

## Malachi 3:1-7b

The Day of the LORD is a **common** phrase in the Bible, which describes the day when the LORD will **return** to our world once again. On that day, Jesus will come and **judge** all people. He will throw the wicked **out** of His sight forever, and He will gather His **believers** to **Himself** in heaven. The Prophet Malachi asks, “*Who can **endure** the day when he comes? Who will remain **standing** when he appears?*” Those are very **valid** questions, especially when we realize that the LORD is **holy** and all **powerful**. Nothing **imperfect** can stand in His presence, which doesn’t leave much **hope** for **sinful** mankind.

But the great comfort found in the Bible is that God Himself has been at work to **prepare** us for that awesome day - to **purify** us from our sins, and to present us to Himself as **sinless** and **holy**. In fact, God is **still** working in our lives, so we **will** be able to **stand** before His throne completely **accepted**. In our text for today the Prophet **Malachi** tells us that the LORD would send **Two Messengers** to us - **John the Baptist** and **Jesus** - messengers who would **prepare** us for the Day of the LORD.

**Malachi** was the **last** of God’s Old Testament prophets. He preached about **400 years** before the birth of Jesus. Through Malachi, God announced to the nation of **Israel** that the **Savior** whom He had promised was **coming**. But **before** He would **arrive**, someone **else** was coming too. Malachi wrote, “*Look! I am sending my **messenger**! He will prepare the way **before** me.*” The Lord promised to send a **messenger** who would preach His **Word** to the people, and who would get them **ready** to receive the LORD **Himself**. We know from the **New Testament** Scriptures that this messenger is **John the Baptist**. Jesus Himself said about John, “*This is the one about whom it is written, ‘Look, I am sending my **messenger** ahead of you, who will **prepare** your way before you.’*”

John was a very **important** character. Luke tells us in his Gospel, “*He (John) went into the whole region around the Jordan, **preaching** a baptism of **repentance** for the **forgiveness** of sins.*” John preached the **harsh** message of God’s **law**, in order to lead them to **repent** of their sins - to **turn away** from them. But John **also** preached the **comforting** message of the **Gospel**, so the people would know that God is **gracious**, and that He would **forgive** their sins through the waters of **baptism**. This was the **message** John had

received from God. and it had great **power** - the power to work **repentance** in the people, and to **wash away** their sins. This is how he would **prepare** the people for the **arrival** of the LORD.

Today our God **continues** to use the message of John the Baptist to work in **our** hearts - to prepare **us** for the Day of the LORD. Even though John himself has been dead for nearly 2,000 years, his **message** of a baptism of **repentance** for the **forgiveness** of sins still lives on. In his sermon to the crowd of people who had gathered on the Day of **Pentecost**, Peter preached the very **same** message. He told the people, "***Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.***" And of course this is the message that faithful pastors still proclaim **today**. God wants us to turn **away** from our sins - to get **rid** of all **bitterness, rage, and anger** - to renounce the **devil** and his **wicked** ways. It's **hard** for us **not** to love the **world** and the **things** of the world, but when we focus on our **baptism**, and the gift of the **Holy Spirit**, we are constantly **reminded** that we have been **redeemed** by **Jesus**. Baptism **saves**. As Luther said, "*Baptism works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare.*" Thank God for His **messenger** - John the Baptist - and for the gift of our **baptism**. May we continue to **drown** the Old Adam in us, along with its evil deeds and desires, by daily **contrition** and **repentance**, so the **New Man** in us can live in **righteousness** and **purity** - **prepared** for the Savior's **arrival** on the Day of the LORD.

But the Prophet Malachi also gave his people the prophecy of a **second** messenger - a messenger who was even **more important** than John the Baptist. He would be the **Messenger** of the **Covenant**. Malachi prophesied: "*Then suddenly the Lord, whom you are seeking, will come to his temple! The Messenger of the Covenant, in whom you delight, will surely come, says the Lord of Armies.*" God's Old Testament believers were anxiously **waiting** for the Lord to come. They knew that He would establish a **covenant** where God would **forgive** their sins, and remember them **no more**. Isn't it **interesting** that after the Jews had **waited** for so many years for the Messiah to **come**, **suddenly** He was **there**. Jesus came to His **temple** - to His **people** - and He came as the **Messenger** of the **Covenant**. But the message of **Jesus** wasn't only a **spoken** message, it was a message that He **fulfilled**. By His innocent **life** and sinless **death**, Jesus established a **new**

**covenant** between God and all sinners - a covenant in which God **forgives** our sins for the sake of **Jesus**.

Jesus **continues** to come to His **people** - His **believing** followers. He comes to us in **baptism**, and brings us into God's loving **family**. He comes to us in His **Word**, as He speaks a message of God's **grace** and eternal **truth**. And He comes to us in His holy **supper**, bringing us His own **body** and **blood** - the **same** body that was offered as a **sacrifice**, and the same **blood** that was poured out for us on the **cross**. Through these Means of Grace, Jesus continually **renews** His covenant with us, and **guarantees** the blessing of **forgiveness**.

But Malachi continues, "*Who can endure **the day** when he comes? Who will remain **standing** when he appears? For he will be like a **refiner's fire**, like **launderers bleach**! He will be seated like a **refiner** and a **purifier of silver**. He will **purify** the sons of Levi and **refine** them like gold and like silver.*" The **day** the prophet is talking about is the **Last Day** - the **second** coming of Jesus. **Fire** and **bleach** are both powerful cleansing agents. A refiner's **fire** burns away all the impurities, and a launderer's **bleach** attacks **dirt** and **stains**. Jesus is like **both** of them. He's not **weak** He's not **lukewarm** - and He's not **tolerant** of sin. Jesus is 100% **pure**, and He purifies **us** from all our sins.

Malachi didn't **like** what he saw in the people of his day. The people brought **blemished** animals to the priest - animals that were **blind**, **lame**, and **sick** - trying to get by with as **little** as they **possibly could** - and the priests **offered** those animals as **sacrifices** to God. With those **imperfect** sacrifices, they were **robbing** God of the tithes and offerings which He had **demande**d, and which He **deserved**. Many of them had **divorced** their **godly** wives, and had married women who worshiped **false** gods. They constantly **complained** that God favored the **wicked**, and that He failed to **reward** the people whom **they** saw as **good**.

But are **we** any **better**? Just like the people of Malachi's day we can be half-hearted in our **worship** and **devotion** to the LORD. Our **love** can be **lukewarm**, and our desire to study His **Word** and to **serve** Him in humble **obedience** often falls **short**. We **say** things we **shouldn't** - we pollute our **minds** with sinful desires - and then we get upset with **God** because it seems like He's letting the **wicked** in the world get away with all their **godless**

actions. Just like the people in **Malachi's** day, we fail to recognize that **we** are just as **wicked** as everyone else. If the LORD kept a record of our sins, **we** couldn't stand on the Last Day **either**. We need to be washed **clean** and **purified** of sin, and the **only** one who can **do** that is **Jesus**.

Malachi wrote, *"He will be seated like a **refiner** and a **purifier** of silver. He will **purify** the sons of Levi and **refine** them like gold and like silver."* That's what Jesus does for **us**. Through His Word Jesus brings to the **surface** all of our **selfish** motives, and our **pride**. Then He **destroys** them. Jesus reveals the **inconsistencies** in our lives - the **exceptions** we want to make to **justify** our sinful words and actions, and He **destroys them too**. At the same time Jesus pours His loving **forgiveness** into our hearts. He **moulds** and **shapes** us to become more and more like **Him** in righteousness and holiness.

Whenever the LORD puts our faith to the **test**, and makes us go through fiery ordeals, it's not **pleasant** for us. But Jesus uses those tests to **refine** our faith, *"So that the proven **character** of your faith - which is more **valuable** than gold, which passes **away** even though it is tested by fire - may be found to result in **praise, glory, and honor** when Jesus Christ is revealed."* The cleansing and refining work of Jesus has a wonderful **purpose**. It **prepares** us for the Day of the LORD. As God works through His Word, He firmly establishes our faith in **Jesus**, and He **guarantees** that He will **fulfill** this promise to us. He says, *"When you walk through **fire**, you will **not** be **burned**, and the flame will **not** set you on fire. Because I am the **LORD** your God, the **Holy One** of Israel, your **Savior**."*

God's work in our lives is truly **beautiful**. Through the message of **John the Baptist** He **prepares** the way for the Lord to come to us. And through the message and work of **Jesus**, He **purifies** us from all **unrighteousness**, and **refines** us to be His people. When He returns again on the Day of the LORD, we will be able to **stand** before Him completely **accepted** - with hearts that are **grateful** for His **free gift** of **salvation**. Amen.