

**Malachi 3:1-4** *"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. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>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, <sup>4</sup>and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years.*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

Mirrors don't lie. That's the problem, isn't it? The mirror doesn't lie. It honestly, sometimes brutally, reflects what is standing in front of it. The queen in the story tale, Snow White, found that out the hard way. While every other day it had answered the question, "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who's the fairest of them all?" with the answer, "Thou, oh queen, art the fairest of all;" it couldn't lie. So it eventually had to return the answer, "You, my queen are fair, it is true. But Snow White is even fairer than you." Mirrors don't lie. We can photoshop pictures to make us look better. We can doctor online images to take out the lines and imperfections. But mirrors don't lie and we don't always like what we see. Like the queen, the reality of what we see in the mirror can bring consternation, anxiety and anger. Very seldom does looking at our reality in the mirror bring us a sense of peace.

As we continue our Advent preparations today, we are confronted with the mirror of God's law. Looking into the mirror of God's law forces us to look into our own hearts to see if our hearts match what God wants for us. Looking into our own hearts doesn't bring a whole lot of peace. The mirror of God's law doesn't lie. Looking at our hearts through the lens of God's law is disconcerting at the least. It makes us extremely uncomfortable. It brings us anything but peace. While this part of our preparation isn't overly enjoyable, it is entirely necessary. To know the peace which God himself offers and to fully prepare ourselves to meet our King when he comes again, it is entirely necessary for us to look into the mirror of God's law. The question Malachi asks today is: *"Who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears?"* Perhaps it helps us to ask the question a bit more pointedly: Will you stand when he appears? Will you endure the day of his coming? While these questions may not provide peace for us at the outset, they will lead to peace through our study of God's Word today. That's what Malachi wants for God's people. That's what God wants for his people. That's what I want for you today: ***Be at Peace.***

Malachi asked these penetrating questions to the people of Israel because he wanted them to have peace. But for them to know true peace, he first needed to strike terror in their hearts by leading them to see the reality of the situation they were in. Their problem is that they were at peace, but it was a false peace. They were at peace with themselves. They didn't realize, however, that they were not at peace with God. When Israel looked at themselves in the mirror, what they saw looked pretty good to them. Malachi was the last prophet God sent to Israel until he sent John the Baptist 400 years later. After Israel had returned to their land from their exile in Babylon, they experienced a time of religious enthusiasm and revival. They had personally seen God's hand of deliverance and they rejoiced in this. But their enthusiasm and revival soon passed and the Jews had again become indifferent to the Lord. Their pattern of indifference had not been purged from them. As trouble set in, they began doubting God's love for them. They felt that they were doing fine as God's people but accused him of leaving them and treating them unfairly. As the wicked around them flourished and they faced difficulty and trouble, they despaired of God's justice and began to lose hope. Their worship degenerated into a listless perpetuation of forms. They no longer took God's law seriously. Yet inwardly, they found their peace in being the people of God, regardless of their actions. They accused God of injustice. They reasoned that because evildoers flourish and God's people suffer, God must love evil more than good. They assumed that they deserved nothing bad to happen to them and that God was unfair in his treatment of them. Rather than taking an introspective look at their own hearts, they were accusing and casting blame on God. They were falsely finding their security in who they were rather than on what God had done and would do for them in the Messiah. So God sent Malachi to prepare the way for the coming Savior in the hearts of these people by directing them to take a deep look at themselves in the mirror of God's law. He wanted them to see the error of their ways and feel the terror they deserved so they would see the need they had for a Messiah and know the spiritual peace He would bring to them.

As we make our Advent preparations, we best prepare ourselves by looking into the mirror of God's law. This is not an easy thing to do because the mirror of God's law doesn't lie. It shows us our sin in all of its ugliness. This is why many people do all that they can to avoid it. Rather than looking at themselves in the mirror of God's law, they use the mirror of subjectivism or the mirror of their own feelings and emotions. That would sound something like this: If I feel that it is ok for me to do this, then God will be ok with it. If I am comfortable with how I am living or what I am doing, God will be accepting of me anyway. I get to make my own choices for my life. We call this the subjective mirror of spirituality and it is a mirror that many people and sadly even many churches use. Then they don't have to talk about sin and God's punishment. Then they can soothe their guilty consciences by convincing themselves that they are ok. Then they don't have to face up to their sin or change their ways or stop doing activities or living lifestyles that are fun and enjoyable but directly against

what God says. Then they can focus more on self-help to make them feel better about their defaults. Looking into the subjective mirror of spirituality lulls one into thinking that he or she is just fine before God and ready to stand before Him.

But, the mirror that counts is not the mirror of subjectivity nor the mirror of feelings or emotions. The mirror that counts is the mirror of God's law. And God's mirror doesn't lie! God's mirror tells us that we need to do some cleaning and work before we are ready to stand before God. When we look fully into the mirror of God's law, the answer to the question, "Will you stand?" is quite clear: No—you won't stand before him. Looking at the our hearts in the mirror of God's law tells us that we are sinners who deserve punishment from God. The mirror of God's law says you deserve God's punishment for all the times you have acted out of selfish ambition rather than the good of others. It says you deserve damnation for all the times you have lusted in your heart or acted sexually out of your lust rather than out of love between husband and wife. It says you deserve to face judgment for all the hurtful words, unloving decisions, apathetic worship, unwillingness to serve, stingy giving, and your unwillingness to be generous in your offerings. When we look clearly into God's law, the answer to Malachi's questions, Who can stand and Who will endure, are brutal: no one. No one will stand before God on their own. Will you stand? No way. Not by yourself. God's law says that for your sin you deserve eternal death to banished from his sight for all eternity. It doesn't matter how good you have lived here on this earth because you haven't met the standard of perfection God desires. We cannot endure his judgment. We will not stand. No, that isn't pretty. No, that isn't comforting. It is scary and fills us with terror and dread at the thought of having to stand before Jesus in judgment when he comes at the last day. But this is what we deserve. This is what the mirror of God's law says and the mirror doesn't lie!

This is what makes the first coming of Jesus so special to us. While the mirror of God's law strikes terror in our hearts, it is the Gospel message of Jesus' first coming which bring us peace. God not only sent his messengers to prepare his people with his Word, he sent the messenger, the messenger of the covenant, our Savior Jesus. What God demanded for the payment of sin is a perfect and holy sacrifice. This offering Jesus generously made on our behalf. He offered himself as the perfect sacrifice needed for our sin. With that sacrifice and the blood he shed on Calvary's cross, Jesus paid for all of your sins. Once for all, he was punished for every single one of your sins. Through faith, God counts his perfection to your account. At your baptism, God clothed you with the robe of Jesus' righteousness. This is what allows you to stand before him in peace. When God looks at you in judgment, clothed with the robe of Jesus' righteousness, he sees only perfection. He no longer sees the dirty ugliness of your sin but the beauty of holiness. Only through the sacrifice of Jesus are we prepared and ready to stand before him. Only through the sacrifice of Jesus can we be at peace and answer the question, "Will you stand?" with a resounding and confident: "Yes!"

How awesome, that God still sends messengers to prepare your heart with a message of law and gospel to give you peace and allow you to stand in his judgment. It's never pretty to examine ourselves in the mirror of God's law, but it is always beneficial to give ourselves a realistic look at our hearts to purge ourselves of sin through Jesus and know the peace of God's love. What love that God does not destroy us when we sin, but instead sends his messengers to bring us the peace of his love and forgiveness and allow situations that refine and purify us. When troubles come, it's easy to be full of anxiety and fear. Thoughts go rushing through your head: maybe God is punishing me for something I've done; maybe God has abandoned me and walked away. It's easy to follow the pattern of the Israelites and accuse and blame God when troubles come. But especially at those times: be at peace. Jesus died for your sins and God promised he would never leave you. You can be confident God isn't punishing you for your sins because God punished Jesus for your sins once and for all. For gold and silver to be pure, it needs to go through the refining process of a hot fire. God allows us to go through troubles of fire to purify and refine us. Troubles, challenges, trials and any difficulties we face all cause us to see how hopeless the situation is by ourselves and how much we need our Savior God. These troubles cause us to see our impurities so that we can lay them before the Lord, turn from them and be at peace as we wait for the return of our king. Use these times of difficulty as a period of reflection to examine your heart and let God purge you of any impurities which might be there. What a gracious God that he would send his messengers to direct us to the messenger of the covenant to fill us with peace.

No, the mirror doesn't lie. But neither does our God. He brings to us the gift of forgiveness through Jesus our Savior so that we can be at peace no matter what we face. Prepare your hearts to meet your king. Examine your heart honestly in the mirror of God's law. Confess your sins. Remove the impurities by changing around your life. Be ready and prepared to meet your king when he comes. When that time comes, will you stand? Absolutely. With Jesus, you are prepared. **Be at Peace.** Amen.