

Five centuries after Malachi’s inspired prediction at the end of the Old Testament, Matthew, Mark and Luke all echo his testimony: “Behold, I will send a messenger who will prepare the way before me...says the LORD Almighty” (Mal 3:1; Mt 11:10; Mk 1:2; Lk 7:27). The gospel writers tell us that Malachi’s foretold messenger is John the Baptist. His purpose is to prepare the way for his cousin Jesus, born of a virgin. Note that Malachi indicates the way to be prepared is not just for any prophet, priest or king, but for “me” says the LORD. Like the proud parents who display on their bumper “My Child is an Honor Roll Student,” the Virgin Mary could have slapped a sticker on the back of her donkey which said “My Child is God!”

Christmas is a time to celebrate Immanuel, God with us. What mystery! The God of the universe makes himself most small, even while ruling over the universe. Athanasius (b. 296 AD), the African bishop who is commonly known as the “Father of Orthodoxy” for his defense against the heretics, said it this way: “The Word was not hedged in by His body, nor did his presence in the body prevent His being present elsewhere as well.... No. The marvelous truth is, that being the Word, so far from being Himself contained by anything, He actually contained all things Himself” (*On the Incarnation*, 17). God, the one in whom all things have always existed (Col 1:16-17), the one in whom all people live and move and have their being (Acts 17:28), this is the one we find in the midst of the muck and mire of human existence, contained in a manger. This is the Athanasian orthodoxy to which we must always return: Jesus Christ fully human and fully divine, at the same time.

Malachi declares, “the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come near” (3:1). When you think of God “suddenly” coming near, how does it make you feel? Do you receive it as glad tidings? The major theme of Malachi is that God will come near, but at first glance it may seem like a less comforting presence than the typical Yuletide one. Indeed, Malachi draws a connection between near, and *fear*! “I will come near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against [the unjust],” the LORD Almighty continues, against those who “do not fear me” (3:5).

This kind of talk may elicit the ominous foreboding of those big black highway billboards—the ones with the white letter messages from the Almighty:

“DON’T MAKE ME COME DOWN THERE.” GOD

Thankfully, God has come “down there.” That’s the good news of Christmas, right? But how does God coming near for judgment square with the good news we proclaim at Christmas? Is it good news for some, but not for most? How do I know it’s good news for me? In light of

Malachi 3:5 above, is Christmas really more like the billboard than we imagined? After all, Jesus himself said, “For judgment I have come into the world” (Jn 9:39).¹

The Judgment of Jesus

On the night he was betrayed, gathered with his disciples, Jesus delivered what has been labeled his “High Priestly Prayer.” Here Jesus gives us more understanding of what it means that he has arrived for judgment. Towards the end he states, “For their sakes I sanctify myself” (Jn 17: 19). It appears that Jesus understood judgment as beginning with the judgment of Jesus himself, and always for the sake of the ones he came to save. Sanctification means purification, a setting free, or setting apart, from sin and unholiness. Yet we are used to thinking of *us* being sanctified, not Jesus! Isn’t sanctification a process of becoming more like Jesus? What could it mean that Jesus is being sanctified?

Following Athanasius, other early Church Fathers were more direct in insisting that “the unassumed is the unhealed” (Gregory, b. 329). This understanding pointed to Jesus’ assumption of our corrupt flesh, not just a sinless, pre-fall flesh, reaching to the depths of our depravity to heal humanity from the inside out. In the words of James Torrance, “the doctor becomes the patient! He assumes that very humanity which is in need of redemption.” This is how Athanasius understood Jesus as the Great Physician of our humanity.

Many today do not adhere to such a view of “the assumption;” it may be that the thought of Jesus taking a sinful nature is too unbecoming of God in the flesh, or perhaps it is too risky—for if Jesus did take on such a nature, wouldn’t it be inevitable, as it is for us, that he would then sin? The writer of the book of Hebrews testifies that Jesus was made like us in every way, even to the point of being tempted exactly as we are, and yet he did not sin (Heb 4:15).

Clearly, even if we favor a pre-fall humanity for Jesus’ becoming “flesh,” we have to deal with Paul’s astounding Scriptural assertion: “He made him who had no sin to become sin for us...” (2 Cor 5:21). Here God assumes not just pristine human nature, or even corrupt human flesh, but something most heinous—sin itself. He does this by becoming the very thing he means to destroy. God therefore reveals his capability to be everything that we are in our sinfulness while still remaining himself (the doctor becoming the patient even while always the doctor). With this picture of Jesus being simultaneously God in the highest, and humanity at its lowest,

¹ Jesus here (Jn 9:39) states he has come into the world for judgment. In Jn 12:47 he states, “I came not to judge the world, but to save the world.” Together these are encapsulated in Jn 12:48, “The one who rejects me and does not receive my word has a judge; on the last day the word I have spoken will serve as a judge.” In other words, Jesus does not come to judge, but by unity of his person and work, he is an implicit judgment in and of himself—he is the Word that will prove to be sharper than any two edged sword (Heb 4:12-14).

our Athanasian orthodoxy is stretched to the limit.² Whatever our understanding of the atonement, Jesus' full humanity must not be separated from his full divinity. In his prophetic voice, it is Malachi who helps us to avoid this mistake.

The Judgment of Humanity in Jesus

Much to the chagrin of Malachi, Israel's priests have not lived up to their calling. Failing to hold the people accountable, they have accommodated a version of what we would call a cheap grace which promotes disregard for the law of God (antinomianism). The Israelites have ascertained that God doesn't care about justice and that he must be pleased with evildoers, since, after all, the wicked are flourishing (2:17). When the line between good and evil becomes blurred, a "why bother" attitude arises in the people.

Also in chapter two, Malachi hearkens back to God's original covenant with the original, and faithful, priesthood of Levi. In Malachi's reference to the past, we also recognize the prophetic description of the coming Messianic priesthood: "My covenant was with him, a covenant of life and peace...he revered me and stood in awe of my name. True instruction was in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips. He walked with me in uprightness, and turned many from sin." Malachi notes that a priest (like a prophet) is meant to be "a messenger" of the Lord (2:5-7). As with the prophet John the Baptist, the high priest who comes after Levi is revealed to actually have existed before him: Jesus Christ is the appointed priest of the highest order (Heb 5: 5-10).

Malachi, then, looks back at what a priest should be, and he looks forward to the day when the people will be refined by the purification of the priesthood (3:2-3a). He is therefore looking further to the one who will supremely fill the priestly role. In other words, central to God's act "as a refiner" is his commitment to "purify the Levites [the priests!] and refine them like gold and silver." Then and only then, foresees Malachi, "the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness" (3:3).³

² A disavowal of Athanasian orthodoxy takes two basic forms: 1) Objectification: "He made him who had no sin to become sin for us," could be understood as God the Father acting *on* God the Son for atoning purposes; the doctor and the patient are no longer one and the same subject. Or 2) Kenosis: it could be ascertained that the "emptying" of Phil 2:7 must dictate some kind of lessening or even temporary loss in Jesus' divinity so that he can take on the sin of the world. Together, the logic runs as follows: because God can't touch sin, and Jesus was made sin, Jesus had to take at least a few days off from being God! (Being smitten *by* God in the meantime).

³ Malachi 3:4 continues "and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years." This hearkening back to days gone by, I would argue, when interpreted Christologically, might perhaps refer to Creation. Even if the Levitical priesthood was relatively pure as originally established by God, it fell short of Christ's perfect human-Godward mediation, the mystery waiting to be revealed to Israel and to the world. As all humans are created in Christ (Eph 2:10), this mediation is in place from the beginning.

In the prophet's mind, the scope of true priesthood has probably not expanded beyond Israel. Still, in glimpsing the righteous offerings which will finally be given, Malachi is providing us a rich portrayal of Christ as the high priest of our humanity. Hebrews declares that Jesus is the Apostle and High Priest whom we confess (Heb 3:1)—as Apostle he is sent to represent God to humanity, and as High Priest he in turn represents humanity to God (Heb 5:1). Revealed in Christ is not on a covenant fulfilled from the God side but also from the human side, allowing humans to participate in the Person of their High Priest, i.e., *in Christ*. What Malachi surely does not envision is the preeminent high priest *offering himself* as the sacrifice, sanctifying first himself and then, in the process, those he represents.

Come Desire of Nations Come!

Interestingly, Chapter 3 begins with the prediction of *two* future messengers, one is the prophet voice we have already mentioned, John the Baptist, who prepares the way (3:1). But in startling fashion Malachi describes this second messenger as the LORD himself, "Then suddenly the Lord who you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant whom you desire, will come, says the LORD Almighty." This is a sentence heavy with Christmas importance. The Lord descends to the temple, which for Malachi is the epicenter of Israel and the world. Again our Athanasian principle comes to bear. The true priest coming to represent humanity to God is himself God!

God coming into the world for judgment may seem lacking in "Christmas spirit!" And yet God's judgment is always purposed to sanctify. In a way reminiscent of the Psalmist, "If you O Lord kept a record of sins, who could stand?,"⁴ Malachi declares, "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." The theme of judgment is revisited at the beginning of Chapter 4, "Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evil doer will be stubble...says the LORD Almighty, "Not a root or a branch will be left to them" (4:1).

But again we ask, who is judged? Who is included in this prophetic word? The sobering conclusion is that everyone represented in the true high priest's ministry is to also be included in his judgment. There does not appear to be any argument of degree. This is corroborated elsewhere in the minor prophets in passages like Zephaniah 1:18, "...on the day of the LORD's wrath...In the fire of his jealousy the whole world will be consumed, for he will make a sudden

⁴ Ps 130:3

end of all who live on the earth.” God’s judgment is all-inclusive and universal. It includes all people, then and now.⁵

Fierce Love

The New Testament dictates that all talk of human judgment must start and end with the cross. Augustine (b. 354), another Early Church Father, stated it thusly: Christ “remains one with him to whom he offered, made himself one with those for whom he offered, is himself one as Offerer and Offering.” In Christ’s representative death, humanity dies (2 Cor 5:14). This theme shines revelation light on how we read Malachi and how we are meant to interpret Old Testament destruction passages as a whole. The destruction of the Righteous One at Calvary is our most graphic portrayal of the consequences of sin. The Old Testament destruction passages, whether God’s wrath is directed at Israel or Israel’s enemies, should therefore be understood in light of the cross, i.e., as illustrative of the inherently destructive consequences of sin.⁶

It follows that the destruction of sinful humanity in Christ’s cross is secondary to the larger purpose. God is fundamentally against sin, not the sinner. It is sin and evil that hurt us, not God. The destruction of sin and evil, then, is what God is after. He will not be satisfied⁷ until sin is thoroughly expunged. But sin is so deeply insinuated in human beings that it cannot simply be

⁵ We may perhaps attempt to wriggle ourselves off the hook back in Chapter Three, when those judged by God are specifically listed as “sorcerers, adulterer, and perjurers...those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice?” Yet is there one of us who has not committed adultery according to Jesus (see Matt 5:28), or who at least has not been indirectly complicit in the unjust systems mentioned?

⁶ But does God not mandate and actually cause the destruction, as Scripture seems to indicate? To this we must say, God doesn’t have to cause it—it causes itself—but at the same time God in his sovereignty allows it. An unnuanced view of God’s sovereignty can all too easily make God an agent of evil, which God never is. Our Athanasian principle must remain conclusive, that the same God who stood among us, teaching us to love and forgive our enemies, is the God of the Old Testament. Holding to the Word, the central lesson we learn from the destruction passages is that God has comprehended all of what he has mysteriously allowed and gathered it all under, and in, his own death on the cross. Is not the highest view of Scripture the one which submits to the Living Word? Without compromising Biblical inspiration, our less than Christ-centered ways of reading Scripture and our faulty notions of a murderous God must be crucified with Christ.

⁷ I use this word purposefully, because it communicates a different kind of satisfaction than a God needing to be mollified, as in some penal substitutionary theories. In this light, Jer 46:10 can be understood as keeping all retributive aspects of the atonement inside of an overriding restorative motif (“But that day belongs to the Lord, the Lord Almighty—a day of vengeance, for vengeance on his foes. The sword will devour till it is satisfied”). Karl Barth is among those who take seriously the Old Testament theme that the day of vengeance *is* the day of redemption; cf. Is 61:2 (“to proclaim the year of the LORD’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn”). Isaiah 61 is the text Jesus read in his synagogue debut in Lk 4. If Jesus stopped reading Isaiah 61 after v. 2a, as Luke might be indicating, it may perhaps be because his hearers were not yet equipped (i.e., apart from the revelation of the cross) to understand the day of vengeance and day of redemption as a piece. See also Isaiah 63:1-4.

extracted. In the slaying grace of God, humanity must die in Christ to be delivered.⁸ Therefore, to the extent that God is against sin, he is against us, but always within the context of affirmation. God is for us! We can be comforted knowing that even our death is contained within that of our high priest, the one whose sufferings we share in this world. Christ sacrificed himself, Athanasius remarks, “out of sheer love for us, so that in his death all might die” (*On the Incarnation*, 9).

Centuries later, Karl Barth put it this way: “For then and there, in the person of Christ taking our place, we were present, being crucified and dying with him....We died: the totality of all sinful men, those living, those long dead, and those still to be born, Christians who necessarily know and proclaim it, but also Jews and heathen, whether they hear and receive the news or whether they tried and still try to escape it. His death was the death of all: quite independently to their attitude or response to this event” (*Church Dogmatics* IV/1, 295).

As far as the curse is found!

From the beginning, Malachi reminds Israel (Mal 1:2,3) that they are an elect people, chosen by God to bear the Messiah. But even as elect people, Israel is chastised for their wickedness: “You are under a curse—the whole nation of you” (3:9). Evidently who is blessed and who is cursed is not as clear cut as we might imagine! In one way or another, all of the Old Testament accounts of sacrifice and judgment can point us to the cross, where the chosen and the curse meet. It is Jesus Christ himself who is truly the Elected One (Eph 1:6). And when God comes near, he as the Elected One chooses to absorb the curse. In himself becoming the curse (Gal 3:13), Jesus represents all perpetrators—being literally numbered with the transgressors (Is 53:12). And, as the suffering Servant (Is 53), he represents all victims.

But if Jesus substitutes for, and represents, everyone in his death and resurrection, are we not left with a one-sided approach which declares everyone righteous to the exclusion of *anyone* being wicked? The antidote to avoiding such a one-sided comprehensive application is to return again to the judgment of grace which is ever so severe, and which has not yet been fully revealed. Indeed, God is determined to clarify for us what is good and what is evil. His

⁸ This death of humanity in Christ does not need to dictate a discontinuation of what is good, i.e., a termination of God’s perfect creation of human being. Renewing is not re-doing, as if the first creation was something of a false start; new creation does not entail a second creation. True humanity does not need to be crucified with Christ, but false humanity. When looking at the *one person* of the two selves, we say Christ was crucified on the cross, or that we were crucified with Christ (Gal 2:20). When looking at the *two selves* of the one person (the single subject), we can say it’s not the original and true self which is destroyed at the cross, but the parasitic and false self of every human (Rom 6:6). Still, the false self cannot be crucified in abstraction, so that to avoid dualism the single subject aspect of the situation must be maintained. By deduction, then, Gal 2:20 and Rom 6:6 together comport to God’s overall affirmation of humanity as described here.

judgment is particularly directed against those who judge only by what they presently see—those asking “Where is the God of justice?” (Mal 2:17).

Malachi’s account is heavily eschatological (related to the end times); the day of judgment is mentioned five times in four chapters.⁹ Like Malachi’s Israelites, we can be confused in this world when “even those who challenge God escape” (3:15). But on that Day, when no secrets remain hid, there will be no escaping. On that Day, I envision all gathered to the foot of the throne of grace and judgment, where Jesus is lifted up (Jn 12:32). We will all appear before “the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn 1:29), “the Lamb who was slain” (Rev 5:11-13). In light of the cross, for the first time we will really see clearly. Perhaps there the “Father forgive them for they know not what they do,” will be supplanted by an even more withering indictment, “Father, forgive them now that they have seen and know what they have done.”

Being fully exposed can cause great fear, yet the overall restorative (versus retributive) context of that Day will elicit a Godly fear different than terror. In the safe context of the one who knows and sees all, we may finally drop our façade and let go of lies and false narratives. Part of experiencing God’s wrath involves seeing that God understands our pain, our brokenness, and the sufferings which he shares and knows most intimately. These are things he did not create and which he consumes in the judgment of his death.

Perhaps God will give us perspective to empathize with those who have perpetrated against us, even while he refuses to blur the line between victim and perpetrator in specific situations. Undoubtedly we will be accountable for every sinful action, and all degrees of our complicity as perpetrators, even if, as I imagine, the deepest purpose of the judgment is to demonstrate that God’s compassion in Christ begins with his solidarity with victims. Indeed, the only one who has a right to judge us is the one who loves us the most.

Spare Me! Beginning with the Priest

With all the talk of comprehensive judgment (“who can endure...who can stand?”), we might be confused by Malachi’s language at the end of the Chapter 3, where he declares that those people who do fear the LORD will be spared. “They will be mine,” says the LORD Almighty, “in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him.” (3:17).

What can “being spared” mean in this context of comprehensive judgment? There are only two alternatives. Either the judgment is not comprehensive after all, and the warning is drastically

⁹ Mal 3:2; 3:17; 4:1; 4:3; 4:5. See also New Testament passages such as Mt 12:36; Rom 14:10-12; 2 Cor 5:9-10; Heb 4:12-13

exaggerated, meaning some are spared to the exclusion of others. Or, the judgment is comprehensive and universal, but so is the sparing. The latter regards sparing as not being spared from death, but *through* death, to resurrection. I contend that the second meaning fits better with the internal logic of the passage, because it is said that God spares his treasured possession *just as a man spares the son who serves him*. Again, this verse is pregnant with prophetic meaning. Whether aware of it or not, Malachi is giving us a key for understanding the sparing as primarily regarding the resurrection life of the beloved Son.

The Son was certainly not spared in one sense (“he who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all,” Rom 8:32), but in and with the Son, humanity comes through the refiner’s fire, restored. The foreshadowing here is of the Son of God and Son of Man, who as the Second Adam represents all humanity in himself; reinforced is the High Priestly representative framework Malachi has already laid out. Universal judgment and universal sparing are both possible because they both take place first in the one Son and Priest, and then, by grace alone, for all humanity.

My contention is that the remnant motif in Old Testament passages of judgment is not ultimately meant to point to those being spared to the exclusion of others but to the one, the high priest, who primarily is spared through death to resurrection, and therefore to all being spared in him.¹⁰ Read this way, *remnant*, like *spare*, is first and foremost a Christological term; it returns us to Jesus’ comment, “For their sakes I sanctify myself,” and puts the narrow focus on the Who of the atonement. The exclusive language of electing Jacob over Esau (language adopted at the very beginning of Malachi), fits inside the inclusive purpose of the Messiah’s work for all whom he represents.¹¹ As Malachi testifies, “Great is the LORD beyond the borders of Israel” (1:5, cf. 1:11, 1:14).

In concurrence with Malachi’s word, then, when it comes to wrath and judgment, everyone is included! This good news of universal judgment is spelled out in the neighboring book of Zephaniah, where the prophetic allusions to Jesus Christ are again unmistakable, “The whole world will be consumed...*then* I will purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on

¹⁰ Barth on God’s “self-giving”: “He does not exercise grace *instead of* justice, but he exercises grace *through* justice....In the New Testament sense, grace is not *favor*, a friendly, patronizing attitude. It is *charis*...a *helpful* justice which does not take place for its own sake, but so that the world may live” (*Learning Jesus Christ Through the Heidelberg Catechism*, 71).

¹¹ This is the argument of Romans 9-11. The election of Jacob over Esau (9:13) is for the purposes of blessing everyone, including Esau (11:32)!

the name of the LORD....The remnant of Israel will do no wrong; they will speak no lies, nor will deceit be found in their mouths” (Zeph 3: 8-9, 13).¹²

Malachi, like Zephaniah, knows that as the high priest goes, so go the people. The prophetic voice is preparing us to see Jesus Christ as the true high priest of Israel and of humanity. Christ Jesus is the spearhead of human salvation history, the first born of all creation and the first born of the living from among the dead (Col 1:15, 18). In purifying himself, sanctifying himself for our sakes, Christ is purifying all of the captives in his train.¹³

A Fiery Conclusion

Malachi is cultivating us for a Christological view of judgment which includes the proper fear of God. In worshipful awe of God’s revelation of himself in Christ, we recognize that the judge is none other than the one judged in our place.¹⁴ In this reverence, beholding the glorious truth of Jesus Christ and our true selves in him, we are made acutely aware that evil will not endure. In an inspired portrayal of the sun rising, Malachi gives us a picture of resurrection glory in another Son: “All the arrogant and every evil-doer will be stubble....But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things,” says the LORD Almighty (4:2-3).

In these words of judgment is deliverance! Have you ever seen calves leaping? They really do! What a joyous day when the revelation of who Jesus Christ is and what he has done for us is before us. In the death of Christ the dross is consumed. The wickedness of our lives burned away. Life abounds. And we dance on our graves.

¹² The whole of Zephaniah 3 is an incredible picture of the judgment of grace in Christ. Interpreters who prefer to see the remnant in strictly an exclusionary and I would argue non-Christological sense must grapple with the comprehensive and universal nature of destruction in the judgment passages.

¹³ See Eph 4:8, Ps 68:18. “Christ died *for us*” can be understood in substitutionary or representative fashion. In the representative way of thinking, when Christ died, we died, whereas, within a purely substitutionary paradigm Christ dies in our place, without us, so that we are spared death. The second overlooks the fact that *our crucifixion with Christ* is central to the good news (Rom 6:6, Gal 2:20, Col 3:3, 2 Cor 5:14). The substitutionary and representative views of the atonement clearly need each other. If God the Son (and not simply another human) had not uniquely died *for us* as our substitute, we would have no representative who could die and rise *for us* in a way that truly signifies, in our high priest’s death, our own death and resurrection. Just as the substitutionary element of the atonement fits inside the representative element, even in Malachi’s prophecy we find the two concepts converging: the theme of “spare” functions within the theme of “restore” in the same way that the cross is appreciated in the context of the resurrection. Both facets coinhere in the one Person who was fully human and, maintaining our Athanasian orthodoxy, always fully God.

¹⁴ To understand judgment properly, notes Barth, “we must hold fast to the fact that all men (we too!) are His [God’s] enemies—but that we all go to meet the Judge who gave himself for us” (*Learning Jesus Christ Through the Heidelberg Catechism*, 82).

Perhaps this is a new way of thinking. I can hear a Christian: “Are you telling me that I will be judged? That I am wicked?” In response, we can only state that there is only one kind of justification, and that is for the wicked (Rom 4:5)! Ironically, those attempting to add to the righteousness they have been given in Christ are only robbing themselves in mythical self-righteousness while robbing the righteousness of others. These are the ones who stand to miss the celebration! Jesus himself reminds us, “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind” (Jn 9:39).

Fire in Scripture has the dual purpose of portraying judgment and illumination, both in and by the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit is inherent proof that the wrath of God serves his love. On that day of revelation no one will get off the hook. There will be a clear inescapable indictment against all evil doers, as we witness our false selves consumed in the judgment of grace—the revelation of the cross. In redemption’s merciful light we are all Jacob and all Esau, all disobedient and all mercifully redeemed (Rom 11:32).

One of Malachi’s main purposes, then, is to teach us about the blessings of judgment. On that Day of clarity, states our prophet, “you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not” (3:18). Like the Israelites, we are, in our fallen selves, prone to rationalize sin. Against any confusion which calls wrong right, we will all see perfectly clearly the difference between the false and true dimensions of our lives and world in the refining fire of Christ’s death and resurrection. And in that moment we may celebrate the wrath of God against any injustice and all aspects of our lives which are not created and redeemed by the same God who proves his love for us.¹⁵

The sooner we recognize that it is we who are judged, not “the other guy,” the better. Far from conveniently pushing judgment away to the future, the Spirit brings eschatological clarity forward into the present. We are motivated to live *now* in the truth of what will endure (Col 3:5-6), living as those born from above (Col 3:1, Jn 3:3). In the Holy Spirit, the reality of that Day is a contemporary event.

Behold I bring you glad tidings: God has come near to you for judgment!

¹⁵ The last verse of Malachi (4:6) reminds us of the beauty of reconciliation, and also that it is futile to try to go around the cross to find another alternative to salvation. Cf. Hebrews 10:26-27.