

“The Pendulum” Malachi 3:1–4 Advent Midweek #2 2021

We have several terms for a situation that moves from one extreme to another. We talk about “the pendulum swinging”. We talk about trying to avoid falling into the right-hand ditch so hard that we fall into the left-hand ditch. Martin Luther used to talk about the drunken rider who fell off the right side of the horse only to get back on and fall off the left side of the horse.

Last week, we spoke about the moral roller coaster ride of the Children of Israel. They lived in this cycle of spiritual ups and downs. They were faithful and God built them up, but then they began worshipping false gods. They rejected God’s protection and Assyria conquered the Northern Ten tribes of Israel and they were lost to history. Judah held on a little longer, but eventually, Babylon conquered Jerusalem and carried the best of the land into exile. Judah remained in exile for seventy years.

At the end of that seventy years, the Persian Empire defeated the Babylonians. The Persians gave the Jews permission to return to Israel. Men like Ezra, Nehemiah, and Zerubbabel supervised the rebuilding of the temple and the city. They never again rose to the heights of power that they had under the kings David and Solomon, but they could live in peace under the rule of the Persians.

This younger generation had learned the lesson of the older generation. They never again worshipped the false gods of the surrounding lands. The first generation of returning exiles were very faithful to God. Sadly, the next generations strayed away from the faith. They knew that they did not want to follow in the footsteps of their great-grandparents and worship false gods, so they fell into the other ditch. They began to think that they could earn God’s favour by keeping the law. They became very strict at keeping the outer words and actions of the law, but they forgot that the law also applies to the mind, the heart, and the spirit. They reduced the law to the performance of empty rituals.

“The Pendulum” Malachi 3:1–4 Advent Midweek #2 2021

The people were looking forward to the coming of Messiah because they were thinking they could show him their good works, and he would bless them. But God gave Malachi a different message. Oh yes, *“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. (Malachi 3:1) But it will not be as wonderful as you expect. *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.* (Malachi 3:2) Those who thought that they could meet the Lord in their own righteousness will fall in terror. Those who wanted justice will find that God’s justice falls on them. Those who thought that God should reward them will realize that they are not as good as they thought.

And lest the priests and Levites think that they are exempt from judgment because they are the ones who led in worship, *“He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord.”* (Malachi 3:3) The Lord will start His judgment with those who serve in the temple. He will start in the temple, but then He will purify the entire land. *Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.* (Malachi 3:4)

The purification will be painful for a time, but it will be good in the long run. God sent Malachi to prepare the way for the Lord a little over four hundred years before Jesus was born. The people were no longer worshipping the gods of the people around them. Instead, they tried to please God with their own good works. In a way, they were committing the ultimate idolatry. They were worshipping themselves by way of their own works. Like many prophets before him, Malachi called on the people to repent. He called on people to worship God in spirit and truth. He called on people to turn to the mercy of the God who forgives instead of relying on their own works.

“The Pendulum” Malachi 3:1–4 Advent Midweek #2 2021

The role of the prophet didn't change over the years. The last of the Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist, still called people to repent. He still had to use words that were both hard and harsh. John the Baptist proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin. He continued to prepare the way for the Lord about four hundred years after Malachi. Unlike Malachi, John not only prepared the way for the Lord, but the Lord came during his ministry. John had the privilege of seeing the Lord in the flesh with his own eyes.

John saw the ultimate fulfillment of Malachi's words. A human body became the temple of God as God took up human flesh to dwell with humanity. The only thing is that the Messenger of the Covenant was not delightful in the way they expected. He proclaimed the same message that John and Malachi proclaimed ... the message of repentance and forgiveness of sins. When people came to show Him how well they had kept the covenant, He showed them their sin and urged them to repent. He directed them to look for purification, not in themselves, but in Him.

Jesus preached the same message of repentance and forgiveness of sins. Purification must come by God's mercy and through his grace. Our sins must be paid for. But not by you or me. Our sins will be paid for by the Lord Himself. This is the same message that John, Malachi, and all the prophets proclaimed. It is the same message that the Apostles proclaimed afterward.

Eventually, the LORD, in the temple of His human body came to His temple of stone in Jerusalem. Here He began the climax of the ultimate process of purification. Here He offered Himself up as the sacrifice to end all sacrifices. He came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many ... to give his life as a ransom, for YOU. Mere mortal men decorated a cross with His body. While He hung on that cross He went through the process of purification that fulfilled the purification that Malachi

“The Pendulum” Malachi 3:1–4 Advent Midweek #2 2021

foretold in his message to Judah. He went through the process of purification that purified YOU.

The purification took the LORD down into the darkness of death, but it did not end there. Death could not hold one who was so pure. Our LORD, Jesus Christ rose from the dead and appeared to those hiding in an upper room. He appeared in Galilee and again in Jerusalem. Now that He has worked purification for all people, He ascended to prepare a place for His purified people. He has promised to return to take His purified people home.

Will his coming be unannounced? God used Malachi, and then John, as his messengers, his heralds. God wants his coming to be announced. We do not know when He is coming, but we know He will come suddenly. He has given us the announcement and asked us to confess Him by proclaiming repentance and the forgiveness of sins in His name. His desire is to purify the nations with the forgiveness He earned on the cross.

Advent is a time of preparation. The coming of the king has been announced. We are waiting for his arrival. Our expectant hearts turn to the preparation at hand. We repent. He has purified us. The kingdom of God is, indeed, at hand! Let us be ready for its coming. Amen