

Messenger of the Covenant (Mal. iii: 1-4)

by Seth Rees

The sermon emphasizes the importance of trusting God and His faithfulness, and the need for a sudden and complete surrender to God in order to receive the blessing of entire sanctification and experience the presence of the Holy Ghost.

Scripture: Malachi 3:2

Topics: "Gods Silence", "Faithful Obedience"

Description

Seth Rees preaches about the silence of God during the four hundred years between Malachi and the coming of Jesus, emphasizing the darkness and despair that can settle when God is silent. He highlights the importance of God speaking to our souls and the need to listen attentively to His voice. Rees draws parallels between the apostasy and mercenary spirit in Malachi's time to the current state of the Church, warning about the dangers of seeking personal gain in religious activities. He discusses the significance of offering our best to God, both in material possessions and in surrendering our hearts completely to Him.

Transcript

Behold, I will send My messenger and he shall prepare the way before Me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the messenger of the Covenant, whom ye delight in: behold He shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth. Mal. 8: 14.

This is the very last message from the very last messenger of the Old Testament dispensation. His very name means "my messenger," and he was God's last messenger uttering His last message to that dispensation. When the echo of his voice had died in the distance that awful silence of four hundred years set in. Not a single word was heard from the lips of God from the time Malachi closed this last message until "He who had spoken in times past by His prophets spake unto us by His Son." O the appalling darkness of those four centuries! It is always distressingly dark in this world when God is silent. If we can not hear from God, there settles down upon us such a gloom, such a silence, such an unbearable silence that people often wring their hands and tear their hair and walk through the streets, or wood, or open field and scream and cry, and yet to the echo of their voice there comes no answer. O the silence of God! What if He should not speak to your soul again? What if you should be standing upon the threshold of four centuries of appalling silence? Think of it! How glad we ought to be this afternoon that God ever speaks to us at all. I read that when Judas received the sop he immediately went out and it was night. It is always

night when a soul goes out from the presence of God! O the blackness and darkness, of that awful night of gloom, that settles down upon the soul who can not hear from God! Those who have ever gone through the awful ordeal of crucifixion appreciate what I am saying when I speak of that distressing silence which proceeds the breaking of the day; that awful night that seems like it would never come to an end, the blackness and darkness which seems unbearable. How glad the soul when God speaks again! O glory to His name, that He should speak to us at all!

This old prophet stood upon the heights of revelation and looked across the dark valley of four hundred years and saw the breaking of the day. While he announces the coming of Jesus and tried to turn the people back from their sin to repentance and to God, he calls attention to the fact that they grieved God, that they had insulted Him, that they had apostatized had gone away until God would speak to them no more. What an awful thing! Brother, if you are seeking God this afternoon the darkness in itself is enough, but supposing it should go on and on and increase, and century after century pass by and you should never hear a sound from God. It seems to me it would be hell itself. It certainly would be hell enough for me. I remember when I was seeking the blessing of entire sanctification I used to get away from my family, I used to go away from my friends, away out among the gigantic oaks, under the twinkling stars where I could hear nothing but the song of crickets, or now and then the mournful cry of a whippoorwill, and even these seemed to deepen my conviction, and the very silence of those hours seemed as though it would kill me. I cried and screamed and rolled on the ground and plead with God. O what a thrilling sensation filled me! What a breaking of the day! What a sunlight in the East when God began to answer, when He began to whisper to my soul. I leaned forward to hearken to what He had to say. O what a mercy that He should speak to us! Again and again we are commanded to hearken.

Whenever God has something to say, He has something worthy of our most profound attention. If God would speak to us today out of Heaven it would be something of great value. If it were only a single sentence we would do well to frame it and gild it and hang it on the walls of our souls forever. I want to notice this afternoon that the closing days of the dispensation of the prophets were strikingly typical of the closing days of the present age. As certainly as Adam failed in Eden, as certainly as the Antediluvian age went out in judgment, as the Patriarchal family sank into Egyptian darkness and bondage, as the conquests of Canaan ended in long captivity, as certainly as the old dispensation went out in blackness and darkness of four hundred years of awful night, so this present dispensation will end in apostasy and awful darkness. I know that people do not seem to see it; nobody seems to realize it but the truly spiritual. The average Christian does not have the slightest conception of the awful darkness that surrounds us; it is most distressing. Many a time the truly sanctified walk the streets or the fields with aching hearts and streaming eyes, crying to the Lord to come and put an end to this awful reign of sin. After Israel was restored from captivity they had a season of prosperity, but this they could not endure. How few people today are able to stand prosperity. More people become spiritual under deepest sorrow and severest trials than under prosperity. The old prophet stood up and called their attention to the fact that there had arisen among them a mercenary spirit, and all their free will service and all their self denial was a thing of the past. "Why," he said, "we have reached the place where nobody will close the doors of the temple without a salary.

We can not find anybody who will kindle a fire up on the altar without pay." We have reached a time now in spiritual declension when men are religious for mercenary gain, and people are members of the Church for what they can get out of it. Thousands of people are members of our worldly and popular churches for financial gain. The merchant patronizes the Church that the Church may patronize him. The tinner, or the

saddler, or the shoemaker, on entering a village and settling down, inquires for the most popular Church, and attends service there that he may gain the patronage of the members. O these days of large salaries and no revivals, salaried organists, salaried choristers, paid singers, and no conversions! Do not these days resemble the days of Malachi? These mercenary times when it seems as if everybody wants big pay for everything they do for the Lord or for the Church. The awful apostasy of the closing days of this age is already upon us. God help us to see that these are awful times, and that we have awful things to encounter, and that if we are going to stand, we will have to be girded with more than human strength; we must have something that will fix us so, no matter what the storm may be, nor how raging the billows, we will ride serenely on. We see that the old prophet calls their attention to a state of apostasy in which they have offered polluted bread. When the bread was too old for them to eat they offered it to the Lord. You can hardly imagine such a thing; but is it not a fact that the offerings of these days are simply, in many instances, what we do not need, or what we can conveniently do without. He says, "You have offered the blind and sacrificed the lame and the sick." They reached a place, in those days of spiritual declension, when they would hunt out a one-eyed animal, or one that went on three legs, or one that was sick or lame, for an offering unto the Lord. This seems ridiculous, but it is exactly what I am faced with all about me.

The sacrifices and offerings of the people are lame and sick. They are not full, fat offerings, they are not whole offerings, they are seldom free will offerings. I believe that one dollar of sanctified money will go further than ten dollars of sick money. A free will offering of one dollar, backed up by prayer and a holy life, is worth more than ten dollars raised by fairs, festivals, or bean suppers in the churches. Who of you would give a one-eyed or a lame animal to God? and yet is it not true that any who hold back any part of their tenth are making a lame offering? Is it not true that all who give grudgingly, or sparingly, are offering the halt, the lame and the blind? We are to give the very best and the very first fruits to God. Instead of that, many so called Holiness people are holding on to their dollars, and giving their pennies. God can receive the widow's mite but He never accepts the sick or the lame or the blemished offering. What God wants, in these days, is a self-denying, self-sacrificing people. He asks for the best, not because He is in need, but because in giving it we show forth the intensity of our love and devotion to Him. Thank God, it is an experience that will cause us to bring the best, the firstlings of the flocks, in fact all we have, and lay it down at His feet.

The prophet here is talking about the coming of the present dispensation. He is announced as the messenger of the Covenant the ushering in of the Holy Ghost dispensation: the grandest age of the world's history. Our privileges of today surpass everything that has ever been. I used to think that if I could have been with the Lord when He was here in person, and walked with Him from hamlet to hamlet, and from village to village, and listened to the gracious words that fell from His lips, that would have been a great privilege, but, beloved, the Holy Ghost opens our eyes to see that there is something even better than the dispensation of the Son. Something that towers above all the past and lifts us into the dispensation of the Holy Ghost. It is one of the grandest privileges of all the ages, and one can do more for God in one of these days than they could in fifty of the former. Everything is contributing to the possibilities of a sanctified Church. Everything seems to be working toward the objective point of getting ready to evangelize the world. All mechanical invention, all recent developments, all modern discoveries, are meant to aid a sanctified Church in accomplishing the plan and purpose of her glorified Head. This is a fast age: an age when men will not wait for time: whether awake or asleep we are on the run. The other night I went to sleep in Chicago and woke up in Cincinnati.

If the results of human genius could carry me three hundred miles while I was taking a nap, what could a sanctified Church do if she were adjusted to all the appliances and wisdom of Heaven. These are days of tremendous progress, days of lightning express trains. This old world is turned into one vast whispering gallery. I sit in my office and converse familiarly with my friends at great distances. O, if the saints of God were on fire and were up with the times, what we might accomplish. A man who knows the Holy Ghost can go into a closet here and pray a little prayer and hang up the receiver and go off and God will answer him in India, Africa, or Japan. O beloved, who shall abide the day of His coming? God has always used certain symbols for the forceful illustration of His truth. Here we find that we are taught by the "fullers' soap," and the "refiner's fire. Soap, of course, goes with washing. That is the first blessing: the washing of regeneration. Fullers' soap is strong soap, and the washing of regeneration is a very strong washing. It not only removes all guilt, all the pollution of committed sin, but whatever remains of the depravity caused by committed sin, so there is nothing left in the human soul which has a good case of regeneration but the depravity that was born there originally. All the increase of human depravity which comes as a result of a long period of disobedience is taken away in this strong washing of regeneration. Then come the fire of the Holy Ghost. Water is for washing, but fire is for destroying.

Beloved, if we get a good case of regeneration it does for us far more than is ordinarily believed. I understand that the fullers' soap not only removes the dirt and the grease, but takes the shrinkage out and fixes the cloth so that when the garment is cut it will remain the same size as the pattern. This makes me know that a great many people have never been regenerated. They puff up, they shrink down, they are not reliable. There is a grace even before entire sanctification that makes us stand true to God. It is true it is with difficulty; it may sometimes be hard, but there generated man goes through with God and conquers, and this fallacy I love to repudiate, that we have got to get sanctified wholly in order to have victory. There is great victory and there can be no perpetual justification without tremendous victory over all the forces of evil. Who shall be able to stand when He appeareth for He is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap.

A few weeks ago I went through the smelters in Denver, Colorado. I started at the beginning where they were dumping whole car loads of Cripple Creek ore into the great furnaces, mixed with lime, stone, and other materials, tons and tons of it. It was black and dirty and did not look much like gold. They took me down to where the ladles were filled. I saw great ladles holding a half ton, filled with beautiful flowing metal, and I said, "O that is fine!" They said, "That is no good," and they sent it off to the dump; hundreds and hundreds of tons they were dumping and called it slag. They would open the furnace and run out several hundred pounds of white, hot, flowing metal, but still they said, "That is only slag." I said, "Where is the gold?" They took me around on the other side and shewed me a little basin. It looked like it would hold about two quarts but was not half full. They said, "This is where the gold comes out." I said, "Is that all?" I waited along time for the little basin to fill up sufficiently for them to mold a brick. I can never think of a gold smelter without thinking of tons and tons of slag, and only a few spoonfuls of gold. This all carried me back to when I went through the furnace being sanctified wholly. I remember the fire of separation revealed an alarming amount of dross and slag, and almost no gold at all. As one after another of my heart's idols were committed to the flames and carried to the dump, it seemed to me that there was nothing worth saving. This is the way you feel when you are under fire. The baptism with the Holy Ghost will greatly decrease the bulk but greatly increase the value. The real stuff will stand the fire; the more you burn it the more it improves it. You can not injure gold by burning it. O beloved, this is what we want, something that will not burn. The judgment is coming; there is coming a test that will destroy everything that is combustible. The fire never comes until after we are saved. If it would it would destroy us entirely, but regeneration gives us a new nature, an indestructible nature, and that is why God holds back the fire for the second blessing.

When God gives us the Divine nature then we will not burn, and when He turns on the fire it will only free us from everything that will burn. It is very humiliating to see nothing but a spoonful of gold, but it is a glorious relief to feel that the slag is gone. Glory to God! He wants everything about us that will burn consumed now. If we have been through the refiner's fire here, the fires of hell will not be able to take hold upon us hereafter. We do not want false gold, we want the real thing; we want something, the more you burn it the better it is; the smaller it gets the more valuable it is. Who shall be able to stand? Nobody will be able to stand except those who have surrendered absolutely to God. If you hold onto a single thing, if you do not turn against yourself, you will never stand.

Beloved, let us quit talking about ourselves, and go to talking about God. Honor God and He will honor you. The judgment is coming, Gabriel is coming to sound the trumpet, the world is going to be sanctified by a baptism of fire. We must be built of something that will not burn; not wood, hay, or stubble, but gold, silver, and precious stones.

Then, I want to notice, beloved, that this blessing of entire sanctification is something that comes suddenly. He will come suddenly to His temple, not to yours. Abandon yourself to the Holy Ghost and talk about God's faithfulness, the certainty of His promises. Begin to reason with Him; tell Him He never has failed and that He never can. Talk to Him about His faithfulness a little while; wait patiently for Him, and He will come. He will never come while you are all the time talking about your consecration; "I have consecrated," "I have given up all," "I will do anything; Lord, I, I, I." This will never bring the blessing. Get away from your great "I," and begin to talk about God. Tell Him how faithful He has been in the past, and how you expect Him to fulfill every word promised; tell Him how the Scriptures can not be broken, and when He sees that you really mean to trust Him, He will come and will not tarry. Very few people believe God; nobody hardly trusts Him fully. How seldom you hear anybody say a nice thing to the Lord. I heard a person say the other day, "I am trying my level best to believe the Lord will help us." What an awful thing! Suppose I should say to my wife, "I am trying my level best to believe what you say. I wish I could trust you; I am trying to put my confidence in you. Please help me to believe you." Shocking! God have mercy on us. O beloved, how can we dare to insult God by talking about our efforts to believe.

When the Holy Ghost comes He comes to stay. What if I had concluded He had left me every time my emotions subsided; that would leave me in a pickle. I do not want to feel like jumping over the moon all the time. I want to settle down in a rocking chair part of the time. I want to rest and the Holy Ghost rest us. We must not get into bondage to each other, or to each other's experience. Do not lay any plans at all; let the Holy Ghost do the whole business. He will come suddenly but He will stay gradually. If you should chance to sleep in a draft and wake up with a headache, and your religious emotions absent, you must not conclude you have backslidden. After the Lord says He has come to stay, He has come to stay. Sanctification is not a question of feeling it is a question of facts. If you have a good set of facts you can praise the Lord without feelings. Do not let the devil get you into a snare and browbeat you because you do not feel like someone else, or like you have felt at some other time. Remember God's covenant is to endure forever; an everlasting covenant. Unless you violate it, it will go unviolated. A marriage covenant, if it is made right, is enough to last a lifetime. Nobody who is really married ever thinks of getting married again. All this Christian Endeavor idea of consecrating once a month is the worst of folly. The Holy Ghost comes to abide. You will not grieve Him without His letting you know it, and He will let you know it in time. He will be with you when you retire at night and when you wake in the morning. He will be with you in sickness and trouble, no matter what the emergency, He will always be there on time; He will never be late. When the waves are tossing, and it seems as if everything is going to fail, He may be in the other end

of the ship asleep, but He will wake up in time. He is faithful and can not fail. Glory to His name forever!

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