

# Malachi 2:17-3:5 "Pulled Over By God"

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- Thank you, guys. Thank you, James. You wrote a beautiful song. Grateful for that. It helps us to feel and to see, as this passage will this morning, where the hurt is.
- And where the hope is at the same time. Thank you for that. Turn with me to Malachi again this morning. God, through his prophets, has been calling his people back to himself because he's like that, right?
- He loves us dearly. He grieves when we wander from him. He longs to welcome us back home to himself.
- He's been doing it generation after generation through the centuries as we've seen these prophets, Micah and Zephaniah and Haggai and Malachi, coming with these very similar messages of repentance.
- [ 1 : 1 6 ]     And then even within each of those prophets' ministries, to the same group of people, they've said this thing over and over. To the same people.
- Repent. A call to repentance. To renewed relationship with God. Because we need it. Friends, we need it again this morning, don't we?
- This is a short but powerful passage. Much as I tried, there's no outline this morning. We're going to read this passage, Malachi 2.17 through 3.5.
- And then we're just going to walk right through it together to understand it and see what God would say to us this morning. So I'd encourage you to keep a Bible open and follow with me through the sermon today.
- That'll be your outline. First, let's read God's holy, inerrant, infallible word that he promises will not return to him void.
- [ 2 : 1 9 ]     That means that it will work in your heart and in mine today for his purposes. That's good news. Malachi 2.17 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 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 and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old, as in former years.

[ 3 : 30 ] 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. Let's pray together. Father, we give you thanks for your word.

And we plead for your help. We need renewal, revival in our hearts. Your spirit is the one who brings that and he does it through the word.

And so, Father, do it now in us for your glory. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Perhaps some of you like me have had this experience. You're driving along the interstate with a 70 mile per hour speed limit. And you're cruising at 75 or 77 or 78 or whatever you've picked.

[ 4 : 44 ] And all of a sudden, this guy comes just flying past you. He must be going at least 90 miles an hour, probably 100. And you think, I hope they catch that guy.

And then maybe the second or the third person that whizzes past you like that, you start to think, I can't believe these policemen. Where are they anyway when you need them?

You've felt that before, right? Well, I suspect some of you have also had it happen where just a couple minutes after those reckless drivers fly past you and there's nobody stopping them, you look in the rearview mirror and there's blue lights flashing.

And you think, yes, finally, justice. Someone who can catch the guy going 100, justice will be served. Except that those blue lights don't whiz past you like those other guys.

They stay right there behind you. And eventually, you pull off to the side and you think to yourself, I wasn't the one speeding.

[ 5 : 53 ] And he says, sir, I've got you at 82 and a 70. And you think, me? I thought you were going to ask me for the license plate of that other guy.

I mean, I'm the good guy here. I'm on your team. We're going to catch the bad guys, right? What do you mean you got me at 82 and a 70? You better get going. They're getting away.

You just honestly can't believe that you're the one on the receiving end of this so-called justice. I don't know if you've felt that before, but whether it's on the road or anywhere else, we all have this tendency to think that God's justice, his just judgment is for someone else.

Right? There's somebody else that needs that. We assume we're the cowboy in the white hat. We're the good guys. Right? Right? Kids, have you ever thought, I'm one of the good kids?

Have you thought that before? I grew up thinking that, you know, I'm one of the good kids. Other kids got in trouble at school, but I didn't. I was especially careful to behave when I was at church.

[ 7 : 10 ] Right? Yeah? You do that? Uh-huh. And then I played a lot of baseball. And so my team played baseball games basically every weekend. Except, you know, on Sundays I went to church and the rest of the guys on my team played baseball.

So I was really one of the good kids. Right? There were bad kids out there and I knew I wasn't perfect, but the bad kids were the other ones and I was a good one.

So if we needed to talk about sin and repentance, if somebody needed to apologize or change, it was somebody else, not me.

If God wanted to come deal with someone about their behavior or have a pastor preach sermons about repentance for weeks on end, I could give him a list of names to talk to.

Here they are, God, you should talk to them, not me. Someone from another political party, someone clearly less spiritual than I am, someone not at church as often as I am.

[ 8 : 24 ] God's people have started feeling that way in Malachi's day. And Malachi wants to warn them. Listen, it's a warning about the danger of feeling like you're the guy in the white hat.

Of feeling like you're one of the good kids. There's a danger in that. That we might miss God's call to our hearts.

It's actually where this passage starts. It's a warning that God's people have started getting critical, not just of others doing those bad things, but of God himself and how he's handling it or not.

Where are those policemen when you need them anyway? Verse 17, where is the God of justice? Jesus. And we're told the way that some of God's people are acting is wearying God.

That's not a good sign, is it? When God who is eminently patient and slow to anger and long suffering is weary with your words, that's not good.

[ 9 : 36 ] What are they saying that's causing that? They're saying everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord. God delights in the bad guys.

He doesn't care about us. Where is that so-called just God anyway? They don't see justice in the world around them. The Persians are stronger and richer and they don't even follow Yahweh.

The Jews have worked hard for God on his temple and it's not paying off. It's not making their city great again. Some wealthier Jews are even taking advantage of poorer ones and they're getting away with it.

They've had enough. God, they tell each other, is not as holy, righteous, and on top of things as he says he is.

If he is just, he's certainly not powerful enough or loving enough to show up here and fix things. And God gets weary of this because we falsely accuse him of unfaithfulness and completely avoid or ignore our own unfaithfulness.

[ 10 : 57 ] We accuse him of being asleep at the wheel. We blame God and keep ourselves off the hook. Now let me be clear on this before we read further.

The Bible is full of examples of crying out to God in the face of injustice. Okay? They're all over the place being passionate about it, emotionally pleading with him desperately.

And this is commended. It's a good thing. It's all through the Psalms lamenting, How long, O Lord? Deliver me. Bring justice against my enemies.

Oh, that you would come and help me. And God loves to hear his children cry to him and long to understand him and know him more.

He loves that. This is not that. Okay? This is different. This is an accusatory complaint. Character assassination of God in order to relieve ourselves of guilt.

[ 12 : 03 ] In fact, you'll notice here that the words are not spoken to God, are they? They're actually spoken to other people. We could say it's gossiping about God, not crying out to him.

Some among God's people have begun focusing on how God should be acting for me, rather than how I should be acting for God, overlooking their own sin and blaming God for what they see in the world around them.

Where is the God of justice? And chapter 3 opens with a simple response to that question.

It's right here. Here I am. 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. I haven't left you. I'm not unreliable.

[ 13 : 09 ] I have a plan. I love that about our God. Even when we weary him, he doesn't give up to get away from that.

Rather, he comes near to us. Any delay in the coming of the God of justice is for the purpose that all might repent, that more might know him.

God is not slow, but patient. Desiring that none would perish, but that all would come to repentance, Peter says.

God's justice is sure. He is coming. In fact, not only is the God of justice coming to make everything right, but someone's even coming to prepare the way for him.

So, two different people in this verse. The messenger and then God himself. Let me clarify those for you.

[ 14 : 17 ] The messenger preparing the way, we learn later, is John the Baptist. John comes, if you remember the New Testament, and he preaches a message of what?

Repentance. Turn away from your idols and turn back to God. Prepare your heart to receive the king. As the herald running before the king, he's removing obstacles for God to come to his people and fellowship with them and justice and righteousness and glory.

That's the first person who's coming. And then the second figure is Jesus. It's a bit confusing because he is also called messenger.

But messenger of the covenant is not the same as my messenger in this verse, but rather it's the same as the Lord, the divine figure.

He's the one you will delight in. He is coming, says Yahweh. He will come suddenly to his temple, right? To be among his people. To dwell with them in relationship.

[ 15 : 28 ] Which is why repentance prepares the way so the holy God can even be able to live with them. God doesn't give up on his people.

Rather, he draws near to them. But when the God of justice comes, it's no light thing for anyone.

I'm coming, says God. But don't presume you're ready. Especially if you're looking at everyone else's sin and ignoring your own.

Verse 2. But who can endure the day of his coming? And who can stand when he appears? You have to have clean hands and a pure heart.

For he is like a refiner's fire. And like 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.

[ 16 : 33 ] Hey, you with the white hat. You who think you're the good guys. Be careful. He's saying. Jesus comes to purify worshipers for Yahweh.

And it's a painful purifying. Two images here for Jesus' work, right? The refiner's fire and fuller's soap.

The refining fire that burns away the dross so that the silver is clean and the refiner can see his image reflected back to him in it.

It burns. And the fuller's soap. You may not be familiar with that. It scrubbed the dirt off of things like sheep's wool to make it clean.

Both purify. And both are painful. Some of this purification process will involve removing people from the people of God for judgment because they will not repent and worship Yahweh.

[ 17 : 42 ] Some of the purification process that Jesus brings will be for those whose hearts are softened, for those among God's people who would worship Yahweh.

But they need clean hands and a pure heart or they can't stand before him. And so Jesus is turning their hearts back to him. That's what Jesus comes to do, right?

That's the work of Jesus. That's what it's about. Not hiding your sin, but running with it to him so that he can cleanse you of all your sin.

That he can renew your heart to worship Yahweh again. Kids, let me explain it to you this way because those are both confusing images, okay?

What God is saying here is not that you have to be perfect, but that you must run to Jesus with your sin so that he can make your heart clean.

[ 18 : 45 ] Let me ask you this. Kids, would you ever eat spaghetti with a white dress on? No, no, no. I hope you would never do such a terrible thing. But imagine that you did.

You were so hungry and you were in such a hurry to eat the spaghetti that you rushed over and you tripped. And the whole plate of spaghetti goes all over your white dress. Oh, no.

It's a huge mess, right? That's what our sin is like. Every one of us is as dirty before God as a white dress with spaghetti all over it.

And when that happens, you may think like some of us adults, you know what I need to do? I need to go hide this dress somewhere. Mom will never know this happened, right?

Maybe she hasn't seen it yet. But what happens if you go put that dress in a corner somewhere? That stain just sets in, doesn't it? Deeper and deeper.

[ 19 : 44 ] And you put it away. But what happens if you actually run right away as soon as it happens to mom? Mom, the fire or the soap that Malachi is talking about, it's like goop, okay?

I mean, he didn't say it that way, but that's what he meant. Goop, your parents probably have something like this. This stuff is amazing. You know what you do with it? You rub it on the stain, right?

And you scrub it in and you may have to be rough with it and it may hurt the fabric some, but it gets the stain out. You put it in the washing machine and the clothes rub and it gets rid of that terrible stain on your white dress.

That's what Jesus does with our sin. He wants us to run to him right away, even though it might hurt some, even though it might be hard and he will cleanse us and make us new so that the stain is gone and we love him even more for how amazing he is, right?

This thing says it's the ultimate stain lifter. That's not true. Jesus is. Jesus, not just your white dress. Jesus wants to take that dark stain on your heart and say, I can deal with that.

[ 21 : 02 ] Bring it to me. The big mess you've made, I know how to take care of that. I can clean that up for you. So when I say repent, it means run to Jesus with your sin, with your mess, because he can handle it.

That's what repent means, kids. And Malachi is telling us this morning, we all need Jesus' purifying work. Your leaders are particularly highlighted as needing Jesus' purifying work.

So we all need to be running to him, not minimizing our sin, thinking he needs to go fix others out there somewhere. I particularly want to challenge us here this morning.

Listen to this, or you're missing Malachi's message. If it doesn't hurt, you're not near Jesus. You may say you know him.

Jesus is, he's just working in my life. This is what Jesus would have me do. I'm a Christian. Of course I'm a Christian. What else would I be? Does it hurt?

[ 22 : 19 ] Because if it doesn't hurt, it's not Jesus. It's true. The ministry of Jesus brings joy and freedom and cleansing and healing.

Yes, all those things. But he does it this way. He is like a refining fire. Fuller's soap. His purifying work burns away the dross.

That's how it happens, right? It scrubs away the dirt. It tears away our idols that we're clinging to. It's a painful purifying. Purifying. Or else it's self-righteous, self-deception, believing my clothes were already white and didn't need it.

It's one or the other. It's painful purifying or it's self-deception, believing you're clean without him. It hurts, doesn't it?

When Jesus draws you out of the comfort you find in your financial security and he tells you to trust him instead of what's in your bank account.

[ 23 : 32 ] It hurts, doesn't it? When Jesus calls you to follow him in a specific decision and you have to let go of the approval of others to do it and that's an idol that you love and ugh.

It hurts, doesn't it? When Jesus shows you you're not loving someone but you're using them in the relationship to feel affirmed and comfortable yourself.

I told you a few weeks ago I was making a running list in my office of idols God is exposing in me through this Minor Prophets series. Those were three of them where he's been working repentance in my heart lately.

It's a painful process and there are a lot of others. But I share those with you this morning to remind you that this repentance that he's calling all of us to is not merely for those who have killed someone or robbed a bank.

Right? We think of repentance sometimes that way. Repentance is daily moment by moment. It's a lifestyle that's normal the way we relate to God and he calls us to that lifestyle where our hearts grieve broken relationship with him where we're constantly turning back to him and then rejoicing over and over again that he restores our relationship.

[ 25 : 03 ] That's how we relate to him. It's not just some big sin you get caught in but the daily state of your heart toward God. Are you willing to stop looking at others' problems and see where your heart has strayed from God?

If you are, Jesus delights to meet you there to heal and restore that relationship between you and your father. and that's the hopeful part. Right?

Jesus purifies us. He does. And then end of verse 3 and then after he refines them and purifies them they will bring offerings and righteousness to the Lord. They can now because of Jesus.

The offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years. As we repent, he promises to make us into worshipers who worship God from the heart.

That's the hope of the gospel offered to us in the context of a passage that primarily is meant to warn us toward Jesus. That's what will happen when you find him and he works on you.

[ 26 : 17 ] And Malachi ends this section with these sobering words. 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. Y'all, this is not an exhaustive list of all the big sins we need to repent of, but rather examples of what it looks like when people stop fearing God.

You see that at the end, right? The wicked among God's covenant people do all these things because they don't fear me.

They have a worship problem before they have a specific sins problem in their lives. And the fact that their hearts haven't come back to love and trust God looks like these things.

Sorcery. Using God or other gods to get what we want. Manipulating God by going to church, looking for the good life by just being associated with Christianity.

[ 27 : 45 ] Adultery. including that in your heart where you use someone else you know or you don't know to get what you want. Dishonesty in order to care for yourself.

Neglecting the least of these because you're not where Jesus would be as Thurman challenged us last week. Not reflecting God's heart because your lives and schedules are full, consumed with other people just like you without regard for the poor and the refugee and the voiceless.

Ouch. God's heart is for faithfulness, truth, mercy to the least and the left out are ours like that.

If you see any of these struggles in your heart and life, the call is simple, painful, but simple.

It's repent. Listen, these verses are trying to tell us all signs point towards repentance. Every verse in this passage is saying repent.

[ 29 : 02 ] repent. The wearied response of God to His people who focus on others' sins rather than their own, repent. The preparation of John the Baptist to get us ready for God to come screamed one word, repent.

The ministry of Jesus is one that works to purify those who realize that they're speeding too, that they have stains on their clothes too, that they don't reflect God's image or even long to sometimes.

So repent. And in the warning of a prophet God sends to speak His word to His people, repent.

Listen, if God's pulling you over this morning, arresting your heart, so to speak, it's not merely to be a killjoy in your life.

It's not like you're driving so fast. That's not who He is. He's not out to get you like that. Rather, He's arresting you to call you back to Him, to show you where life really is, to remind you where it's found, perhaps even to point you to this table where His justice is poured out not on you, but on His Son fully.

[ 30 : 29 ] where Jesus underwent the ultimate refiner's fire so that you could finally and forever be purified. Your repentance may be painful and may start with tears.

It usually does. But Yahweh sent the messenger of the covenant so you would know that you can walk into that repentance because it ends not with tears and pain but with joy and life.

That's what He came to do. It's what He said to His disciples even in that painful moment for Him on the night He was betrayed. Jesus took bread and what He was picturing was going to hurt.

He broke it and gave it to His disciples as I'm ministering in His name give this bread to you and He said take eat this is my body which is broken for you do this in remembrance of me and in the same way after supper He took the cup and said this cup is the new covenant in my blood shed for many for the forgiveness of their sins but His blood was going to have to be shed and He said drink of it and do it in remembrance of me for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

If that's what you're here to do to proclaim His death if you come as a sinner repenting of that sin and saying I need to run back to Jesus who took the justice that I deserve then come joyfully weeping and rejoicing to this table if you don't know Him if you haven't thrown yourself on Jesus as your only hope then the call of God's word to you this morning would be not to come to a table like this that pictures something that for you is not a reality in your heart but rather He's saying to you this morning come to Jesus there's no other way to find yourself safe from the justice of God and to know your heavenly Father we'd love for you to come and talk with us we'd love to pray with you we'd love to tell you more about Jesus let me pray and we'll celebrate together Jesus for your sacrifice for sinners like us we are so grateful

[ 33 : 09 ] Holy Spirit make us repentant sinners who would come running not with anything in our hands to offer to our Father but clinging desperately to Jesus remind us of that remind us that because of Him you welcome us to this table that's amazing grace give us delight in that as we celebrate in Jesus name Amen our host team members will usher you to tables forward and back we will celebrate God's love for us together for more information visit us online at [southwood.org](https://southwood.org)