

December 9, 2018

Malachi 3:1-4

Imagine the perfect Christmas peace. “Silent night. Holy night. All is calm.” “God bless you, merry gentlemen, let nothing you dismay.” Perfect peace, all around. Add some snow, not cold snow, clean snow so that the world looks clean and right. Now add some jingle bells, silver bells, tinsel and glitter shining bright. Add one more touch - everybody living “thank you” in their hearts and lives. A perfect Christmas peace. I could go for some of that. How about you?

It doesn't seem possible, does it? Instead of “thank you” all around, the “yous” we hear aren't all that peaceful: “Why can't you ...? Why won't you ...? You better You” And after the Wall Street bell rang on Friday, I think we all have less silver to shine. As for clean, when my wife left on Wednesday, the house was practically spotless; now? But what's worse is all the clutter and crud in here [my head and my heart]. With what's going on in here [my head and my heart] and what's going on out there, “Let nothing you dismay”? A perfect Christmas peace? It doesn't seem possible, does it?

Especially when we want our peace served up on a platter. Simple, easy, care-free. A clean house without cleaning, a clean heart and mind without cleaning. Peace in the heart without clearing out the garbage. Peace in the family without making peace or giving peace. Instead, peace by the “rule of should” - “They should She should He should God should”

“God should” That's where the people were at the time of Malachi. We're about 400 years before Christmas; about 100 years after the Babylonian captivity. God's people had been set free from their exile in Babylon. Now, in Jerusalem, out of the ruins, they had a new temple, new city walls, a new life. It should have been great time of peace. It should have been a time of peace at home. Instead, family life, marriage life was a mess. Husbands and wives, parents and children all stuck on themselves. It should have been a time of peace out in the world. Instead, the “haves” were crushing and cheating the “have nots.” It should have been a time of peace

with God. Instead, God's people were cheating God. Instead of living for God, they were living for themselves. Instead of looking out for God's work, they were looking out for themselves. Instead of giving God their best, they gave God their left-overs. Instead of saying, "Yes, God," they blamed God for all that was wrong in their lives. Instead of saying, "Yes, God," they expected God to say "yes" to whatever they wanted. "God should do what I want. God should give me what I want. God should make me happy the way I want. God should ... God should ... God should" And so, God said, "no!" And there wasn't much peace to be found. Sound familiar?

But God didn't just say: "No!" God also said: "Yes!" **"Yes, I will send my messenger to prepare the way before me."** (We know that messenger as John the Baptist.) **"And [yes,] the Lord you are seeking ... the messenger of the covenant whom you desire will come."** (It would be another 400 years, but) yes, the Lord God, the Son of God, was about to step into history to clean things up.

To clean things up - how? As "messenger of the covenant." I'll suggest that there are two ways to understand "messenger of the covenant." One way is as messenger of the Old Covenant, the covenant God made with his people at Mt. Sinai, "You better get it right or else." Some day and suddenly, on Judgment Day, the Son of God will come as messenger of the covenant, as enforcer of the covenant, and he will clean things up in a way that will burn. That day is still coming. We want to be seen clean on that day and not burned clean. And we can be seen clean on that day because on Christmas Day, Jesus came as Messenger of the New Covenant. The New Covenant doesn't say: "Get it right or else." The New Covenant says: **"I will be your God; you will be my people; I will forgive you and remember your transgressions no longer."** A whole lot more peace there than in: "I'm God; you're not. Now get it right or else." - isn't there? We get to live in the peace of that New Covenant: **"I will be your God; you will be my people; I will forgive you."**

We get to live in that peace because God's messenger of the covenant, his angel and agent of the covenant, satisfied the demands of the Old Covenant for us. Born of a woman, born under law, Jesus lived a perfect life

and satisfied the demands of God's law for us. Born of a woman, born under law, he satisfied the demands of God's justice with his death on the cross. What does that mean for us? "There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus." Instead, we have peace with God! He sees you as his, his children, his forgiven children, children he loves. With Jesus, it's his joy to love you and protect you; with Jesus, it's his joy to provide for you and bless you; with Jesus, it's his joy to take you to heaven! How about that for peace!

You might be thinking: "There has to be more to peace than that." True, peace with God doesn't automatically mean peace up here [head], or peace at home, or peace out in the world. And peace with God doesn't mean a peaceful, easy life. Malachi tells us about life with Jesus - **"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 [don't think of a soft soap like Caress or Palmolive; think of a harsh soap cleanser that burns]. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver."** Malachi isn't just talking about cleaning and burning the godlessness out there; he's talking about cleaning and burning the godlessness in here [in our hearts and minds].

Why? God knows how self-reliance and self-satisfaction can poison our faith and spoil our peace. He knows how love for the world - love for the stuff of the world, love for the ways of the world - can turn us from him and his peace. He knows the danger. And so by the fire of his Word in here [the Bible], and by the fire of troubles in us and around us, he works to purify our faith, to refine us. That doesn't sound comfortable or cozy, does it? But Jesus wants more for us than to be comfortable and cozy. Jesus is looking to purify us, to refine us, to train us to serve as his royal priests - priests pure with his love, priests strong with his mettle, priests eager to share the treasures of heaven.

You might be thinking: "Priests? Why priests?" Think of it this way - Could you, your home life, your friends and neighbors use more treasure from heaven? ... more peace with Jesus? God shares the treasures of heaven, he shares his peace through his priests. So what needs to be purified in you and refined out of you, so that your family can have a family priest, a family

of priests, praying for each other, sharing the treasures of heaven with each other, bringing the peace of Jesus to each other? What needs to be purified in you and refined out of you, so that your friends and neighbors can have a priesthood praying for them, sharing the treasures of heaven with them, bringing the peace of Jesus to them? What needs to be purified in you and refined out of you, so that you can more and more know the peace of Jesus, so you can more and more show the peace of Jesus?

I don't ask those questions to spoil your peace, but so you can live your peace!

Jesus is coming to do more than jingle some bells or snap a "peace finger." Jesus is coming to do more than give us peace. Jesus is coming to clean us up so we can live peace! Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.