

Second Sunday of Advent

December 5, 2021

Malachi 2:17 - 3:1-7b

“About Return: His and Ours”

- I. The First Coming.
- II. His Return.
- III. Our Return. Don't Be Hornswoggled.

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Malachi 2:17-3:1-7b

Dear Friends in Christ,

Our text opens with, "You have wearied the Lord with your words. But you say, 'How have we wearied him?' By saying, 'Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them.' Or by asking, 'Where is the God of justice?'" (2:17) Maybe those words reflect things we hear, or have said. If God is love then why does He let bad things happen to good people? Why does he let good things happen to bad people? Why doesn't God do something about this messed up world?" Or, maybe some would say what Asaph said: "...my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." (Ps. 72:2-3)

And maybe some are surprised by what God said to His people through Malachi, "You have wearied God with your words." This isn't to say that God wears out. This is along the line of a parent saying to their child, "I'm sick and tired of listening to your whining and complaining! Enough!"

At this point, we remember the words given to Peter: "...with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day." (2 Pt. 3:8) You know this isn't to be taken literally, but refers to the Lord's great patience. But there is also this Word of God given to Peter: "...the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly." (2 Pt. 3:7) The Day is coming.

This second Sunday of Advent we consider that Preparing for Christmas is . . .

ABOUT RETURN: HIS AND OURS

I. The First Coming.

In response to the whining and complaining, God promised through Malachi, "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me." (Mal. 3:1a) This Scripture points to John the Baptist. This is verified by Jesus who said of John, "This is he of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.'" (Mt. 11:10)

Concerning John's message, we recall these words from St. Mark's Gospel: "John appeared baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism for the repentance of sins." (1:4) St. Matthew's Gospel reports, "In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" (3:1-2); that is, the reign of God is at hand. And that brings us to this statement from our text: "And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming..." (v.1a)

The messenger of this covenant, the New Covenant or Testament, is Jesus. At His First Coming He brought the New Covenant in His blood, as John writes, "the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." (1 Jn. 1:7b) And with that the promise, "Whoever believes in him is not condemned", and the warning, "but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God." (Jn. 3:18) Then follows these words about Jesus from Malachi:

"...behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. 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 fullers' soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord..." (vv.1b-3)

Again, this is the cleansing and purifying we receive through the blood of Jesus. God's word is clear, from the Book of Hebrews, "...without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness." (Heb. 9:22b) This is the New Testament, where we are; the assurance of God's love and forgiveness through faith in Christ.

II. His Return.

This brings us to *His Return*. This moves us to the second part of "...who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears." (v.2) This . . .

"Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts." (v.5)

And this takes us to these words of Scripture:

Immediately after the great tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken...then all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. (Mt. 29-30)

The tribes (all who have rejected Him) will see and understand who Christ is. But, of course, too late! They will mourn. The world will clearly understand that it has never come even close to resolving the reason for its persistent grind of rising and falling, hatred and war, violence and murder, corruption and exploitation of others. Without one speck of excuse or reasoning, the world will understand one word: *sin*. Lawlessness! It's the heart that throws aside the stability and quality of life God gives through His Word. Throws this aside for what it wants and demands. It's the heart that justifies rejection of God's love and forgiveness in Christ. His return will usher in these words of Jesus: "...I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness." (Mt. 7:23) Sin! The Word of Christ will be fulfilled:

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left." (Mt. 25:31-32)

To those who see the horror of sin and are brought to faith in Christ He will say, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." (Mt. 25:34) And this brings us to this word from our text. . .

III. Our Return. Don't be hornswoggled.

"For I the Lord do not change; therefore, O children of Jacob, you are not consumed. From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts." (vv.6-7b)

Advent is a time of preparation for our celebration of the birth of Christ. Advent is a time for repentance. The fact is, the entire Christian life is one of daily **repentance, of returning**, of coming to terms with Scriptures' teaching through Paul: "For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out." (Rom. 7:18)

And so we battle with our sin, never excusing or minimizing it, but holding on to the promise of Scripture, "The blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin." (1 Jn. 1:7b); holding to the promise, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Rom. 8:1)

At the same time, there is the unequivocal need to understand that there is a devil and a world he uses to deceive and lure Christ's people. Have you ever heard the word *hornswoggle*? Its origin is unknown. It has been defined as to "get the better of (someone) by cheating or deception." Lying! Of the devil, Jesus says, "He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth...he is a liar and the father of lies." (Jn. 8:44) His goal is to hornswoggle God's people into the depths of hell! Take it personally: he's after you. And me.

The promise of the Lord is always there, without change: "Return to me, and I will return to you." Jesus didn't die for certain sins. He died for every sin of every person. He is always there to forgive and assure us of that forgiveness through Word and Sacrament. And He doesn't lie. As the Scriptures promise:

He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west (infinitely far!), so far does he remove our transgressions from us (forever removed!). (Ps. 103:10-12)

You see, Advent is **About Return**. Hold fast to the promise.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott