

Malachi 3

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 December 2024

Preacher: Bing Nieh

[0 : 0 0] from Malachi chapter 3. I have been asked to start in 2.17 as a help to our expositor, so I will start in chapter 2, verse 17. You have wearied the Lord with your words, but you say, how have we wearied him? By saying, everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them. Or by asking, where is the God of justice? 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. Behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like a fuller's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi, and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord. Then the offering of Judah in Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years. Then I will draw near to you for judgment.

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 fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts.

For I, the Lord, do not change. Therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them.

Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you say, how shall we return? Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, how have we robbed you? In your tithes and contributions. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you.

Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house, and thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts. If I will not open the windows of heaven for you, and pour down for you a blessing, until there is no more need. I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the Lord of hosts. Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the Lord of hosts.

[2 : 3 1] Your words have been hard against me, says the Lord. But you say, how have we spoken against you? You have said, is it vain to serve God? What is the profit of our keeping his charge, or of walking as in mourning before the Lord of hosts? And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evil-doers not only prosper, but they put God to the test, and they escape. Then those who feared the Lord spoke with one another. The Lord paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed his name. They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him. This is the word of the Lord.

Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, Jesus. You may be seated. Well, allow me to welcome those who are visiting loved ones, and I know it's the season where we have opportunity to be with family, friends, and those we love, and it's great to see old faces return. And you've walked in to an Advent series that we will spend four weeks in the book of Malachi, and we've simply titled it, titled it God's Last Word Before Christmas.

God's Last Word Before Christmas. Allow me to pray for us, and then we will turn to the scriptures together. Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you that it illumines our world, it illumines our hearts, and it shows us the Lord Jesus. And so, in this season, may Jesus submerge this beautiful, grand, saving. And Lord, for these words on the pages of the scripture, may they live to us. And Lord, as I give these words, may we sense that there is a fire within my bones that I cannot contain it. And may that fire rage upon our hearts, that we would sense the spirit alive and active amongst us. And to that end, we pray, we ask these things for Jesus' sake. Amen.

You better watch out. You better not cry. You better not pout. I'm telling you why, because Santa Claus is coming to town. He's making a list. He checks it twice. He's gonna find out that he's naughty or nice. Santa Claus is coming to town. Creepily, he sees you when you're sleeping. He knows when you're awake. He knows if you've been bad or good, so be good, for goodness sake. Now, it's no Christmas carol. Let me just get that out of your minds. But the song has survived nearly a century of circulation. Parents use it as motivation for their children, wanting them to know that what happens at Christmas or the gift receiving that might take place at Christmas is contingent on your moral behavior. Little Johnny needs to know that it mattered whether he was naughty or nice. Little Susie needs to know that it matters whether she is good or bad.

The popular song conveys the truth that our lives are under assessment. The song holds out to us a truth a truth about our, that's found in our text this morning. There is a distinction between the righteous and the wicked.

[6 : 54] And the wicked. Your life as well as mine is under assessment. It's being evaluated. It's not just a self-assessment. I know we do that sometimes. It's not just a social assessment that culture or society uses to assess you.

It's a divine assessment. We are and we will be assessed during the language of our text, judged.

Now, I have no intention of ever going to court unless I'm called there for jury duty. To be honest, I've never been in a courtroom. I've only been there through television and movies. And I hope and don't ever plan on being a defendant in a trial.

Yet it is worth saying to myself and to you that in the scheme of the Bible, one day you will find yourself in a courtroom.

Not in an earthly courtroom, but heaven's courtroom. I will be there. You will be there. You will be there. We will be there. I have no idea how long that line is outside that courtroom. But we will all be there.

[8 : 12] Every individual across all of history, all geography will be there. And God will make a pronouncement for each and every one of us.

Judgment is coming. As the writer put it, it is appointed for you and for me to die once. But that's not the end of it. It'd be great if that's the end of it. The terror is then the judgment, the assessment.

Well, I've chosen to handle our text in three parts. How are we going about this Christmas season?

And as you and I wait, as I wait, as you wait, for this impending trial date, this Advent season, this expectation season, this waiting season, this longing season, while we're in this season, what should we be on about?

Three things, three things that emerged from our text this morning that as we wait, we are being refined.

- [9 : 34] We are being, the Christian is being refined, that as we wait, the Christian is a repentant, is a repentant, and as we wait, the Christian, the people of God, is found responding to the call of God.

We are a people who are being refined. We are a people who are repentant, and we are a people who are responding to the call of God.

Refinement. This passage is interesting because there are, and I'll point them out to you, kind of two conversations between God and his people.

Like I mentioned two weeks ago, the book of Malachi is a series of disputations. God, you're not, you don't actually love us.

No, I do, I do. God, you're not actually listening to us. No, I do, I do. And the disputations, I'll point them out to the front end because I think they will hold our time together, but they're found in chapter two, verses 17.

- [10 : 41] The Bible tells us that God had grown tired of the people's words. The people were giving the Lord lip service, and when they're confronted in verse 17, the people are saying, well, Lord, how have we wearied you?

And they reply by saying, everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in those evil people. Or by asking, where's the God of justice?

And the second dispute comes in verse 13 of chapter three. Again, it's the words of the people. Your words, God has said, are hard on me, are actually arrogant toward me.

And the people say, well, how have we spoken against you? And they reply, and he replies, you say it's vain to serve God.

What good is it to keep these laws? The arrogant are blessed, verse 15. Evil doers prosper. They test God, and God lets them off the hook.

- [11 : 46] And so you get a sense of this text. Really, what's behind it are the people are struggling with this question. Is it worth it? Is the Christian life worth it?

Why should I give myself to these things if the wicked and the righteous have the same outcome? I see the life of the wicked, and they prosper, and they flourish, and they're healthy.

And I see the lives of God's people, and they suffer. They're under duress. They experience loss. Is there any difference?

And the text this morning will tell us there certainly is. God had grown tired of their words. The accusation comes that the Lord is approving of the evil practices of others.

They're actually saying, God, you're not just. Where is the God of justice? Because if you saw what we saw, you would intervene. Therefore, you must not be concerned.

- [12 : 49] You're probably not involved in human affairs at all. But if you're not, evil is prevailing. All across the nation, and let me speak sarcastically, they're saying, God, you must not be bothered by it.

You must love what's taking place. Otherwise, or other, you would do something about it. Where is the justice? And you and I may share a similar sentiment.

If the Lord really read the news, saw our feeds, followed the media, he would intervene if he cared.

See, we're tempted in the same way. And while we wait in this Advent period for his return, we are tempted to think he isn't just.

And what's surprising is the Lord's ultimate response is not to initiate new reforms. He doesn't say, hey, I mean, he actually does earlier in the book, turn back.

[13 : 53] Turn back to laws that have already been established. Go back to my laws. Your sacrifices are blemished.

Your priests are corrupt. Your relationships are unfaithful. And though these reforms are necessary, God's ultimate response to change his people does not come with more reforms.

It actually will come through a person. Specifically, a sequence of messengers. You see that in chapter 3, verse 1.

God's justice would come through people. Specifically, I think, to individuals. God mentions that he will send messengers.

The first, you see in verse 1, has this preparatory role. Behold, I will send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. Their second individual is mentioned in the latter half of verse 1.

[14 : 55] The Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to his temple, and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. And so there is a sequence of messengers. The first is one who prepares the way.

The second uniquely comes to his temple. He is a messenger of the covenant. And for all the hints in the text, it identifies seemingly as God himself.

The messenger prepares the way for an individual who enters his temple with such cleansing intensity that it will transform the very sons of Levi, or the priesthood, in its entirety.

The result will be the people of Israel. In verse 4, Judah and Jerusalem, pretty much summarizing, all the people of the nation will bring offerings and sacrifices in righteousness.

They'll have the right motivations and the right devotion to the Lord. This messenger, apparently the Lord himself, would refine, purify, and cleanse the people.

[16 : 04] He is like a detergent. Fuller soap. A fuller was simply one who worked with textiles, who prepared cloth, and treated materials in Bible times.

The refiner is an artisan, someone who worked with precious metals. The academic discipline is metallurgy.

But in Bible times, metals, how they purified and refined them, or they would heat them. And so what they would do, whether it be silver or gold, they would heat them, and at a certain temperature, the impurities would rise to the surface, and at another temperature, the impurities would actually begin to evaporate and change into gas and be removed from these precious metals.

And what Malachi is telling us is a messenger will come, and this individual will have a purifying process on the people of God.

the contaminants and the people would be removed, and they would be pure. And while purification is happening, what we also see is a purging is happening in verse 5.

[17 : 24] There is a judgment. Verse 5 summarizes that those on whom the judgment of God would fall, sorcerers, adulterers, liars, oppressors, all summarized under the term those who do not fear me.

These six sins are all found in the Old Testament, all violations of Old Testament law. They are people who live in a way that have no regard for God, no concern for pleasing God.

They live as if there is no God. They are those who do not fear God. And as the people question God's justice and concern, God responds to them in this way, be assured, I am just.

And how will you know I am just? I will send a person. And this person will exact judgment. Because we know this.

justice requires judgment. In any just situation, there has to be someone who assesses the situation and determines what is just.

[18 : 41] And as we live in a world that seeks justice, to make wrongs into rights, to demand fairness and impartiality, we must remember that in a world that demands justice, there must be judgment.

Someone has to be making these things. An arbiter to what is just. We do it through courts and communities. God will do it through an individual, a judge that he installs.

Well, we know this. Fast forward, God's justice would ultimately come fully in Jesus.

He would be the messenger who accomplishes both the purification of the people and performs judgment on the godless. In his first coming, he purifies his people, generally speaking.

In his second coming, he will perform judgment on the world. Well, we are a people, as we wait, who are being refined, purified, and it's accomplished through a single man, namely, the Lord Jesus.

[19 : 57] As we wait, secondly, we are a people who are repentant. Verses 6 through 12. God's righteous judgment, according to verse 6, comes and consumes people, those who do not fear him.

And if it were not for his unchanging nature, the unchanging nature of God, Israel would certainly have perished. If it were not for God sustaining his promises, whether it be Egypt, Assyria, or Babylon, would have ended the nation in its entirety.

Though the people of Israel have been disobedient, idol-filled, and have turned aside God, because he cannot change. God, because he's a promise-keeping God.

God, because he's a covenant-holding God, preserves his people. The people were experiencing God's preservation, but they were not experiencing God's prosperity.

You see that, according to verse 9, they are somehow under a divine curse. The curse was God withholding his hand of full blessing on the nation. God wanted to bring abundance, spare their harvests from pestilence and fruitlessness.

[21 : 19] God wanted to bless his people. God wanted to give, but he chose to withhold. Why? Well, it turns out in the text, it's because the people are withholding.

Now, I know, here we are, probably the most well-known passage on giving and hearing from Doug. Now you see it from Malachi, and you're like, Bing, what are you going to say about this?

And I'm curious as well. But what, it turns out, the people are withholding from God. They've been withholding their tithes from the Lord.

The metaphor is very vivid. Robbery. How dare you steal from me?

Will man rob God? Verse 8, yet you are robbing me. But you say, oh, how are we robbing you? In your tithes and contributions. You're cursed because you robbed me.

[22 : 26] And interestingly, it's not just one or two. It's not just the priests. It's the whole nation is stealing from the Lord. Robbery as a violation is bad.

It's never permissible. But if you had to steal from somebody, there are those you should never consider stealing from. Maybe it's mom and dad.

It's loved one. I mean, I guess we do, yeah. But here it is, stealing from God. Turns out the entire nation is robbing God.

You see, the nation had a duty to uphold the temple and the priesthood. Now, what's different about the nation and probably our experience today is Israel had a centralized worship scheme.

God met with his people at a single location. There was only one place you could meet God. Therefore, that one place, the temple, was where everyone gathered, everyone worshipped at this single location.

[23 : 33] The temple had employees. It had priests. It had workers. It had singers. There were the descendants of the tribe of Levi who were entrusted with the upkeep of and the operation of the entire temple religious system.

And the tithes and the contributions, according to Numbers chapter 18, were given for the well-being and the care of the temple of God and the people of God and its ongoing worship.

That's what the tithes and offerings, that was a purpose behind them. Now, there are various texts we can go, but I'll take one. Leviticus 27, verse 30.

We'll spend five months there beginning in January. Not just this one verse. You're like, five months on giving? Maybe. No, but five months on the book of Leviticus. But let me read this. This is Leviticus 27, verse 30, and it reads this way.

Every tithe or tenth of the land, whether the seed of the land or the fruit of the trees is the Lord's. It is holy to the Lord.

[24 : 43] So when the nation was formed, when the people's identity was being forged, part of their identity was 10% of what I have, what I receive, what I grow, what I sell, belongs to the Lord.

It is holy to the Lord. Why? Because it cares for the ongoing worship of the nation. Now, when it's being withheld, when God is being shortchanged, Malachi puts it as robbery.

He calls them to return what is being stolen. See, robbery only occurs when you take what rightfully belongs to somebody else.

This is the principle at work. God is saying, the land is mine. The fruit is mine. Your resources are actually all mine. Return them back to my house and I will therefore open, then open, the floodgates of blessing.

You see, what's at work here is why? Why do people withhold withhold from God?

[26 : 01] Why? Because that's a legitimate question. What is the cause of my stingy, Scrooge-like heart to say, this is mine, all mine, only mine?

It's not yours. It's a heart issue. And the call is there to repent, to return to me. Verse 7.

For you have turned aside from what the Lord requires. And here's the shocking thing. Repentance that would be demonstrated by the people of God in this chapter is tethered to their pocketbooks.

Now, repentance tied to money? I always said, oh, I repent.

Lord, I'm so sorry I said that to somebody. I apologize. I'm going to go say something to this person and try to reconcile. Lord, I'm going to repent and I'm going to pray a prayer and that's it.

[27 : 11] But here, what's astounding is the Lord will know is people are repentant when they return the money that is rightfully His.

I'm getting a little nervous here, but here we go. If you are truly repentant, it will be displayed through returning what is rightfully God's.

Now, God goes straight to the heart. What does it reveal? It reveals, at least in this chapter, that the heart of the nation was tethered to her money and her wealth.

It tripped up the nation. It trips up our nation. Let me bring it closer. It trips us up because for some in this room, this is our stumbling block.

Chapter one, you were like, oh, this is okay. Oh, blemish, sacrifices. No, I come to God. I come to Christchurch Chicago with this sincere worship. Sincere heart.

[28 : 16] I don't know why they were offering these blemished animals, but here in chapter three, you know, in chapter one, the prophet addresses the inadequate quality of the sacrifices.

In chapter three, let me say it slowly, the prophet addresses the inadequate quantity of the worship.

For some of us, it's a quality of worship. I just go through the motions. I just come into this room. Who cares where my heart's at? I'll empty my pocketbook. That's fine.

God says, I want the quality in chapter one. And then you get to chapter three. Some of us go, oh, I have the quality of worship. My heart sings.

But no, I'm not going to give the quantity of worship. God wants it all. I want the quality. I want the quantity.

[29 : 21] See, and for God's people, what we see in Malachi, they're deficient in both. Neither quality nor quantity. They would bring to God and therefore God is displeased.

And the question that certainly arises and I should address it, well, how much? How much should I bring? How much am I supposed to tithe?

Does God really expect 10% of my hard-earned, well-deserved paycheck back to him? Is that 10% before taxes or after taxes? Do I just give to Christ Church Chicago or any charitable gifts count?

And I'm not going to answer those questions. I, I, I, I, but there is an expectation in the New Testament that assumes God's people are generous towards God's work and ministry.

See 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. There is that expectation. Entire sermon series have been preached on giving and there is much material in the New Testament on it.

[30 : 28] But we won't belabor it here. But here's the reality. For some people, this is an obstacle and a hurdle.

The rich young ruler goes to Jesus with the quality of worship. Lord, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

You sense the sincerity. You sense the urgency. Well, keep the laws. All those I have kept from my youth, his compliance, his obedience, his urgency, his fervency, his quality is all there.

And then Jesus says, well, it's easy. Sell everything you have, give to the poor, and come follow me. Oh God, that quantity is too big.

I can't do that. The Lord wants it all. He deserves it all. He expects it all. The rich young ruler could not follow Jesus.

[31 : 28] Not because Jesus wasn't worth it, but because his money was more valuable to him. Sometimes we refrain to give out of fear. Will I have enough?

Sometimes we refrain to give out of selfishness. Does God actually deserve this more than me? Sometimes we refrain to give out of apathy. Why should I even care about what happens in this place?

And the text calls us to repentance, to return to him and inviting us to trust him. See, for our purposes this morning, the principle emerges as a warning.

yes, there is quality required in worship. Yes, there is an appropriate quantity required in worship. And here's the challenging thing.

I can't assess that for you. I don't know what you make. I don't know what you give. Dave's already mentioned.

[32 : 31] And I can't do that. I can't sit there and say, okay, well, let's see, that's not generous. But God can. And God will. And God does.

And if God gives you a million dollars, ten million dollars, ten dollars, ten cents, on your court hearing date, you'll walk in that room and he'll ask you for an account.

Did you rob me? Oh, no. Oh, God. I don't want to.

Sorry. I can think of a million scenarios. But that is the question that this text needs me and needs you to answer. Given your resources and your hearing date, did you rob God?

Well, if so, repent, turn, return. We are being refined. We are those marked by repentance.

[33 : 41] And lastly, we are those who respond. As the book concludes, the people who fear the Lord, you see it there in verse 16, the people who fear the Lord assemble together and in some sense renew their vows before the Lord.

The ESV puts it, they get together verse 16. They speak to one another. God hears them and pays attention to them and assembles a book together.

And certainly, the book is not for God. It's not like God can't name and identify these people. It's most likely it's for the people. It's for the people. That they get together and they renew their vows before the Lord.

It's a covenantal renewal ceremony. They assemble a book of names before the Lord as those who desire to submit their lives to Him and esteem His name.

They gather a book together. They put their names in it. Why? Because they needed to remind themselves that they were committed to the Lord.

[34 : 56] and so, it would be Bing and, you know, whoever. On this day, we pledge to give ourselves to the Lord. We are here to remind ourselves that we are covenant people.

We are covenant people. And the Lord's response, according to verse 17, is, on that day, which we'll explore next week, on that day, they will show up as God's treasured possession.

On that day, they would be spared from judgment and receive pardon. On that day, God assures there will be a clear distinction in verse 18 between the righteous and the wicked.

It will be very clear on that day the outcome of a life of service to God different from the life given toward the rejection of God.

Jesus speaks of that day often. That day, there's a separation of sheep and goats. On that day, the wheat and the chaff will be separated.

[36 : 03] On one side, there are sons and daughters. On the other side are strangers and outsiders. This is all over the New Testament. And the people respond to the word of God, piercing their heart.

They put their names on a list knowing that he's probably going to check it twice. See, the closest thing that we have, I think today, of responding similarly is putting our names on a list.

And what kind of list does this look like? Well, I'll give the pitch here. We saw it if you were here last week. Individuals who covenant in doing life together.

We simply call it church membership. There are 120 of us, exactly. I looked it up this morning. Who have made this commitment to one another for our spiritual well-being and upkeep.

That we respond to the Lord. We've heard the charges from the Lord. We are guilty as charged. And what are we going to do? We're going to put ourselves on a list.

[37 : 12] Not because God needs a list, but because we need a list. Because when the elders, the seven of us, sit down every second Monday evening of the month, we go through that list and there is a name.

Where are they? How are they? Who are they? How can we pray for them? We've covenanted to their spiritual well-being. And likewise, you to ours.

That is the list. We have pledged to serve Christ, to serve one another in this place and for this congregation.

And if you want to do so, January 19th and 26th, sign up. Why is it a big deal? Because it seems that at least here in Malachi, that's how they responded.

How do I know God is doing something in someone's life? They're saying, I'm on this team. And if this ship sinks, I'm going down.

[38 : 18] And if this ship flies, I'm going up. But all the while, I'm holding an oar. And whether I'm paddling in the water or flying in the sky, I'm here for you.

I'm here for you. I'm here for us and the well-being of this faith family. The people of God, while we wait, we are being refined.

We are marked by repentance. And we respond to God's word. I don't know that court date for me.

You don't know yours either. But it's all on the same day, incidentally. And I'll be summoned into that courtroom. Hopefully, never having to have been in earthly court, my first court experience will be in heaven.

And the charges will be read. Did you, Bing, selfishly withhold your gifts and resources from the Lord?

[39 : 30] Did you, Bing, out of your angry outburst, belittle the children that God gave you? Did you, Bing, proudly overlook a neighbor in need?

and snub them? Did you, Bing, fasten your eyes upon something that wasn't, didn't belong to you? Did you covet that which was not yours?

Did you, Bing, tell that lie to mom and dad when you were nine years old? And the charges may go on and on and on and the judge will say, what is your plea?

well, my plea is this. I'm guilty. So guilty. Guilty as charged. Do you know what the penalty is when you offend a holy God?

I do. I do. and there he'll be.

[40 : 43] The judge also happens to be my advocate. Guilty.

Guilty you are. but in Christ pardoned you'll be. Guilty. Pardoned.

What does Jesus do for you? He takes all that guilt, all that penalty that you deserve, incurs it upon himself and says, when you show up to your court date, I will be there.

I will be your attorney. I will be your defense and I will assure you that your verdict, your punishment is erased.

erased well hallelujah and may that be true of all of us he sees you when you're sleeping he knows when you're awake he knows if you've been bad or good so believe him for Christ's sake well let me pray for us Father we give you thanks for your word and the reality that it holds out to us we thank you for a messenger who comes not only to purify us but to change us to redeem us to save us to pardon us and so Lord may we be a people who fear the Lord serve him with all our might knowing that in the end there is great distinction between the righteous and the wicked and Lord may we be found because of Christ on the side of the righteous we ask these things for Jesus' sake

[43 : 12] Amen