

Malachi 3:1-5 – “Surprising Advent”

(Pew Bible Page: 802)

Intro: During the Advent season we celebrate Christ’s first coming and anticipate His second coming. The Jewish people of Old Testament times knew nothing of that second advent, understanding only that Messiah would appear at an undisclosed time in their future. The prophets had made this much clear, but when Jesus came at His first advent, the manner of His coming and His mission completely escaped them. They were looking for a conquering King, one who would defeat all earthly powers and establish a world-wide reign from Jerusalem. When Jesus came as a humble itinerate rabbi, they turned away in unbelief, thinking, “Surely this can’t be the one for whom we are waiting!” And when He died on the cross, they had proof positive that they were right, they supposed. In other words, His long-awaited advent wasn’t at all what they supposed it would be. The prophets Amos and Malachi had warned them that there was more afoot than they suspected, saying to them, “It isn’t what you think it will be,” but they were still caught out. One of those passages is before us tonight, inviting us to ask the question, “Could we, like the Jews, be in for more than we suspect when Jesus comes again?” Let’s use these five verses from Malachi as a lens through which to examine the events surrounding Christ’s return and how it will affect His people.

Proposition: Jesus is coming to His people again, and His advent will be Sudden, Surprising and Separating when it occurs.¹

Our study tonight has three movements: (v.1a) Jesus’ First Advent Brought Salvation; (1b-4) Jesus’ Second Advent Will Bring Sanctification; (v.5) Jesus’ Second Advent Will Bring Separation.

(v.1a) Jesus’ First Advent Brought Salvation – Malachi’s prophecy pointed toward two “messengers” that would come to bring peace to the troubled people of Israel. The first of these messengers is mentioned in the first half of verse one: **Malachi 3:1** *“Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me.”* We know with certainty from reading our New Testaments that Malachi was here predicting the coming of John the Baptist, the opening movement in Christ’s first advent, for this verse is quoted in reference to John the Baptist in Matthew 11:10, Mark 1:2, and Luke 7:27. As the verse tells us, John’s ministry would be a ministry of preparation for the coming of Jesus. John’s work was to preach *“a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins,”* (cf. Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3). In other words, a turning away from sin and a turning to God in preparation for the saving work of the Messiah, Jesus. The crucial point is that Jesus’ first Advent brought the hope of salvation, peace with God for everyone who believes. Anyone putting his or her faith in Jesus receives personal peace: reconciliation between God and man through Jesus’ sacrifice on Calvary.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Jesus’ first advent offers personal peace through Salvation to any and all who will receive Him as Savior.

¹ “Sudden, Shocking and Separating” courtesy of Alistair Begg.

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[ILLUSTRATION] “A journey of a thousand miles begins with one step,” says the old Chinese proverb, and in like manner anyone’s journey to peace begins with the first step of turning away from sin and turning to faith in the Savior, and thus receiving peace with God personally.

[APPLICATION] Until peace with God is established in the heart of an individual there is no hope of peace for anyone. Peace begins with this first step, and at His first Advent Jesus provided all we need for reconciliation and peace with God through His sacrifice on Calvary. John the Baptist prepared a remnant of people in his generation to receive that peace, and in like manner believers today can help their friends, neighbors and family members be prepared for Jesus’ second advent. Now is the day to turn from sin and to the Savior. Those who wait will have no chance to repent and believe when Jesus suddenly breaks through the clouds. Peace will come when Jesus returns, but only for those who put their faith in Him now.

(vv.1b-4) Jesus’ Second Advent Will Bring Sanctification – Verse 1a spoke of the first messenger, John the Baptist. The last half of verse one and the verses following to verse four speak of another messenger and a second advent: **Malachi 3:1b–4 1b** *“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, 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 fullers’ soap. 3 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. 4 Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.* It is clear that the person being spoken of here is another messenger rather than John the Baptist, as the parallelism of verse 1b makes plain. In order to see this, notice first the two different translations of the word, “Lord,” in the verse. “Lord” in regular type means, “Adonai,” the Old Testament name for Jesus, our mediator, but near the end of the verse we find “LORD” in all capital letters. By this the translator is telling us that the Hebrew word being translated means, “YHWY,” the covenant name for God the Father. The parallelism of the verse makes clear that the messenger of the covenant being referred to is Adonai, the Messiah, Jesus. It is also clear that Jesus’ second advent is being predicted since the ministry of His first advent doesn’t match the ministry that is being foretold here. The Second Advent of our Lord will be Sudden, taking the whole world by surprise, a fact predicted by Jesus Himself in New Testament Scriptures (cf. Matthew 24:36-42). This return will not only be Sudden, but it will be Surprising: *But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?* Why will it be so Surprising? One reason is that it will be a time of purification of God’s people, likened here to a refiner’s fire and a fuller’s soap. The refiner’s fire was intense, designed to separate the dross from the precious metal intermixed with it in the raw ore. The fuller’s soap was lye soap, worked into the fabric by intense scrubbing, then beaten with sticks in water and washed away. Both images are of severe but extremely effective purification of the valued substances subjected to them. In the Old Testament three instruments of purification of God’s people are commonly mentioned: fire, water and blood. In these verses the first two are indirectly referred to: the refiner’s fire and the fuller’s soap and water. But notice carefully that there is no mention of blood. Why not? There is no need of blood for the saints at Christ’s second coming, for His blood has already settled the issue of peace with God in our case. All that will be needed is our final Sanctification when Jesus comes

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again. And the final sanctification in view here is clearly referring to believers, represented by “the sons of Levi,” the tribe in Israel given in place of all the firstborn sons of Israel for the Lord’s exclusive use. The final sanctification spoken of here will establish peace forever in God’s kingdom as verse four shows: *4 Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.* Sin’s damage will finally be undone, and sweet fellowship once again restored between God and His people when Jesus comes again because our Sanctification (purification) will finally be complete.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Jesus’ second advent will bring peace through final Sanctification of God’s believing people.

[ILLUSTRATION] My mother told the famous story (in our family at least!) of wearing her favorite outfit often. She loved the combination of a pale pink blouse and black slacks; she loved it that is until she had cataract surgery and discovered that the blouse she thought was pale pink was flaming orange! Her opinion of the outfit changed overnight once the impurity in her eyesight was removed and she could again enjoy accurate vision. Mom was surprised to learn that she hadn’t been seeing things as clearly as she thought until the impurity in her vision was taken away.

[APPLICATION] Like my mom, many believers have developed cataracts – not physically but spiritually. Walking around in the world every day our spiritual vision tends to get cloudy. The dust of the world – its thinking; its values; its ways – all of this and more tends to collect on our souls. Before long we can become so disconnected from the truth that we are no longer aware of our lack of purity. This will have to be corrected by the Lord for us to be fully ready to enjoy eternity in God’s presence. When Jesus comes again, He will clear away the dust of this world from His Church and from each individual believer. This final “foot washing” will prepare us to experience peace in His presence forever. Peace will come for all in God’s family when Jesus’ Sanctifying work is accomplished at His second coming.

As we’ve seen, the second advent will be Sudden and Surprising, but now we must realize that it will be Separating as well.

(v.5) Jesus’ Second Advent Will Bring Separation – Final peace cannot be established for God’s people until sin has been fully dealt with among those who profess to believe but are still outside of Christ. When Jesus comes again, such souls will be forever separated from those who truly believe. Verse 5 speaks of this being accomplished at Christ’s second coming: **Malachi 3:5 - 5** *“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 the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.* Note carefully that in verse five God was speaking to His people, not the unbelieving world: *“Then I will draw near TO YOU for judgment.”* He is not here speaking of the unbelieving nations, but of those Paul wrote about in Romans 9:6 – *“Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel.”* To understand what is being said here, we must remember that the people of God on earth are ever a mixed multitude, containing some who are redeemed, and others who remain sinners. This must be corrected before

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Christ can bring His people peace in God’s presence. Look carefully at the list of sinners to be judged at Christ’s second coming. Sorcerers – dabblers in the occult; adulterers – the sexually immoral; those who swear falsely – all liars; those who oppress the helpless; all who do not fear the Lord – who do not take His Word and warnings seriously. Is this not a picture of the unbelieving world today? It is, and judgment will come to the world when Jesus returns, but it is also a picture of the worldly in God’s Church (cf. Jude 3-13). Sin and sinners must be once and for all time dealt with not only in the world but in the Church if peace is ever to come in heaven and earth, and at Christ’s second coming Jesus will accomplish just that. “Peace on earth and goodwill toward men” eagerly awaits this final consummation.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Jesus’s second advent will bring peace through Separating sin and sinners from His believing Church.

[ILLUSTRATION] Every building project begins with site preparation and the laying of a foundation. This is always an exciting time for those who are eager to build and brings much joy. But it can’t begin to compare with the joy that they feel when the last stone is put into place and the project comes to its long-awaited completion. In between those two points much blood, sweat, tears and toil go into the project, all in hope of that final day when everything will be finished and the building ready for occupancy.

[APPLICATION] When Jesus comes again, God’s long-awaited project on earth and in heaven will be completed and His dwelling place with His people will finally be ready for occupancy. Peace will finally arrive with Jesus’ second advent.

Conclusion: How does peace arrive through Jesus’ second advent? In these three ways: Personal peace comes with His first advent; purification with His second advent; judgment of sin at His second advent. The Bible tells us that the people of God living in the day of the prophets Amos and Malachi made the mistake of thinking that the coming Day of the Lord would be a time of unalloyed happiness and rejoicing for Israel. While it is true that for the believing remnant peace would come, they completely overlooked the fact that that day would not come without significant pain preceding it – the pain of purification and the terror of judgment must precede the coming of final peace. As those anticipating the second advent of our Lord, let’s not make that same mistake! Let’s realize that personal peace precedes final peace; that personal purification precedes final peace; and that personal judgment precedes final peace. Jesus’ coming will be Sudden, Surprising and Separating! Let’s help everyone we know be ready to enjoy peace when Jesus comes again.