Malachi You want justice?

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Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[0:00] Good morning, friends. If you'd like to get your bubbles and turn back to Malachi, we are on our third installment of our commitment series, and we're sort of roughly halfway through Malachi.

Right from the start in Malachi, we saw the glorious foundation of the relationship between God and his people. It was right there, chapter 1, verse 2, I have loved you.
And we unpacked that incredible statement that God's love is an electing love. His love for them is unconditional love because he chose them before they'd done anything good or evil.
His love for them is a sovereign love because he wasn't tricked, he wasn't forced, he wasn't manipulated to loving them. His love for them was a free love because it's an abundant overflow of the immeasurable grace that can never be bought, repaid, or earned in any way.
But Israel, as we saw from verse 2 of chapter 1, they failed to see the greatness of God's love. They failed to feel the greatness of God's love as well.
[1:05] We've also seen that they failed to see and feel the greatness of the majesty of God in chapter 1, verse 6. The son honors his father and to slave his master. If I'm a father, where is the honor due to me?

The fatherhood of God here in the first few verses of Malachi means that he loves me, but it also implies that God is to be honored and revered and venerated.
Malachi wants us to see and feel that our Father in heaven has infinite authority in the universe. He can wield any and all armies on the earth to accomplish his purposes among the nations.
He has myriads of unstoppable angels who do his bidding fallously and never fail in their errands.
He has appointed every star in the universe in its place, and he holds it there by the power of his word, or trillion upon trillion of them, and he calls them by name, each one of them.
And so it is the sheer majesty of the fatherhood of God that Judah's missing. And the sheer abundance of his mercy and grace that they're missing.
[2:19] And so the outworking for this is that their view of themselves is big, and their view of God is small, and so therefore they are giving God the leftover of their lives in careless worship and in the way that they treat other people.

Chapter 2, verse 17, where we're up to today, reveals just how small their view of God is. You have wearied the Lord with your words.
How have we wearied him, you asked? By saying, all who do evil are good in the eyes of the Lord, and he is pleased with them. Or, where is the God of justice?
They want a God of justice. No doubt we can identify with that. When aid money for war-torn countries is redirected towards guns and ammo, we feel the injustice of that.
Or when a billionaire milks money out of poor people with dodgy schemes, we feel the injustice of that. When a criminal escapes conviction through illegal technicalities, we feel the injustice of that.
[3:34] And in those moments, there is a right sense of justice stirred up within us. But a sense of futility is often stirred up in those moments as well.

Will the perpetrators ever be brought to justice? Will oppression ever end in this world? And so, you see the cynical, unbelieving question in verse 17.
Where is the God of justice? That question is tantamount to doubting the existence of God. Their view of God was so diminished that they were wondering if he even existed.
You see, the return from exile in Babylon quickly turned to disillusionment for the people of God. They had rebuilt the temple as instructed, but where was God?
Where was God? Zechariah and Ezekiel both said that the Lord would return in a glorious fashion and Israel, God's people, would be restored.

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[4:44] They would be on top of the world as they were under David and Solomon. And yet, the temple's built and decade after decade after decade followed and there was no supernatural event marking the return of the Lord to his temple.

And so, we've done our bit. God, you haven't done your bit. It's a question of, is he, in fact, faithless to his covenant promises?
You see, the evidence to them on the surface pointed to God forgetting his covenant promises. There was famine, there was oppression, life was really hard.
In fact, it was better back in Babylon and they were fed up and they were weary of it all. It turns out, however, that God had a greater reason for weariness.
2.17 again, You have wearied the Lord with your words. How have we wearied him, you ask? By saying, All who do evil are good in the eyes of the Lord and he is pleased with them.
[6:02] Or where is the God of justice? You see, God isn't wearied by the faithful prayers of the oppressed. He is wearied by faithlessness and sin.

And we saw examples of that last week in their careless worship and their unfaithfulness in their relationships with one another. And so where's God?
Has he forgotten his covenant promises? Is he going to turn up and come to his temple as Ezekiel and Zechariah said he would? Verse 1 of chapter 3.
See, or quite literally, listen up. I will send my messenger who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple.
The message of the covenant whom you desire will come, says the Lord Almighty. He's coming. And it says there, he's coming suddenly.
[7:04] That has an ominous feel to it. God says, The Lord you are seeking whom you desire will come. He is committed to his covenant.

He is coming and he tells his people exactly how it's going to work. We are told the Lord will send his messenger ahead of him to get things ready. Malachi here is picking up the imagery of the ancient kings who would inform their subjects that they were coming for a state visit and to give them time in order to get things ready for them.
So they weren't taken by surprise. And of particular importance was the need to prepare the way for the royal procession by removing anything that gets in the way.
All the debris, all the obstacles, all the boulders. And the messenger here has the same function. But they are spiritual rather than physical obstacles to the coming of this king to his temple.
The forerunner is to come in and to warn the people that the king is coming. Prepare your hearts.
[8:15] Prepare your lives. And once the forerunner has done his work, then the king will follow.
The Lord, who they are seeking at the beginning of chapter 3 verse 1, is also the messenger of the covenant whom they desire at the end of chapter 3 verse 1.

It's the same person. So in these verses, there's the messenger preparing the way for the Lord who is also the messenger of the covenant. Two people being referred to here.
As the messenger of the covenant, he will continue the work of the forerunner messenger. There will be a synergy between the two.
The difference is that because the messenger of the covenant, the second one, is also the Lord, that is the Lord of hosts, the Lord Almighty, he will speak with unparalleled authority.
He will not just present the message of the covenant. He is the message of the covenant. He is the mediator of the covenant. He's the one who will bring it in to fulfillment amongst the people of God.
[9:38] And so the message here for these cynical people of God is that the Lord has not forgotten his covenant. It would have seemed like he had forgotten it.

Things weren't so great in Israel at that time. And it would seem that he had forgotten it for another 400 years after these words when God never said a word to them.
There was no message for God, from God for 400 years. and then after four centuries we have Mark chapter 1 verse 4 saying John came.
He doesn't fill in all the gaps for us. He's assumed we've got our Bibles open at Malachi and at Mark. It's not hard to work out. In verse 2 of Mark chapter 1 he quotes Malachi chapter 3 verse 1.
I will send my messenger ahead of you who will prepare your way and in the very next verse it says John came. And John is doing what he's famous for doing.
[10:57] Baptising people. Saying wash yourselves before God as a sign of your change of heart. It's time to clean up and get ready for the one who's coming after me is hot on my heels.

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And although the crowds gathered to see the spectacle of John possibly the first time in 400 years that there's a real prophet on the scene.
John says in verse 7 don't make a fuss about me I'm the curtain raiser. After me will come one more powerful than me. It's so powerful that I'm not even able to step down and tie up his shoelaces.
And then Jesus turns up coming out of Galilee it says to be baptized by John. And you see in chapter 11 sorry verse 11 of Mark 1 that God confirms that what John has said about the greatness of Lord Jesus is true.
You are my son. The message comes from heaven in whom I love with you I am well pleased. And if we are left in any doubt at all about the sheer majesty of Jesus in the following chapters in Mark's he heals paralytics the lepers he tells demons to go and take a hike he tells the storm to shut up and be quiet tells the waves don't move.
[12:28] He feeds 5,000 with a cut lunch and then another 4,000 with another cut lunch after that and it just continues and continues until three days after he's dead he comes out of the tomb.

The sheer majesty of Jesus controls everything in the world and beyond the world. There is nothing outside of his authority but the big lead up in all the miracles of Jesus displaying his majesty and then in chapter 11 the Lord comes to his temple in spectacular fashion.
It may have taken four centuries but the Lord is faithful to his covenant. The basis of this covenant are there with those words Jacob I have loved and God has never turned his back on that covenant promise.
His commitment to his covenant of love saw the Lord Jesus who is the messenger and the mediator and the fulfiller of the covenant go to the cross for the sin of the world. God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son so that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.
The great fulfillment of God's sovereign electing unconditional free love is the willing sacrifice of the majestic Lord Jesus on the cross for the world.
[13:57] God has never turned his back on his covenant of love. God's sovereign of course when he came though they weren't looking for him and so God's being a little bit ironic in Malachi 3 1 in saying that they are seeking him or that they desire him.

He's being ironic because frankly the people in Malachi's time as they were in Jesus' time thought that they were okay with God and everyone else is going to get it in the neck.
Things aren't great in Israel but deep down we've got the temple it dominates the skyline. Deep down you know you're looking forward to it.
God's promised it that his kingdom is going to be put back together and his enemies are going to be judged. That God himself is going to come and he's going to put everything right. He's promised it.
He's going to come in judgment and God's enemies are going to get in the neck while we the people of God are going to get a pat on the back.
Bring it on. It's going to be a real treat to finally be on top and everyone else underneath. Malachi 3 2 is a wake up call to the people of God who can endure the day of his coming who can stand when he appears for he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap.
[15:34] So thank you Chris for bringing out that yellow soap. It brings back memories of a teacher who thought that yellow soap can clean on the inside. And when I see it still I can taste it.

I can still taste it 35 years later and still remember the bubbles coming out of my nose. It is awful stuff.
Don't ever do it. You scar people for a long time and it costs a fortune in counseling. Notice that the Lord Almighty is coming to his temple.
the judgment of God isn't starting out there. He's coming to his temple and it says here he's coming as a refining fire.
He's coming in judgment and no one will be able to stand their ground. This is referring to the people of God. Not one will be able to pass the penetrating test of the Lord.
[16:45] What a turn up for the books. They had this notion that the Lord was going to come and that it would be a blessing for them rather than judge judgment. They were looking out to their neighbors and seeing them all prosper while they suffered and they were asking the same question of Asaph in Psalm 73.

What good is it being a person of faith? Where is our God when the nations prosper and his people suffer? God is going to be a God.

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And they want him to come and they want him to sort it all out, to turn it on its head and to crush them and to lift us up. Show the world that we are your chosen people by making us prosper and everyone else suffer.
God is going to be a God. But that's not what's happening here. Instead they had to learn that their smug contentment, their self-righteousness would not survive under the scrutiny of the God of justice.
Judgment would begin with the people of God. But notice how Malachi describes the judgment of God's people.
[18:07] Verse 3. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver. He will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver.

This judgment is a refiner's fire. It's not described as a forest fire which destroys indiscriminately. It's not an incinerator's fire that destroys totally. It's refinement. It's a refinement at the initiative of God from his hand.
And the purpose of this refinement, as we are told there, is purity. It melts the gold and the silver and it separates the impurities that would in the end destroy the value and the purity of the precious metal.
And the Lord will come to his people until he has, that is, come to his people to purify his people in judgment until the end of verse 3. Men will bring offerings of righteousness and the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord.
[19:17] The judgment of his people will be for their refinement. That is, it is for their holiness so that they can actually come into the presence of God.

It will result in them loving and honoring and worshiping God as they should. The spirit of faith and devotion of the Lord that used to be shown will indeed be recaptured.
Unfortunately though, verse 6 reveals that not everyone will embrace the refiner's fire. there are those who refuse to fear the Lord.
And so for them, the coming of the Lord in judgment was not a threat, not something to be concerned about. They continued to self-righteously pat themselves on their backs to their own detriment.
And if I can say this, I think Malachi at this point is being a pastor and saying to his people, come back, come back, come back, embrace the refining fires.
[20:27] Because all that's left is the all-consuming fire. If you don't. What we know this side of the coming of the Lord Jesus is that the refining process was ultimately done on the cross by Christ.

God took action to make us holy and presentable to himself through the Lord Jesus atoning for the sin of the world. You see that in Ephesians 5, verses 25 to 27, which says this about Jesus' death on the cross.
He loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word and to present her to himself as a radiant church without staying or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.
Oh, well, that's good. I mean, it is good. But don't be mistaken with that verse. It's easy to conclude it's all done and dust. Thanks for loving me, Jesus.
Now pure, no more refining. Interesting, the cross of Christ 2,000 years ago, while the decisive moment was in fact not the end of the refinement matter, that day of judgment when the Lord will come happened 2,000 years ago and it continues this side of eternity.
[21:58] We are in the day of the Lord right now. The refining day of the Lord. 1 Peter 4, you've got it there on your sheet.

Notice it there, it says it's time for judgment to begin with the family of God. That's post-cross. The refining process continues for the people of God.
And so I want to take you to Hebrews 12. It's a passage which helps us to embrace the refining fire in a way that will cause us to grow in holiness as opposed to in smugness rejected.
Hebrews 12 verses 5 to 9 says this, And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons. My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline and do not lose heart when he rebukes you because the Lord disciplines those he loves and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.
Endure hardship as discipline. God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? The word discipline here is meant to be taken in the bigger sense of training.

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[23:13] That's the bigger overarching sense here. It's the idea of training. Under that is subsets of things like punishment. But it's all within the context of training of his people.

And these verses here encourage us to enter into the hard times of life by thinking of them in terms of a training experience given to us by the loving, merciful, covenant God.
God. They come from his hand to us. He loves you. He is treating you as one of his children.
In other words, in your pain, you are not being treated like a slave. You are not being treated as an enemy. In your pain, God is not removed from it all going, I wish I could do something.
God is not a surgeon who looks at a bad thing and comes in and fixes it up and makes it good. He plans the incision. He plans the whole lot because you are his love child.
[24:37] And the issue is, will you believe it? Will you let the word of God settle the issue for you so that when the suffering comes, you don't turn on God and put him in the dock and prosecute him with accusations like, where is the God of justice?

He probably will not tell you why it's your turn. Or why it is happening right now. Or why there is so much pain.
Or why it is lasting so long. But he has told you what you do need to know. It is the love of an all-wise father to his child.
Who never turns his back on his covenant. Will you trust him? In everything that causes pain.
From health issues, from death of a relative, to problems with the kids, or your marriage, or I've lost my job, or I've crashed my car, or finances don't reach, or that there's changing church.
[25:52] Everything. Coming from the merciful hand of God. And verse 14 helps us to see that this loving God has a very good reason.

It says, make every effort to be holy. The picture in Malachi 3.3 of the refiner. You notice it there.
It says the refiner sits and concentrates all of his tension. That's what they used to do. As the refining process is happening, the fire is happening, the refiner would pull up his chair and he would sit and watch the metal being refined.
And particularly with silver. And he would watch it and watch it and concentrate all of his concern.
And do you know when he knows it's been, the fire's over, the refining process is done, and the purity has been achieved?
Do you know when he knows? It's when he's sitting there and he can see his reflection in the silver.
And that's the picture of our God here.
[27:02] That's the beauty of this picture. He sits all of his attention until he sees his reflection in his people. And why is the reflection of God, the holiness of God, so essential?

Because at the end of verse 14 of Hebrews 12, without holiness, no one will see the Lord. That's why it's essential.
Because the very foundation of God's covenant is that he would spend eternity with his people.
That's the goal. And these verses assume that the most important thing in this life is not to be happy, it's not to be comfortable, it's not to be fulfilled.
It is to know God, to become more dependent upon God, to allow him to strip every aspect of self-dependency from us, so that we throw ourselves at our saviour's feet and just say, glory, Lord God Almighty.
My friends, I wish I could come with a slightly different message, but there is no painless path to heaven. It is no more possible to become pure painlessly than it is to be burnt painlessly.
[28:21] Painlessly. So my friends, let me just put on my pastor's heart just for a moment. If that is you right now, right now, the temptation is to think that God has forgotten you, that God doesn't love you, that he's not committed to his promises to you, that he doesn't care about injustice.

Jesus, I just want to say, please do not despise the Lord's discipline. Have confidence in God.
The covenant promise is this. The furnace of affliction that you are currently going through is for refinement. It's not for your destruction.
The refining fires are not evidence that God has abandoned his covenant. Do not listen to the good intentioned person who will say, but you're a good person, or but you're a believer.
Why is this happening to you? Do not listen to those good intentioned people. I want you to know the promise of Malachi 3.6, I the Lord do not change, so you, O descendant of Jacob, are not destroyed.
[29:44] That simply means that life in the refining fire is a life of trust in the unchanging, purifying love of God. Secondly, I want you to learn the lesson of verse 5, and fear God.

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Fear that you might dishonor him by not trusting him. Fear the impulse to want to jump out out of the refiner's fire of mercy into the incinerator fire of judgment because it looks cooler over there. When you reject the refiner's fire, all that is left is the all-consuming fire of judgment. And thirdly, take the long view. Take the long view to the day when there will be no more pain.
Revelation 21 gives us the goal of what we are refined for. I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, now the dwelling of God is with men. He can now be with them, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. And he will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death, no more mourning, or crying, or pain. [31:01] The old order of things has passed away, and the refiner's fire has been extinguished. The purpose has arrived. The goal is there. That's it, my brothers and sisters.

And so if you're in the refining's fire right now, let me point you to that long-term goal. Revelation 21, verse 7 says, Amen.

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