

Turn from sin. The moral side of life is always under the control of the individual, and hence the gospel calls to repentance, a turning from the evil ways. Judgment and purification are necessary. (b) Follow the conditions of salvation. The soul can surrender to Christ, can use the means of grace, can believe. This is the human side to salvation, and the teacher should seek to have all feel this responsibility. This may well be a decision day with many of our young people. The teacher should prepare for it, teach for it and work for it.

For Teachers of the Boys and Girls

"Have you ever watched for the morning?" There is a long, dark period (400 years, it turns out to be) before the Jewish nation. Malachi, the last of the prophets, has a final word from God: it is a bridge over the dark chasm; it is a star of hope over the far horizon. This Lesson holds that word. Have the scholars pick it out of v. 1. Very likely their first try will be wrong. Here it is: "The Lord . . . shall . . . come." That is the good news. That is the star of hope.

But His "messenger" (herald) first, v. 1. Who? Matt. 3:1-3. What preparation did he command? See Matt. 3:2; for the obstacle is sin. Sin must go out, before God will come in.

Then the coming Lord? How shall He come? Whither? V. 1. Who is He? "The Lord." For His character and relation to His people see such passages as Gen. 17:1; Ex. 3:6, 14; Ps. 95:3-7; 1 Tim. 1:17; Rev. 4:8. Who is He? "The messenger of the covenant." Who is this? See Ex. 14:19; 23:20; Zech. 1:11. (Explain "the covenant"—God's promise and pledge to save and keep His people.)

Were they looking for Him? "Whom ye delight in" shows that their one hope was the promised Deliverer. (See Isa. 40:3-5; 42:1 Mic. 5:2.)

In what character were they expecting Him to come? As a triumphant earthly King, who would lead their nation to highest honor and fame.

But read v. 2. Explain "refiner's fire," "fullers' sope." V. 5 is the best comment. "A fierce, relentless King," they cry: go over the items one by one, the awful sins of the people. Yes, the coming King is fierce against them, will burn them up, will bleach them out. Is this unmerciful? The beautiful outcome is given in v. 4.

Oh, how God longs to bring sinners back to Himself! Have you ever seen a strong man weep? There is a great sob in vs. 6, 7. Have you ever thought of how the father of the "prodigal son" must have felt? V. 7 (first sentence) shows the anguish God feels; the second sentence the length and breadth and depth of His love. Surely no one can resist it.

But they did:—"Wherein shall we return?" they cried. See how God brings their sin home to them and its awful desert (vs. 8, 9); and then follow up with the wonderful promises of vs. 10-12. (Explain "tithes," "windows of heaven," "the devourer.") Conclude by showing on what the blessing turns—giving God His due: serving God in the way He appoints; in one word, taking God's way, instead of our own way—just what the "messenger" commanded. "Repent" (Matt. 3:2): just what Jesus Himself commanded. "Repent" (Mark 1:15; Luke 13:3). Can there be a fairer offer than that of v. 7 of our Lesson—"Return unto Me, and I will return unto you?"

ADDED HINTS AND HELPS

In this section will be found further assistance under various headings.

Lesson Points

Before God can come into our hearts they must be cleansed from sin. v. 1.

Heaven must get into us before we can get into heaven. v. 2.

Purity is well worth the price of pain. v. 3. Our gifts please God only when they are

prompted by a loving and grateful heart. v. 4.

Human excuses shrivel up before the divine testimony. v. 5.

None but those who are holy can dwell with a God of holiness. v. 6.

The door of pardon opens wide at the touch of the penitent. v. 7.

No calculation can be correct that leaves God out of account. vs. 8, 9.