

Bethel Pulpit

Sermon 292

The Coming of the Lord

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day evening, 31st May, 2009**

Text: *"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" (Malachi 3. 1).*

There is no doubt at all that this verse is a prophecy of the preaching of John the Baptist and the coming of the Messiah, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Some things we are not altogether sure of; others seem more clear. But this is one of those promises, one of those prophecies put beyond any shadow of doubt. The New Testament clearly tells us that John the Baptist's preaching was the fulfilment of this verse. And then the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ Himself in speaking to the people confirmed it. "Behold, I will send My messenger" – John the Baptist – "and he shall prepare the way before Me," before Messiah, the incarnate Son of God.

So this is one of the wonderful Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. But let us be clear, beloved friends, there are two sides to it. Of course, there is the blessed side, the Saviour coming to accomplish the work of salvation. "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich." But then there is the other side, for those who have no interest, for those who are out of the secret, for those whose religion is nothing more than hypocrisy.

Now lingering on this point, there are many rebukes of hypocrisy in Malachi's prophecy. It seems clear at this time that there was a general expectancy, a looking forward to the coming of the promised Messiah. Now there was a godly remnant, but there were others who still longed for the coming of the Messiah: they thought He would bring glory to their nation, deliver them from their troubles, exalt them. At the end of the previous chapter, "Ye have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied Him? When ye say ... Where is the God of judgment?" Now this is the answer. This opening verse of the next chapter is the answer.

So though there is a beauty and a blessedness in it, do not forget there is a very solemn side to it, to the Jews then and to us tonight. “Where is the God of judgment?” “The Lord, whom ye seek.” You are saying, Where is He? You want Him to come, this glorious Messiah to exalt you, to exalt the Jewish nation. “The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple.” There has been a lot about the temple in Malachi. “He *shall* ... come to His temple.” This “Messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.” So do not forget that solemn side to it.

Over the years in reading the Word of God I was a little bit puzzled about this second verse: “Who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth?” Because we love to speak about the birth of the Lord Jesus and His coming into this world and the gracious and glorious purpose, the salvation of sinners and the name given: “Thou shalt call His name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins.” But there *is* this other side, this Lord whom these hypocrites are longing for, delighting in, seeking – “Behold, He shall come,” but, “Who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth?” It was so when the Lord of life and glory came to earth the first time; it will be so when He comes the second time, not as He did at Bethlehem, born in weakness, but in great power and glory and all His holy angels with Him to judge the world in righteousness. This Lord whom ye seek, think carelessly about, perhaps thinking even carnally about, “Behold, He shall come,” as He once came to Bethlehem. “Behold, He *shall* come,” the second time, to judge the world in righteousness. And, “Who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth?”

Well, it is a great question. It is very, very easy to sing, “Bold shall I stand in that great day.” In my native Haslingden at chapel when the ministers gave that out, the people sometimes used to say, “Well, will you? Will I?” “*Bold* shall I stand in that great day.” “Who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth?” And we know that those who shall stand will be those who have been taught by the Spirit that they have no standing in their own supposed goodness or righteousness, but as sinners, by faith through grace, have to take their stand upon the merits of Christ, His righteousness, His blood.

“I stand upon His merit,
I know no other stand.”

O if by precious faith you are standing upon the Rock of Ages, you will stand when He appeareth and you *will* be able to sing,

“Bold shall I stand in that great day.”

Why?

“For who ought to my charge shall lay,
While through Thy blood absolved I am,
From sin’s tremendous curse and shame?”

“Behold, He shall come.” He once came to Bethlehem. He will come again, but, “Who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth?” I wonder how some of you got on with the closing hymn this morning (1106). Now I thought that was really good, and that is our only hope. The first time I was ever asked to give out a hymn in public when I was quite young, that was the hymn I gave out. But it is still our only hope. Really, it is all our religion.

“My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.”

As you sang it, line after beautiful line, and here is our hope, our joy, our rest, we have no other. But beloved friends, there is good standing ground here. There is solid standing ground here.

“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.” He did come, didn’t He? And He shall come again.

But it is the great question: “Who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth.” I said right at the beginning there were two sides, and we need to consider that solemn side and not pass over it, because originally it was spoken to people where there was a lot of hypocrisy. But now there is a blessed side. The Old Testament church waited long, but they did not wait in vain. Immediately after this word was spoken, the canon of the Old Testament Scripture was to be closed for ever. It seemed to close in a day of darkness. There were going to be four hundred years, the light of prophecy withdrawn, but to the godly remnant, those who were like Simeon and Anna who were “waiting for the consolation of Israel,” who were “looking for redemption in

Jerusalem,” there was a word here they could hang on, God’s promise that the Saviour would come, and they waited long, but at last, blessed be His name, He did come.

“The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come” – unexpectedly come – “to His temple.” So we have the wonderful birth of the Lord Jesus, the Son of God from all eternity, taking our nature without sin into lasting union with His divine Person.

“Jesus, who lived above the sky,
Came down to be a Man and die.”

“Behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.” And He did. He came into this world of sin and sorrow, and He lived as “a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” He came literally to His temple. We read in the gospels of how He was taken there by Mary and Joseph. We read of how Simeon took Him in his arms and blessed Him. “Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy Word: for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.” We think of those various occasions when He came to the temple and when He drove out the buyers and the sellers with a whip of fine cords. Now it was literally fulfilled. He literally came to His temple, the temple that was standing in the days of Malachi, the second temple that was built in the days of Zerubbabel, the second temple that was promised. But I take it we have not to look at this word, coming to His temple, too closely and too exactly. He came into this world. He came to do good. He came for those who were waiting for Him. He came with a gracious purpose.

We are told here that He came as “the Messenger of the covenant.” That covenant stood from everlasting between the eternal Father and His beloved Son. In it every blessing was treasured up for the people of God as they were loved with an everlasting love and as they were all given into the hands of the Son of God and as He lovingly, willingly took them and undertook to be their Saviour and their Surety and their everlasting All. And in that covenant, the price of redemption was fixed. The Son of God must become incarnate. He must live that holy, spotless, righteous life. He must lay it down in death. He must satisfy divine justice. He must open up a way of salvation before He should return victorious to heaven. And on the grounds of this, the Father blessed His people from everlasting in Christ. Now when the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ came to this earth, He came as “the Messenger of the covenant.” A messenger is one who is

sent, and how often the Lord Jesus spoke of His Father sending Him, and of His loving, willing obedience.

“The Messenger of the covenant.” “Lo, I come,” said the incarnate Son of God. “In the volume of the book it is written of Me, I delight to do Thy will, O My God.” He came as the Messenger of the covenant in love and mercy to fulfil His Father’s holy will. And so as the Messenger of the covenant He came to fulfil (can you follow this expression?) every covenant obligation, those obligations which in love and mercy He had taken upon Himself in the covenant of grace in order to save His people from their sins. He came with a covenant engagement. He came to fulfil the covenant, to reveal His Father’s will, to set a gracious, glorious example, to teach, to bring in that everlasting righteousness by His spotless obedience to His Father’s law.

But especially He must seal the covenant with His blood. That is why He came as the Messenger. All those covenants of the Old Testament were sealed and ratified with blood, whatever they were, between man and man. And what about the eternal covenant? Surely, surely the blood of bulls and goats could not confirm the eternal covenant. “The same night in which He was betrayed,” when the Lord Jesus took that cup, He said, “This is My blood of the new testament” – the blood of the covenant – “which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” And then He went forth in love to Gethsemane and to Calvary and there in His death He sealed the covenant with His blood – which I take to mean this: that He had accomplished everything, everything that was needful and necessary for the salvation of lost, ruined, guilty sinners. And so sealing the covenant with His blood, He cried, “It is finished,” and He died. How beautifully the apostle says, “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant”!

“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.” Well, beloved friends, we have spoken a little bit about the Lord’s first coming and a little bit about His second coming. But though now risen, exalted and glorified, He still comes to His people where they are, personally, savingly, to do for them all that they can never do for themselves. We sang this morning, “Thou visitest sinners

still.” What a mercy! The Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ when He comes, He comes in much love and much compassion.

Like that wonderful account in Ezekiel’s prophecy chapter 16, the people of God like that helpless infant cast out in loathsomeness and blood in the day of its nativity, helpless, lost, dying, ruined, polluted. Now this is how the Saviour comes: “Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time was the time of love; and I spread My skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swear unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord God, and thou becamest Mine.” You have it again: “And when I passed by thee, and saw thee polluted in thine own blood, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live; yea, I said unto thee when thou wast in thy blood, Live.” And then follows this wonderful catalogue of what He did when He came: the washing, the cleansing, the dressing in the beautiful garments. Do you know how it all ends? “Perfect through My comeliness, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord God.” And that is just what you and I want, isn’t it?

“When loathsome in thy sins and blood,
He did thy state survey,
And for a stranger Surety stood;
He hates to put away,”

says John Kent. Perhaps you feel loathsome in your sin and blood, and hopeless and helpless and unworthy and guilty, and as the Lord once came to earth, you want Him by His blessed Spirit to come to you personally and to bless you and to do everything for you so that you might have that standing in which you can stand complete when He appears. “Perfect through My comeliness, which I had put upon thee.”

“Behold, He shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.” In our need and helplessness and weakness and sin we love to think of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ coming to Bethlehem and going to Calvary, and now with the psalmist we say, “O when wilt Thou come unto me?” “Remember me, O Lord with the favour that Thou bearest unto Thy people: O visit me with Thy salvation.” You dear souls who are waiting for His appearing, those who are longing for Him to come, those who are seeking after Him, “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” – come to the midst of His solemn assemblies; come to each one personally. What do we sing?

“We humbly for Thy coming wait,
Seeking to know Thee as Thou art;
We bow as sinners at Thy feet,
And bid Thee welcome to our heart.”

“O when wilt Thou come unto me?”

“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.” So there are just two things now as we draw towards the close of this evening’s service, and the first thing is, how are these people described who cannot be satisfied without the Saviour, who say,

“I must have Christ as All in all,
Or sink in ruin, guilt, and thrall”;

who long for His coming, His appearing? Well, they are described like this: “The Lord, whom ye seek.” So these are they who are seeking after Him. Now beloved friends, do not take it for granted you are a seeking sinner. I think there is a fault in our chapels. They say, These are the Lord’s people and these are not and those are seekers. The Word of God just has the two. The Lord’s people are seekers at the beginning and seekers to the end. But the great proof of being a seeker is that you find what you seek. The one who was seeking the pearl of great price was not satisfied until he had found it and when he had found it, till he possessed it. O but what a word to seeking sinners: “Seek, and ye shall find.” When John Kay, that clergyman who was ejected for the truth’s sake from the Church of England, began to preach in our chapels, and he was so cutting and so severe, J.C. Philpot said, “There is one thing that John Kay cannot do. He cannot blot that text out of the Word of God: ‘Seek, and ye shall find.’”

“The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly” – unexpectedly – “come to His temple.” How often down the ages the Lord has come in a moment and He has turned darkness into light and sorrow into joy and bondage into liberty. “The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple.”

And the other thing: “Even the Messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in.” Now these are the people, those who seek the Saviour truly, earnestly, because of their sin, because of their need, because they want to

be right, because they cannot manage their own case. And they delight in the Saviour. One or two hymns come on my spirit.

“Make me, Saviour, make me feel
All my soul’s delight in Thee.”

Now can you say that?

“O Lord, I would delight in Thee,
And on Thy care depend.”

Now can you say that? “Even the Messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in.” “Delight thyself also in the Lord,” says the Word of God. “Delight thyself also in the Lord; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart.” What is the desire of your heart? Is there one person here this evening who answers that questions and says, “That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death”? “He *shall* give thee the desires of thine heart.”

So coming to the close, that is the first thing, these to whom the promise is made, those who seek the Saviour, those who delight in Him. The second thing: when He comes, He will come as when He came to this earth. He will come as the Messenger of the covenant, which I take to mean this: He will bring with Him all new covenant blessings, and there is every blessing there, every blessing that a God can give, every blessing that a helpless sinner can ever need. These new covenant blessings: pardon, forgiveness, adoption, salvation, cleansing, eternal life. You could go on and on and on. These new covenant blessings which flow through Christ, through His precious blood. “The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in.” And then because wretched unbelief would still begin to quibble and doubt and contradict, the Lord Himself confirms it all, seals it all: “Behold, He *shall* come, saith the Lord of hosts.”