

The Messenger of the Covenant

By Paris Reidhead*

Will you return again to Malachi, the 3rd Chapter. Our thinking shall be from this Chapter. I believe God has a message in it for our hearts. Our text, the first seven verses. May I read them, asking you to pay particular attention to them:

“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. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner’s fire, and like fullers’ soap: And 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, and 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, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts. For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed. Even from the days of yours fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinance, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts, But ye said, Wherein shall we return?”

Now the subject may well be titled, Revival, but I have chosen The Messenger of the Covenant, because I want to fix your eyes upon the Lord Jesus Christ this morning. We hear a great deal being said, and every day.. It is not something peculiar to ours, but as I read and become better acquainted with the writings of the Reformed Church, that is since the time of Martin Luther¹, there has not been a generation but what the Christians that have loved God have cried out to God for revival. And they rightly should.

But the question often arises, Why does revival come? A hundred years ago and more Charles Finney² wrote a book saying, “Revival is like harvest. If you will follow the laws, you will receive the reward.” But it is not that simple. You cannot reduce revival down simply to laws obeyed and adhered to. There is more to it than that. There are laws, certainly. But it is not something that can be produced at your will, as you wish. It is something that the Lord Himself must sovereignly and supernaturally bring. We understand that, though we shall explore the laws a little later. But it is not something that you press a button and automatically there is a result. But when does revival come? This often is a question that we ask. When does it come? Well obviously, there again we have principles, principles that must be understood. But you must recognize that there are two levels of response. When you do everything that you think the Father wants it may not be just as He has desired. You have, of course, having been a child on your own and having had experience in watching them and observing them, known that children often interpret orders a little differently than the parents do. Mother says, “Now dust this. And dust means to go like this twice, in different places,” and then, according to the child, it is dusted. And so he says, “Well I have dusted that. What else can I do? Wipe the dishes. Well that means, just brush the water off under the palm of the hand with the towel. Let the rest of it weep and drip as it may, but the dish is wiped.” Then the mother comes and says, “Now look. This is not dusted.” “But I dusted it.” “No. Dust it. Do it over again.” And sometimes it may need to be done two or three times before the child begins to understand the mother’s definition. Do you see?

And so it is that we often feel that we have done exactly what the Lord wants. According to our definition we have. But He is responding, not on what we understand, but on what He understands. So when does revival come? Does it comes when we have done all that we thought we should have done? No, it comes when we have done all that He has asked us to do and the measure and the standard is not ours, but His. And how does revival come? Ah, this is the question. This is the question that is before us. What does the Lord Jesus Christ do when He comes in revival blessing? For He is the Messenger of the Covenant.

I am going to ask you to note prayerfully verses 2 to 4, and then 5 and 6 and 7. We have three points. The first is this. That when our Lord comes to any company of people, to any one that is expecting Him and desiring Him, *He comes first and*

¹ Martin Luther (1483-1546) German monk, former Catholic priest, who wrote the Ninety-Five Theses.

² Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875) Leader in the Second Great Awakening in the United States

foremost as the purifier of His people. Will you notice verses 2 to 4. “Who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when He appeareth? For He is like a refiner’s fire, and like fullers’ soap: And He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver:...”

The first thing the Lord Jesus Christ does when He comes in liberty to work as He desires to work, in any home, in any heart, in any church, in any organization that exists for His glory and praise, the first thing He does is to purify His people. Now you will never feel that revival is come, and you have missed it. You have certain indications which are hallmarks of His working. It is essentially this. When the Spirit of God is free to work, and His work is recognized, He causes you to feel the same way about things as He feels. He puts into your heart His attitude. Previous to that time, you have been feeling either complacent or grieved. You may have been complacent when you ought to have been grieved. You may have been grieved when you ought to have been at ease. For our judgment is often so incorrect and so inadequate. But when the Spirit of God is released to do what He wants to do He makes the things appear as they do to Him. Little sins which have been overlooked by His people, now acquire the size and the importance they have had all the while in the Lord’s mind. You will feel at that time that nothing that grieves the God whose name is holy is small. Nothing is little. Up until that time you have been quite content to be satisfied with your own standard of judgment. But this is not important. I can do that. I can do this. This does not matter. But when the Lord comes He comes as the refiner of silver, and thing, which would have been all right to the eye of man, is absolutely forbidden to the eye of God. You understand that the analogy He uses here as the refiner of silver has to speak of hidden impurities. One can take a lump of silver, and put it on the buffing wheel, I am told, and have it appear almost pure silver. But there will still be many hidden impurities which stand in the way of its perfect usefulness. Before that can possibly be used as pure silver or would be used, it must be put into the caldron over the fire. And you can see the little vessel of clay, or whatever it may be, that has been placed over the coal. The bellows are working. The heat is becoming more and more intense, being transferred to the silver, first a drop, and then another; and then as it all melts there is a scum that the one who polished the block of silver never imagined was there. But as the heat continues, and as the silver boils, more and more hidden impurities come to the surface.

Now it says, He sits as a refiner of silver. This is a most interesting thing. The refiner of silver in the days before it was all so technical as it is today, (but in primitive countries this still prevails) the refiner of silver is so seated in relation to the boiling pot that he can look into it. He has a little slender handled skimmer that he reaches down and brushes the impurity to the side, and gently lifts it off and puts it away because even this will be boiled down again for whatever value it may still have. But as he takes off the impurity that rises to the surface, he is looking for something. This silver will be pure when he can see his own image reflected in it without distortion. And this is what the Lord does when He comes in revival blessing. He by the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of burning that comes to your heart and to mine and applies to it the burning of His holiness in the fire of His justice and purity, to the end that there may come out of our life all the hidden impurity that no one has seen but God, and no one is concerned about but God, impurity which is distorting the image of the One who desires to see His own face reflected. And so it is that this is the work of God in revival when in periods of spiritual intensity He is released to move and work and bless. It will be to the end of bringing out from within you all deep down in the hidden crevices of your conscience, your memory, and your heart, all of that which is defiling. Outwardly you may have appeared right, but this is the work of the Spirit of God in revival, to purify the inner part of man.

Then we discover also that He is like fullers’ soap. The two are not synonymous. For the one washes out the stain that has already come and causes there to be a bleaching that is going to turn the garment into spotless white. And I believe that the one is the work of the Spirit of God in revealing to us all that which is wrong and bringing out hidden impurity, and the other is the cleansing of the precious Blood that washes that which was scarlet and crimson till it is white as snow. And so God is so gracious. He not only shows us what is wrong with us, but He deals with that which He shows us. Then we discover that He is not only the purifier of His people, but we find in verse 5 that He is the *punisher of the perverse*. For there have been some that have been identified with His people who were not. He speaks of these in Revelation, saying if Israel, of Judah, Jews but were not (and said) and are of the synagogue of Satan. And so in revival this always is the work. The Spirit of God not only purifies His people, cleansing them, but He also discloses and reveals that which is spurious and false and untrue and improper. And I will come near to you in judgment.

We have often prayed for revival, but I wonder if we understand when we understand exactly what the Lord will do, if we are concerned about it then as we were before. Too frequently we think that revival is just a time of religious excitement when church membership swells and numbers grow. And so it should be, and frequently is. But it has to be something far more basic and real and meaningful than that. And so He says, *I will come near to you in judgment*. This is a preliminary judgment. This is not the final judgment in respect to revival. This is that work wherein there is an exposing of those who have a name to live but are dead. I will be swift against sorcerers, or those who have been amenable to and under the control of evil spirits. Those that have had profession of faith in Christ but actually have been listening to and acceding to the voices of demons. "I will be swift against sorcerers, and against adulterers, and against false swearers, ..." And so He is dealing with the relationship to Satan. He is dealing with the relationship to the flesh. He is dealing with the relationship to other people. And he is saying that there are those that have had a name to live that have claimed to know the Lord and know the plan of salvation, but they have never broken. They have never actually repented, never known true faith. They have everything but Christ, and this company will be disclosed.

We are applying this, of course, to the church, and I understand the prophetic sense in which it comes. But this is a basic principle that always follows. Whenever He is released to do what He wants to do, He separates the precious from the vile. Those who are His from those who are not. It is possible to masquerade. It is possible to go incognito for a time, but when the Lord comes in this release of His presence, then those who know Him not are revealed. We discover something else, Verses 6 and 7, that He is the protector (I have said this that you might see that promises mean much to God.) *He is the protector of His promises*. I am Jehovah. I change not. And now He has brought this attribute of His immutability, to bear upon all of His promises. I am Jehovah. I do not change. I am always going to see the hidden thing and hate it. I am always going to hate the hypocrite and deal with this hypocrisy. It will be exposed. Whenever I come, I come as I am. Do not think that you are going to find a lesser version of Me. Do not think that you are going to find less than I am, for I cannot dilute My essence. I cannot change My character, said He. I come only as I am. Whenever the messenger of the covenant is allowed to work, He always works in all that He is. Purifier of His people, the punisher of the perverse, and He is there to protect His promises. I am the Lord. I change not. And then again, He says, "Even from the very first your fathers have gone away from Mine ordinances, and have not kept them." But now the promise. "Return unto Me and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts." This is His promise. He is a covenant keeping God. And our Lord is the messenger of the Covenant.

You remember the covenant that He made with Solomon, wherein was said, "If My people which are called by My name will humble themselves and seek My face and pray and turn from their wicked way, then will I hear from Heaven, then will I forgive their sin, then will I heal their land" (II Chr. 7:14). This is the promise that God brings His own, immutable, unchangeable character to reinforce. Here He has insured that if His people will return to Him, He will return to them. Can one then say, "Why there is no use to pray? There is no use to humble yourself before God. There is no use to seek His face. God's arm is heavy and cannot be moved. His ear is heavy-He cannot hear." Oh, no. He said, I have brought My whole character. I have put it on the line. All that I am and have I am prepared to be with you what I have ever been; I am the God who changes not. I am the unchangeable One, the immutable One. There is no shadow of turning with Me. So when He comes He comes as He is. There will be no mistake about it. We cry out, O Lord, reveal Thyself in the midst of Thy people. Yes, I am sure that as John there on the Island of Patmos on that good Lord's Day morning, was looking back, saying, O God, revive Thy work in the midst of the years. Come, Lord, as you came before. John did not know what it would do to him. He was not aware of it. But he said, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a great voice as of a trumpet, saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last... And I turned to see the voice that spoke with me, and being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks. And in the midst of the seven candlesticks, one like unto the Son of Man, clothed with a garment, down to the foot; girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and His hairs were white like wool, as white as snow. His eyes were as a flame of fire. His feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace. His voice as the sound of many waters. He had in His right hand seven stars, and out of His mouth went a sharp two edged sword, and His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead" (Rev. 1:10-17). Now this is the Messenger of the covenant. And when John who had leaned upon His bosom, whose intimate friend he was, saw Him when He came that day to the Island where John was exiled, he fell at His feet at dead. Why? Because He is very God of very God, The purifier of His people, the punisher of the perverse, and the protector of His promise.

But when we understand this, we realize that just as the first verse of our text says, I will send My messenger, The Lord Jesus has been sending messengers. He sent... The Father sent before our Lord, John the Baptist whose work it was to prepare the way of the Lord. And you recall what his testimony was. "Repent, for there is One coming after me, preferred before me; He it is that will baptize you with the Holy Ghost and fire" (Mat. 3:11). God has promised to send a deliverer. The deliverer is coming. Make straight the path. Cut down the mountains and fill up the valleys, and make a way for His going. This was the messenger. And I believe that God is continuing to send messengers today to the church. I understand that He is doing it now through every voice that stands before a company of people as you are seated before me at this time. Everyone who stands and entreats on behalf of God for those eternal, unchangeable principles that God cannot alter only at the expense of His own character is in a sense a messenger. Our Lord had in His hand seven stars. And these we understand to have been the messengers that He used in the churches. He has ever been pleased to use voices, and He uses voices.

If you study the history of the church since the time Martin Luther revolted against the tyranny of Rome back there in 1517 until the very present, you will discover that God has used messengers. You will have to hear some messenger. It will be the messenger of His written Word, these who being dead yet speak. It will be the message that you hear on the air, if you should be tuned in to someone who is faithfully proclaiming His Word. It will be that which you have read from some book that has stirred your heart. I think of the time in England every sermon of Charles Spurgeon³ was published. On one occasion a factory shipped china over to Sweden, and used paper from the local printery. And in these papers were the copies of Spurgeon's messages. And as they were taken to Sweden, they fell into the hands of those who unpacked the china. And they carefully went through and smoothed out the papers, and read the sermons, and a great move of God in that period in the late '50's broke out in Sweden because God used a messenger who was not even there, to emphasize His Word. But always it has been that the principle is, the people find fault with the messenger rather than considering the message. And thus, even a newspaper that had been stamped with the Word of God, when it was taken by a humble, devout, earnest, honest heart, could be the instrument of revival in Sweden. "Behold I will send My messenger and He shall prepare the way before Me." And it is thus necessary that if we are to have the Lord come in power to bless, that the messengers must be heart.

The first thing is to ascertain, not who the messenger is, but is the message God's. Is the Word God's. You have heard it said, "Never consider...Whenever you are criticized, consider the source." I believe this is utterly wrong. When criticized, consider the criticism, regardless of the source. And so He says, I will send My messenger. John the Baptist came, clad with camel's hair, eating locusts and wild honey, and the people of Israel said, Here is a man that we cannot hear. He is uncouth. He is rude. But he had God's message, carried God's way. And thus it behooves us always, ever, to recognize that God is speaking. He has been speaking. He is not starting something this morning. He has been speaking to our land for the last hundred years. The last time in America that we had heavenly Holy Ghost revival that touched an area was in the time when Charles Finney was ministering up in New York State. I believe that the Spirit of God is calling back again that just as He has worked in other lands where they have been able to see Him and hear the truth, so He is preparing to work today. And I do not believe it is any harder for God to settle down over Manhattan Island than it was for Him to settle down over the Island of the Hebrides. I believe He is still the same, utterly unchanged and unchangeable, but there must come a time when we recognize that God has sent His word of unchangeable, eternal principles.

Now what are they? It is repent. The message of John is the unchanging message. If I take you to Revelation for just a moment, you discover in the 2nd Chapter, verse 5, that our Lord said something to this church at Ephesus. "Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works, or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of this place except thou repent." Now this was the word of the Lord. This was the Head of the church. This was the One whom John saw that day, and the messenger that He sent thus (through John)...John was telling of the church at Ephesus. This exiled prophet was telling this people that were rich and increased with goods, and had need of nothing, that God had something against them. This church that had so much, and yet had lost their first love and turned quickly out of the way, they must repent, or He would come and take the candlestick from them.

³ Charles Haddon (C.H.) Spurgeon (1834-1892) British Particular Baptist Preacher

Then if you see what He said to the church at Pergamos, verses 14, 15, and 16: "But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth" (Rev. 2:14-16).

This is the Head of the church. This is the Lord Jesus speaking. And He is sending His messenger. His messenger is John, this one that has been with Him those three years of ministry, but now nearly 90 years of age, is talking to the churches and talking to us, talking to me, to my heart, to yours.

Verses 15 - 20 in the 3rd Chapter also give us the testimony of the Lord. He is writing to the Laodiceans: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of My mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of Me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me" (Rev. 3:15-20). This is the message. This is the one that He sends. This is that testimony that He Brings to every generation, to you, on this occasion as He has in the past. Always to the individual, to the home, to the church, to any group, God's message is one exhorting us to brokenness, to humbleness, and confession, He is bringing us constantly back to the place of beginnings.

Why? Because He said, "My Name is Holy. I dwell in the high and holy place with him that is of a broken and of a contrite spirit to revive the hearts of the broken, and to revive the spirits of the contrite ones" (Isa. 57:15).

But come with me just a little further. We have seen something of what He does when He comes, something of whom He sends to prepare the way for His coming. But I want you to just look for a closing moment at who it is that comes. For He says, "The Lord whom ye seek. The Lord whom ye delight in." Do you seek the Lord? Is there a deep yearning and longing in your heart for Him? Oh, how many have wanted revival, not because the Lord was coming, but because numbers were coming, or money was coming, or something else was coming. But here He says, The Lord whom ye seek. Ye shall search for Me and find Me when ye shall seek for Me with all your heart. What is the deep desire of your heart today? For what do you yearn? Is it longing that you have for something, for an it, for anything less than Himself? What can the Lord do for us, if we have less than Him in our eyes, if we see less than Him as the focus of our desire, then you know we cannot expect Him to bless and meet us. We will have to resort to our own ingenuity. We will have to resort to psychology and to all the promotional tricks and means. The only possible way that we can have blessing of God is to want what God wants us to want. And God wants us to want Himself. "Ye shall seek for Me and find Me when ye shall search for Me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13). Oh, we cannot want a bi-product; we cannot want the secondary things. We must have our eyes fixed upon Him. The Lord whom ye seek, the Lord whom ye delight in, this is the One that stands outside the door of the church, this church, your heart, my heart, ever yearning, longing, wanting to be wanted. Listen, He died for desire of you, out of longing for you He endured the agony of the Cross, and now He longs to be longed for. He longs to be wanted, for Himself, not some bi-product, not some secondary thing. The Lord whom ye seek. Is your eye focused on Him? Is your desire for Him? Even though He is the spirit of burning, even though He is the purifier of His people and the punisher of the perverse. Are you longing for Him? Lord, come in all of Thy purity, and all of Thy Grace, all Thy Holiness, because I love you. You have drawn my heart and hidden me in the wounds of your hands and side, and opened the cleft in the rock, and I long for you.

Can it be that today I am speaking to some who say, Oh, I long for Him. I am not caring about any secondary results. I am not wanting Him because He will bring something or give something. I want Him for Himself. The Lord will we seek. The Lord will we delight in. He shall suddenly come, shall suddenly come. This is His promise. For just as it is said that the night is darkest just before the dawn, so it is that faith is never in vain, preparation of heart is never wasted. Elijah was called by his people saying, "We are in draught, and we are famishing. Do something for us." He said, "You are a wicked people. I can do nothing for you." And then he went to the Lord and the Lord said, Yes, you go to them. Prepare for blessing. Prepare for blessing. And so, Elijah

said, All right, I will do it. What is it, Lord? And he called the elders and he said, the Lord told me to dig ditches, to dig ditches, and they are up on a hill and there is no way for the water to get there, not water above them. He said, That's all right. God said, Dig ditches. And so they go in and put trenches and irrigation ditches through their parched fields and it is tiresome, laborious work, and they say, Where is the water coming from? Elijah does not know what he is talking about. Here he has us digging ditches and hewing this dry ground. Look at it. It is dust. Where is the water coming from? No well. We ought to be digging a well. We ought to be...Dig ditches. But then you know what happened. God caused a flood to come and the waters came up over the hill and every one who had dug ditches had his soul irrigated. For the waters came suddenly.

Suddenly. He says, Plow up the fallow ground of your heart at this time to seek the Lord till He come and reign righteousness upon you...till He come, for He shall come suddenly. Where? To His temple, to His temple. But when He comes, it is to His temple. When the Lord comes to satisfy your heart with His fullness, it is not to satisfy you but to His temple, your body, that it might be His possession, that He might fill you with His fullness. When the Lord comes to His church with revival blessing, it is not that our church should be blessed that we may be prosperous and numerically increase. It is that God may have something; for Himself, that the Lord may have His church, His temple in which He can reign, in which He can rule, in which He can be the Head, in which all things can be to the glory of the praise of His grace.

And so we want the Lord to come suddenly to His temple. We must remember what He does when He comes. We must remember who He sends to prepare the way. We must remember who it is that comes. It is the Lord. This one of whom we spoke, before whom John fell as dead.

Now you say, What must I do? What is the answer in my heart and life? Oh, dear heart, the answer is simple. Break before Him. Break before Him. It is not hard to find or hard to seek, but break before Him. Put yourself in the way of blessing. Break up the fallow ground of your heart. Just break before Him until anything and everything that grieves Him is out, and named and verbalized under the Blood. Seek the Lord with all your heart. Let your heart turn toward Him, not something, not some gift, not some bi-product, just Himself. "My heart pants for Thee as the heart panteth for the waterbrook. My soul panteth for Thee, O Lord" (Psa. 42:1-2). Just Himself. The Lord whom ye loved, the Lord whom ye delight in, shall suddenly come to His temple. Shall we bow our hearts in prayer?

Grant, Heavenly Father, that we shall sense and see, and know Thy Word, the truth of it. Thou knowest this company. Thou knowest each one before Thee. Thou knowest the purpose of this exposition and exhortation. Thou knowest, Lord, what Thou wouldst do in the days of this week as we take the Word, The Lord shall suddenly come to His Temple. Oh, burn it upon our memories, Lord. Burn it into our minds and hearts, and grant that we shall realize we seek not in vain. But every step we take is nearer Him. Every preparation we make is nearer to the day when all is right and in order that He can come and reign in righteousness upon us. Lord, should there be any that are weary in seeking, weary in well doing, weary in yearning after Thee, may the promise of Thy Word, Behold I stand at the door and knock, just that He is there at the very threshold, at the very door, waiting until all is in readiness, waiting until the door is opened from the inside by our obedience and brokenness, our confession and our turning to Thee, in order that He can come in and sup with us and satisfy ourselves with Himself. So, Lord, burn this word deep into our hearts this morning and let it do its work, in Jesus' Name. Amen.

Let us stand for the benediction. "Now may 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, make us perfect in every good work to do His will, working in us that which is wellpleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, to whom be the glory now and forever. Amen" (Heb. 13:20-21).

* Reference such as: Delivered at The Gospel Tabernacle Church, New York City on Sunday Morning, February 11, 1962 by Paris W. Reidhead, Pastor.