

Reading: Malachi 2:17-3:5

Theme: A weary God!

Both my grandfathers worked in coal mines. On my father's side my grandfather was a coalface worker; on my mother's side, my grandfather was a blacksmith in the mines - in early times shoeing horses, pit ponies, but then making and repairing any and all sorts of equipment. His work was hot, dry and dirty work. One visit we made visiting the family, when the children were teenagers, was to St Fagan's to the Welsh Folk and Rural Museum - where there are many buildings from all over Wales rebuild there from various times in Wales' history. One of the buildings was smithy from the turn of the 1890s into 1900s and it was up and running as in its heyday. It was a busy, hot place!

In the verses we read, the Lord does not use a picture of a blacksmith, but of a silversmith – who'd get silver ore, smelt and then refine it to remove its impurities - being left only with pure silver to work with. The Lord said through Malachi that He would make His people pure and holy, for that is what He wanted then - it is also what He wants now for us who are believers. We are to be a pure and holy people as individuals and a holy and pure local church. We realise that any church on earth will be a mixture of those who are saved and going on with God, those, even as believers, who limp on with God and those who have no real life and may just have an outward profession of being a believer and be involved in the church. The Church is never a pure Church here on earth, but those who know and love the Lord Jesus are to desire to live to be as pure and holy as much as possible in a fallen world.

Malachi was living and ministering in a time when things were spiritually very bad in Israel, in Judah. There was a formality, a superstition about worshipping the Lord, as well as a cold, lifeless orthodoxy and going through the motions, yet having no true heart

love, life or living for God. This was coupled with the people being generally surprised as to why God wasn't prospering and blessing them. There was the shock of other nations, notably Persia – who didn't worship God, seemingly prospering and getting on so well. They wanted the Lord to come and no doubt sought Him to come and right the wrongs and sort out these other nations. Yet all the time they failed to see they were not being blessed because of **their own** sin and failure.

Sadly, we as believers can be critical of others, wanting God to give them what for, yet, we may not be living correctly with God in the first place! The situation in Malachi's day demanded serious action, as did the unheeded message God sent through Malachi. The message would have shocked the people. I want to look at the verses we read and use 5 headings, but as usual I over prepared and we will only look at 2 headings this evening.

1. The Incredible Statement! (v17)

The Lord made an incredible and surprising statement to the people in v17a - they had wearied Him! Wow - God being wearied by His people! This is an incredible statement because God is good and love; one of His attributes arising from those attributes is long-suffering, patience. We see it in His dealings with so many in OT; we see it in the fact that He has not yet destroyed this sinful, God ignoring and hating world - as Peter explains in 2 Peter 3:9 *“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”* That goes for someone here or listening online, who may have heard the gospel many times, yet continues to neglect or reject the Saviour God has provided. Is God being very patient with anyone here?

Basically, God says through Malachi “*I’ve had enough of and from you lot!*” We have seen the Lord had put up with the bored, time-serving priests; the covenant breaking people; the wrong marriages and wrong divorces. Yet something far worse was going on in that they wearied Him through stubborn, God-accusing self-righteousness. The people were going through the routines and rituals, with no heart or life involvement toward God. Yet they expected, demanded, God blessed and prospered them as they wanted! When it wasn’t happening, they made out that God had changed as they saw the evil ones (*in their view*) prospering and they (*the good ones*) not prospering, even suffering. In their view they felt God had changed and was pleased with the evildoers! They even questioned “*Where is the God of justice?*” (v17b) - again another incredible statement by the people. They accused God of being in the wrong and they being in the right. They gave no thought that they were not as good and righteous as they imagined themselves to be.

God was weary with such words and thoughts and they with Him, but they did not fear that God was weary with their lives, thoughts and actions. It is an easy trap to fall into, even for us – we may have heard the gospel, that God is love and patient; so we secretly think God will be pleased when we, after we have lived as we want to do, had our fun, we can then turn to Him in faith! This is wearisome to God! Is it wearisome to God to imagine that as a believer we can keep on in sin because He has forgiven us anyway? Yes, it shows how good God and His grace is – but this also is wearisome to Him. God is long suffering, patient, but we are not to push Him too far! Do not deliberately provoke or presume on this holy God! Would we know if we went too far? As believers, we are to be careful that we do not presume on God’s goodness and mercy. In the Bible our duties and privileges are laid

down for us. God has no responsibility to bless our ignorant or deliberate disobedience.

This statement by God is an incredible one, as it shows to what extent the people of Israel, Judah had been provoking God by and through their words and ways. Matthew Henry wrote “*Those who think God a friend to sin affront Him and deceive themselves.*” Here they expected blessing for obedience in minor, formal matters - which they seem to have done such things for their own advantage. They felt God was condoning sin, evil and not blessing good i.e. what they viewed as good.

Sadly, people today look at God as a sort of lucky charm, keeper off of evil, a genie-type-figure to fulfil their wishes. He is viewed as the One to give only health, wealth and prosperity and if these things fail, it means God has failed, He has changed and for many that means He is not worth believing in! Such a view wearies God as it did here in Malachi’s day - His patience is being tested, His long-suffering and patience is being abused, His word is being side-lined and there is no heart and life relationship with Him.

If God was to punish sin and wrong as it happened, doing it automatically, the earth would have no people in it! We so often point the finger (*in our minds at least*) at others being sinners, evil, especially if things hurt us or our loved ones, but we fail to see that we deserve punishment and judgement from God because we are not perfect and we fall short of His standards.

Here the Lord answers and deals with the people’s sentiments and statements and we are to realise that both the statements from the Lord and His people are incredible. The Lord goes on to answer their statements and sentiments:

2. The Preparatory Messenger. (v1a)

The Jews wanted the Lord to sort out the Persians, but the Lord's response is very surprising, as it is as if He answers the question at the end of chapter 2 "*Where is the God of justice?*" by saying "*I'm here, I know what is going on and I will do something as an answer!*" The Lord says 3v1 "*See/Behold, I will send My messenger, who will prepare the way before Me.*"

The Jews wanted the Lord to come and sort things out. It is as if the Lord said here there needed to be ground work, preparatory work by the messenger He would send - by the 'Malachi' He'd send (*remember Malachi = messenger of the Lord*) - who was already in place to sort the people of Israel out that time! The Lord was going to do something dramatic and awesome, but first this promised messenger would come to prepare the way. In fact, this messenger is mentioned bpreviously in OT in Isaiah 40:3-5 '*A voice of one calling: "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. the glory of the LORD will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."*' It is thought that the Jews in Malachi's time often quoted this passage - as all seemed a mess, a wilderness and so the messenger would come from the Lord to sort out the situation -especially other nations. Basically, there were looking for the Anointed One (Messiah) and looked for the messenger announce His coming.

Yet the Jews at that time had a messenger - Malachi himself - but he was ignored. Following him there were 400 years when there were no messengers from God, just 400 years of silence and no message given. All the formalism and ritualism of Malachi's days became more formalised, even fossilised and systematised and

then suddenly Mark 1:1-4a *“The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is written in Isaiah the prophet: ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way’ - ‘a voice of one calling in the desert, ‘Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for Him.’” And so John came, baptising in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.”* The hypocritical self-righteousness of Malachi’s time had come to full fruition in Pharisaical Judaism and then God sent His messenger to prepare the way - John the Baptist. Matthew 11:10 makes it clear this refers to John *“This is the one about whom it is written: ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.’”*

John came to confront people with God, to make the way ready, to clear out the rubbish, obstacles, prepare people to receive the coming One - who he spoke of, clearly pointed to. It was a sad verdict on the Israelites that one was needed to prepare the way before the Lord. The people of John’s day were away from God, separated by ritualism, religion, good works and false ideas.

It is so sad to see what is recorded from Malachi’s time, but also it is sad to see such in our day - people going to church, being good and nice, kind and generous, but having no living relationship with God through the Saviour He has provided. We need to realise that the good news of Jesus Christ is really bad news for good people - it condemns them, their morality, religion, good works, niceness and even their self-sufficiency.

When John the Baptist began his ministry, he had to clear the way for the Lord among such people. We can read of John in the brief mentions of him and his work in the Gospels. He had to be a stern, hard preacher - because he had a tough congregation! The ideas of being fine because they were of the seed of Abraham, were Jews,

who were religious, nice etc. were strong ideas and notions to break, to clear out of the way. He even called the Pharisees, the religious bigwigs, a “brood of vipers” (*see this in Matthew and Luke chapter 3*). John the Baptist shook Jewish society and the hierarchy of his day. His preaching even affected King Herod - who, though he imprisoned John, nevertheless still gladly heard him preach. John the Baptist had to show that outward religion is no substitute for a real and heart religion - a true relationship of a life in love with God. John spoke of this and spoke of the One to come. John knew he himself was not the Messiah and yet he was surprised when he recognised the Messiah at His baptism! John told people of the One who was to come and even pointed some of His own followers to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

John was a real firecracker, a demolition expert and a path clearer. Yet he recognised that was all he was and when it came down to it, he realised he was just a voice in the wilderness; knew he had to decrease and the Messiah had to increase. John was content to have it so. Are we in our lives?

God often uses messengers in preparing His way in a person's life, in the life of a town, village or country. There can be providential circumstances - sometimes good, sometimes bad, but these remove obstacles in a person's life - whether the obstacles are being too content, too thoughtless, too self-absorbed. The Lord often does this preparatory work in a person's life in a gentle way, yet sometimes it occurs like as if a bulldozer had cleared the way. The Lord knows what He's doing in our lives - all the time as He prepares for the coming of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus. Personally, I am, like all of us are, a messenger from God and He has sent me to preach and proclaim the Lord Jesus, I realise I may be preparing a way for Him into someone's life.

The incredible thing, to me at least, is that the Lord is patient, willing and plans to use us in this work as we present people with the news of the Saviour, also the Lord can use our words in a preparatory way for Him to come to a person or family.

John was seemingly no one special, in fact he seems a bit of an oddball really! Yet he was the one set aside for God's use, wholly given over to Him and the Lord used him, his ministry and life to achieve much for a time. We are to pray that we will be used in a John-like way, that we too would be messengers of the Lord to bring people prepared to God and to receive the Saviour.

I know we have only covered 2 out of the 5 points – the remaining three are:

3. The Sought and Desired One. (3:1)
4. The Purifier. (3:2-4)
5. The God of Justice inaction. (v5)

I knew I'd be struggling and hoping to do too much - or maybe I was just deluding myself! Nevertheless, what we have seen is important. We are not to be foolish in our attitude, thoughts and even words about God as we could end up testing His patience. I pray we might be ready and willing to be messengers of God who would be used to prepare the way for the Saviour to come to the lives and experiences of people – perhaps even those we know and love. I pray we would be those who will listen to and hear the message such ones give us from God - by both their words and life and not be someone who is ignorant and neglects the Lord Jesus, but that we would leave, abandon, throw overboard any false hope of our morality or religion and come and trust only the Lord Jesus as our own Saviour.