

Justice and Judgment

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[0 : 00] I'm going to thank Tolo and Esther again for doing a great job with that. We've got some really talented people in the church and you will see the point. You will see the point. Was that for me? I like applause. So if you're new or visiting, it's good to have you.

My name's Jono Smith, one of the pastors here and we're in the second week of Malachi in a four-week series. So keep your Bibles open to that page, particularly for chapter three. That's where we're going to land most of all.

So just to recap a little bit about Malachi, if you're not aware, he was a prophet of God. His name means my messenger. He was to be God's messenger to the people of Israel because in about 450 BC when he was around, Israel, the people of Israel were returning to their land after God had been disciplining them by exiling them out of their land.

And so they're returning now after a period of exile, which was very painful for them. If you want to hear about what that was like, you read the book of Lamentations and you get the idea of how tragic it was for them to be removed from their land, to be removed from their temple.

And so they've come back after this period of discipline from God. And so the question on everyone's lips who is watching and our lips as we read is, are these people any different? And we saw last week that in fact, they're not any different.

[1 : 20] They're just as rebellious, just as wanton in their sin, just as unrepentant. And so God has sent his messenger Malachi to speak to them, to call them back, to warn them away from rebellion against God.

So tonight we're going to talk about justice and judgment. And I wonder if in your Christian life, you've ever looked around at the culture around you, at the way things are happening around you, the way things tend to work around you, and you're starting to ask the question, is there any point being a Christian?

I mean, does it make any difference at all being a Christian? There are people all over the world who are prospering off the back of oppression of the poor, right?

People who are prospering through dodgy business practices. I mean, the saying that cheaters never prosper isn't really true, is it?

I mean, they're prospering everywhere. I wonder if you look around at the world around you and you think, I'm trying so hard to be a Christian, so hard to be holy, trying so hard to live as Jesus would want me to live, and yet it's making no difference.

[2 : 34] Where's the justice? Well, if you've asked that question before, you're asking the same question as the people in Malachi's church were asking.

We're going to see tonight that God has an answer for them and an answer for us. It's the same answer for the both of us. So why don't we look at it.

Let's go to verse 17. We'll skip ahead to there and start there. Verse 17 says this, That's the question.

Where is the God of justice? The wicked succeed. Evil men prosper. What is God doing?

And what's the point of trying to be godly if it makes no difference to me in the end? You may as well just enjoy yourself. Enjoy your life. Indulge those passions that you've been working against because it makes no difference.

[3 : 53] And this might be why these people are failing so much in their lives as God's people. Remember last week we saw that these people were just failing.

They were just backsliding in just about every area of their life in faith. They were sceptical of God's love. They were careless in worship. They were indifferent to truth, disobedient to the covenant, faithless in their marriages.

We heard that in the first part of the reading. And they were stingy in their offerings. We're going to look at that next week. They were backsliding people. And this might be part of the reason why. They were looking around and seeing that all of these evil men were prospering. And they were thinking, Well, what's the point? Maybe we should be like them. Chapter 3 verse 14 is very telling.

It sort of sums it up. They've been saying, It is vain to serve God. It is vain. What do we profit by keeping his command or going about as mourners before the Lord of hosts?

[4 : 58] Now we count the arrogant, happy, evildoers not only prosper, but when they put God to the test, they escape. That's what they're saying. And it's driving them away from faith.

So I wonder if you've ever thought that. I think one of the reasons some of us have thought that and the reason that we're prone to thinking that is because many of you have been told the lie that when you become a Christian, you'll have an easy life.

You'll have a happy life. You'll have a prosperous life. You put your faith in Jesus and he will give the desires of your heart. You become wealthy and healthy.

You won't experience depression or anxiety or any of those kind of things. You can have your best life now. A lot of teaching like that today.

And see, if you believe that, you can see what's going to happen when you do suffer. You're going to start to doubt God. I've had three conversations with people this week, new Christians, who have told me that since they became Christians, their lives are much harder.

[6 : 14] Right? Much harder. Because they're aware of things that they need to battle against, for one. Satan is more aware of them and more likely to attack.

Many reasons why life gets harder after we become Christians. But if we don't realise that, if we put our hope in prosperity as a result of faith, we will be like these people, doubting God.

So he says, you've wearied me by saying this and the reason is just because it's rubbish. That whole idea is rubbish. And it wearies God to hear us complain to him when we don't prosper on account of our faith.

So what's God's response? Let's take a look. Go to chapter 3, verse 1. This is God's response to their whinging. He says, See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple, the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight.

Indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. So their question is, where is God? Where is God? In all of this? Where is God?

[7 : 29] And his answer is, I am coming. I'm coming. Their big mistake is to expect all of God's justice in the here and now, that everything should happen according to God's perfect will, that Stan should win tonight.

I don't know. I've never seen the show. Just put my hand up. I'm out of touch. But according to Wayne, if God's justice is perfect, Stan will win. Now, he might not win because God's justice isn't perfect right now.

We're going to see more of that in a bit, but they were expecting that it would be. God says, no, the time is coming when I will come and put things right.

I want to look just a little bit more closely at verse one. We need to figure out who he's talking about here. Okay, so there's a couple of people he's talking about. There's a messenger and there's a Lord.

Okay, and this is God speaking through Malachi, these words, and he's kind of saying the same thing in two different ways. So, who's the messenger? It's not Malachi.

[8 : 38] His name means my messenger, but it's not Malachi. This is talking about a future event after Malachi's time. Who's the Lord? It's not exactly God. God is speaking these words about a Lord who is the Lord of his temple and we can get the answer to the riddle if we read the New Testament because Mark chapter one and I think it's Matthew 11 identifies, quotes this verse and identifies these two people.

Who are they? The messenger is John the Baptist and the Lord is Jesus Christ. That's who God's talking about right now. 450 BC before Jesus, 450 years before Jesus he's saying I'm sending someone.

I'm sending someone. I'm going to send John the Baptist. He's going to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus Christ to put things right. We're going to talk a lot about this in week four so I won't harp

on it now but this is big.

The Lord is coming. He's going to come to his temple. He's going to put things right. So what's God going to do?

He's going to send John the Baptist. You're going to hear a lot of this around Christmas time too. John the Baptist is going to come prepare the way for Jesus and Jesus is going to inaugurate a kingdom.

[10:03] The kingdom of God and in doing so he's going to start something that's going to bring about justice. It's going to loose people from the bonds of oppression.

It's going to offer salvation to people the world over. That's the kingdom of God. But it's only going to be started in part like a mustard seed in the ground when he comes and then it's not going to come to full fruition until he returns the second time.

That's what we're hoping for. That's when perfect justice will be done. But for these people back in Malachi's day remember it's 450 BC they hear that God is coming and they're expecting it right now and they're kind of happy about it.

Where is God? Where is justice? God's answer I'm coming and they think excellent finally God is coming to the temple a little bit late God we've been here for a while now but you're coming thank God for that you're going to deal with all those people who are sinning against us all those unrighteous people not like us the righteous people of God you'll deal with them they think he's coming to judge all those bad people out there but in fact what does it say in verse 2 God is coming but who can endure the day of his coming and who can stand when he appears they think it's going to be a good thing when he comes he says no no no be afraid be very afraid of my coming I'm coming to judge you the people of Israel for your sin for your unrighteousness for trusting in yourselves rather than throwing yourselves on the mercy of God for wantonly sinning against me I'm coming to judge you so who can stand I remember a story actually kind of illustrates this I had a buddy who lived in Donvale and he lived on an avenue where heaps of people sped a lot and I was one of them and it was like you go for a record by the bend if you're not doing 140 then you've wussed out and so the residents particularly the people who lived on the corner got really upset about all the speeding rightly so and they invited the police to come in and to set up speed traps there and to get these really bad people who were speeding like me I never got caught but you know the first people who got caught exactly right the people who invited the cops in first people never invite the police into your street that's a bad idea and it's kind of what's happening here see those people thought these bad people are speeding in our street we'll be okay if we invite the police in because we're law abiding and yet when the police came they were the ones who were first judged and it's the same with these people they want

[13:17] Jesus to come and mete out justice but they're going to be the object who can stand before Jesus is judged this is the question we should be asking we know that Jesus is coming again to judge how can we be sure that we will be safe that we will not be judged in a judgment that leads to condemnation and we've talked a lot about this in recent weeks remember the p sermon I did on perseverance when we were looking at salvation series and we saw that in the New Testament as well as the old that the Bible says a lot about you will not inherit the kingdom of God you prostitutes you will not inherit the kingdom of God you drunkards you will not inherit the kingdom of God you thieves and so the question was who will inherit the kingdom of God and the answer was those who live in faith and obedience faith in the death of Jesus on the cross to save us from our sins that's all we need he's done it all for us and then the result of that is living a life of obedience which proves that we have our faith in

Jesus that's day by day perseverance just grinding it out for Jesus that's how you know you'll be safe but these people they they didn't have either of those things they didn't have faith they had faith in themselves their own righteousness they didn't have obedience we're going to see in verse 5 they're doing all kinds of dodginess and so they should be very afraid of God's coming so what's going on exactly let's just focus in on these people see what we can learn from these people in Malachi's church what were they doing that meant that they were going to be judged so they're standing here appealing to God to come and judge the wicked people and all the time they're indulging in those things that they're asking God to judge the way it would have played out they would have seen a dodgy employer underpaying his workers and they would see that God didn't kill that guy for sinning like he could have and so they would say well he's getting away with it why don't we just underpay our workers or maybe they looked out at the nations and saw a

lot of divorce and adultery going on and they knew that the command of God was to be faithful to their wives but they saw that God didn't kill those people for doing that so they thought well let's just do a bit of that ourselves as well that's their problem they're standing with a plank in their eye and they're talking about the speck in the eyes of the nations who don't even know God or his commandments these people are in the New Testament as well you remember Jesus going around throughout the gospels just tearing shreds off hypocrites it wasn't the prostitutes that were in trouble with Jesus it wasn't really the sinners it was the hypocrites it was the teachers of the law who he said were teaching people not to steal and then stealing themselves they were the whitewashed tombs that looked good on the outside but dead inside they were the blind leading the blind it's like these people self righteous

I wonder if this lands on us a little bit whether you're feeling a little bit of a tug at your heart that perhaps you like many many Christians have a very holier than thou kind of mentality that you find it very easy to look down on the sinners committing all those very obvious sins and yet in your heart you have a lot of self righteousness this is a warning to you if that's you so what's God's aim with us if it's not that we be hypocrites and self righteous what what does he want to do with us let's continue in verse two he says this Lord he is like a refiner's fire and a fuller's soap he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver and he will purify the descendants of

Levi and refine them like gold and silver until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years God says this when Jesus comes he's going to clean people up he's going to clean people up he's like a refiner's fire do you know what a refiner's fire is it's what metal workers use you heat up a brick of gold or a lump of gold and all the impurities float to the surface all the dross and you scrape that off and you're left with pure gold Peter talks about this in his epistles he's like a fuller's soap this is a very harsh soap that people would use on their clothes and then bash it on the rocks of a river and that way they would get their clothes clean this is what Jesus is like with us and you know what fire and fuller's soap both of them hurt a lot that God uses suffering that God uses discipline as it says in I think it's Hebrews 12 to discipline his children so that they might grow in godliness this is what

[19:09] God does this is what we call when we get saved this is what we call expiation it's a big word that means that God takes all of your sin and all of your filth and he washes you clean like a piece of slate that's grown all sorts of muck and God just scrapes it clean that's expiation that in the past life you were a drunkard you were just really slutty with your friends at parties you were self righteous and God takes that and he washes it in the blood of Jesus we sing about it and he makes you clean and then after that we go through this process of sanctification right so this is the refining under the fire that day by day God makes us a little bit more like Jesus day by day he chips off the hard edges to make us more like Jesus that through suffering and discipline and pain he makes us more like Jesus that's sanctification it's through perseverance day by day following him and then we look to the end when

Jesus comes again or when you die and and this is glorification that you get given a new body when Jesus returns and it's a sinless body and you are without sin now for eternity in heaven no more expiation no more sanctification you have arrived you're complete this is what Jesus is all about he is a refiner's fire he's a fuller's soap he's going to make us into his image more and more day by day what about these people Malachi's church this is a group of people who aren't seeking to be refined not seeking to be sanctified it's a group who are disregarding God disobeying God so he says verse 5 finish on this then I will draw near to you for what judgment judgment

I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers against the adulterers against those who swear falsely against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages the widow and the orphan against those who thrust aside the alien and do not fear me says the Lord of hosts now this this warning here it's not a warning of condemnation it's a warning that's supposed to woo these people back to God remember this coming of judgment it's going to come in the future so they've got a window here they've got a window to turn back to God to repent to be refined by him rather than judged by him finally when he comes and it's the same for us today isn't it one of the purposes of your life is to have a window to respond to Jesus to repent to come to him in faith to be saved to have your sins forgiven that's one of the reasons you're here is to have that opportunity if you're here tonight and you're not a

Christian the reason you're here is because God wants you to respond to him in faith that's it there's no mystery you're here because God wants to save you from this judgment it's a warning it's a it's a wooing warning God doesn't want to judge you like this he wants you to turn he wants you to come to him in faith so these people think they're safe you ask the average person out on the street today are you safe from judgment they'd say absolutely if there is such a thing I'll be okay never murdered anyone right these people are the same they think they're safe we're the people of God we're the chosen people of God we've got the law we've got the temple we'll be okay and God says no you're not okay you're trusting in yourselves you're not submitting yourself to me and therefore you will be judged so I want to end by asking you a question about where you're at if we plotted a line it doesn't really work like this but just for the sake of clarity if we plotted a line and you go over here there are people who just don't have any idea who

God is they don't know who Jesus is the fact that he came to earth to die for their sins to bring them to God to give them eternal life and so they haven't responded to him or maybe they know about him and they've rejected him maybe you're you're there tonight this is a warning for you you need to come to Jesus you need to be saved you need to have your sins taken away from you and put on him otherwise it's just going to be judgment Jesus is going to come back and it's going to be too late maybe you're a little bit away along kind of you've accepted Jesus but you're backsliding you're like these people you're seeing all of this stuff that's happening around you you're seeing how people kind of indulge in whatever they like they do whatever they like to other people they please themselves and nothing happens to them in fact they're richer than you are they've got a better car they've got a better job they've actually got a boyfriend or a girlfriend or a wife or a husband they're doing better than you are maybe you're starting to slip into that way of thinking that you may as well just go down that path away from

[25 : 37] God who doesn't seem to care this is a warning for you guys and an encouragement keep going keep persevering in faith Jesus is coming and he's going to judge and he's going to put everything right and if you want to be with him worshipping him in paradise you need to keep going keep going get some brothers and sisters around you in the church keep going what about if you're you've arrived you're a mature Christian not being arrogant about it but you've accepted Jesus you're confident that on the day he comes you will be with him paradise you're persevering in faith the call to you guys from this is to guard yourself against self righteousness we've talked about this but I reckon also after hearing Wayne's sermon this morning which is really good download it from the web it's on there now I think from

Acts 24 Paul's mission is to tell everyone he meets about Jesus so that on the day that Jesus does come to judge his conscience is clean Wayne said this morning that when Jesus comes when he comes to judge he's really really passionate about not being able to look at people and for them to turn to him and say why didn't you tell me why didn't you tell me that this judgment was coming are you tracking with me with that have you ever thought about that these people that you know of that I know of that I just have never told about Jesus because I'm too ashamed I love myself more than I love them I'm afraid of the way they'll respond and so we don't say anything Jesus comes back that's it no second chance so I reckon the call for you guys is know that

Jesus is coming know that he's going to judge and everyone who has ever lived is going to be raised and you're either going to be raised to eternal death or to eternal life that's it they're the options and the only way to get eternal life is to put your trust in Jesus in response to what hearing the gospel in response to hearing the gospel that's the only way it happens so the call for you guys is share it share the gospel with people that you know that you're in relationship with share it don't come to the day of judgment and have people turn to you and say why didn't you tell me let's leave it there I want to pray for us though so please bow your heads I'm going to give us a minute silence to think about where we're at along that line unbelief to strong belief want us to take some time to judge ourselves to let

Malachi God's messenger speak to us and I'll pray that God will work in us we'll Thank you.

Dear Father, it's easy for us to look around ourselves today and see evil men prosper. And to wonder whether it's actually worth it to follow you in holiness and obedience and faith.

[30 : 20] Lord, please help us tonight. Encourage us that your Holy Spirit, the encourager, would encourage us in our faith. Lord, this kind of thing doesn't happen individually or in a vacuum.

We are given the body of Christ to encourage us in faith. So please use this congregation, this church, to encourage one another along the way. Lord, I pray.

I really pray for those of us here who aren't believers, whose destiny is judgment and death. I pray that they would hear the wooing voice of God pleading with them to come to him. Father, Jesus said that no one who comes to him will ever be rejected on the basis of anything in their past. On the basis of anything at all. Please bring people here to come to know you tonight.

[31 : 38] Lord, we pray for the self-righteous Christians in the room who look down on others. We talk about the speck when they've got a plank. Lord, please be with the hypocrites, the whitewashed tombs.

Lord, please bring us back to walk with Jesus, to be humble, to be thankful, to know that we wouldn't have anything apart from your grace.

God, please do all these miraculous things in this place, in these people, for Jesus' sake. Amen.