

19.12.21 pm

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Date: 19 December 2021

Preacher: Reverend David MacLeod

[0 : 00] Good evening, a warm welcome to the service this evening. We're going to begin this time of worship by singing to God's praise and we sing from Psalm 32 verses 6 and 7. Psalm 32 verses 6 and 7.

For this shall every godly one his prayer make to thee, in such a time he shall thee seek, as found thou mayest be. Surely when floods of waters great do swell up to the brim, they shall not overwhelm his soul, nor once come near to him. Thou art my shield and hiding place, thou shalt from trouble keep me free, thou with songs of deliverance about shall compass me.

These verses of Psalm 32, we'll sing them in Gaelic. We remain seated to sing to God's praise in Gaelic. And after we've sung, Donald will hop over here to the pulpit and lead us in prayer, please.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

[2 : 27] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Hey.

Thank you. ...

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

[5 : 12] Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

[6 : 21] Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

[7 : 29] Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

Oh, yeah. when keem To the n6i and■■■ at the Jessica Dollar ■iles are a largeeng.

Ter invites ajach to be a Sie m6ssen uns ■■■ N kon quarters Sie m6ssen, indem die Zahl von Valentin Baby, Gewaltner Leute in den letzten Jahren wir m6ssen And others were, right up here.

Or else they would love, Listen and listen and listenin. And I'm anne, what has it been like?

The actual history of the planet is really a scientist and his own record is about throwing the saints ...

[10 : 02]

Do gren OHE, me more? I Git punching nokJ near hudu l'aim mamy chocin ga seblara l'oku offers his Birgót the masters of Tj servicloan and the forts of Tknapac, for the onwards, and emerging at Tc 4.

Zingyirdidi subscription for indemn Eth acces link in the couples website Lable P vigkeit verschieden I am from author chegouäche With a Greater que B Dev Eject, tava.

no I'm joining the fun show in Rome chums says I was turned to die for transportors to otherplares.

I know. Right.

[12 : 33] Indian Molc invitation is founded. So,gin under run, the parent again quyden and he willl better us.

The version and thought could be ary. When we sing and have our own habits, it's time to force ourselves to serve as individuals in making their own.

a trifle green the corner .

Ashintayn galwae mashiniatska aj aptay na ju k'i'k axu sixu phosphor And from the left we even went venue.

Very first home. And before let's go to perché We finish s.

[14 : 46] And inflation doesn't do it because of our independence. children from the unrest.

They must look idle for adultery SSSE at the same floor made from Australia who , , or .

So all these girls had an opportunity to come together for everyone.

Our parents have some other things.

database, were gone, they went across the river. Amen. Amen.

[16 : 47] Let's sing to God's praise again and we sing from hymn number 165, O Come, O Come, Emmanuel. We're carrying on with our studies in Malachi tonight and the whole of this book in that sense is a call for God, for Emmanuel to come and to save the people and to bring them close.

So we'll sing this praise to God's praise. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. of mind who do thy trite on side by side in ancient times it did the law in cloud and majesty and law rejoice rejoice Emmanuel shall come to thee O Israel O come thou rod of Jesse free thine own from Satan's tyranny from deaths of hell thy people sing and give them victory o'er the grave rejoice rejoice rejoice

[19 : 15] Emmanuel shall come to thee O Israel O come thou which may come and cheer O spirit by thy love and hearsin oh King and I'll come to thee, O Israel.

O come, thou die of David, come. I hope and why I'll hand me home.

May save the way I reach on high. And close the path to misery.

Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

If you could open your Bibles, if you have them, at Malachi chapter 2.

[20 : 53] And the words will be on the screen as well in just a minute. Okay. Boys and girls, do any of you have dogs?

Put your hand up if you've got a dog. Or maybe your granny or your shendler's got a dog. Okay. Most of you have dogs. And tell me, do your dogs always do what they're told?

Always. Always. No? Sometimes they don't. Sometimes when you take dogs out for a walk, they walk close by you.

And that's what you want. And sometimes when you take dogs for a walk, they might see something. Like a sheep. Or another dog. Or something that smells very interesting off in the distance.

And they disappear off. And they take off in the other direction. So what do you do to get them back? Henry? You shout their name.

[22 : 02] Yeah? Is that what everybody does? You shout their names? Yeah? Sometimes you see crofters and they can do what I can't do.

They do whistles. They kind of do that and they've got whistles. And one whistle means one thing. Another whistle means another thing. But dogs that can be miles away, they hear the whistle and they come right back.

And they're very obedient. Sheep dogs in particular, especially when Alistair's trained them, you're Shennar, they tend to be very obedient. But little dogs like Shoros, sometimes not so obedient.

And like the dogs that you have, little pugs, you take them out for a walk and they want to do their own thing. So with a sheep dog, it can go far away and you shout the name of the dog or you whistle and it usually comes back.

But with a little dog that's not a working dog, sometimes if you let them off the lead and they smell something they want to investigate, they're off. And trying to get them back is a hard job.

[23 : 11] So what do you have to do with wee dogs like that? Do you just let them run free? Or do you do anything for them? Do you put them on anything? Emily? You put them on a lead.

And so for Shoros, when I take them out for a walk, I put them on a lead. And when I'm walking down the car, I've got the lead quite short because you never know who's going to come up the drive at high speed.

And when we go over that way down the side of the school, you give them a bit more slack. But he still gets into all kinds of bother. He walks the wrong way around lampposts.

So you're walking and 20 yards down the road, Shoros stops and he's twisted around a lamppost. And sometimes he gets twisted around fences and he gets stuck at the hotel wall because he wants to do his own thing.

And so sometimes I have to say, Shoros, back here. And sometimes I have to take the lead and it goes quite a long way but I push a button and it goes back.

[24 : 15] And he gets pulled back. And this book that we're reading, we're about to read a bit of the Bible again. And this is a letter where God has a messenger who brings a message to his people.

And his people were a bit like a disobedient dog because they were wandering far away. They were getting themselves into all kinds of trouble.

And so God, through Malachi, he calls them back. He says to them in one of the verses that we read in a second, return to me.

Don't stay far away from me where it's dangerous and where it's dark and where you'll be sad. But he says, come close to me.

Return to me. And when we're God's people, one of the encouraging things is it's like he keeps us in a lead. if we're truly Christians, if we truly have trusted Jesus, asked for our sins to be forgiven, and asked Jesus to come into our lives, we still make a mess of things.

[25 : 35] We still want to go our own way. But it's kind of like God, he puts us on a lead. And he sometimes gives us a bit of slack and we can run our own way and we get ourselves into all kinds of trouble.

But then he calls us back and he keeps on calling us back. It says in John, in chapter 10, that God is the one who gives us everlasting life.

Let me just look at the verse and I'll read it out for you because it's an encouraging verse for those who are Christians. We don't keep ourselves, God keeps us.

He says, my sheep listen to my voice and that's us if we're Christians. I give them eternal life. They shall never perish.

No one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father who has given them to me is greater than all. No one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.

[26 : 36] I and the Father are one. God was saying to his people here, don't stay far away. Don't wander from me.

Come back to me. Come close to me. And maybe he's saying that to somebody here tonight or maybe he's saying that to somebody who listens in some other place tonight.

We all wander. We all get into trouble but God keeps on calling us to come back. And if we've never come to him in the first place, what he says to us through the Bible, every time we open it is come to me.

Don't stay far away from me but come to me. Trust me. Have your sins forgiven. Have my light in your life. And there's no better thing to do than that.

So we're going to read this portion from Malachi. Chapter 2 and verse 10 is where we're going to start. We read to verse 9 last week where God, through Malachi, is speaking to the ministers.

[27 : 44] And then in verse 10 we continue in this letter. God, through Malachi, the messenger, says, Have we not all one Father?

Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers? By breaking faith with one another. Judah has broken faith. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem.

Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the Lord loves by marrying the daughter of a foreign God. As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the Lord cut him off from the tents of Jacob, even though he brings offerings to the Lord Almighty.

Another thing you do, you flood the Lord's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands.

You ask why? It is because the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.

[28 : 48] Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.

I hate divorce, says the Lord, God of Israel. And I hate that man man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment, says the Lord Almighty.

So guard yourself in your spirit and do not break faith. You have wearied the Lord with your words. How have we wearied him, you ask? By saying all who do evil are good in the eyes of the Lord and he is pleased with them or where is the God of justice?

See, 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.

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. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver.

[29 : 57] He will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord as in the days gone by, as in former years.

So I will come near to you for a judgment. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and fatherless and deprive aliens of justice.

But do not fear me, says the Lord Almighty. I, the Lord, do not change. So you, descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.

Ever since the time of your forefathers, you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me and I will return to you, says the Lord Almighty.

But you ask, how are we to return? Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, how do we rob you? In tithes and offerings, you are under a curse, the whole nation of you, because you are robbing me.

[31 : 08] Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this, says the Lord Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room for it.

I will prevent pests from dividing your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit, says the Lord Almighty. Then all nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land, says the Lord Almighty.

Amen. And may God bless that reading of his word to us. And we'll sing again now to God's praise that carol, Still the Night.

Still the Night Still the Night, glory and night, sleeps the world hidden from sight.

He and Joseph in stable fare, watch for the child beloved and fear, sleep in heavenly rest, sleeping in heavenly rest.

[32 : 42] Still the night, glory and night, shepherds' words saw the light, very shining, we have known, but I'll hear the angels' song, Christ the Redeemer in heavenly rest.

Christ the Redeemer in heavenly rest. Christ the Redeemer is with you. Still the night, glory and night, Son of God, God, O how bright, love is shining from thy face, Christ the Redeemer is shining on thy face, Christ the Redeemer of grace, Savior, Savior, Savior, Savior, Savior, Savior, Savior, Savior, Savior, Savior, Savior, Savior, Savior, Savior, Savior, Savior, we'll turn back to God's word, we'll just pray for a moment as we go there.

One prayer point actually I wanted to share with you this evening is that Alan Bartley, who you know well as a congregation, Neil Cameron's son-in-law, is in hospital and has been the last couple of days.

he has COVID and it's hit him quite hard so he's been struggling the last few days. The rest of the family with the exception of Rachel have COVID as well but not quite as severely but Alan is struggling a bit so they would appreciate our prayers for him.

So let's pray. Lord God, we thank you for your word and we pray that you would give us ears to hear and eyes to see that you would help us if we've wandered from you to return to you as we hear that word coming through so powerfully in this book of Malachi.

[35 : 09] Speak to us, Lord, we pray and draw us close and hear us as we pray for others as well and we pray especially for Alan Bartley tonight. We thank you for his ministry in past years in this congregation.

And we ask, Lord, for your presence with him in hospital. We pray for your healing hand to be upon him that his oxygen levels would go up that he would begin to increase in health and strength again and that he would know your presence.

And for the rest of the family we pray for them also and we pray for Neil and Ketak who've been missing for so long now and we ask that you would bless them and that you would draw them back to us as well.

We know that their desire is to be here but health and strength are limited just now so we pray also that you would increase their strength and for every other person who is struggling just now or who is anxious just now and who is unable to be in this place we ask, Lord, that you would meet with them even as they listen wherever they are just now and we pray for others who have health and who have strength and who have opportunity but who have no desire and we ask that you would touch their hearts you are the God who seeks us before we seek you and we ask that you would seek those that we pray for that we see in our mind's eye and draw them close as we pray that you would draw us close and we pray this in Jesus' name Amen One of the things that I've had to watch over the last few weeks is Christmas films I don't know if all of you watch Christmas films but there are some homes where there's quite a lot

I can see from some of the expressions and faces that there's quite a lot of Christmas films go on and there's channels that are devoted to Christmas films they're on repeat all hours of the day and night and it seems to me having watched quite a number of them now that most of them follow the same plot line you have a guy or you have a girl and they're far from home and they're estranged from their loved ones they're estranged from their family they might be making a lot of money in stocks and shares in some big fancy city but they're not happy they're discontent they're struggling and that's how the film begins but then through the events of Christmas everything begins to change and love and light and joy bring through come through the film and they always finish with a happy ending so that's the general if you're thinking about watching a Christmas film probably don't bother because I've given you the plot line for virtually all of them far away unhappy and through Christmas they're brought close to their loved ones and they're happy and it seems to me that as we look at the book of Malachi that's not far from the plot line in one sense because Malachi writes

[38 : 34] God's messenger God's Malachi writes to a people who have lost that sense of God's love he writes to a people who are far from God and consequently there's parts of this book that are quite dark and bleak but it's a book that's filled full of hope and promise because those who are far from God are being called through Malachi to return to him and to be close to him this is the book remember that the Holy Spirit inspired to be used as the message that would prepare God's people for the first Christmas the coming of Jesus into the world it's God's last word to his people before the word became flesh and made his dwelling among us so there's two points tonight in the time that we have we first of all look at people who are far from God that's point number one and then we hear this call through Malachi to return to God so first of all all we're looking at this people who are far from God and I want to kind of think very big picture this evening and think about the story so far how do we know how can we recognise that these people were far from God what was going on what did it look like to be far from God and Malachi gives us various markers where we can see that God's people were not in a place of spiritual health they weren't close with God there were symptoms of sickness just as when we are sick there are symptoms we might have a high temperature we might be coughing we might be sneezing we might be tired our colour might be fading these are all signs that we're not well physically and there are signs here there are symptoms of spiritual illness there are signs and symptoms that show that God's people were far from him and so

I want to look at a few of these first of all so we can see that in them and perhaps we can see it in us because this is a diagnostic book so that if we are far from God we'll know that and we'll return to him so what were the symptoms of spiritual illness well the first one was the people they were burdened with worship worship for them it wasn't a joy it wasn't a thrill it was a burden something that they endured there's nothing about it that gripped them and that's what we saw in Malachi chapter 1 we see that God's people they're still coming to the place of worship they're still going to church she could stay they're still attending the temple they're still coming with their sacrifices even though they were poor and scrawny sacrifices they're still going through the motions of religion there's a form of godliness about them but there's no power there's no passion we sometimes sing that hymn that Charles

Wellesley wrote oh for a heart to praise my God a heart from sin set free you know that's that's a hymn that expresses a heart that's spiritually healthy but that hymn would not have been sung by the people that Malachi was addressing sin in in this book these people were not singing along with these lyrics their hearts were not tuned to worship and praise their hearts were not continually turning from sin but as we'll see they were actually remaining in sin determinedly so and so for them there was no joy about coming to church there's no joy in bringing sacrifices there's no thrill about worship when they thought about coming to the Lord's house what they said inwardly was what a burden what a burden to have to do this that was the first sign of being far from God and then moving from chapter 1 to chapter 2 thinking big picture here the second thing we see is that there are priests who are bored with ministry and that's the first nine verses of chapter 2 we looked at last Sunday evening we see a group of priests or ministers who are more interested in their own names and their own reputations than they have any interest in

God's name they're more interested in their own comfort than they're interested in God's glory and they're straying from God's word they're no longer leading people towards God but they're a stumbling block they're actually leading people away from God they're bored with ministry it's a sign of spiritual sickness being far from God and the third thing we see here is we see that amongst God's people in that place there's broken down faith there's broken faith and that takes us into chapter 2 verse 10 and following and listen to what God says in verse 10 have we not all one father did not one God create us why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another

Judah has broken faith so we might wonder what does broken faith look like we know what a broken down car looks like we know what broken devices look like what does broken down faith look like for these people at that time well it seems that God's people in that place at that time they'd forgotten who they were they'd forgotten that they were they were family they'd forgotten that God was their father they'd forgotten that they were brothers and sisters in the family of God they were neglecting fellowship with other believers and actually what they were doing was they were entering into marriages with unbelievers God's people verse 11 were were marrying the daughters of a foreign God and these daughters were were not turning from foreign gods to the one true God like Ruth did but they were actually turning their husbands away from the one true God so fellowship and unity were being neglected amongst

[46 : 06] God's people and they were turning to those who were actually leading them away from God and say we'd rather spend time with them and that broke their faith and so often that is a cause of broken faith you know when believers knowingly and willingly enter into intimate relationships with unbelievers there can be such damage we've seen it so often in ministry and Malachi warns of it here Paul the apostle warns of it in the New Testament 2 Corinthians 6 he says do not be yoked together with unbelievers for what do righteousness and wickedness have in common or what fellowship can light have with darkness and what the people here were doing is they were willingly and knowingly going from a place of light and seeking out darkness they were entering into relationships that they knew were going to take them away from

God and I think one very practical question we can ask when we're considering going into a relationship you know whether it's a deep friendship or whether it's a romantic relationship whether it's a business relationship I think one really helpful question to ask is will this relationship build up my faith in God or could it break it and that's a question that was not being asked in the time into which Malachi was writing there's broken faith the priests are bored with ministry the people worship was a burden to them the final thing we see here under this heading of being far from God is that they were broken marriages not only were God's people going into marriages with unbelievers who were bringing all their idols with them into the marriage but they were breaking their marriages with believers so in that context if you got bored with your wife if she was this is a technical term from that time if she was not pleasing to you you could just get rid of her very easily wives became disposable divorce was easy to get and yet the people they were still in church they were still at the place of prayer they were praying verse 13 with floods of tears but their prayers were not being answered and their sacrifices were not being accepted and so

God speaks plainly to them through Malachi and he challenges them in verses 13 to 16 about how likely they were taking their marriages and how displeased he was with the divorces verse 16 that they were just carrying on into and divorce was the particular sin in that place at that time that they were indulging it became acceptable to them they tolerated it in fact they loved it they loved to trade one wife that they were bored within and just get another newer model and they were loving what they were doing but God says I'm seeing what you're doing and I can tell you I hate what you're doing and I will not listen to your prayers until you repent of it now for us tonight this is not a word designed to blast anyone who's been divorced there are situations where the

Bible permits divorce we can go to Matthew 5 and see that there are those who in years gone by may have gone through divorce and have long since been forgiven any guilt in connection with that so this is not a verse that's used to blast people who have been divorced the reason divorce is highlighted in this particular section is that was the particular sin they were indulging so God says I can see into your hearts I can see into your lives and I'm going to press the one area that there needs to be change now for you and I the sin may not be divorce but it could be self-righteousness or it could be the sin of greed it could be the sin of anger it could be the sin of pride it could be the sin of lust it could be any range of sins all of us are sinners none of us are righteous all of us are guilty but the point is if we hold on to our sin whatever that sin is if we try to hide it in our hearts if we try to cherish it and indulge it that sin whatever it is will separate us from

God and leave us far from God and we'll find that worship is a burden and ministry is just boring speaking to people about Jesus I'd much rather do something else you would say and we end up broken down spiritually and maybe there's some here tonight and you know we're here in worship but to be honest we'd rather be anywhere else our minds are going here there and everywhere maybe we're here tonight but it feels like a burden maybe as we think about the way we spend our time the zeal we once had to tell people about Jesus is long gone maybe it seems like as we think about faith it's not growing but it's shrinking maybe we feel like we're far from God tonight you know like the guy or the girl in the

[53 : 04] Christmas movie far from the love we once knew far from the place that we know as home and if that's you or if that's me there's good news because God writes to those through Malachi who are far from him and he calls them to return to him that's the call tonight to all of us because we all drift none of us are as close as we should be to God and so for every one of us we need to hear this call to return to him day by day to be returning to him and isn't it amazing that this is the message that the God who loves us is saying to us return to me stay close to me you know when we express our love to someone as God does at the very beginning of this book in chapter one verse two when we express our love to someone if that person pushes us away time and time and time again we tend to very quickly just close the door on that person and say

I'm done with them I'm trying to love them I'm trying to come close to them but they keep pushing me away but God even though his people keep pushing him away he keeps on calling them back even though they do verse 17 weary him with all their false impressions of who he is he keeps on saying to them come back to me come close to me look at chapter 3 verse 1 God says see I will send my messenger who will prepare the way before me and we know even in the light of this morning service that these words about the messenger propel us 400 years forward into the heart of the Christmas story me and he because who is the messenger who was going to prepare the way for the Lord well the kids told us this morning repeatedly that's John the Baptist he prepared the way for

Jesus he pointed us to Jesus and it's only because of Jesus that we can return to God nothing in our hands we bring simply to his cross we cling naked come to him for rest for dress helpless come to him for grace it's all because of Christ that we can come to God or we can come back to God and that's the call tonight if you've never come to him come to him if you're far away come back to him so what's involved in that let me give you just a couple of headings before we finish well the first thing that's involved in returning to God is we're to seek him we're to seek him then suddenly verse 1 the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple the messenger of the covenant whom you desire will come says the

Lord Almighty and we know that the fulfillment of this verse in the most in the truest sense is found in Christ he is the Lord he is the messenger of the covenant the new covenant that would be sealed by his blood the one the world was seeking came on that first Christmas in Jesus but there's an application for us in these verses as we think about our own spiritual state for us to come to God or for us to return to God if we've drifted for us to know salvation for us to have the desires of our of our hearts satisfied we need to seek Jesus Jeremiah 29 and verse 13 says you will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart we used to talk about people who were who were seeking didn't we you'd see somebody who who started coming to church who once hadn't been in church and then they would start wandering along to a prayer meeting and they would start to show an interest in the

Bible they might appear at a Christianity explored course they might be picking Christian books off the shelves and as we saw these signs and we would say that's a person who's seeking the Lord they're seeking and we need to seek the Lord if we're to be close to him if we're to come to him if we're to return to him we need to seek the Lord we don't sit back and do nothing we don't wait for God to arrest us dramatically in some Damascus road experience we don't wait for God to massage our emotions until we're kind of emotionally overwhelmed we we're to seek him we're not to see the thing that I often hear people saying and that's if God wants to save me there's nothing I can do about it I just have to wait here and if God wants to save me he'll save me I just have to sit back here and wait for it to happen that's nonsense

[59 : 02] Malachi makes clear and Jesus makes clear that there is something that we can do and there is something that we must do if we are to be saved or if we're to return to God and be close and that's seek him get off our phones put down our iPads reconsider our priorities and seek him so a word to the lost tonight is seek the Lord while they may be found call upon her while he is near and a word to those who once were close to God but have lost their way seek him don't lament your state don't blame somebody else for it seek him return to him he says and I will return to you

Jesus says in Matthew 7 verses 7 and 8 ask and it will be given to you seek and you will find knock and the door will be opened to you for everyone who asks receives the one who seeks finds and the one who knocks the door will be opened so if we are to return to God we are to come to God we must seek him and the second thing that we can expect or we see as part of the process of coming back to God or coming to God is we have to expect that there is a refining you look at verses 2 to 4 of chapter 3 we see that word refining three times in two verses who can endure the day of his coming verse 2 who can stand when he appears he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver the Lord will have men then who will bring offerings and righteousness and so the verses go on so we have three times in these two verses for maximum volume for full emphasis that word refining if we are returning to

God if we are seeking intimacy with God if we are wanting to come to God for salvation we have to expect he will refine us I think it was Max Lucado who said God loves us just the way we are but he loves us too much to leave us that way he will refine us the last few weeks we have seen new managers come to various clubs in the world of football Newcastle Man United Harris Football Club new management now what do the players expect when there is a new manager in the club will they expect change fitness levels will be challenged diet may be scrutinized there will be new tactics there will be new strategies new training sessions there are all kinds of changes that are introduced by a new manager that are designed to refine the team and when we come to

God or when we return to God our lives come under his management his lordship and he sanctifies us he refines us he applies pressure to us he applies the heat of his word to us he cleanses us like a launderer it says he makes us more like the old sinful me sorry he makes us less like the old sinful me and more like the Christ that he calls us to be to be like and all that involves refining so when we come to God or return to God it's on these terms we don't come swaggering up to him we come in humility expecting change and we receive grace that's the third thing we're almost done and we see grace in verses five six and seven just step through them for a moment it says there in verse five so I will come near to you for judgment

I will be quick to testify against sorcerers adulterers perjurers against those who defraud laborers of their wages who oppress the widows and the fatherless and deprive aliens of justice and as God speaks to Malachi here he's saying I'm now analyzing your life I'm looking into your lives I'm seeing some of the things that are going on in your hearts and in your land and he gives a sample of the sins that he sees and all these sins they're damning sins they're all worthy of judgment so what do we expect to follow verse 5 well in our own mindset we probably expect there to be a heavy sentence applied here we probably expect God to say and in light of all these many sins this is the judgment that's coming but what does God say he lists the sins he exposes the sins he names the sins and then he says but do not fear me

[65 : 07] I the Lord do not change so you descendants of Jacob the sinner are not destroyed ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them return to me and I will return to you says the Lord Almighty and we might be deep in the Old Testament but what a word of grace here in the midst of such a bleak landscape spiritually God speaks and he promises grace for those who return to him he promises hope and intimacy for those who will repent of sin and return to God and notice that all the reasons that are listed there to encourage the people to come to God are because of who

God is not because of who they are the Lord reminds them here of who he is that he is the unchanging he's the slow to anger he is the abounding in love covenant making and covenant keeping faithful God so he says because of who I am return to me why would we not return to this kind of a God if we are wandering tonight why would we not come to him if we've never come to him because the final thing that's promised here is blessing and you can scan verses 8 to 12 my time is long since gone but you see there that in these verses is the promise of blessing if the people of God will turn from sin if they will return to God if they will trust him if they will obey him if they will change their ways there's the promise that he will return to them he will show them grace and the blessing of

God will fall what a promise for these people who will far from God if they will return to him he promises in these verses to take their land from being a place of darkness and a place of curse and transform it into a delightful land of light and of blessing he finished with the Christmas film you'll never see a review of a Christmas film that's positive because every critic of the Christmas films will say it's not real life you know it's all rose tinted spectacles it's not the real world it's some kind of

Christmassy marshmallow dreamy reality that people who were so far away and sad would finish up with such a happy ending it's cloud cuckoo land it never happens but this message of Malachi to finish with let's be reminded of the fact this is reality the hallmark films may not be but this is this is not a too good to be true message this is the truth of the gospel we were far away from God because of our sin some may still be far away from God tonight but if even in these moments we will bow our heads and return to him or come to him we have the promise through Malachi that he will return to us and he will bring with him blessing that will last not just for Christmas day but this blessing is a blessing that lasts for eternity you you're far from

God tonight if you are confess it admit it to God in prayer and then hear his call and heed his call to return to him find grace find blessing as you seek the Lord and we'll pray heavenly father we pray that we would come in response to this call that we hear through Malachi we confess that we are a people who are prone to wander we are a people because of our pride we are reluctant to come to you and to receive grace we want to pay for our own salvation we want to earn our own way but we recognize as we look in your word that there is no possibility of that none of us are righteous not one and there is only one way to come to

[71 : 29] God come to the father through Jesus the son we thank you that all of the the words in Malachi are pointing us to Christ we thank you that he is the one who made it possible for those even who were called enemies of God to be reconciled with God Jesus is the one who makes it possible for those who are far from God to return and find intimacy so we pray for all of us as we bow before you just now we ask Lord that those who are outside of Christ still in sin unrepented would even in these moments bow before you and confess sin ask for your forgiveness and ask for you to come into our lives as we as we seek forgiveness as we seek your face and for any Lord who are at a distance tonight who may say with the hymn writer where is the blessing that I knew when once and first I knew the Lord for any who have lost that close walk with God we pray that this Christmas time we would not stay at a distance but that we would seek you as you are able to be found at this time in the day of grace and that we would be brought close to hear our prayers take away our sin we ask in Jesus name Amen we'll sing to conclude hymn number 191 O come all ye faithful we'll sing just the first three verses of this hymn we'll sing the fourth and the Christmas Eve service but we'll just sing the first three verses of this hymn to conclude O come all ye faithful joyful and triumph

O come ye O come ye to Bethlehem come and behold them born the king of angels O come let us adore him O come let us adore him O come let us adore him Christ the Lord God of God light of light glory of healthcare and

Christ the Lord Lord O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.

Sing, boys of angels, sing in exultation. Sing, all ye citizens of heaven.

[75 : 26] Glory to God, in the highest. O come let us adore Him, O come let us adore Him, Christ the Lord.

And now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of God the Holy Spirit be with us all now and evermore. Amen.