

The Promise of the Refiner's Fire: The Gospel According to Malachi Malachi 2:17-3:6

Introduction

Last week we looked at this passage and what did we learn? We learned that God is faithful even when His people are faithless. We saw the brilliant radiant sun of God's Gospel promise that He would one day curve the tide of sin, but He promised to do it in a way that Israel did not anticipate.

They did not in any way expect a guy wearing camel skin who preached about repentance in the middle of the wilderness while eating honey and locusts to be the one to prepare the way for the King of kings.

They certainly did not expect the One who would come as Messiah, the promised Son of David, to die first before He would come again to set up the Messianic Kingdom. God answered Israel's questions concerning His character and justice, but it was not the answer Israel wanted to hear.

As we read through the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation what we see is God become more specific with His promise to turn things around.

- In Genesis 3, God promises Eve a man-child who would crush the head of the serpent.
- In Genesis 17, God gets more specific with Abraham by promising, *"I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you.⁷ And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you."*
- Then when you get to Exodus, God sets up His covenant with Israel through Moses to be a kingdom of priests. Their identity would be marked by both the Law of God and circumcision of their flesh.
- Then God even gets even more specific with King David by focusing His Covenant promise on an individual. We read this promise in 2 Samuel 7:13-14, *"When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom.¹³ He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever."*

But all throughout these promises what we see and hear is the echo of Redemption:

- With the promise to Adam and Eve of a man-child we hear the echo of Sin's defeat.
- When we read of God's covenant to Abraham, we hear the echo of God's blessing to all nations through Abraham's seed.

- What we witness with Israel is that even though she is set apart to be a kingdom of Priests, even though she is called to follow God by keeping His laws, even though Circumcision was an outside sign of who their God was supposed to be, Israel was not consistent in their obedience to God nor in their love for Him.

What we see in the Bible is that God repeatedly reminded Israel that a day was coming when He would go far beyond anything they could do by applying a circumcision not to the flesh but to the heart, and that this circumcision would enable them to obey and love God as they never were able to do before. Listen to the following promises from the Bible...

Deuteronomy 30:6. “ *And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.*”

Jeremiah 31:33-34. “*But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. [34] And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.*”

Ezekiel 36:26-27. “*And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. [27] And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.*”

With Adam and Eve, God promises to deal with sin by crushing the head of the serpent; with Abraham, God promises to bless a people through one descendent; and with Moses, God promises to call a Kingdom of Priests who would be marked by God’s commandments and outward circumcision.

We see echoes of the New Covenant throughout all of these promises: The New Covenant would deal with sin, the New Covenant would involve circumcision (but of the heart), the New Covenant would result in the Law of God being written on the hearts of His people, the New Covenant would identify the people of God as a Kingdom of priests.

So in essence what we see throughout the Bible is how God builds on covenant promise after covenant promise but while doing so, becoming more and more specific about His New Covenant Promise.

What we discovered last week is that after the coming of John the Baptist, a second messenger would appear who Malachi calls, “*the messenger of the covenant.*” What does this messenger come to do: “*sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver...*”

So what are some of the things we learn from the passages I gave you to read this past week about the New Covenant?

- God will Circumcise the heart for the purpose of loving Him
- God will put His law within His people
- God will be God and His people will be His people
- God will remove their uncleanness
- God will provide a new heart
- God will provide a new Spirit within His people
- God will cause His people to walk in His ways and obey His rules

What does the NT say about the New Covenant?

- Jesus called his blood the “blood of the New Covenant.”
- Jesus is the mediator of a better covenant (what covenant?: the one in Jeremiah 31).
- Peter attributes the birth of the Church to being part of the New Covenant fulfillment (Acts 2).

Let’s look at Malachi again and try to get some of our questions answered,

“Behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me. 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.”

So last week we discovered that the first messenger mentioned here is John the Baptist and the second is Jesus Christ, we saw that this has to be Jesus for three reasons: 1) He is called “Lord,” 2) He owns the Temple, and 3) The Messenger of the New Covenant is the “Me” in the first part of v. 1.

What are some of the things we learn about Jesus in this passage?

- He is the messenger of the covenant
- He is a refiner’s fire (purges)
- He is fuller’s soap (cleanses)
- He will be the agent of purification
- He will purify the sons of Levi
- Those he purifies will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD.

Do you hear the echo’s of God’s New Covenant promises in this passage? Have you ever wondered why the Apostle Paul wrote in Colossians 2:11-15...

“In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal

*demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.*¹⁵ *He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.”*

So what we know so far is that

- Jesus’ death and the coming of His Holy Spirit fulfills the promise in Deuteronomy 30:6.
- We know that Jesus came to earth to purchase a Bride for Himself (the Church).
- We know the Bible calls this Bride “*a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession...*”
- We know that as a result of Jesus’ death and resurrection we can have eternal life.

So here is another question we need to try to answer: What is the curse of sin? Is it only physical death and eternal death or is the curse deeper than that?

What do we learn from the Bible? For starters, we learn that the Christian was once an enemy of God (Rom. 5:10). So what does it mean to be an enemy of God? Why is it that we human beings are flawed in so many ways? We were all at one time enemies of God because the curse of sin also involves our nature and the desires of our hearts.

Did you know that the Greek word that we get redemption from (λύτρωσις) which can mean: to ransom or buy back, also means to liberate. Folks, Jesus is called redeemer not only because He purchased us, but also because He plans to liberate us through the power of His Spirit from the slavery of Sin. This is why Malachi calls Jesus the Mediator of the Covenant. Only the mediator of the New Covenant could bring the promises of Deuteronomy 30:6 and Jeremiah 31, and Ezekiel 36 to a desperately flawed people.

Why else would Hebrews 8 attribute Jesus to being the Mediator of a better covenant and then spell out what that covenant by quoting Jeremiah 31 word for word? What is the New Covenant promise? A heart transformed for the purpose of loving and obeying God.

Why else would the Bible tells us that, “*...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*” (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Jesus came to call a desperately flawed people to Himself to save them not just from hell but to change them day by day into image of Himself. This is what the Apostle Paul meant when he wrote, “*now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.*” (Romans 6:22)

We are made children of God the moment we place our faith and trust in Jesus’ death and resurrection, but the process of becoming more and more like Jesus is a life long process that God takes you through. His Holy Spirit is the conduit of life change that often involves pain, suffering, fellowship, discipline and the Bible.

We sin, fall, at times take some steps backward, but Salvation always involves a purging, a refining, and metamorphous. Salvation not only about escaping hell, but being saved from my old nature. Permit me to read a quote from C.H. Spurgeon’s book, *All of Grace*,

"The old nature is very strong, and they have tried to curb and tame it; but it will not be subdued, and they find themselves, though anxious to be better, if anything growing worse than before. The heart is so hard, the will is so obstinate, the passions are so furious, the thoughts are so volatile, the imagination is so ungovernable, the desires are so wild, that the man feels that he has a den of wild beasts within him, which will eat him up sooner than be ruled by him.

We may say of our fallen nature what the Lord said to Job concerning Leviathan: "Wilt thou play with him as with a bird? or wilt thou bind him for thy maidens?" A man might as well hope to hold the north wind in the hollow of his hand as expect to control by his own strength those boisterous powers which dwell within his fallen nature. This is a greater feat than any of the fabled labors of Hercules: God is wanted here."

"I could believe that Jesus would forgive sin," says one, *"but then my trouble is that I sin again, and that I feel such awful tendencies to evil within me."* As surely as a stone, if it be flung up into the air, soon comes down again to the ground, so do I, though I am sent up to heaven by earnest preaching, return again to my insensible state. Alas! I am easily fascinated with the basilisk eyes of sin, and am thus held as under a spell, so that I cannot escape from my own folly."

Dear friend, salvation would be a sadly incomplete affair if it did not deal with this part of our ruined estate. We want to be purified as well as pardoned. Justification without sanctification would not be salvation at all. It would call the leper clean, and leave him to die of his disease; if would forgive the rebellion and allow the rebel to remain an enemy to his king. It would remove the consequences but overlook the cause, and this would leave an endless and hopeless task before us. It would stop the stream for a time, but leave an open fountain of defilement, which would sooner or later break forth with increased power."

Remember that the Lord Jesus came to take away sin in three ways; He came to remove *the penalty* of sin, *the power* of sin, and, at last, *the presence* of sin. At once you may reach to the second part--the power of sin may immediately be broken; and so you will be on the road to the third, namely, the removal of the presence of sin. "We know that he was manifested to take away our sins."

So, the question I leave with you is: Why did Malachi give Jesus the titles: refiner's fire / fuller's soap?