

**Malachi 3:1-5**  
**The Coming of Christ: A Curse**  
*Jimmy Snowden*  
*Sovereign Grace Fellowship: June 14, 2009*

**Introduction**

I would like to start this morning with an interesting illustration. Before moving to Arizona, my dad owned a fencing business in Nevada. When I was in college I used to work for my dad over the summers. Those of you who work in the construction industry know much better than myself how Godless the work environment can be. Well, I befriended one of my dad's employees that I worked with over the summer. We worked well together and got along quite well. The unfortunate thing about this employee of my father's was that he had a seemingly unbreakable addiction to hard core drugs. He would fall into it, pull himself out for a few months, fall back in, and the cycle would continue. Because I worked with this guy so much over the summer I got to talk to him about his struggles, and even about Jesus.

I remember one day as we were driving to our job site we passed a cop car in traffic. As we passed, he yelled, "PIGS!" I looked over at him and said, "Why do you hate cops so much?" He responded with a bit of surprise, "They are nothing but a bunch of pigs!" It was his normal no-brainer response. He then looked at me and said, "What, You like cops?" I looked back and quite cheerfully said, "Of course I do. Cops are awesome!" He gave me a disgusted look and said, "How can you like cops?" I responded, "You don't want to know." He looked puzzled; "Yes, I do. Tell me." I said, "No, it will offend you." He then said, "Really... tell me."

I said, "Ok, but remember that I warned you that you were going to be offended. Think about it. You don't like cops because they are law enforcers and you are always doing something that is against the law. In your mind you see them as your enemies. Their job is to keep you from doing what you want to do. I, on the other hand, obey the law. I see them as my protectors. They don't keep me from doing what I want, because I have no desire to break the law. It really makes all the sense in the world." I then continued; "I like cops because they protect people like me from people like you." Of course, my statement did offend him as I warned. I looked at him and laughingly said, "Don't look at me like that. You know its true." I then asked him if he had ever been strung out on cocaine, if he had ever broken into someone's house he didn't know to steal, and if he had ever put anyone in danger by driving recklessly when drunk. He said, "Yes" to all three questions. I then said, "If you get all strung out on cocaine, break in to my house, and put my wife and kids at risk I'm gonna call the police, and they are going to come with their badges and guns, arrest you, and take you off to jail. That night my wife and I will sleep in peace because of the police."

Is it a good or bad thing when the cops come around your block? Is it a time for rejoicing or weeping; is a time to run and hide or be friendly; is it a time to laugh or grit your teeth? It all depends on who you are and what you are doing. If you are breaking the law, their presence brings suspicion, fear, and unease. If you are a law-abiding citizen, their presence brings comfort, protection, and a sense of security. In essence, therefore, the presence of the police is a double-edged sword.

Is this not what the second coming of Jesus is like as well? The second coming is a double-edged sword. Those who have submitted to Christ as their Lord and received him as their Savior actually look forward to the coming of our Lord. In fact, the coming of Christ motivates us to live our lives in fullness of joy and hope. The whole of a Christian's life looks forward to this one event. For the unrepentant unbeliever, on the other hand, the second coming is only bad news. For the unbeliever, the second coming is a time to weep and wail—it is a time of utter despair. Isn't this what you find in Matthew 25:31-46? In this passage Jesus foretells his own second coming—when he will appear on the clouds in his shining glory. When he comes back he will separate the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right hand and they will “inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world,” but the goats will put on the left and they will be thrown “into the eternal fire prepared for the Devil and his angels!” For those who have not received Christ, the second coming of the King will be the worst day of their lives. For those who know Christ, have put all of their hope in him, and have found all of their joy in him, the second coming of King Jesus will be the entrance into the best eternal day of their lives.

The coming of our Lord is both the biggest blessing and the biggest curse. It all depends upon who you are, where your heart is, and what you are doing. And what we find in Malachi 3:1-5 is that the first coming of our Lord, Jesus, into this world was the same way. Jesus' entrance into the world was a double-edged sword. How are sinners to respond to the presence of the infinitely holy Creator taking up residence in a human body and walking around with his own fallen, sinful creatures?

### ***Malachi 3:1-5 in Context***

If you remember last week, Malachi 3:1-5 is the response to the Israelites' whining prayers of accusation against God. In essence, what we find in Malachi 2:17 is that the Israelites were angry at God for not dealing with the sin of the nations surrounding them. The Israelites were an oppressed people, and they were questioning God's justice because of his lack of action against their enemies. They were oppressed by the Persians and they were surrounded by bully nations who really did afflict them. You can imagine their prayers, “God, how can you call yourself a God of justice while such great atrocities happen against your own people.” The answer that God gives them in 3:1-5 is; “Israel, do you really want me to come in my justice? Do you really want me to come and establish righteousness in Israel? You are just as sinful and unjust as the nations that surround you. If you want righteousness to be restored, get ready because you are in need of purification and cleansing just as much as any nation.”

What we find in 3:1-5 is a promise. God promises to answer the prayer of the Israelites uttered in 2:17. However, this promise is a double-edged sword. The problem, as we discussed last week, is that the Israelites really thought they were pure—they were convinced that they were God's righteous people suffering innocently under the hands of wicked men. And here we find them crying out for God to come as *their* God and deal with the injustice around them. Oh... he is going to come alright, and he is going to deal with injustice alright, but he is going to deal not just with the injustice of the nations oppressing Israel; he is going to deal with Israel's own injustice. Be careful what you pray for! You pray for the God of justice to come, but who can endure the day of his coming (Malachi 3:2)?

So let's take a look at the response of God to their hypocritical, self-righteous prayer for justice.

***Malachi 3:1—God's Response to Israel's Prayer in 2:17***

First of all, notice that there are three characters in this first verse. There is the speaker (“**I** will send **my** messenger), “my messenger,” and “the Lord you seek” who is identified by Malachi as “the Messenger of the covenant.”

First of all, the “I,” without a doubt, refers to Yahweh.

Who is “my messenger?” Well, fortunately for us, we live on the back side of the New Testament. Jesus identifies John the Baptist as “the messenger” by quoting Malachi 3:1 in Matthew 11:7-10.

*7 “As these men went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John [the Baptist]: What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed swaying in the wind? 8 What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothes? Look, those who wear soft clothes are in kings’ palaces. 9 But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and far more than a prophet. 10 This is the one it is written about: **Look I am sending My messenger ahead of you; he will prepare Your way before You.**”*

Lastly, it is vital that you understand that “the messenger” in first part of the verse is different from the “the Messenger of the covenant” in the second half of the verse. Malachi makes this very clear by clarifying that the Messenger of the Covenant is “the Lord,” the one who owns the temple. The messenger in the first half of the verse is to “clear the way before” God so that the messenger of the covenant in the second half of the verse might be able to come to his temple to purify and cleanse. The sending of a forerunner to clear the path was a common practice in the ancient world. MacArthur says,

*“It was a custom of Near Eastern kings to send messengers before them to remove obstacles to the their visit.”<sup>1</sup>*

Jesus is “the Messenger of the covenant.” Although this whole passage is focused on the first coming of Jesus the Messiah, it does not find its ultimate fulfillment until his second coming. Before moving on we must ask the question; “What does it mean that Jesus is ‘the messenger of the covenant?’” This idea of a covenant messenger was actually quite common in the ancient world. When two nations made a covenant between each other, if one of the parties was to break their side of the covenant agreement a messenger would be sent to enforce the terms of the covenant. Really, the “messenger of the covenant” is the enforcer of the covenant. The messenger was one who had the authority to dispense the blessings promised in the covenant on those who were faithful to the covenant and to enforce the curses of judgment on those who did not hold up their side of the covenant. John MacArthur helpfully suggests that the covenant messenger was

<sup>1</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2005), 1084.

one “who has the authority to reward or judge His people on the basis of their faithfulness to His covenant with them.”<sup>2</sup>

The interesting thing is that God was in covenant relationship with his people Israel. The covenant that God made with Israel went as so: God promised to be their protector and provider if they were faithful to all of the laws which he set before him; however, he promised to fight against them and judge them if they were they were to disobey his commandments (Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28). The ironic thing in 2:17 is that we see the Israelites demanding that a covenant enforcer be sent. Why? Because they thought God had failed to hold up his end of the covenant. They were, in essence, suggesting that God had failed to be faithful to the covenant that he had made with them *as a nation* because of his lack of action on their behalf. However, as we know, it was a stupid thing for the Israelites to call for a covenant messenger/enforcer. Why? Because they were the ones who had failed to hold up their end of the covenant. It is like a jewelry thief calling 9-1-1 on the owner of the jewelry store in the middle of a heist because the owner of the jewelry store pulled a gun on him to protect his diamonds. The Israelites had come to a point in their relationship with him where they were completely neglecting his commandments. What we find here is that God promised to give them what they wanted, a “covenant messenger.” However, the big blunder of the Israelites was that they were wrong about themselves; they saw God as the failure and sinner, and themselves as the righteous. They saw God as the covenant breaker and themselves as the covenant keepers What Pride!

In Malachi 3:1-5 God promises to give them what they so badly want—a covenant messenger. Notice in vs. 1 that this covenant messenger, this one who will enforce the curses of the covenant on those who have been faithless, “*will suddenly come.*” MacArthur suggests that this statement has very little to do with when he will come, but with the unexpectancy of his coming. In other words, it suggests he will come “instantaneously and unannounced.”<sup>3</sup> Much like the second coming, he will come “like a thief in the night.” (1 Thess 5:2)

### ***Malachi 3:2-4***

And when he comes, those who have been faithless to the covenant will be not be able to “endure his coming” nor “stand when he appears.” Why? Because he comes to judge the unjust and the faithless with fierce and radiant fire. Notice how God describes the coming of Jesus. It is described in negative tones. Without a doubt, God sent his Son Jesus to save (John 3:16-18), but he also came to claim authority to judge (Acts 10:40-43; 17:30-31). It must not be missed that Jesus was sent to curse the nation of Israel and to officially demolish the covenant that God had made with them *as a nation* by replacing it with a newer and better one. And this is exactly what Christ did.

Notice what God promised the Israelites that the promised Messiah, the covenant messenger, the owner of the temple, was going to do when he arrived (upon their request):

*For He will be like a refiner's fire and like cleansing lye. 3 He will be like a refiner and purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver.*

---

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

He will come with his work boots on to do dirty work. A refiner's fire was a hot fire that was used to purify metals. The fire would get so hot that the metal would turn into a liquid form. When it did so, the impurities and imperfections (called *dross*) would float to the top. The metal worker would then, in essence, take a ladle and scoop the dross off the top of the liquid metal and throw it away. It was a way of getting the impurities out of the metal to make it pure and solid. The hotter the blast furnace, the purer the gold. Now don't be mistaken, the Lord is not saying this to a people who just mess up every now and then. He is not saying here that he is going to purify the people as individuals from their individual sins; rather, his covenant is with the nation. His purpose is to purify the nation. Thus, the dross that is going to be removed is not the sins of the individual people; rather, the impurity (or dross) that will be removed is the unrepentant people in the nation of Israel. The people of Israel are unclean, full of all sorts of defilement, and God is sending his covenant messenger to thoroughly cleanse his people by riding them of both the wicked and their wicked ways.

He then suggests that Jesus will come like a cleansing lye. Another way to translate "cleansing lye" is "launderers soap." The lye was a soap that was made with certain plants and salts that had the ability to extract dirt and grime from within a garment. The *Dictionary of Biblical Languages* suggests that this word refers to a "detergent for laundering, i.e., a soap made of either lye (alkaline leached from natural potash), or alkaline salt (extracted from the iceplant)"<sup>4</sup>

The word "cleansing" literally means "to tread, or trample with the feet." *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures* thus suggests that it means "to wash garments by treading on them when under water."<sup>5</sup>

In other words a launder would get a bucket of the lye/soap, put his dirty and stained garment in the bucket of detergent and stomp on his shirt so that the lye could be worked into the shirt as deeply as possible. The agents in the soap would then extract all the dirt and grime out. This is the process that the promised messenger of the covenant *that they so desired* was going to perform on them.

In essence, therefore, the messenger of the covenant was going to put Israel through a blast furnace, drench them in a bucket of soap, stomp on them, and then ring them out in order to remove all of their sin and impurity. This is a drastic, gruesome, and extreme way of dealing with the dirt and filth of sin. This is how seriously God takes sin and holiness.

### ***The Coming of Christ: A Curse***

Do you remember in the beginning of the sermon I asked, "Is it a good or bad thing when the cops come around your block?" My answer was that it depends upon who you are and what you are doing. The same question can be asked here, "Is it a good or bad thing when Jesus, the covenant messenger, comes to His temple?" Well, it depends upon who you are and what you are doing. For Israel ***as a nation***, the coming of Christ

---

<sup>4</sup>Swanson, James: *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)*. electronic ed. Oak Harbor : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997, S. DBLH 1383, #1.

<sup>5</sup>Gesenius, Wilhelm ; Tregelles, Samuel Prideaux: *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*. Bellingham, WA : Logos Research Systems, Inc, 2003, S. 382.

was not a positive thing. The nation of Israel was, by and large, an apostate nation;<sup>6</sup> they had rejected the covenant that God had made with them.

The coming of Christ was a curse for Israel—he came not as a purring kitten, a ferry, a fluffy cotton ball, Santa Claus, or a hippy flipping a peace sign. No, he came as a refiner’s fire and cleansing lye.

Actually, what we see with the coming of Christ is a putting away and a putting on. God, through Christ, put away the covenant that he had made with Israel *as a nation*, and established a *New Covenant*. This New Covenant is what we celebrate when we partake of Lord’s supper. It is a better covenant with a better priesthood (Christ alone) built upon better sacrifices (a once-for-all, impeccable sacrifice), and offers a superior hope (eternal forgiveness, access to the Holy of Holies, and unhindered relationship with God).<sup>7</sup> God is done with Israel *as a nation*, but he is not done with Israelites as individuals (Romans 11:25-27). The beautiful thing about the new covenant is that there are no longer any national, cultural, social class, or gender barriers “for Christ is all and is in all” (Colossians 3:10-11).

Just like with my friend in Nevada, the presence of the police was a double-edged sword: to the lawless, cops are enemies, but to the obedient, cops are safety. Christ came to do away with the covenant that God had made with Israel, but not all of the Israelites saw this as a bad thing. In fact, we find two Israelites in Luke 2, Simeon and Anna, who rejoiced at the birth of the Messiah. It was a double-edged sword.

#### ***New Testament Fulfillment of Malachi 3:1-5 (Matthew 3:1-11 and Matthew 21:33-46)***

What I want to do is go to two different New Testament passages to show you the fulfillment of the promise that God gives Israel in Malachi 3:1-5... the promise of judgment on Israel through the Messenger of the covenant, Jesus Christ. First, look with me at Matthew 3:1-11.

*1 In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Wilderness of Judea 2 and saying, "Repent, because the kingdom of heaven has come near!" 3 For he is the one spoken of through the prophet Isaiah, who said: A voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way for the Lord; make His paths straight!" 4 John himself had a camel-hair garment with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then [people from] Jerusalem, all Judea, and all the vicinity of the Jordan were flocking to him, 6 and they were baptized by him in the Jordan River as they confessed their sins. 7 When he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to the place of his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? 8 Therefore produce fruit consistent with repentance. 9 And don't presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones! 10 Even now the ax is ready to strike the root of the trees! Therefore every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.*

---

<sup>6</sup> “Apostate nation” simply refers to the fact that they had by-and-large rejected their relationship with God (*as a nation*) wholesale. They had forsaken their God, his revelation... their religion.

<sup>7</sup> Just read the Letter to the Hebrews if you want Biblical support.

*11 "I baptize you with water for repentance, but the One who is coming after me is more powerful than I. I am not worthy to take off His sandals. **He Himself will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.** 12 His winnowing shovel is in His hand, and He will clear His threshing floor and gather His wheat into the barn. But the chaff He will burn up with fire that never goes out."*

Here we see the first messenger, John the Baptist, the one who paves the way for the Messenger of the Covenant. He comes preparing the way for Jesus, baptizing, preaching the necessity of repentance, and declaring the coming of the King, Jesus. In this scene we see the Pharisees and Sadducees, who were both religious sects within Israel, come to him. The Pharisees and Sadducees represented Israel as an apostate nation. John rebuked them and warned them of the one who was to come after him, Jesus. Notice what he says to them in vs. 11-12. First he states that Jesus is much greater than himself, and that he doesn't merely baptize with water, but with the Holy Spirit and **fire**. Does this sound familiar at all to Malachi 3:1-5? When the messenger of the covenant comes, what will he do? He will be "like a refiner's fire." I believe that John had Malachi 3 in mind when he said this to the Pharisees.

We then see him warn them that the Messiah "has his winnowing fork in his hand." The winnowing fork did the same exact thing as the blast furnace in the process of purifying silver—it separated the useful product from the waste. While the heat of the blast furnace separated the dross from the precious metal, the winnowing fork was used to toss the stalk of grain into the air, and the wind would blow the light chaff (the useless product) away while the heads of grain (the fruit of the harvest) fell to the floor to be picked up and stored. Notice that the word "fire" is used again in vs. 11. Verse 10 and 12 suggest what the baptism of fire is going to be like. First of all it is going to be "imminent and irreversible" (vs. 10)--like a tree that is just about to be chopped down.<sup>8</sup> Second, it is going to be like raging fire which consumes the useless parts of the harvest.

I believe that John is speaking to the Pharisees and Sadducees specifically as Israelites. He is warning them that the one, the Messenger of the covenant, that God promised through Malachi is on his way to his temple to judge and purify.

Secondly, look with me at Matthew 21:23-46.

*23 When He entered the temple complex, the chief priests and the elders of the people came up to Him as He was teaching and said, "By what authority are You doing these things? Who gave You this authority?" 24 Jesus answered them, "I will also ask you one question, and if you answer it for Me, then I will tell you by what authority I do these things. 25 Where did John's baptism come from? From heaven or from men?" They began to argue among themselves, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say to us, 'Then why didn't you believe him?' 26 But if we say, 'From men,' we're afraid of the crowd, because everyone thought John was a prophet." 27 So they answered Jesus, "We don't know." And He said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things. 28 "But what do you think? A man had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'My son, go, work in the vineyard today.' 29 "He answered, 'I don't want to!' Yet later he changed his mind and went. 30 Then the man went to the other and said*

---

<sup>8</sup> MacArthur, 1125.

*the same thing.*" "I will, sir," he answered. But he didn't go. 31 "Which of the two did his father's will?" "The first," they said. Jesus said to them, "I assure you: Tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God before you! 32 For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you didn't believe him. Tax collectors and prostitutes did believe him, but you, when you saw it, didn't even change your minds then and believe him.

33 "Listen to another parable: There was a man, a landowner, who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a winepress in it, and built a watchtower. He leased it to tenant farmers and went away. 34 When the grape harvest drew near, he sent his slaves to the farmers to collect his fruit. 35 But the farmers took his slaves, beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. 36 Again, he sent other slaves, more than the first group, and they did the same to them. 37 Finally, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. 38 "But when the tenant farmers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance!' 39 So they seized him and threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him. 40 Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those farmers?" 41 "He will completely destroy those terrible men," they told Him, "and lease his vineyard to other farmers who will give him his produce at the harvest."

42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This came from the Lord and is wonderful in our eyes? 43 **Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing its fruit.** [ 44 Whoever falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder!"] 45 When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard His parables, they knew He was speaking about them. 46 Although they were looking for a way to arrest Him, they feared the crowds, because they regarded Him as a prophet.

Here we have Jesus at the temple declaring God's judgment on Israel *as a nation*. He does so by telling two parables; The Parable of the Two Sons and the Parable of the Vineyard Owner. Of course, we could also go to Jesus' cleansing of the temple, and the withering of the fig tree. Jesus fulfills the role of the Messenger of the Covenant in every way, declaring to Israel God's judgment on them for rejecting the covenant that God had made with them. I especially want you to notice in these passages that Jesus is at the temple, and that these two parables are directed right at the Pharisees, who are representative of Israel as an apostate nation. Especially see vss. 31-32 and 43-44. Notice vs. 43, "**Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing its fruit.**" In essence, Jesus proves to them that they rejected their own Messiah, the messenger of the covenant that they so badly desired.

What Jesus was saying in the parable of the vineyard owner was this: it is one thing, Israel, for you to stone and kill the prophets of old—Jeremiah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Zechariah—it is quite another for you to kill God's own Son. For Israel *as a nation* to reject the prophets of old was one thing, but the depth of their rebellion and rejection of God was evidenced through their rejection of God in the flesh. This was their ultimate act of rebellion against God and the covenant that he had made with them. They

rejected God's ultimate Prophet, Priest, and King. Their actions against Christ revealed their wholesale rejection of the covenant that God had made with them as a nation.

### ***Application***

I want to bring an application very quickly. Although Malachi 3:1-5 does find its immediate fulfillment in God's rejection of the Israelites through Jesus, Malachi 3:1-5 will not be ultimately fulfilled until the second coming of Christ the King. The Israelites were not ready for the first coming of Jesus, and God judged them for it. They had nothing but eternal fire awaiting them, an eternal blast furnace.

Are you ready for the coming of the King? If you reject Jesus, you are rejecting God's own self-image, his greatest prophet, the King himself. How will you fare when he comes? Will you immerge from the furnace as gold, or as the dross that is tossed away? Will the axe be laid to you, to be taken away and burned in an eternal unquenchable fire? You must prepare for his coming. The Second coming of Christ will be the most joyful and yet the most terrible day in all of history. Which will it be for you? It all depends upon what you do with God's Son, the Messenger of the covenant. If receive him as your only hope, as your only treasure, as your supreme joy, and as your only King you will be ready; however, if you do not do these things, you will be judged just like the Pharisees.

I implore you to consider the words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:2, "Today is the day of Salvation." Turn your hearts to Christ, repent of your sins and lean upon him as your only hope of salvation.

Malachi 3:1-5 is a double-edged sword. The first coming of Christ meant salvation, life, and joy to some (for example, Simeon and Anna in Luke 2:35-38) while at the same time it meant judgment, death, and condemnation for others. This week we looked at how the first coming of Christ was a curse to the Jews *as a nation*. Next week we will consider the other edge of this sword. We will consider how the first coming of Christ was a blessing—we will discuss the hope, life, and salvation that it brought.