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A Series of Advent Sermons

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Buches: Von der Juden Lügen wider die Person unsers lieben Herrn Jesu Christi. Der vierte Teil des Buches: Was für ein Unterschied zwischen der Christen und Juden Messia. (St. Louiser Ausgabe XX, 1860—2029.)

1543. „Vom Schem Gamphoras und vom Geschlecht Christi.“ — Diese Schrift hat Luther augenscheinlich gleich nach Vollendung der letztgenannten Schrift begonnen; denn sie war schon am 7. März vollendet und konnte am 28. d. M. versandt werden. Hier findet sich Luthers klassische Ausführung über die Bedeutung von „Alma“, und die ganze Schrift legt Zeugnis ab von Luthers gründlicher Kenntnis des hebräischen Textes. (St. Louiser Ausgabe XX, 2028—2109.)

U m e r k u n g. Unter den Schriftauslegungen dieses Jahres finden sich die Exegese „Von den letzten Worten Davids“ und die Dietrichsche Ausgabe der Hauspostille. Nicht sehr lange danach erschien auch die „Vorlesung über Jes. 53“. (Die exegetischen Schriften finden sich I—IX und XIV.)

1544. „Kurzes Bekenntnis vom heiligen Sakrament wider die Schwärmer.“ — Diese Schrift, die besonders auf Schwefelfeld gemünzt war, aber auch die andern Sakramentschwärmer im Auge hatte, hatte Luther am 8. August in Arbeit. Er scheint sie handschriftlich etwa bis Ende des Monats fertiggestellt zu haben, da sie am 27. September im Druck war und am Ende des Monats erschien. Die Charakteristik der Schwärmer und die Ausführungen über den Unionismus sind besonders wichtig. (St. Louiser Ausgabe XX, 1764—1791.)

1545. „Wider das Papsttum zu Rom, vom Teufel gestiftet.“ — Diese gewaltige Streitschrift, die letzte, die wir aus Luthers Feder haben, hat Luther schon am 9. Januar dieses Jahres geplant. Am 28. war er an der Arbeit, und am 20. März konnte er berichten, daß er in etwa acht Tagen fertig sein würde. Tatsächlich konnte die Schrift schon am 25. März versandt werden. Die Sprache ist oft reichlich scharf, aber die Darlegung der Lehren, sonderlich die von der Kirche, ist sehr wertvoll. (St. Louiser Ausgabe XVII, 1019—1132.) P. C. R.

"Behold, He Shall Come!"

A Series of Advent Sermons on Mal. 3, 1—6.

I.

MAL. 3, 1—3.

Malachi, the last of the prophets, announces that now at last Jehovah is about to send that messenger who was to prepare the way for the coming Messiah. That long period of waiting and expectation was drawing to its close. Nine-tenths of the appointed time had expired. No more prophets should arise in Israel, but a messenger, who should prepare the way for the Lord of hosts. And then suddenly, unexpectedly, shall the Lord, whom they sought, come to His temple, even the Messenger of the Covenant, whom they delighted in.

Behold, He Shall Come, the Messenger of the Covenant.

1. *He is the promised Messiah.* 2. *He is the Lord of hosts.*

1.

V. 1. Who is this Messenger of the Covenant? It is none other than the Messiah, promised for the first time to fallen mankind in Paradise (mention other important prophecies), for whom believers had looked, Gen. 4, 1; 5, 29; 49, 18; Ps. 14, 7; Is. 64, 1. This Mes-

senger is none other than Jesus of Nazareth. Malachi says that preceding this Messenger the Lord of hosts would send another messenger, and then suddenly the Messenger Himself would come. There can be no doubt as to the identity of the preparing messenger. This is stated by the angel, Luke 1, 17; by Zacharias, filled with the Holy Ghost, Luke 7, 76; by the three synoptists, Matt. 11, 10, and parallels. Just so surely the Messenger of the Covenant is none other than Jesus. For He it is whose way John prepared, John 1, 26—33. While John was still preaching, suddenly, unexpectedly, Jesus came out of the wilderness to be pointed out by John as the promised Messiah and Savior of His people. Unknown to the mass of people, He had grown up at Nazareth, and His appearance came as a surprise to all and as a shock to many. Thus did the Lord long expected still come, suddenly and unexpectedly.

2.

This Messiah, according to the words of our text, is the true God. V. 1 He is called the Lord, the Ruler, one endowed with power and authority. We ask, Was He a ruler human or superhuman, a Lord mortal or divine? The very fact that a divinely appointed messenger was sent before Him and that His coming was announced four hundred, yea, four thousand years before His birth stamps this Lord as a King unique. Which human king can lay claim to such an honor?

Again, we read: v. 2. Can language such as this be applied to any human king or lord? Does not this word place this King far above all principality, etc., Eph. 1, 21. 22?

V. 3. The Messenger sits and purifies even those who were the divinely chosen purifiers of the people, making their offerings acceptable to God. Can He who comes to purge the sons of Levi be a mere human being? As Purifier of the hearts of men is He not God? Once more we read that the Lord whose way is being prepared shall come to His Temple, v. 1. There is not a single instance in which the Temple is called the temple of any man. It is God's house. So also the counter-type of the Old Testament Temple, "the Church on prophets and apostles built, and Christ the Corner-stone," is not the temple of any man, of any angel; it is God's Church. If He that cometh, cometh to His Temple, He must be God.

Finally we read, "Behold I will send My messenger, and he shall prepare the way before Me." "Behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of hosts," v. 1. So it is the Lord of hosts Himself that is coming to His people. Jehovah, before whom the angels fall down in adoring worship, before whom even the cherubim and seraphim veil their faces; Jehovah, beside whom there is no god, comes to His people. Before His face the appointed messenger prepares the way. Since it is Jesus whose way John the Baptist prepared, it is Jesus, who is the Lord God of hosts, that is speaking here. He is the Messenger sent

of God; not, however, on that account inferior to God, but of equal power and majesty. This, then, is He that cometh, whose birth we are preparing to celebrate. It is Jesus of Nazareth, the long-promised Messiah, the Lord of hosts. Him let us worship, to Him promise our untiring service, let Him be the joy and rejoicing of our heart, until we shall join those hosts falling down before the throne and exclaiming: Rev. 5, 13.

T. L.

II.

MAL. 3, 1.

He that cometh is the Lord of hosts. In Him the Day-spring from on high hath visited His people. In Him God Himself was made manifest in the flesh. Now, what was the purpose of His coming? Malachi answers this question.

The Lord of Hosts Shall Come as the Messenger of the Covenant.

1. *He Himself establishes this covenant.*
2. *He Himself makes us partakers of this covenant.*

1.

The Bible makes mention of two covenants which God made with man. One He proclaimed from Mount Sinai, promising God's favor only on condition of perfect obedience and holiness in accordance with the divine Law as laid down in the Ten Commandments, Luke 10, 25—28; Deut. 27, 26. Malachi has in mind a covenant altogether different. Describe this covenant on the basis of such passages as Jer. 31, 33. 34; Is. 55, 1—3. 12; 32, 18; 35, 8—10; 25, 6—8. Truly, a wonderful covenant, granting divine grace and everlasting loving-kindness all the days of our lives, throughout eternity, forevermore.

The establishment of this covenant was the purpose for which the Messenger of the Covenant, Jesus Christ, the God-man, was sent into this world. Without this Messenger of the Covenant there is no covenant of grace and pardon, there is no hope of salvation for fallen mankind. In Eden, God based His promise on the one fact that the Woman's Seed should bruise the Serpent's head. When God established His covenant with Abraham, it was again the Seed of Abraham in whom and by whom this blessing was to be made possible, Gen. 22, 18. All the visions of Isaiah had for their background, their content, yea, for their source and author, that Messenger of the Covenant, Is. 53. So throughout the Old Testament the covenant of God's grace and forgiveness is based entirely on the work of the Messenger of the Covenant. The New Testament only serves to establish this truth, Acts 4, 12; 2 Cor. 5, 14—21; 1 John 1, 7. Christ is indeed *the* Messenger of the Covenant, without whom God would never have entered into this covenant of grace and forgiveness and loving-kindness with fallen mankind.

2.

Having established this covenant, the Messenger now invites mankind and makes all believers partakers of it. Throughout the Old and New Testaments we see Him who in the Old Testament is so often called the Angel of the Lord setting forth on His mission of mercy to make men partakers of the covenant established by Him. For this purpose He calls sinners to repentance. Appearing to Hagar, the runaway maid of Sarah, He tells her of her sin: "Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence comest thou, and whither wilt thou go?" Gen. 16, 8. Apostate Israel is rebuked for its faithlessness, Judg. 2, 1 ff. Self-righteous Nicodemus is told: John 3, 3, and bigoted Saul must hear: Acts 9, 4. 5. When sinners stand repentant before Him, their heads bowed down in shame, their hearts heavy with consciousness of sin and guilt, then He, the Messenger of the Covenant of Grace, gives them of His fulness and grace for grace, Zech. 3, 1—5. The same promise of forgiveness and pardon is given to wayward, erring Hagar, filling her heart with peace and comfort. "Thou, God, seest me," so she exclaims and returns to her home rejoicing, assured of the favor of her God. And whosoever comes to Him, whether it is a Nicodemus, blameless before men, or a publican and sinner; whether they are little children, brought to Him in infancy or early youth, or hardened criminals, who, like the thief on the cross, turn to Him in the last hour — for all He has that selfsame message of pardon and peace: "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out. Be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee. Depart in peace." The Messenger of the Covenant is also our gracious Friend and Helper in all bodily ills and woes. To weary Hagar and Ishmael dying of thirst in the wilderness; to Jacob fleeing from the wrath of his brother; to Israel groaning in slavery in Egypt; to Joshua facing Jericho with its seemingly impregnable walls; to hundreds and thousands who came to Him applying for His help while He walked the soil of Palestine; to all those millions who since that time have called upon His holy name, — to all, to each and every one of them, He has proved Himself the Messenger of the Covenant of Grace, graciously hearing their prayer, graciously aiding them with His advice, His comfort, His almighty power; freeing them from their woe or giving them strength to carry their cross willingly or filling their hearts and souls with His wonderful peace, standing ever at their side, never for a moment leaving or forsaking them, finally delivering them from all evil, and graciously taking them from this vale of tears to Himself in heaven.

Have you accepted the invitation of this Messenger? Now, while you hear His voice, harden not your hearts. Accept the grace, the peace, the salvation, which He offers, and eternal life is yours.
Is. 54, 10. T. L.

III.

MAL. 3, 2. 3.

The covenant which the Messenger establishes is a covenant forgiving sin, but not granting permission to sin. The Messenger of the Covenant is not only the Redeemer, He is also the Purifier of His people.

Behold, He Shall Come, the Purifier of His People!

Let us consider —

1. *The purpose of His purifying;* 2. *The means of His purifying.*

1.

Silver and gold, as found in their native state, are, as a rule, not pure and free from imperfections, but are mixed with impurities, from which the silver and gold must be separated in order to be of any value to its owner. The rock in which the silver is enclosed must first be broken into small pieces and then put through the refining process. There sits the refiner before his crucible. Having kindled his fire, he fills the silver-bearing rock into the crucible. See him stirring up the fire, adding a fresh supply of fuel to the already fiercely burning fire in order to keep the heat at a maximum degree. So he continues his refining process until the silver becomes so clean that his face is clearly reflected in it. Not until then is his work finished, not until then is that silver as pure as it ought to be. And as he looks again, he rejoices. No longer is his face a mere shadow on the cloudy metal. Gradually and with ever-increasing distinctness his features begin to show, until in sharp outline his face is mirrored in the pure silver, until he sees in it his own image looking back at him.

What a beautiful picture of Christ purifying His people! All Christians, all believers, are sons of Levi, are priests before God, 1 Pet. 2, 9a; Rev. 1, 5. 6. As priests God expects us to offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness, v. 3. Cp. Rom. 12, 1; 1 Pet. 2, 9b. 11 f. Alas, we are like the sons of Levi of old, in constant need of purifying, Rom. 7, 15—23; Phil. 3, 12. 13. That precious metal of godliness and true holiness implanted in us by the power of the Holy Spirit is still mingled with much that is ungodly and unpleasant to behold and sinful in the sight of God and man. It very often resembles a thin vein of silver running through a hard rock of stubbornness and selfishness, through much dross and impurity of worldly lusts and sinful desires. Time and again not the silver and gold of a truly Christian life are to be seen, but only the dross, the unsightly rock, the impurity of sin and wrong. True, Christ forgives all the sins of all His Christians, thus cleansing and purifying them. But He does more than that. He purifies and refines His people by

teaching them and enabling them to lead a truly holy life, to overcome sin, and to walk in godliness and good works. Like the refiner's fire and the fuller's soap He is the inveterate enemy, the irreconcilable foe, of all impurity and dross of sin and wrong-doing. Wherever He sees sin, He at once attacks it until all slag and dross of sin and iniquity fall crushed and crumbled to the ground, while, free from impurity, the precious silver of true holiness rises to the surface, until His Christians come unto a perfect man, until He Himself and all that see them behold in them the likeness of their holy and spotless Redeemer.

2.

V. 3. How does the divine Refiner purify His people? The means whereby He purifies His people is His Word, Jer. 23, 29. Both Law and Gospel, each in its own proper sphere, are used by Christ in His refining process. Christ has need of the Law in purifying His people. The Law, like the refiner's hammer, crushes their pride, strikes fear and terror into their hearts, and like fiercely burning fire crumbles the rock of self-righteousness, self-satisfaction, and false security. Then Christ applies the life-giving fire of His Gospel. In this Gospel He points out the love of the Father, who in abounding loving-kindness sent His only-begotten Son that through Him we might be made the children of God; and then He admonishes us: 1 Pet. 1, 13—15. This Gospel directs us to that boundless grace of Christ, the Son of God, 2 Cor. 8, 9, and then pleads with us: 1 Pet. 2, 24; 2 Cor. 5, 15. The Gospel tells us of the communion of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter and Advocate of all Christians, and then admonishes us: Eph. 4, 30—32. This Gospel does not only admonish and exhort; as a living and life-giving fire it purges out the love of sin and worldliness and perfects more and more the precious metal of Christian love, which is the source and fountainhead of all Christian virtues. This Gospel is the means whereby Christ, the divine Refiner, purifies unto Himself a peculiar people, Titus 2, 12, 14; 2 Pet. 1, 5—7.

The Bible calls attention to another crucible which Christ uses in His refining process, Is. 48, 10; Ps. 66, 10—12. So the divine Refiner uses the fire of trials and tribulation to cleanse and refine His Christians, to keep them on the highway of holiness, from which it is so easy to wander, Ps. 119, 67. Again, many of the most beautiful Christian virtues are brought to perfection only through fiery trials. Would Joseph's unflinching trust in God, his splendid chastity, his humility, his submission under God's will, have reached such perfection had they not been tried and tested in the furnace of affliction? Heb. 12, 11. Hence David exclaims: Ps. 119, 71. And St. Paul rejoices: Rom. 5, 3—5. So the divine Refiner sits and purifies His people. While in this life, Christians never attain perfection; yet He rejoices as gradually sins are overcome, evil habits are put off, His

image becomes clearer and more defined. So He keeps on refining, purifying, sanctifying His own, until their eyelids close in death. Then His work of sanctifying is finished. Issuing from the grave at His divine command, all dross, all imperfections, are gone forever, Ps. 17, 15. Till then, Lord Jesus, sanctify, purify, refine us, Thou divine Purifier of Thy people.

T. L.

IV.

MAL. 3, 2. 5. 6.

A brief review of the preceding sermons. The Lord of hosts, the Messenger of the Covenant, the Purifier of His people, is also the Judge of the World.

Behold, He Shall Come, the Judge of the World!

1. *He shall come surely, but suddenly;*
2. *He shall be a swift Witness against all that fear not the Lord;*
3. *He shall give to all believers eternal life.*

1.

V. 5. Throughout the Old and New Testaments we hear that message repeated over and over again: Is. 2, 10—22; Zeph. 1, 14—18. The last word recorded as spoken by the glorified Savior to His Church on earth is: "Surely, I come quickly." The prayer of the bride, the Church, for 1900 years has been: "Amen. Even so; come, Lord Jesus." Of the coming of the Lord to Judgment there can be no doubt. Though scoffers scoff, yet He will come. He that spoke these words, "I will come near to you to Judgment," is the Lord of hosts, who changes not, who neither lies nor deceives. Just as surely as at the appointed time the Messenger of the Covenant came to establish this covenant; just as surely as He has for 1900 years made men partakers of this covenant, just so surely will He fulfil the last part of His promise, just so surely will He come as Judge of the world.

As Christ's coming into the flesh was preceded by the coming of a messenger preparing His way before Him, so His coming to Judgment will be heralded by many messengers, Luke 21, 10, 11, etc. Yet as His first coming so His second coming will be sudden and unexpected. All attempts at foretelling the exact year and day of His coming are doomed to disappointment. 2 Pet. 3, 10; Mark 13, 32.

2.

That day will strike fear and terror into the hearts and souls of men, v. 2. Zech. 1, 14—18; Luke 21, 25—27. Then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory, and before Him shall be gathered all nations, and then v. 5 will be fulfilled. Not only those workers of iniquity who in open defiance of God's holy will and Word trample under foot His authority and find their delight in transgressing His commandments;

not only those who ride rough-shod over every right of their fellow-men, cp. Ps. 14, 4; 12, 2—4; 36, 1—4, but every one in whose heart there is no fear of God, Matt. 15, 8; not only Modernists, who under the guise of Christianity deny its very essence, but all outwardly orthodox who make not God's Word, but their own carnal mind their norm of life. How will they tremble when they see Him whom they rejected, whose Word and will they despised, sitting on the throne of glory, their God, their Judge! Rev. 6, 15—17; Amos 9, 2 f. Then He Himself will rise as a swift Witness against them. Not only will their fellow-men accuse them, not only will the sighs and lamentations of the oppressed and the tears of the widows and fatherless testify against them, not only will the blood of all those whose souls were murdered by their false and blasphemous doctrines cry out against them, but He, the all-knowing God Himself, who understood their very thoughts afar off, will stand as Witness against them, Ps. 90, 8; 50, 21. He, the "swift Witness," will swiftly answer all their arguments, swiftly convict them of their guilt, swiftly stop every mouth and silence every lip. What will His sentence be? If Jesus Christ as Witness has established their guilt beyond the shadow of a doubt, can He as Judge do aught but punish the guilty ones? God against you, the Lord of hosts against you, Jesus, the Savior and Purifier of His people, against you, can there be a thought more terrible, more horrifying? On earth He still called them to repentance; He, the faithful Messenger of the Covenant of Grace, was ready to accept and purify, also to justify and sanctify them; but that day is no longer a day of grace, it is a day of wrath. On that day He, the Lord God, will no longer place them in the refining and purifying fire, but: Ezek. 22, 19 ff. This Judge no man can bribe, Deut. 10, 17. From the sentence of this Judge there is no appeal to a higher authority. He is the Lord of hosts. If He has spoken, all the world must keep silence. Neither will He change His sentence, v. 6a. Heb. 10, 28—31. They shall go away into everlasting punishment; the smoke of their torment ascendeth up forever and ever.

Shall that be your fate? There is but one way of escape.

3.

V. 6. The sons of Jacob shall escape the sentence of eternal woe. Why? Because they are sons of Jacob. Like Jacob they have learned to confess that they are not worthy of the least of the mercies of God. Like Jacob they have learned to put their faith in the Messenger of the Covenant. Like Jacob they will not let their Savior go. On their deathbed they, like Jacob, turn their breaking eye upon their Redeemer and exclaim: "Lord, I have waited for Thy salvation." For such there is no condemnation; for the Lord, who changeth not, has said: John 5, 24.