

Malachi 2:17 - 3:5 NIV

## **“Answering our questions; where is justice?”**

### Reading

“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” or “Where is the God of Justice?” “See, 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 messenger of the covenant, who you desire, will come,” says the Lord Almighty. But 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. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; He will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord as in days gone by, as in former years. So I will come near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud labourers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless and deprive aliens of justice, but do not fear me,” says the Lord Almighty. “

### Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you for Your word and we pray that it will be our guide and our teacher. We thank you for your Holy Spirit. Above all Father, we pray that everything we do will be for your glory and we ask this for Jesus sake. Amen

### **A People Weary with the Lord**

Can I ask the young people, do you ever get weary and fed up with parents nagging on all the time about the same thing? It might be clearing up your room or “are you sure that you haven’t got any more homework?” or “why have you left your lunch box behind again?” Do your parents ever say those sorts of things? You get really tired because you know what they are going to say and you’re fed up with it. Well its not just young people, we all get very weary with particular situations. We get weary at work, weary in all sorts of situations and the result is that we get tired, exhausted and just feel like giving up, because we know that the same thing is going to come at us again and again.

Well, can I just bring us back to fifth century BC Israel? The situation there when Malachi was alive, was that years before the Israelites had been in exile. They hadn’t been living in their own land; they had been carted off to what is modern day Iraq. But they then had been brought back all the way from modern day Iraq all the way through to modern day Israel. They had returned to a new temple and it was a new day of opportunity. But though they were back in the land it seemed just the same as before. Nothing had

really changed; even though they were now back in the land. Life was still difficult. The harvests were still unreliable, there were still enemies facing God's people and their expectations of what would happen when they got back had not been matched by what they actually saw.

So, just imagine that mum and dad have shown you this amazing holiday brochure of a hotel with a swimming pool and you think that this is going to be great. But when you get there you find that the hotel is only half built and its really foggy and you hardly see the sun for the first few days that you are there and you are really disappointed because mum and dad have promised much but they have not been able to deliver. And that's what these people, were thinking about God. He had promised so much but it really wasn't working out. God's promises seemed to have evaporated. So why bother with God? You can't really trust what He says. Things weren't working out.

Well I guess it might be that some of us are in the same situation tonight. Perhaps we have also lived in, as it were, exile, that far country. And then we heard the gospel and we came all the way back to know God as our saviour and that was great. But now, if we are honest, although we are now back where we belong, life sometimes seems to be much the same as before. We still face difficulties at home or at school or at work. God often seems remote. Sometimes we think that He is actually not that bothered and the joy and peace that we had when we first became Christians, has evaporated. Sometimes we say "*why are we bothering?*" Well, if that is you tonight in any way, then know that the people in Malachi's time were also in that situation. So as we look at Malachi there is a good chance that we will find out what God can say to us if we are in that situation this evening. So let's look at our two points. The first one is that we meet a people weary with the Lord.

#### A. When is He coming? (verse 17b)

These people were saying two things. We'll take the second one first. At the end of that verse they were saying, "Where is the God of justice". You see God had promised to sort everything out after the exile, once they were brought back into the country. Well where is He? We have asked him to sort things out, to bring a bit of justice into the situation but He has not heard us because we are still struggling, we are still facing difficulties. We have asked Him but perhaps He is not coming. Where is the God of justice? Where is He? A bit like us at the Rectory. We have been waiting for many many weeks for a builder to come to sort out a problem and we thought that they might come soon after Easter but time has gone, weeks have gone, our wardens' phone calls have not been heeded and it has gone on and on and on and I suppose we have got to the stage now where we are thinking "Is the builder really going to come to sort things out? Is he ever going to come?" And you can get into that way of thinking and that is what the Israelites were doing. And it is something that is found in the New Testament. There were people on the edge of the church in 2 Peter who were saying, "*Where is God? He said he is going to come again at the second coming. Where is He?*"

And they started to scoff saying that He is not going to come at all. And that's what the people were doing here. "Where is the God of Justice?" They are weary with God. When is He going to turn up?

### B. We can do what we want (verse 17a)

The second thing they were saying in verse 17, "*All who do evil are good in the eyes of the Lord and He is pleased with them.*" Things that everybody used to say were wrong, now are good. God's not really bothered, He's not going to come so it doesn't really matter what we do. And I know that people in the olden days, the Israelites, used to say that you couldn't marry a non-Jew and that sort of relationship was wrong. But that's OK, there is no problem. You see, times have changed.

A few months ago, we went to a place called Sandwich in Kent. It is a very interesting place. It's one of the Cinque Ports. But it is not a port at all because it's miles inland, three or four miles inland. But the thing is, times have changed. It used to be right by the sea but now, what's happened over the centuries is that more and more sand has been washed up and washed up and eventually the coastline has extended over the centuries. And the people here said that it's a bit like that because "*times have changed God. Because things that we used to think were wrong, well, they are actually quite good. I should think God's actually quite pleased that we do them.*"

Just an aside before we move on. Isn't it interesting that that is exactly what we have been hearing if we have been reading the papers over the last week or so with the appointment of Canon Dr Jeffrey John as the Bishop of Reading. What everybody knew was wrong over the centuries has now apparently changed. We are now told that he would be a really good Bishop because times have changed, the line has moved. They are actually good in the eyes of the Lord and He is pleased with them. It just reminds us we don't need to make God's Word relevant, it is relevant and it speaks to us every day and hour.

And so the people were weary with God and with His word. They were tired with God. He's not coming, he's not bothered, and He's not keeping his word so why should we keep His word? Why should we be bothered? Times had changed. But before we move on and just point the finger at other people, don't we just need to look at ourselves. Aren't there areas in our life where we are basically saying the same as verse 17? There is no sin and God will not judge us and we just carry on our way, drifting away from God's word, doing what we think is best. It's a danger isn't it? Imagine ourselves at our place at work and what would others, perhaps at our small group, think if they knew that's what we do? We need to examine ourselves because the finger points back to us.

### The Lord Weary with His People (verses 1-5)

And so the people are weary of the Lord but it wasn't just they who were weary because the second half of what we are looking at, verses 1-5 show us

that the Lord was actually weary with his people, verse 17, **“You have wearied the Lord with your words.”** You see it’s not just the people who have the right to be weary. God is weary with them.

Just imagine we are all in the car going for a holiday and as we get onto the motorway for a long long journey, the words come *“Are we there yet, are we nearly there?”* and we are only just at Riverhead. So we eventually make a rash promise about perhaps stopping at a Macdonalds and then it keeps on coming *“Are we there yet? How long, how long will it be? How many miles is that?”* And it goes on and on. Who is weary now? As a driver I am weary because I think, *“When is this going to end?”* And you see the people were weary with God. *“He is not going to keep His word”,* they say, *“Times have changed”*. But God was weary with them.

#### A. The Judge will come. (verse 1)

And so we see here what He says in Chapter 3 verse 1, that the judge will come. ***“I will send My messenger who will prepare the way before Me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple.”*** It has two stages. First God is going to send a messenger to prepare the way and that was of course fulfilled with the coming of John the Baptist who was the one who would prepare the way for Jesus. And then the Lord Himself would come and enter the temple and establish His covenant which was fulfilled when the Lord Jesus Christ came, when He came into the temple and when He died on the cross giving us that new covenant.

So it is already fulfilled that the judge will come and yet we also know that Jesus will come again. He sent down His messengers and we all know as Christians, especially those of us called to teaching and preaching, that we stand in the same place as John the Baptist, reminding the world that the Lord Jesus Christ is coming, He will come again. And that is the first thing that the Lord said to these people. The judge, the Lord Jesus Christ, will come and He will come not as a saviour but He will come as a judge.

Again, children, you know those times when the teachers get very nervous because somebody from OFSTED is going to inspect their lesson. They tell you to be on your best behaviour. The teachers are concerned because the OFSTED folk are coming. There will come that day of inspection. And that is what God is saying here. I’ll send my messengers to give a warning but then the judge, the Lord Jesus Christ will come, and although it was fulfilled for the people, in Malachi it says it will be fulfilled at the end when Jesus comes again. And what will happen on that day?

#### B. Judgement will come (V2-5)

Well verses 2-5 show us. And if verse 1 is responding to the question *“where is the God of justice?”* verses 2-5 are responding to the message in verse 17 that all that is evil is good in the eyes of the Lord. No, that is not right says God because when I come I will bring a message of judgement. Judgement will come. And notice that this is judgement on the people of God. It is on the

people of God who are loved by Him. Chapter 1 verse 2 God loves these people even though He is coming to judge them.

### i) What is it like?

Notice therefore what this judgement is like. It will be like being in a refiner's fire, verse 2 where the metal is inserted so that the dross can be removed, so that the metal can be purified. Or it is a bit like soap? I think the best illustration relates to the Centrepoint house party. Those of you who were on the Centrepoint house party dragged some of the leaders with you through the bog and emerged absolutely filthy. So when you came home your parents had the job of picking these horrible garments out of black bin liners and they had to put them in the washing machine and probably then put them in the washing machine again in order for them to be used again. Only after the article has been thoroughly washed can it be used again.

And God is saying that is what I will need to do to you. I will come to completely clean you up so that I can use you so that you can then be acceptable in my sight.

### ii) What is the standard?

And notice what is the standard of God's judgement, verse 5. All of the things mentioned in verse 5 are things that have been mentioned already in God's word, way back in Leviticus or Deuteronomy. It shows therefore that God's standard when He comes to judge and refine us does not change.

### iii) Who is to be judged?

Who is to be judged? Well those who do not love their neighbour as themselves, for example. The sorcerer, the person who deceives their neighbour, the adulterer, the one who cheats, the perjurers, the one who lies, the one who defrauds labourers of their wages, the one who exploits their neighbour, the one who oppresses the widow and the fatherless, the one who ignores their neighbour, the one who deprives aliens of justice, the one who drives away their neighbour. You see this is the word for today because as we dispense with God's word and say it is out of date we are actually dispensing with God's way of life. You see God's law is actually a law of love that he longs for us to fulfil in our life. Now of course, as we apply these words to ourselves, who can stand against such a judgement? And of course, no one can, all of us are sinners. All of us will need to be refined by the Lord Jesus Christ on the great day of final judgement. But if we have come to know the Lord, then we will be saved.

But nevertheless this is a wakeup call to people who are weary with God's word; weary with God and who think God said it but doesn't really mean it. This is a wake up call because God is saying "I do mean it, I do mean it".

Now just imagine that you are just a little bit and mum and dad have gone away for a few days. You've decided to hold a party at home and when you think about all the things that could happen in the home you also think, "I

wonder what mum and dad would say when they come back?" You know that they are going to come back and you know what their standards are because you've lived with them for all these years that you've been growing up. And knowing what mum and dad's standards are and what they are going to be saying hopefully will be a wake up call before the party gets out of hand. It will be a reminder that although your mum and dad will always love you and care for you, you don't want to risk their anger when they return. So it is as believers. Verse 5 and the other verses; show us what God's unchanging standards are. You know that He is our Heavenly Father and we will one day have to front up to Him. We want above all, surely, to have a welcoming embrace as He welcomes us into glory rather than, as it were, a stern lecture as to how we have failed to please Him in our lives.

So, as we come to the end here we have got one reference we are going to look at in the New Testament and perhaps you might want to turn to that now, Galatians 6 verse 7. We've been talking about the fact that they were a people weary with God, weary with his word. Why bother with these things? And yet the Lord was weary with them. And so He reminds them that there will be a day when they need to account for the way they have lived and there will be a day when we as Christians will need to account for the way that we have lived before our Heavenly Father and I think that this is summed up in Galatians 6 verse 7. ***"Let's not be deceived brothers and sisters, God cannot be mocked. A man, woman, a child, we reap what we sow. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; but the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, in doing the things that God wants us to do in His word. Let's not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time when he comes again we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people and especially to those who belong to the family of believers."***

Let's not give up. Let's press on and seek to honour and praise the Lord.  
Amen.