

Intro: Advent. The word means ‘to come to.’ Advent is the season of the church year that falls on the four Sundays before Christmas. The focus of Advent is primarily on the coming of the Lord as Savior. But there is also a focus on the coming of the Lord as Judge at the End of time. Malachi seems to blend both ideas in our text for this morning. He speaks to the people about the coming of the Lord as both Savior and as Judge and how they might be prepared for both of those comings.. We take as our theme today one of Malachi’s rhetorical questions: **Who Can Stand When the Lord Appears?** As we will see, it is 1) **Those who are prepared by his messenger** and 2) **Those who are purified by the Lord himself.**

- I. Those who are prepared by his messenger (1)
  - A. John was to prepare unprepared hearts
    1. hearts of the people were unprepared
      - a. have you ever had unexpected company
      - b. people who just showed up and wanted to come into your home
      - c. and you and your home were totally unprepared?
      - d. we had an instance like that a few years ago
      - e. a son of one of St. Matthew’s former pastors came to our door
      - f. and wanted to see his old home
      - g. I’m sure that at least, according to my wife, the house was ill-prepared for a guest
      - h. many of the Jewish people were unprepared for the sudden appearance of the Lord as Savior
      - i. their hearts and lives were filled with all types of sin, perversity, and crookedness
      - j. so they did not care about a Savior coming
      - k. even the religious leaders were unprepared to meet the coming Savior
        - l. the Pharisees were rooted in self-righteousness
        - m. and did not see a need for a Savior
        - n. the Sadducees did not believe in a Messiah
        - o. and the peoples’ sins were an obstacle to the coming Savior
        - p. the Savior could not dwell in those whose hearts and lives were filled with sin
        - q. in general, the peoples’ hearts were unprepared for the coming Savior
    2. so the Lord sent a messenger to prepare them
      - a. and so the Lord sent a messenger ahead of him
      - b. to prepare the way before him
      - c. the Hebrew literally states ‘to clear the way before him’
      - d. this is in line with the ancient eastern custom of sending messengers ahead of a visiting king
      - e. to announce his coming, to remove all obstacles to his coming, and to make his way passable
      - f. the NT gospel writers clearly identify this messenger as John the Baptist
      - g. it was his mission to prepare the way for the Lord
      - h. it was his ‘job’ to remove the obstacles that hindered the Lord, the Savior, from dwelling in the peoples’ hearts and lives
  - B. Prepared hearts with law and gospel
    1. sin and grace
    - a. and this is what John did by preaching a message of repentance and forgiveness of sins

- b. he called on the people to repent
  - c. to turn from their sin
  - d. to change their attitude about sin from loving it to despising it
  - e. then, after bringing the people to a realization of their sin by a preaching of the law
  - f. he would share the good news of forgiveness with them
  - g. the forgiveness that would be won for them
  - h. through the death of God’s Lamb, Jesus, who would take away the sin of the world
  2. hearts were then prepared for the Savior
    - a. and those who heeded John’s message
    - b. whose hearts and lives were changed by the law and the gospel
    - c. and who had their sin removed
    - d. were ready to welcome the Lord as Savior
  3. our hearts are unprepared for the Savior
    - a. are we ready for the coming Savior?
    - b. it’s almost here - 19 days by my count
    - c. I’m not talking about presents, paper, and parties
    - d. or cards and cookies or trees or trimmings
    - e. I’m talking about being ready to welcome the Lord as Savior
    - f. are our hearts ready for him?
    - g. not really – our hearts and lives are as crooked and perverse as the hearts of the people in the Baptist’s day
    - h. they are filled with self-righteousness, unbelief, doubt, and manifold other sins
    - i. and these sins are crowding out the Savior – there’s very little room for him in our hearts and lives sometimes
  4. heed the messenger’s call
    - a. therefore, we, too, need to heed the messenger’s call to repent
    - b. we need to turn from our sin, to regret it, and resolve not to repeat it
    - c. we need to change our attitude about sin – turn from enjoying it to despising it
    - d. and having repented of our sin, then trust that forgiveness is ours through the Savior
    - e. who, when the time had fully come, placed himself under the law to redeem us from our sins
    - f. when we do this - when our hearts and lives are changed by the message of law and gospel
    - g. we are ready to welcome the Lord when he appears as the Savior
    - h. and to have him dwell in our hearts and lives
- Trans: Who can stand when the Lord appears? Those who are prepared by his messenger. And...

- II. Those who are purified by the Lord himself (2-4)
  - A. No one can stand before the Lord really
    1. only those who are holy can stand before the Lord
      - a. who can endure the day of his coming?
      - b. who can stand when he appears?
      - c. those are both rhetorical questions
      - d. and both are expecting the answer: Nobody!
      - e. only those who are holy can be in the presence of the Lord and Savior
      - f. our psalm for this morning, Psalm 24, states that only those with clean hands and a pure heart can stand before the Lord
      - g. only those who are holy in thought and in action
    2. therefore, no one can stand before the Lord

- a. but no one is or can be holy
  - b. (Ps 14:3b, "...there is no one who does good, not even one.")**
  - c. and, since, no one is holy, no one can stand in the presence of or endure the appearing of the Lord as both Savior and as Judge
- B. The Savior came to purify his people
- 1. by removing sin
    - a. and that is why the Savior came
    - b. to make his people holy so that they can stand before him and endure his coming as both Savior and as Judge
    - c. that is why the Son of God was born of a virgin and appeared in human flesh
    - d. and humbled himself on this earth by giving up the full and constant use of his divine power
    - e. and by hiding his divine glory
    - f. and even humbled himself to the point of death, even death on a cross
    - g. so that with the humble sacrifice of himself and his life he might make a payment for the world's sin
    - h. (1Jn 1:7, "...the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.")**
  - 2. by giving holiness
    - a. with his perfect life and death in their place
    - b. the Savior gave his people holiness
    - c. with his appearance on this earth as the Son of God made flesh, the Savior purified his people
    - d. which makes them able to endure his coming as Judge
  - 3. by a constant process of purification
    - a. and the same Lord and Savior continues to purify his people, day by day
    - b. so that they continue to be holy and are able to stand before him when he appears as Savior and as Judge of all
    - c. Malachi compares the Lord to those who purify, refine, and launder
    - d. like a refiner who burns the impurities out of metal
    - e. or a launderer who uses soap and scrubbing to remove stains from material
    - f. so the Lord and Savior continually purges his people of their sins
    - g. with the fire of life's trials and tribulations
    - h. he burns up what is sinful in his people
    - i. and through the soap and scrubbing of life's hard knocks
    - j. he eats away and removes the stains of sin from their lives
  - 4. holy, acceptable people
    - a. as a result of the Savior's continual purification
    - b. his people serve him in righteousness
    - c. in humble repentance and with sincere gratitude
    - d. showing that they have been purified and can stand and endure the coming of the Lord as both Savior and as Judge
  - 5. application
    - a. this is what the Lord has done for you and for me
    - b. with his humble life and death
    - c. Jesus, our Savior, removed our sins and purified us
    - d. and, through the difficult circumstances of our lives
    - e. he continues to purge us of our sins
    - f. so that we can stand in his presence
    - g. as welcome him at the manger in Bethlehem
    - h. and when he returns as Judge at the End of time

Concl: Who can stand when the Lord appears as Savior and as Judge? We can. Because we have been prepared by his messenger and purified by the Lord himself.