

“The Good Ol’ Days”—Malachi 3:1-4

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “The Good Ol’ Days”, is Malachi 3:1-4 → *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. 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. 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. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Over the years I’ve encountered many conversations where people analyze the times and dynamics within which we live today and compare them to “the good ol’ days.” The good ol’ days? What’s the good ol’ days? The phrase is rather confusing to me as I ponder the many stories I’ve heard about life in “the good ol’ days.” People have told me about having to go to the bathroom in something called an outhouse . . . outside across the yard . . . in twenty below zero temperatures! Hmmm

. . . what's good about that? They recall their idea of "running water"—running outside, pumping it and carrying it back to the house . . . in all kinds of uncomfortable weather. If one was fortunate you might have the pump actually in the house. Then they'd reminisce about having to share the same bath water with their siblings. Hmmm . . . what's good about that? Maybe you've heard some of these descriptions of life in "the good ol' days" too.

Actually, peoples' reference to those times as "good ol' days" refers more to the values which they believe people generally held in their dealings with each other in society. They praise the importance of face to face friendships expressed by get-togethers and visiting your neighbors. Those times were filled with a trust which generally prevailed, where one didn't have to wonder about being sued for anything and everything by your neighbor as all struggled to provide for their families. It seems many in those days had faith in God which seemed to be taken seriously expressed by a commitment to be in worship even though it was quite a chore to accomplish. However, even in the midst of such perceived ideals of "the good ol' days," they too were tainted by sin as people mistreated others sinfully and rebelled against God's laws.

Apparently Yahweh also finds some "redeeming qualities" to "the good ol' days" according to verse 4 of our text. He talks about a time when *the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD*

*as in the days of old and as in former years.* In other words, He promised His people that He would make their worship be what it was in “the good ol’ days.” However, in order for them to offer worship *pleasing to the LORD* they would experience some very humbling, difficult, trying and painful times in their lives.

The spiritual state of the people to whom God had sent the prophet Malachi was pitiful. He had to call the priests (i.e. *the sons of Levi*) to repentance because they were leading the people astray in their instruction as well as accepting the “leftovers” of the peoples’ offerings and sacrifices. He had to call the people to repentance because their worship had become routine and self-centered, divorce was widespread and they neglected giving the LORD the firstfruits and best of their income and resources. In effect, they had become selfish, self-centered, ungrateful, “poor me” people who thought that the center of the universe was themselves. It’s called idolatry—the worship of self with the facade of the worship of God.

While they complained about the LORD’s delay in His promise to save them, Malachi revealed to them that they were not as prepared for His coming as they thought. In verse 2 of our text he puts forth the rhetorical question: *Who can endure the day of His coming, and who can stand when He appears?* How will you stand before Him on that Day and justify your devotion to the LORD displayed by such sinful, hypocritical

behavior?

While they looked for things to be great for them on that Day He speaks about coming *like a refiner's fire* (i.e. heating the metal in fire to remove the impurities) *and like fullers' soap* (i.e. beating the cloth with the soap in it to get it clean). The picture of burning and agitating is like experiencing trials in difficult circumstances so that they would recognize their sin, repent by confessing that sin to the LORD and clinging to **His salvation on His terms in His time!** Refining is not destroying but purifying. Thus, for instance, it wasn't a matter of getting rid of the priests (referred to in our text as *the sons of Levi*) who were not serving the LORD with a right attitude but "refining" or cleansing their hearts from sin so that they would *bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD*. (cf. verse 3) God does not want to destroy sinners. He wants to cleanse them from their sin, restore them into a perfect relationship of love and respect with Himself and sanctify their life together with their neighbors!

God promised to make those "good ol' days" of living in a right relationship with Himself come alive again in their lives of worship and service by sending them *the messenger of the covenant—the Lord*—the promised Deliverer and Savior for Whom they were waiting. (cf. verse 1) While many may have been thinking of nationalistic deliverance, Yahweh had a better deliverance in mind. It is the once for all deliverance from the power of sin, the devil and death which brings you into the perfection

of Eden restored! Thus, the *messenger* to which Malachi refers is Jesus Who sealed God's covenant of grace and forgiveness by His blood sacrifice on the cross for your sin and His resurrection from the dead for your eternal life!

Interestingly, Christmas seems to be a time when many people reflect on "the good ol' days" connected with their "holiday celebrations." However, there are many who cannot reflect on them as "good ol' days" because they were so filled with the sinful mistreating of one another in family relationships. Resentments festered by contempt and unforgiveness clouds any thought of a "good ol' fashion family Christmas celebration." Instead of being a time to celebrate the coming of *the messenger of the covenant*—the birth of Jesus our Savior—for them, it is a time filled with tensions ready to explode at the slightest whim. The peace which everyone desires can only happen by laying down the burden of such resentments, grudges and unforgiveness at the cross of Jesus in repentance, the greatest display of love for us broken sinners. Jesus put it this way to the Christians in Ephesus in Revelation 2:4-5 → *You have abandoned **the love you had at first**. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first.* That first love is always God's love for you in the Person & Work of *the messenger of the covenant*, Jesus.

We also find the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy from our text in the

work of John the Baptizer as well as Jesus. John is the *messenger* referred to in verse 1 who *will prepare the way before Yahweh's coming*. He prepared the people to meet the LORD by calling them to repentance, which should be evidenced by bearing *fruit in keeping with their repentance*. He also announced how Yahweh's judgment upon sin and this "refining" was going to take place **in Jesus**. (cf. Matthew 3:8-10) The call to repentance is a call to surrender your sin to Jesus, the One Who has dealt with that sin once and for all under God's unchangeable (cf. Malachi 3:6) *covenant of grace*. When Yahweh took on human flesh in the Person of Jesus (i.e. incarnation) He did *suddenly come to His temple*—the place He chose for the worship of His name—and cleansed it by driving out the money changers, buyers and sellers (cf. John 2:13-17) before dying for their sins too.

So, if you really want to consider "the good ol' days" then reflect on how the LORD has "purified" you in Christ and made you ready to meet Him with joy and blameless in His sight! Jesus came to make it possible for you to worship and serve the LORD with a proper heart, cleansed by His atoning work to forgive your sin so that you can serve and worship with a new life today by the power of the Holy Spirit! You—His Church gathered for worship in this place right now—*are God's temple* because *God's Spirit dwells in you!* (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:16)

Thus, "the good ol' days" for us Christians take us back to our

baptisms, which connected us to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, making us His forgiven children. We actually live the “good ol’ days” everyday as His people who read His Word with a view to obeying it; gathering to worship and be strengthened in our faith and service through His Word and Sacrament; and living each day as people prepared to meet our LORD, busy serving Him with hearts “refined” and made new in His grace! Amen.

*Since we have confidence to enter the holy places*

*by the blood of Jesus,*

*by the new and living way that He opened for us . . .*

*let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith,*

*with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience*

*and our bodies washed with pure water.*

*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering,*

*for He Who promised is faithful.*

(Hebrews 10:19-20,22-23)

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