

BE ENCOURAGED, THE LORD IS COMING // MALACHI 21:17-3:6

Main Idea: God is coming to judge the world and purify his people, so prepare his way and trust his word.

Advent has a dual role. It is a time for looking forward to Christmas and for thinking about that first coming of Jesus. It is also a time for looking ahead as we await the time when he comes again.

1. The Lord sends messengers to prepare his way (v. 1)

The imagery used here is the arrival of a king. A messenger is sent ahead to remove obstacles and to prepare the people. Who is the messenger sent by God? On one level, it's Malachi himself, whose name means "my messenger." But we also see this as a reference to John the Baptist. Zechariah prophetically tells his son, "you will go before the Lord and prepare his ways" (Luke 1:76). John the Baptist was to herald the arrival of Jesus. Finally, we see the application to ourselves. We are also sent as God's messengers, preparing the way by making disciples because we have a king who has been given all authority (Matt 28: 18-19).

2. The Lord is coming to purify his people (v. 1b-4)

In addition to sending messengers, God himself is also called a messenger, a title that would have seemed strange to the original audience, but points to Jesus for those of us on this side of the New Testament. In verse 2, we see that no one can stand against God's judgement, which has no partiality. God's order of justice begins with him purifying his people.

The purpose of this purification is so that his people will worship him properly—in righteousness. These four verses are fully fulfilled in the person of Jesus in his first coming. He comes and cleanses and purifies the sinful. Shouldn't we align our hearts with the way God works? Ask him to purify our hearts so that we may worship him properly.

3. The Lord is coming to judge those that do not fear him. (v. 5)

The Lord paints a courtroom scene where he is both judge and witness. Those who are being judged are those that do not fear him. What is the fear of the Lord? It is the recognition of God's proper place in the universe and in our lives. A picture of what it means to fear God is found in Genesis 22—Abraham trusted God, so he prepared to obey him by sacrificing his son. He is spared when the angel of the Lord stops him and declares, "I know that you fear the Lord." The list of people in verse 5 becomes a place for us to think though whether our lives look like people who fear the Lord or those who don't.

4. The Lord has not changed (v. 6)

We do not always see God's justice being enacted right away. It may be easy for us to think, "God, where are you? Have you changed?" In verse 6, Malachi points out that for Israel, their very existence confirmed that God does not change. God is faithful to keep his promises. He had promised to Abraham that he would have a great family through which all the nations of the world would be blessed. However, they would also face adversity—exile and dominion by foreign empires. But through it all, God remembered his promise, and that promise came to fruition in the person of Jesus Christ. We also have a promise—that Jesus will be with us always. We trust him while we wait, and in the meantime, he has given us the task of being his messengers, announcing the coming of the king.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what way do we fulfill the role of God's messengers?
2. What does it look like for God to purify his people? What is our response to God's purifying work in our lives?
3. What circumstances might tempt us to think that God has changed? How can we remind ourselves of his immutability?

SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE
FROM DECEMBER 5, 2021