet, just because he did that work centuries ago, it does not mean that we no longer listen to it. John's words are recorded in Scripture so that our hearts always treasure the forgiveness Jesus has won for us.

You know the messenger of the covenant is coming. He has already come once. If God kept a promise to send a Savior, if he kept a promise to forgive us through the death of his Son, if he kept a promise to raise his Son to life, then he will certainly keep his promise to return for you.

Yes, sometimes waiting for Christmas feels so long that you grow frustrated and impatient that the day has not arrived yet. Your God knows that. Yes, he knows that you wait for the fun of Christmas Day, but he knows that as Christians we can grow tired of waiting for Jesus' coming. That is why **THE MESSENGER(S) COME!** *to prepare hearts, to proclaim forgiveness.*