

# When true revival comes

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- [ 0 : 00 ] Let us now turn to Malachi chapter 3 and the verses this evening are verses 3, 4 and 5.
- Malachi 3 at verse 3. And he, that is Christ, shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver and he shall purify the sons of Levi and purge them as gold and silver that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.
- Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years. And I will come near to you to judgment and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against false swearers and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages the widow, the fatherless and that turn aside the stranger from his right and fear not me saith the Lord of hosts.
- Now the section we are looking at runs from chapter 2 verse 17 to chapter 3 and verse 6.
- We have noticed that before. And you will remember that the general theme of those verses in that section is the theme of the coming of Christ.
- [ 1 : 39 ] Of course they were looking for Christ's appearance for the first time. We are now looking for Christ's second coming.
- There are many similarities therefore. In verses 1 and 2 of chapter 3 as we noticed last time is a prophecy of the coming of John the Baptist who is my messenger and also of Christ himself the messenger of the covenant so that as we saw last time there are two messengers referred to in verses 1 and 2.
- And in verse 2 of that section which we looked at last time the ministry of John and of Jesus is comparable to fire and soap.
- Those are the two illustrations. That is to say the ministry of these spirit filled men John and even still more Christ would be to bring about purification cleansing in the state of the Jewish religion and of the Jewish society and indeed later of the whole world.
- Now in verses 3, 4 and 5 which we are looking at today we have a prophetic section.
- [ 3 : 15 ] Clearly 3, 4 and 5 refer to the future. You will have the proof of that at a glance when you notice that the verbs of verses 3, 4 and 5 are in the future tense.
- He shall sift He shall purify and purge and they may offer as a consequence. In verse 4 then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant.
- Verse 5 I will come near and bear testimony. Clearly then this is prophetic and it is not simply prophetic but it describes the effect of the preaching of John and Jesus amongst the Jewish nation.
- And you will see there that changes were to occur through their preaching. He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver.
- He shall purify the sons of Levi. And then in verse 4 this will affect the religion of the people.
- [ 4 : 37 ] The offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant unto the Lord as in the days of old. And that again will have a further effect in verse 5 upon society.

God will witness against these flagrant and glaring sins of society. So the theme of verses 3, 4 and 5 is the effect which would be brought about by the preaching of John and Jesus particularly of Jesus.

and the reformation which would follow the revival under the preaching of Pentecost.

So what is in the focus of interest and of attention prophetically in verses 3, 4 and 5 is Christ followed by the apostles and their tremendous spirit-filled preaching which would affect the whole state of society beginning at the top with the sons of Levi and going right down to the common people with their outstanding and enormous sins.

So prophetically that is what was in mind. But of course we have here eternal principles. If this were not the case then our interest in verses 3, 4 and 5 today would be simply historical.

[ 6 : 12 ] All we could get out of it would simply be to say that we have information here about what John and Jesus did. But of course the principle is that the preaching of spirit-filled men is always the same in its leading features and in the changes it brings about.

so the theme for us if you like of this subject the theme is revival and the reformation in society which always accompanies it.

But the revival is the work of God and it is his work to raise up outstanding and spirit-filled men.

And the changes which the preaching of such men bring about are such as we have them described in verses 3, 4 and 5.

There is never a revival there is never outstanding powerful spiritual preaching but there are accompanying changes of precisely the kind that we have given to us in 3, 4 and 5.

[ 7 : 27 ] so the references to Christ and to his spirit and the change which they always bring about in the world wherever there is this spiritual power accompanying the proclamation of the truth of God.

Now I want to stop to make an observation. We today hear a great deal about the Holy Spirit. There is a tremendous interest today in the churches in the subject of the person and work of the Holy Spirit and there are books about the Spirit and there are conferences about the Spirit and there are special prayer meetings for the Spirit there are articles in Christian magazines about the Spirit and there talk about the Spirit and there are some people who give the impression that because there is all this concentration of interest in the Spirit we must already be witnessing a real revival or at least some sort of real renewal.

Now that is a view which some people have and they become optimistic therefore about the state of affairs of the church in this country. Now I want to be realistic not pessimistic and I want to say to you I cannot share that interpretation of the talk which is so current today in the world about the Holy Spirit and the reason why not is because whenever the Holy Spirit truly is present in the church in a great measure and when there is real revival there are always concomitant changes in the church and accompanying reformations in society exactly after the pattern of the statements in verses 3, 4 and 5.

now there is therefore this description about what happened in the days of the acts of the apostles and the best commentary on 3, 4 and 5 is the acts of the apostles itself the book because there we discover how these simple unlettered men as many of them most of them were fishermen and others as they went forth filled with this divine dynamic into the greco-roman world as well as the jewish world they simply saw the powers of darkness tumble everywhere they went the bulwarks of the devil collapsed so that they were described these few men as turning the world upside down and society was simply staggered and alarmed at the new dimensions of spiritual change which their preaching brought about at Ephesus we all well remember how the silversmiths with their trade union became very concerned at losing business because so great was the effect of the word of God that Paul was preaching and his accompanying brethren that idolatry was as it were being starved to death and they saw that their wretched industry of producing these tiny trinkets or little souvenir goddesses to shrines and images of Diana they were in danger of just vanishing altogether through the power of the truth of God and so you remember in Acts 19 I think they stay this great demonstration and they went into the theatre shouting great as

Diana of the Ephesians and they would have torn the apostles limb from limb had they been able to get at them and this was because Christ was with these men and the spirit was with them and Christ was like a purifier of silver refining and affecting the ministry the church and also society now the same happened again exactly at the protestant reformation God God raised up Calvin and Luther and Knox Latimer these outstanding men who were again spirit filled with this great energy and authority and when they lifted up their testimony and expounded the word of God we see that the medieval church and society and all the errors which had accumulated for a thousand years began to subside and to collapse under the power of the light and of the truth and we got the same thing happening society was turned upside down by those men comparatively few you might say compared with the multitudes and the masses and the same happens always you may know of perhaps a lesser known preacher in the 1920s in Northern

[ 12 : 34 ] Ireland to which reference has been made and rightly so already tonight W.P. Nicholson again was filled with power we believe when he preached to the Ulster masses in Belfast and elsewhere and in the 1920s there was so much of the divine blessing attending his preaching that the people would come an hour or more before the meeting was due to begin they would queue up as they do today to get into bingo halls and picture theatres and other places like that and such was the crush to get into the church that even to this day you can see where the stones which formed the gateposts were pushed aside with a million crowds of people trying to get in to hear the word of God and so many people were converted and blessed and convicted amongst those that heard W.P.

Nicholson that Harland and Wolfe the ship builders in Belfast they had to open up a special yard to receive all the tools and all the spare parts which men who'd stolen and now repented brought back they had no space to put them all and men were repenting and their consciences were aroused as never had been known before it is precisely the same phenomenon as we have in these verses now I want to show you next in these three verses the order of God's ways now we all believe that God is a God of order God doesn't do things like a flash of lightning without any I don't want to reflect on the wisdom of a flash of lightning incidentally I have no very little knowledge of what it is and what it involves but I mean there is in God always the working of wisdom there is nothing haphazard or slipshod or thoughtless or second rate in the order of

God's purposes and I want to point this out to you because in verse 3 we are told what the preaching will do first is he will purify the sons of Levi now Levi is the name of that Old Testament tribe that have the responsibility of the ministry of the tabernacle of God and of course we can see at once that the name Levi is a symbol for the ministry of the New Testament church in a verse in Isaiah I think 66 the last chapter there is a reference to the fact that when the Gentiles ourselves would be converted God says I will take of them for priests and for Levites which is another way of saying under an Old Testament form of speech that he would choose men for the ministry of the church in the days after Christ's coming his first coming so the first thing

God always does when he is about to revive his work is he affects the ministry of the word of God first of all now the second thing is in verse 4 then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years now to see the second element in God's order is the change brought about within the church that is the reference to Judah and Jerusalem their offering their worship their service their testimony if you like so the first thing he affects is the ministry the pulpit the public teacher of the word of God that's the word God begins when he is about to do a great work and history will bear me out just as the word of God does and then the church is affected but then it doesn't stop there in verse 5 I will come near to you to judgment and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and adulterers and false swearers and all these persons who are in society society as a whole society at large we can't imagine that the priests and Levites and Pharisees and Sadducees were precisely guilty of these particular sins particularly sins of adultery and sins of sorcery and sins of fornication they were moral men for the most part they were respectable and virtuous and upright men they were men indeed in many cases as we all very well know who were not converted they weren't godly men but they were moral men so the persons referred to in verse 5 are the wider sphere of society and this is the order which God brings about whenever or he manifests and reveals

I mean whenever he brings about a great work of revival such as is described in verses 3 4 and 5 the pulpit is reformed first then the church second and then society third and I think we can see can we not that there is a tremendous divine order and wisdom in that and therefore there is something which we should notice and something to remark at in that very procedure which God has adopted and we notice here I hope all of us a resemblance to something that appeared in the reading in Romans 10 if you recall what Paul argues in Romans 10 he has a most interesting section I shall not turn to it but the verses are 13 to 15 but in that section Romans 10 13 to 15 what Paul is saying is this men will be saved if they call upon the name of the Lord that is to say offer the prayer for forgiveness prayer seeking mercy

[18:29] God is rich in mercy he argues to all that call upon him whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord be he Jew or Gentile black or white young or old he will be saved and then Paul enters into this minute argument this step by step logic he says but how shall they call upon him in whom they have not believed and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard and how shall they hear without a preacher to tell them and how shall preachers go I'm paraphrasing but this is his thought how shall a preacher go unless God sends him how shall they preach except they be sent and you see step by step he shows that God is the originator of every spiritual movement and the origination of the movement is God raises the preacher he sends them a

David Livingstone into darkest Africa or a William Carey into India or a David Brainerd to the Red Indians or John G Payton to the New Hebrides or whoever it is and then the church and then society as it were the circle widens of the sphere of divine influence but it all begins when God sends the preacher now I want to spend the remainder of my little time tonight opening out these three divisions which I think you would agree with me are natural and not forced first in verse three the effect of the revival is the change in the pulpit the change in the preacher the second in verse four the change in the church and third in verse five of the change in the society in the wider sphere so the first reformation which revival always effects is a change in the holy work of the ministry let's read that verse he that is

Christ or the Holy Spirit because Christ and the Spirit are always doing the same work of course he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver and he shall purify the sons of Levi and purge them as gold and silver that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness notice that word in righteousness holiness and righteousness the language clearly refers to the burning purity and the outstanding holiness which is appropriate to men who preach the word of God this is how John was described by Christ John the Baptist he was a burning and a shining light and you were willing for a season to rejoice in his light you remember how Stephen is described by Luke in Acts 7 when he was being stoned to death and he saw the

Son of God sitting at the right hand of power and lifted up his face seraphically remember and they looked on his face as though it had been the face of an angel now there is therefore that reference here to real godliness and that is the essence of the ministry of the gospel of Christ and that is the highest and most important ingredient in the ministry of the gospel of Christ now men may be moral men and men may be virtuous men as the Pharisees and as the Sadducees and others but godliness goes far above that godliness adds to morality and decency a still higher element which is burning zeal for god and a holy man is a man whose character smokes if you like with indignation against all the challenges the glory of god and that is why these apostles and these prophets of the new testament and the acts of the apostles and elsewhere that's why these men were prepared to die for the honor of god the reformers of course and the covenanters and the puritans and others were the same their demand of society was that god had absolute claims and those claims were not negotiable and they were not viable and when society insisted or the church insisted in ignoring god's claims men said very well you must burn me or you must cut off my head but I will not move from the demands that god has given to us we must obey god more than men now that is holiness and it is the holiness of the pulpit and of the ministry and it is the thing which is supremely important in the work of the ministry more important than eloquence more important than gifts more important than learnedness or bookishness although all of those things in their way are very important now you may remember a verse in 1st corinthians 3 that goes like this similar again to these very words in malachi 3 3 paul is referring to the ministry especially and he said every man's work should be made manifest for the day will declare it the day of judgment of course he means some men's work is like gold silver precious stones other men's work like wood hay and stubble the fire will try every man's work to discover what is its true character and its true kind now very interesting that reference it could be for all I know that Peter had this very verse at the back of his mind not Peter but Paul

I can't assert that but it may be so because it's interesting that he refers to the idea of purging and of purifying with fire you see just as the day of judgment will make manifest every preacher's work so there is a similar suggestion in these very words here now of course I must make this observation and application my dear friends one reason why we do not regard I do not regard this as a day of revival yet though I long have prayed that it may become a day of revival but one reason why I cannot believe that this day of revival has yet dawned is this where are men with their burning conviction where are men in the assemblies and courts of all the churches of our land who will say thus far wilt thou come but no farther I stake my life on this truth where are men of that apostolic spirit and of that burning seraphic zeal men of conviction men of plain speaking men who will tell the truth to congregations everywhere instead of being mealy mouthed and spineless that's what we need and we need it right across the country

[ 25 : 44 ] I heard today of a certain man poor man who is said to have murdered his mother to have murdered his mother and is being nominated to a certain congregation of a certain church not all but very far from where we are in the south of Scotland now God breeds the hearts of men but it doesn't look to me like a very good old man for the work of the ministry that a man has murdered his mother it doesn't seem to me to be a good start God is able to forgive all that whether it's appropriate for a man who has done that ever to be considered for the ministry I leave to the judgment of others just now the point I want to make is what we need everywhere in our day is not simply men who will fill pulpit vacancies and stand in because the cause is weak and therefore we must get somebody up there up the pulpit steps and say something to these people and fill in ten minutes of their time no no holy men is what we want when we get them dear friends we will be well on the way to seeing the

Holy Ghost come down in waves and billows but it begins here I submit verse 3 then the holy ministry now verse 4 talks about the holy church then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years well we have the same thing again only we have it now in reference to all the people of God Judah and Jerusalem were the Old Testament names for the people of God no longer simply the ministry the ministry is not simply for its own sake men don't preach just in order to have an opportunity to say something to make themselves important in the eyes of others they're not there for their own sake they're there for the church they're there to help men to heaven they're there to make men holy and spiritual if by the grace of

God men will listen to their preaching and teaching and so the effect of this preaching of the sons of Levi now renewed is that the church becomes renewed and the church becomes holy and pure now you notice here there's no gimmickry about all this there's not some new thing we don't want any tricks what we want says the book of God here in verse 4 we want to get back to the days of old we want to get back to the former years now that's the most important reference there because today there's so many people purvey the idea that we need something brand new society won't listen to us because we're old fashioned I was once in a meeting and I heard a certain minister of a different denomination he knew me quite well and he knew I was sitting there too and he made this remark in public and I just wondered who it was intended for I had my suspicions and this is what he said he said some people have a God who seems to have gone out of business a hundred years ago

I felt that with all my sorrow and never forget that remark to my dying day that man thought you see that what we need is to get into some new attitude towards God the old fashioned God of our fathers the Victorian God is gone for good we need a new sort of God the new television type of God image to be projected we must enchant men with our personalities and make them see that we're lovely people and our religion is smooth and delicate no says Malachi real revival brings the church back not to some new position but to where it was that's what the church needs to do to get back to the old paths I don't simply mean in which we all use a certain type of ancient language which is made sanctified by the mildew of time and that goes down like old wine in bottles which have been preserved for ten thousand years no not that not the old ruts of the past but the old truths of the past the old power which accompanied those truths the old conviction of that truth the old glories of the gospel the blood of

Christ the regeneration the wrath of God and redemption by Christ alone that's the old path that our fathers trod and we need to get back to that and when the preacher is put right by the grace of God so the church will be put right also he says by the way by the same preaching and their offering will then be acceptable what's the offering well of course it's the worship our prayers will then ascend I'm not suggesting of course they don't ascend right now I'm not saying that only in revival is there acceptable prayer that would be extreme but when the church is awakened we all realise there's a new spirit of prayer you don't have to drag people to prayer meetings in times of revival the difficulty is finding seats for them all opening up new parts of the church to get them all in and they're all wanting to utter their desire to God in one way or another the singing reflects this new attitude to God their giving reflects a new attitude to God they're a revived people and their regularity and their punctuality everything is the indicative of this change within the people of God through the preaching of the word now this happened in all revivals let me mention simply one in Wales in 1904 and 5 the crowds frequented the buildings where the blessing was so much they had to have three services a day morning afternoon and evening and the evening services sometimes lasted right up till about midnight it wasn't that the preachers mercilessly held the people behind locked doors and compelled them to wait till the whole service was over no the preacher might finish at 10 o'clock and perhaps go back to the man's where the people wouldn't budge they stayed on and they prayed on and they sang on and they worshipped on now that's not to say there weren't occasional abuses there are always abuses in the sinful world but you see the glory of it when men are caught up in the spirit to see the wonder of

[ 32 : 26 ] Christ and of his redemption there's a new spirit amongst the people of God now I want to observe this professor Thomas Torrance who taught in New College for a number of years and is a very brilliant and a famous man and deserves to be spoken of with great respect for his learning and for many other reasons professor Thomas Torrance some years ago said that what's needed in the state church and other churches of this country is more evangelism now that was a very timely remark and very true and one which we would all endorse but I cannot understand why a man who's everything like that should not see the inconsistency of his own position because for years he had been teaching his students for the ministry things which were calculated to knock all the stuffing of the gospel right out of them and then years on when he came to retire he said we need more evangelism and the great question is who was going to do this evangelism if he in his position as professor of systematic theology had taken as much gospel so called out of them as he possibly could and left them anemic and weak and without the knowledge of the truth which he ought to have given them now that's my understanding of the state of affairs

God forgive me if I'm being too severe but that's as I read it and as I understand it but you see what's needed before you get holy churches is holy men who can preach to the people and then the church is affected by and should be affected by what they hear and so I come third and briefly to verse 5 which talks about this further change the change now in society at large and I will come near to you to judgment and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against false swearers and against those of the press the hireling in his wages the widow and the fatherless and the turn aside the stranger from his right and fear not me saith the Lord now then society is mainly unregenerate society at large is mainly godless there are godly people in it but the most part of mankind who make up society all about is in any generation revivals or non-revivals they're unregenerate people and they're described here in these terms of verse 5 the things they do sorcerers that means they're after false religion if they're after any at all adulterers they don't respect the bond of marriage false swearers they break their marriage vows and all sorts of other vows they don't treat seriously the things of god and then they're oppressive towards the employee we see a lot about that in the papers and then on the radio and television today and then they don't fear god which is the root of it all now this is society and what is being said here is that god or christ or the holy spirit is going to come to society and is going to make a judgment about society and confront society and show society what it really is like now

I mustn't be lengthy but as I wind up let me put it to you like this society is rotten but it is more manifestly rotten in some generations than in others for instance if you went back to the victorian age or to certain other ages you would find society rotten but it would not be so boastful about its rottenness you would get all of these sins in victorian society or almost any society that there have ever been since the fall but men do not boast about these things as they do in some ages for instance today people are proud of their fornication and adultery and people will parade their private lives so called before the whole world film stars and others too and they're glad that these things are happening and they're boasting that they have the power to commit these things and they revel and they glory in their very shame now that is a sign that God has withdrawn from society that he has given society over that's the phrase Paul uses remember in Romans 1 does he not say God gave them up

God gave them over God gave them over to the lust of their own heart and gives a tremendous catalogue of all the sins of that perverted Roman and Greek society sins which we couldn't even talk about in the setting in which we now are or perhaps any other society for that matter without a sense of blushing and shame depravity foulness men were filled with fornication adultery lust murder godlessness disobedient to parents the whole lot it's our modern society writ large in the book of Romans and chapter 1 now this is what God says here in Malachi when revival comes God becomes a witness in society against the lusts of society I will come near to you to judgment what does this mean well in simple language it means that God will make wicked men see that they are wicked now that of itself doesn't save them friends that's not regeneration though many of them are converted through it through the testimony of the church and of the preacher but at least even if it doesn't convert men it stops this world becoming a hell on earth and what always happens in revival again is when the ministry is revived and the church revived society feels the impact of that men who yesterday were shouting about their drunken brawls and their experiences in certain houses of ill repute when this gospel comes to them and they are told by their friends or by the preacher or by the word of

God which they hear the wickedness of their sins men blush and their private lives are tidied up and they don't talk in the same vein about their wickedness as they used to do the things that they laughed about they speak in a whisper about now sin becomes a shame to open its mouth now that is one of the effects of true spiritual revival and how we need it in order to stop the mouth of men and women who glory as I say in their shame and so as we close this evening obviously we must draw this application the answer to society's needs today is not simply the passing of acts of parliament we need those alright and we need agitation we need petitions and we need these things and letters to the prime minister and letters to this other minister and letters to the

[ 39 : 44 ] MP I wouldn't say these things have no place but they're not the answer and we all know it what is the answer when God comes down when the spirit is poured out when the pulpit suddenly becomes alive with holy men telling the truth expounding the mind of God and applying it to the church first of all then when men are converted society at large here's the impact and so the great lesson for us surely is this although we are not seeing revival today friends we may see revival tomorrow and we can give God no rest something I feel I long to say to God every day I live forgive me if it seems over bold to you but time and again I find myself saying in prayer to God as I kneel before him oh God that some angel would take this message to the Holy Spirit today and say to the

Holy Spirit oh Holy Spirit who are so far removed from us thou art missed let it be sounded let it echo let it reverberate in the courage of heaven oh Holy Spirit who hideth thy face thou art sorely missed thou art remembered and we cannot live without thee and the world is rotten for absence of thee and for want of thee dear friends that is surely the call of the people of God should long and yearn and agonize until he shall come near and bless us as in the days of old God grant it so