

Malachi 2:17–3:5

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Cool. Prayer with me real quick. Lord, thank you so much for your word. Thank you that you are the God of justice, that you bring the fire, and that we get the opportunity to know you in love, and we can walk according to your will.

In Christ's name, amen. As we move closer to Advent, the question I want to put forward that I think Malachi, upon hearing the words of Malachi, would be, what does the preparation for Christmas entail?

When you look at these words, what does the preparation for Christmas entail? What is involved in the preparation of Christmas?

What would it look like for God's people to properly prepare themselves while the rest of the world is getting ready and being festive?

What sets the church apart? What does it look like for you? Has there ever been a difference, even?

[1 : 23] And what's the significance of our witness as a local congregation on the south side of Chicago? What's the significance of Christmas for us that is in contrast to the world that we live in?

And it's understandable that this season does give cause for expectation of gifts, and, you know, everybody's waiting for something.

What's the distinction that characterizes the people of God in contrast to the world? So our text this morning brings us to the fourth dispute brought on by the prophet Malachi.

It's a dispute over people's expectation and God's reputation. The dispute is over people's expectation in contrast or in light of God's reputation.

It's a dispute that brings into question God's character and God's cause. A dispute concerning his rule and his role.

[2 : 31] You'll notice that the fourth dispute in 2.17 through 3.5, Malachi speaks the words of Yahweh to the people with what seems to be a change in topic.

It could be a different topic that he's bringing on. All right, let me focus on this real quick. But I would even argue that, yeah, it might seem like a little bit of a change, but I think he's also building upon the same argument he's already had in the beginning.

First of all, the first dispute in chapter 1, verse 1 through 5, the questioning of God's love. He dealt with that. Second dispute, chapter 1, verse 6 through 2.9, the priest despised God's name.

You see them in the temple acting a fool. And then the third dispute, it's in light of this faithless profaning of the covenant of God.

Three disputes, and then you get to chapter 4, and you cannot help but get a sense of this eschatological, looking forward to what's to come scope.

[3 : 46] what is to come. And if I could just give you the keys to how you should listen to my next few words and to framework what we will talk about in Malachi in this fourth dispute, it would be this.

How one is to prepare for Christmas, according to this chapter, would be by knowing that you can't fully appreciate the blessing of the birth until you believe the message of the Baptist.

You can't fully appreciate the blessing of what Advent will get us to of this birth that is to come until you believe the message of the one who was sent to prepare the way.

I guess I could just ask, do you believe? A friend of mine used to say, do you believe? And what about God? Do you believe? Well, let's look at how it's laid out.

Verse 17, this mischaracterization of Yahweh. The people have wearied the Lord by their mischaracterization of Yahweh.

[5 : 05] They wearied him. And what does he mean by wearied? It's a sense of this burdening. He's worn down by their words. He's troubled by their words.

He is physically spent at the fact that this is what you've come to about me. I'm me. By the things the people have said.

And what's the response of the people? Well, surprise, surprise. How have we wearied you then, Lord? I didn't mean to put that much emphasis on it. Maybe they were like, really wanting to know, like, how do we wearied you? How do we wearied you, Lord?

Two ways are mentioned. Two dilemmas that concern Yahweh, first and foremost. First, that God is, they say that God is okay with evil.

Making evil good. That if God has not checked the evil that is running rampant in the world, he must be okay with it. Well, that's a problem.

[6 : 11] And it shouldn't be a problem if it were true. And they don't even stop there. They have to go, they have to dig a little deeper. And look at the text. He says in verse 17, and he delights in them.

They're basically saying that God not only gives his hearty approval to the maneuvering of evil in the world, but he actually loves that type of stuff.

He actually doesn't mind what's happening. In other words, the evil that they see is leading them to believe that God favors evil.

A mischaracterization. Secondly, they don't stop there. He says, by saying everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord and delights in them. And then he says, or by asking, where is the God of justice?

Where is the God of justice? Secondly, if the former isn't true, then the attitude that they come to or the conclusion that they come to is that there is no God at all.

[7 : 20] Either God is unjust or God is absent. That's the conclusion they come to in their mischaracterization of God. There is no God at all.

Something faulty within their line of reasoning, it would seem. Where is the God of justice? It's faulty. Two clauses, two dilemmas differing from each other.

One pertaining to the character and the nature of God, saying, where is the God that was promised to deliver us from evil? Where is the God who takes no pleasure in wrongdoing?

Where is that God? How come I don't see him in the world? The first is an attack on God. It's a sneak attack even on the character. The people are accusing God of injustice.

Any gamers in the house? There's a game that came out. Injustice, God's amongst us. Anybody play that? There you go. Nikki, I got you. The basic premise of the game is the fact that you don't know who's a hero and who's a villain.

[8 : 31] Superman can be teaming up with Lex Luthor and Batman teaming up with Joker because the confines of right and wrong have been, well, the lines have been erased.

This is what they're saying that this God is. There's no lines. He must love it. He must be on the other side. They took my land. God must not care about us.

They killed my family. God must not, he must not be around to actually speak on this. Secondly, the clause as to the reason for God's being weary with the people is because they are doubting the very existence of God.

They have decided to become atheists in the process, in their response, in their mischaracterization because God has seemingly left them in their lowest state.

Because, because after returning from exile and after, after rebuilding the temple twice, they're thinking that, well, we would have had a representative. We would have been restored back to where our former glory was.

[9 : 44] We would, we would be triumphant in the world. We, we, we would have gotten further than we are today. He must not be real. No doubt, they might have been susceptible to nations around them.

clearly, no doubt, they, they are not taking into account the stories that were told to their forefathers before. They're actually acting as if their forefathers are, didn't themselves be punished for not walking according to God.

I mean, the whole reason you were in exile was because of things like this. You have to appreciate Malachi's including of both dilemmas in the text because while the, the people, while the people are irritating God with their words, they are doing so on the basis of the word of God himself.

You see, you see the irony there? they are attacking God based on what the Torah says. They're attacking God on the basis of the fact that, well, God, you said it.

So I guess you aren't real. Wait, if I said it, I have to be real. Deuteronomy 5, chapter 4, verse 5 through 8.

[11:00] For what great nation is there that has a God so near to it as the Lord, our God, is to us whenever we call upon him. I can imagine them remembering those words.

Where's that guy? Deuteronomy 4, verse 7. And, and, and, and they are attacking God on the basis of the fact that they know God's word and they know he actually does exist.

So when I say sneak attack, I mean the fact that they, they know God exists. This is more so, this is their tactic to get God to do what they want him to do.

The soul of the argument is not that the people did not believe these things would happen, that, that, that what Deuteronomy 4 would say, says would happen. The soul of the argument, or the reason they wanted to see God in action had little to do with what God had said, but what they wanted.

They have evidently come to the conclusion that they have either been deceived or have been forsaken. A mischaracterization. But that leads us to chapter three, verse one through five.

[12:14] First of all, one and two, you see this messenger. As to God's answer to their mischaracterization, God sends a messenger. Everybody say messenger.

So how does the prophet answer the two dilemmas? He does so by attacking their expectations. What are you expecting from God? He attacks their expectations.

I would venture to say some of us need our expectations attacked today. He answers the frustration of the people by providing them a point of view from Yahweh himself. God begins to answer with the dramatic word behold.

Behold. I mean, that can preach itself. Behold. If he wants to underline and thrust his listeners into a climax of, well, you say he's not there, but behold, look and see, I'm here.

Check it out. Check me out. If you want to get literal, first of all, this is God talking. First of all, I'm right here. That's what he's saying. You might have missed it, but first of all, I'm right here.

[13:29] God begins his answer by pointing to his presence. I am the Lord, your God. He handles the last dilemma first and foremost.

If you're saying that I'm not here, well, I'm speaking, so I have to be here. But right away, God's word points the listeners to an understanding that there will come one, a messenger, that will herald the arrival of a king.

God answers the dilemma by telling the people, by telling the people that whatever obstacles you had in believing that Yahweh would arrive, these obstacles will be answered in the form of a messenger, one that will prepare the way for Yahweh.

What does the Lord, what does the Lord do once the way is prepared for him? What does he do according to the text once the obstacles are moved out of the way?

Well, look again. He says, Behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me.

And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight.

[14:45] Behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. First of all, the Lord suddenly appears in the temple. He spoke, and he appears. And then he doesn't stop there.

The Lord that comes is also a messenger in and of himself of a covenant that has already been established, but this covenant points us to something that's to come in the future.

And then lastly, the Lord is who will be the one that people should be waiting on. This Lord that is coming is the one that they should be delighting in.

The Lord that is coming is the one that you should be looking forward to. The messenger sent by God will refute the false claims made by the people towards this great God.

Is he present? Is he Lord? This God will come with justice for his people, and he is not changed. He is not stirred. His hand will not be thwarted.

[15:46] He holds true to who he is and who he always has been. Holy and just. Righteous and true.

And if there's any clarification that's needed to be made by the listeners of Malachi's words as to who this messenger would be, despite the fact that Malachi's name means messenger, Malachi's not talking about himself, and despite the fact that people could be thinking that Elijah is the one that is to come, according to our last chapter, chapter four, in chapter four, the allusion about this messenger was referring to the future messenger, not to something that has already taken place,

but someone who will come.

So hold tight. And we are left to the words of the New Testament language of who this messenger is, who will prepare the way. And you probably already know it.

According to Matthew chapter 11, verse nine through 10, he says, I tell you, and more than a prophet, he's more than a prophet, this is he whom it is written, behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare the way before you.

And even Mark picks up on the same language. Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way. Luke 7, 27, a prophet sent ahead of you.

[17:20] That's what's meant by before your face. This prophet is sent ahead of you. Or perhaps the verse is better understood, better understood in light of Isaiah's words.

Chapter 40, verse three, a voice cries in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for God.

At any rate, the task of the messenger that is sent beforehand is to prepare the people for the messenger coming that will champion the covenant.

Are you prepared? The task of the Baptist, as you see in Matthew and Luke, is to prepare the people for the blessing of the birth of the Lord.

The text then points us to the fact that John is the one prophesied as to be placed in the role of the one who will inaugurate the coming of the king into the world.

[18:28] Because you won't appreciate the birth until you sit under the message of the Baptist. So the Lord answers this mischaracterization by saying, oh no, sit tight.

There's a messenger on the way. But then he also tightens the screws one more time by taking a scope into what that message actually entails.

Verse 2b through 5, Malachi points his listeners to a future hope. And not only a future prediction, but to the understanding that what you are complaining about, you don't actually want the answer for.

The thing that you're complaining about, you're not really seeking to solve that. You're just, it seems like you're looking for a technicality to get off of actually following the truth.

Following the one that will require you to change and go the opposite way. Verse 2, Malachi lets the people know that no one is actually ready for the day of the Lord.

[19:42] No one. Look at it. But who can endure the day of his coming? And who can stand when he appears?

This enduring is, the emphasis is who can contain the one that is coming? And this containment actually gives us a hint at the metaphor that Malachi will pick up on of fire in the text.

Used to describe how God would dish out his justice. You want to know where the God of justice is? Well, check, take a look. Check out the message that is going to be delivered through the messenger of the covenant.

It's a metaphor of fire. For Malachi's audience, what they needed to understand is that you're not ready for the truth about Yahweh. You're not ready for the true Yahweh if you have a dilemma about the truth about Yahweh.

The message that is encompassed in the gift is that mankind needs to be prepared for the day of the Lord.

[20:52] Mankind needs to be prepared for the day of the Lord. And he packages this message in two ways. First of all, to be through verse 4, the message of purification.

It's a message of purification. What's going to remove the stains of impurity from the lives of people? What's going to wash man's dirty clothes thoroughly?

It will be the refining fire of the Lord. No doubt the prophet is picking up on the language of others that have said the same stuff before him.

This is nothing new. Isaiah 48, 10 through 11, Behold, I have refined you, says the Lord, but not as silver. I have tried you in the furnace of affliction for my own sake.

Not for your sake, but for my own sake. For my own sake I do it. For who should my name, for how should my name be profane?

[21:57] My glory I will not give to another. Why should my name be profane amongst y'all? I'm not giving my glory to another. You know what I'm going to do?

I'm going to refine you in the fire so we can be assured that that won't happen. The message is a message of purification. Are you ready for the, what the Baptist is bringing forth?

Jeremiah 9, 7. Therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts, behold, I will refine them and test them. For what else can I do because of my people?

There's a refining there. And look at how he alliterates this refining. He will sit as a refiner, verse three. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver and they will bring offerings and righteousness to the Lord.

Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.

[23 : 10] You'll notice that in scripture that the refining of men is not only a removal of sin. Did you know that? It's not just for your removal of sin, which you need, because you can't do it on your own.

But it's also for a placement of your heart. It's not enough for God to wash you if you're just going to go back and do the same thing. We're talking about a gracious God that if it's not because for his mercy, you'll see in a second that you'll be consumed by the fire.

But he washes you clean and then he puts your heart in a different place. In other texts it says he takes out your heart of stone and puts in his heart of flesh.

But I like the way 1 Peter picks it up. He says, having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from what?

A pure heart. Since you have been born again, not only, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable through a living and abiding word of God.

[24 : 21] What the people were misunderstanding in their mischaracterization of Yahweh was the fact that he wasn't merely concerned with their social well-being if it meant that their hearts were far from him.

You understand that? Yes, he cares about the things you need, but if it means that your hearts are far from him, you probably don't need that. The idea of refining fire in the lives of God's children means that he also is their protection from evil, that their dependence is on God.

That's what it means to be purified by the fire that you don't need anyone else, that you're not seeking anyone else, that you depend solely on God, not on what others choose to make up about God, to either distort the view of God or to toss out God altogether.

No, no, no. You, if you are to be refined by the fire, it means that you are set apart and that you receive the full weight of who Christ is.

The fire that purifies is what the children of God are meant to look forward to as they bring their offerings of righteousness. That's what verse 4 is entailing there. As they bring their offerings, they can bring it with clean hands and a pure heart that they don't have to worry about.

[25 : 55] And because you know what was happening, they were like, because their hearts were not in the right place, they would just bring the other type of offering. I get the one that, you know, the one that was sick, bring him.

I don't know, just get something, just bring it. He says, I'd rather you not bring anything. He condemns both the people and the priests that defile the temple in that verse alone.

In other words, the Lord's coming not only deals with the unfaithfulness of certain Levites, but it points to the true priest who himself will suddenly come to the temple to prove that he is the Lord.

And he will take his b-boy stance and say, I'm God. Enough said. What did you think I was? Who did you think I was? Where did you think I was coming from?

Who did you think I was coming for? But not only is this fire metaphor a purifier, but you'll see in verse 5 here, then I will draw near to you for judgment.

[27 : 00] Same word as justice. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker and his wages, the widow and the faithless and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner.

Do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts. The final way in which we see this metaphor being utilized by the prophet is in the prediction of the coming judgment that awaits those who do not fear the Lord.

While the question back in 2.17 is, where is this God? And it's a question of justice.

The response here is about if those seeking the just God are prepared to meet the just God. The reality is you're not because outside of the covenant, outside of the messenger who will bring the fire, outside of that, you don't want God to show justice because nobody will stand.

Thank God for God. The answer is emphatically, no, you're not prepared to see him if your hearts, if you're dirty, if you're outside.

[28 : 32] The prophet's answer here is to let people know that if you did not meet, that if you did not meet the God of justice, the God of judgment in your current condition, if you met him in your current condition, you will not last.

But the hypocritical person calling God unjust when they themselves are unjust, they themselves are owing what they are applying to this God.

When all humanity, because of our sin, is deserving of punishment. In other words, the Lord's coming has a specified target. It's a specified target when it comes to justice.

In fact, non-believers should most likely do less finger pointing than introspection. Believers should do less finger pointing than introspection.

I mean, do less finger pointing and more introspection. Repenting. Repenting. Because he's an all-consuming fire. The gift of judgment, the gift of this judgment is meant to tip us off, to tip the listeners off to the fact that the true followers of the Lord find their benefit in sitting under the judgment that leads to purification.

[30 : 01] If you're not willing to sit under the judgment that leads to purification, you can't appreciate the fact that he came. In fact, you'll either deny it or redefine it. While those that skip the lifestyle of purification await judgment that is laid out against those who do not fear the Lord, the answer to the mischaracterization the people had to where God comes by way of a messenger.

A Baptist who will prepare the way for the birth of one who comes to judge the living and the dead. You simply won't appreciate the blessing of the birth if the message of the Baptist doesn't take root in your heart.

Since the Lord of the covenant makes his appearance, and according to Mark, this message is simply repent and believe in the gospel. If this messenger is going to come, he's coming with the message that says, what I'm saying is true, so turn and follow.

That while everyone stands in agreement against God's character, against God's goodness, where is your God on 9-11? Or you live in Chicago, where is your God?

Where is your God when this happened, when this ailment took place? While everyone takes a side against God's character, while the world makes light of his presence and denies him altogether, the church lives in light of repentance.

[31 : 29] They live a life of repentance and obedience to the gospel. They live in what I would say freedom, unhindered, unbound. It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.

This is what it means to make the path straight, to take away the obstacles, to see Christ in all his beauty. Because, you know, in that same text where Jesus is talking about John being someone who is a forerunner, he also says, hey man, from the day of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom has brought forth violence.

Meaning, the fact that God and what he says is true, it's an aroma of violence to those who would have nothing to do with God. I don't want that.

Why would you? Nah, I don't want that. I'm good with where I'm at. Is that you today? The scripture has something to say about that. Matthew chapter 3, verse 10 through 12, I think sums up the text perfectly.

And it says, even now, the axe is laid at the root of the trees. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

[32 : 42] You get that judgment piece right there. And then John comes, he says, look, I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me mightier than I, whose sandals I'm not worthy even to carry, he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.

There's that purification. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear the threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.

Two types of people that stand before God, the forgiven and everyone else. Do you believe the message this morning?

If you believe, continue to prepare yourself for Christmas. Continue to prepare yourself for the one that constantly is willing and able to purify the hearts of mankind and has already done so by his bloodshed and calls you to himself and tells you, hey, play card my name in the neighborhood of Chicago.

Campaign for me wherever you go. Live for me with the attitude of expectation that this won't always last. That injustice won't run rampant.

[34 : 02] That not everyone gets away, because no one gets away out of the sight of God. And while you might think it's one way, revert back to the where I am. I'm the God of Jacob.

I'm the God of Abraham. I'm the God of Isaac. If you don't believe that message, if not, you, as Malachi says, if you thrust aside these words, you're left to deal with the fire yourself.

And to that, I would say in the angelic words of Liam Neeson, good luck. But I pray you choose this day to spend the rest of your life seated under the purification of the fire of God.

Let's pray. Lord, as the psalmist said, I reverence your holy name in awe of your presence.

And as one writer said, consuming fire, sweet perfume, we ask that your awesome presence fills this room.

[35 : 24] That we can bow our knees to who you are. And we can humbly ask you to fill us.

Lord, we need you. We need you now. Forevermore. Amen. I invite you to.