**Malachi 3:1-4** "See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty. 2 But 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. 3 He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, 4 and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years.

I know we have had this discussion before but I find that repeating things is always helpful in the learning process. The discussion is one concerning prophecies and how they work. Bible scholars have learned that there are really three distinct types of prophecy. First there is a type called “intermediate prophecy.” This kind of prophecy I would guess might be the most abundant type. In this kind of prophecy you will find that there is a partial fulfillment of the words in a future event but the complete fulfillment is going to be found in the life and times of Jesus. An example of this is found in 2 Samuel, where a prophecy is made about the building of the Temple by the one who takes the throne of David. This is partially fulfilled in the life of King Solomon, but completely fulfilled in the life of Jesus and his building of the Holy Christian church.

The next type of prophecy is called “typical prophecy.” Here is a prophecy where a person or an event is foretold and that person or event is a shadow of what would be found in Jesus’ life. Immediately in my mind two examples of this type can be mentioned. First there was Abraham and his being asked to sacrifice his only son Isaac to the Lord. Although that sacrifice was never done, still you can see how it was a shadow of when God would sacrifice his Son Jesus. Or another example of this type is found in the life of David. One of David’s close friends and advisor Ahithophel ends up betraying David. This shadow is pointing to the life of Jesus and how Judas would betray him.

Then there is the third type of prophecy. This type is called “rectilinear or direct” prophecy. It is a prophecy of a future event and that event finds its fulfillment only in the events and life of Jesus. I can bet that you know why I waited to tell you about this kind last? That’s right, because one of the great examples of this type of prophecy is right before us in our text. The prophet Malachi was given a picture of the Messiah to come. His words are found to be fulfilled and true only in the life and events of Jesus. But be alert, because found in these words there is a twist. It is a twist of such nature that many did not grasp and understand it until the very days of Jesus himself. So let’s take a look at these words before us, this direct prophecy of Jesus, and see what we can learn. Our theme will be: **THE MESSENGER OF THE COVENANT.**

Now I think it rather important for me to begin by telling you that Malachi was a prophet of the Lord around 430 B.C. That’s right some 400 years before Jesus was ever born. Malachi came at a time when the people of Israel were particularly godless. I say that because this is a people who have been returned from captivity under Babylon, as God had promised, were able to restore their land and their worship life in full. But they didn’t do that! In the Temple they offered blemished sacrifices and in many ways profaned the name of the Lord by teaching what was false but what appealed to the people. The Priests and Levites were more interested in popularity and money than they were in serving the Lord. The people themselves, with the godlessness of the religious leadership before them, literally robbed God. That’s what God clearly says to them in Chapter 3 of Malachi (past where our text ends). Can you imagine that, God himself telling the people they were robbing him. God says they did that not only in withholding tithes and offerings but in the way they slandered and said harsh things of God. So you can guess that the ministry of Malachi was not an easy one.

And yet throughout all of this God had Malachi again and again, give prophecies concerning the Messiah, to give them hope and direction and perhaps in that hope and direction bring to them to repentance. It is one of those wonderful prophecies that we have before us.

Malachi starts his prophecy this way, **“See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me.”** Now, did you pay attention to those words? God is speaking of a messenger who is coming. That messenger is someone who **“will prepare the way BEFORE ME.”** There is something to note. The messenger is preparing the people for the very coming of the Lord himself. Yes, God, the almighty and all powerful, is going to come and be among his people.

Already I can see that most of you know when this prophecy got fulfilled. It is fulfilled in the birth, life and calling of John the Baptist. When the angel of the Lord appeared to Zachariah, he was told: **"Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to give him the name John. 14 He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, 15 for he will be great in the sight of the Lord…he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from birth. 16 Many of the people of Israel will he bring back to the Lord their God. 17 And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous-- to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."** Those words announce the fulfillment of what Malachi said. The messenger had appeared and thus the Lord himself was soon to come!

Our prophecy goes on. **“Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the Lord Almighty.** The message is clear. Once John is there, then will come the Lord God. Of course, the way people thought it would be and the way it ended up is different. The Old Testament people thought in terms of adults and worldly power struggles concerning the Messiah. They never dreamed of babies, the baby John in his mother’s womb and the baby Jesus in his mother’s womb six months apart. So in many ways, though surely people had been told and alerted to what was going on, John and Jesus came without much fanfare from the people. Now the God was excited. God sent angels to tell the shepherds. One line in particular sticks out in my mind. **“Suddenly a great company of the heavenly hosts appeared, with the angel, praising God and saying.”** There is that “suddenly” found in Malachi isn’t it? The Lord has come. The Lord that the Jewish people had desired, hoped for and counted on. The Lord who would change everything in every way for them had come. But they missed it.

Let me just take a moment and speak about that title that is given to the Lord that Malachi said was coming. He is called, **“The Messenger of the Covenant.”** Not long ago in a sermon I spoke to you about that word covenant and how it could be translated with the word “testament.” It really is a word that points to a “testament”, a last will and testament. Jesus, for that is surely who we are speaking of, is called here “the messenger of the Covenant.” He is. He is the fulfiller of the Old Covenant or Testament. All the things that were foreshadowed, prophesied, and revealed through the ceremonial laws and word of God are fulfilled in Jesus. With that fulfilling of the Old Testament Jesus helps us understand his work and then gave us the New Testament or Covenant. It is a covenant that says that God has done all things for our salvation. That God has leveled out the paths and made the crooked road straight, the rough way smooth. That’s Jesus, our Savior from sin.

He became our Savior by living the perfect life we could not and then Jesus, in love and joy, went to the cross and there paid for our sins. Because Jesus has made the payment for sins, God the Father, because of Jesus grants us eternal life and salvation simply by faith. We believe what Jesus has done. We believe the truth, wonder and salvation of God revealed and fulfilled in Jesus.

Don’t miss that this new covenant is also a testament. Testaments are only fulfilled once there has been a death. Jesus died and His testament, His New Covenant was put into place. The cool thing is that Jesus came back to life and it is Jesus who administers his own last will and testament. It says, “You have been forgiven for my names sake. You have eternal life because I have given you the victory and clothed you with righteousness.” Everything is accomplished in Jesus. That’s what the Gospel message is about. About Jesus and his victory in every way.

Now here is the fun part and the twist that is found in our text. Malachi’s picture of Jesus kind of jumps ahead to the Second coming of Jesus. That’s right, it starts with his first advent and then looks ahead to his second advent. It is in looking at the second part of Malachi’s words that we grasp the full implications of what Jesus does, is doing and will do.

Malachi says, **“But 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 soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years.”**

There is so much revealed in those words. I will try and give you the wonder of them without taking too much time to do so. To understand that Malachi sees Jesus at his second coming, then just look at passages that speak of that. Jesus will come righteous, victorious, Almighty and fierce. We are told every knee will bow to him, even those in hell will acknowledge and praise Him as God and Lord but they will do so in torment and terror. The returning Jesus is coming as the Judge of all the world and for many, this day of his coming will be filled with total fear and horror because they refused to believe in his name and trust that He is God and Lord of all. Jesus told us as he carried his cross to Golgatha, **“For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' 30 Then "'they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!"' 31 For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"** Jesus even at his crucifixion looked ahead to the time of his judgment of all people and souls.

But there is more to grasp about Jesus. Notice he is called **“a refiner’s fire or a launderer soap.”** He is not the refiner nor the launderer, but the refiner’s fire and the soap. Do you get the message? The refiner’s fire melts down the metal and pulls the impurities out. Silver and gold and made pure in this way. The message of the soap is the same. Soap purifies and cleans, it takes away all the dirt. Trust me, Tide and Cheer will have nothing on Jesus’ soap! Both of these phrases are prophetic ways of telling us that Jesus will forgive our sins and cleanse our trespasses. You and I will be pronounced clean, holy and pure, yes, declared righteous, just because of what Jesus did. You and I will be allowed to enter into heaven.

That is of course the bent of the words that speak of Judah and Jerusalem and offerings that are righteous and acceptable to the Lord. Once in heaven, we will be holy and perfect, truly filled with righteousness so that everything we do will be acceptable and pure to the Lord our God whom we will live with for all eternity! In other words, those prophetic words are about the total joy, marvel, wonder and absolute goodness of God’s eternal kingdom. If you doubt what I say then I will ask this. In the Book of Revelation, when God desires to give us a picture of heaven and its absolute wonder and glory, how does he do it? Turn to Revelation 21 and read God’s description of heaven title: The New Jerusalem. It is a place with streets of gold, foundations of precious stones, gates of pearl and you and me living with God in total wonder and awe!

What a marvel these words of Malachi. He gives us a picture of Jesus. Jesus who comes to be our Savior, who comes to serve us by bring that new message, that message of grace and forgiveness from the Lord. At the same time Malachi lets us see Jesus the judge and ruler of all, who brings his Covenant promises to total fulfillment in the gift and wonder of Heaven as our eternal home. Dear people, rejoice in Jesus. Give thanks to Jesus. Catch the wonder and joy of Jesus for yourselves as you prepare this season for the coming Jesus. Amen.