

Reading: Malachi 2:17-3:5

Theme: Heart and love questions?

It has been some 5 weeks since we last looked at the book of Malachi. We have seen that the Jews of Malachi's time were living self-centred, contented lives which had a veneer of religious formalism stuck all over their lives. They were going through the motions of worshipping God, yet expected God to bless and prosper them for it! They were so surprised when they didn't get the expected blessings. Because of this they said things about God and in 2:17 God answered them. Last time we saw 2 of our 5 headings from this section:

1. The Incredible Statement (2:17)- as the people questioned God, even presumed He was not just. We also saw God's incredible statement that they wearied Him! They even questioned "*Where is the God of justice?*" In 3:1-5 the Lord answers them and did so in a way that must have surprised and shocked them. He told them of **2. The Preparatory Messenger (3:1a)**- we noted this was fulfilled ultimately by John the Baptist as he shook the fully ripened formalism and ritualism of his day. John was sent to prepare the way for the One who was to come. God often sends messengers to prepare His way in people's lives - tests, trials, losses and even successes, as the Lord then comes to that person's life. The same can happen in a church as events, themes, messengers and various preachers all are used to prepare the Lord's coming in a special way in the life of the church. Pray the Lord will come to us as a prepared people. Malachi spoke of this Preparatory Messenger, but he then continued:

3. The Sought and Desired One. (3:1b)

The Jews of Malachi's day were seeking a political Messiah and deliverer to sort out the prospering Persians and restore their own fortunes and blessings! They looked for one to come and do it. They sought out and desired this Messenger of the Covenant. Here the Lord promised this One would come and would arrive suddenly.

These Jews had questioned “*Where is the God of justice?*” Here the Lord proclaims He knew exactly what was going on and what He would do. In fact, what He would do would be a shock and surprise to the Jews! The Lord says here in the 2nd part of v1 that He would do these things “*suddenly*”. He forewarns them, He would send His Messenger, yet incredibly it would be a surprise and catch many off guard.

When the messenger came to prepare the way - John the Baptist, there was speculation among the people if he was this messenger and then people were expecting the Lord to come, for the Anointed One they were expecting was again someone who would deal with their oppressors (*the Romans that time*) and sort out their problems and again give them blessings. They were looking for mighty warrior and when the Lord Jesus came, He didn't fit their preconceived ideas, He was dismissed and eventually they got rid of Him because He and His ways were not liked or wanted!

What of us here? We can easily look on God as a lucky charm, the divine genie and we want only His help and provision, but are not bothered about obeying Him or doing what He wants of us. Perhaps when He challenges us, demands commitment and obedience of us, we can dismiss Him and do what we want to do, but exclude Him from our lives!

Back to Malachi – the one called “*the messenger of the covenant*” in v1b is the Lord Jesus. John the Baptist was the Preparatory Messenger, but the Messenger of the Covenant would more important than John, for Jesus is the Lord and the Messenger; the One who would speak for God, of God, from God and is God. The Lord Jesus is God's final revelation to mankind - called the Word in John's gospel, also declared to be the one through whom God has spoken in these last days (Hebrews 1:2). He spoke as God - who took a real human body to Himself and not only spoke of a new covenant

with God, but He made and secured that covenant Himself by His blood being shed.

This One is shown to be both God and King and because of such, He will rule and He is also the One who brings about reconciliation - a new covenant of peace between God and man. In Hebrews 12:24 the Lord Jesus is called "*the mediator of the new covenant*". All that Jesus did in His birth, life, ministry, teaching, death, resurrection and ascension, were all part and parcel of His work and standing as the Messenger of the Covenant. His work and ministry were not what either the Jews or John the Baptist was expecting! The Jews wanted this political revolutionary hero; John the Baptist was expecting someone who would fit the details of the one portrayed in v 2, 3 & 5! Jesus surprised them all - His covenant was even more radical, revolutionary and real than any of those short-sighted, restrictive hopes and ideas. Jesus would do something radically different - both for them and for us! He can still come to our lives and do radical and revolutionary things.

The Jews of Malachi's days and Jesus' days were seeking and desiring the Lord to come and work. When He did so, it was a way they had not expected! He can also work in our lives in unexpected ways in our lives. Often, we can ask "*Why doesn't God do something?*" Do we realise and are we ready that the thing He would do may have to begin with our lives - to sort out our lives, our situations, our family, our neighbourhood or our church!

The Lord promised that He, the Messenger of the covenant, would come suddenly and come to His temple. When He did, very few recognised Him - either as a child, youth or man. The question is, would we recognise Him if He were to be here this evening? Amazingly, He is here, in our midst! He has promised that, but are we aware of Him? What would it be like if for a few seconds we were made aware of being in the presence of the Lord Jesus, the Son

of God? As believers, still in our mortal bodies, it would be terrifying and we'd feel we were not able to take any more, yet would desire it to continue! If you are an unbeliever, it would be the most terrifying experience of your life as His greatness and purity would devastate and crush you. You would certainly not want it to continue, but it would be just a very brief and gentle glimpse of hell for you - to be in the felt presence of the holy God and to be there in your sin. Obviously, hell will be much, much worse, as there will also be His poured out holy wrath and anger as punishment on your sin.

Thankfully, the Messenger of the Covenant has made a way for us to be right with and accepted by God and able to be in His presence with delight forever. That way alone is what is proclaimed in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Saviour this gospel tells us of, is the One we need to trust in to be accepted by God through all He has achieved and accomplished on our behalf. The gospel declares we need to believe on the Lord Jesus as our own Saviour to be accepted by God. When that happens, He transforms our standing and eternal nature with God - then we are not only allowed to be in God's presence, but be able to be there in His glory and delight in it. When we believe in the Lord Jesus, it means we cannot do as we like in relation to God in terms of His worship or our living, for we see that one of the primary purposes of Jesus' ministry and work is:

4. The Purifier. (v2-3)

The Jews viewed God coming among them as a great day, a day of triumph for them and a terrible day for their enemies. Malachi challenged them and he challenges us with some questions in v2a... It would be an awesome and terrifying day even for those who profess to be God's people – it will not be a glib, silly, red nose type day, but awesome and terrifying.

The Jews looked to the day of His coming as a time when their enemies would be sorted out, but the Lord, the God of justice, would

begin with His own people before He dealt with the world around! That is a true and observable biblical principle, for God is not so much concerned with the world out there, a world that doesn't know Him or love Him, but He is primarily concerned with His people - in Malachi's day it was the returned people of Israel, in our day it is those on earth who have believed on the Lord Jesus - the Church.

The Lord God, even in this post Calvary time, doesn't want and will not stand for formalised, fossilised worship. We are to worship Him in spirit and in truth. Part of the work of the Lord Jesus now, as well as on that great day of His coming, is to be the Purifier of His people. His work is as a refiner, as a fuller (KJV) or launderer to clean His people from internal as well as external dirt and pollution in their lives.

Jesus' work was and is about that. John the Baptist saw of that aspect and proclaimed it in Matthew 3:10-12 *"The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. I baptise you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing-floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."* Our Saviour, is still the same holy Saviour and God as He was when here on earth. Our Lord wants us to be holy and we are to reveal, show our cleansing from sin, guilt and its consequences as we live clean and holy lives – so showing we are being freed from its captivating and ensnaring effects. It does not mean we will be perfect on earth, but it does mean we will aim and try our best to do so. We will love Jesus so much we would want to be like Him as much as we can.

The pictures used in the 2nd part of v2 are of different cleaning processes - refining to get pure metal - silver or gold, free from its

impurities that make it worth less, that causes it to decay; or launderer's soap, used to wash - say a white garment – rub in soap, wash, rinse and repeat.

We see the Lord Jesus doing this in His life's ministry as He dealt with the ritualism and formalism of the Pharisees or as He dealt with the sin of ordinary people. He carried out a cleansing, purifying work. His teaching and preaching turned up the heat and in some the dross was consumed and they believed e.g. Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea or the woman at the well of Samaria.

The work was brought to fulfilment on Calvary as He endured the pains and agonies of hell on our behalf, to pay the punishment for the sin of all who trust Him as their Saviour. As a result of this, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came as tongues of fire and swept into the church in His fullness and the worship of God, the knowledge of His love and the new life He gives blossomed most abundantly.

Our Lord and Saviour is still in the purifying and cleansing business. No matter our sin, we can trust Him, be forgiven, cleaned out and up and made right with God. When He does that, we are forever credited with His righteousness to our life, but He wants that to be shown as we go on living a holy and pure life. God's people are not to deliberately pollute their bodies, lives, minds and hearts. We are to keep our lives, bodies, minds and hearts clean from sin and its influences. I know and understand that our doing such does not make us any more a Christian, nor give us a more secure place in heaven. Yet it does give us comfort as we see evidences of His work going on in our lives and we find that we want to live for and to please our God.

If we can **persistently** sin and then keep on sinning with no conscience problem, it means we have either hardened our hearts and

consciences, or we've never really been saved. We need to seek God in both situations - one for repentance to restoration, the other for repentance to salvation!

If a believer persists in sin, such ones are to be warned, for the Lord can use drastic measures to stop us sinning and to clean us up. Should we still persist in dishonouring Him, He can, as a final resort, remove us from the scene of time and so prevent us dishonouring Him further. Now that does not mean that all who die unexpectedly are in that case, as often the Lord can no longer bear to be separated from them and He takes them home to heaven.

5. The God of Justice in Action. (v5)

The Lord is still the Purifier of His people and He will deal with them before He deals with the world. These Jews saw the world around them and felt the Lord wasn't dealing with them at all and they questioned "*Where is the God of justice?*" We see God's answer to them in v5 - the answer here is a direct answer to their direct challenge! This refining God would show His justice in His own people first of all. His purifying work will involve justice, will involve judgement on the sins of His people and we have to note things about the sins listed here in v5! The God of justice would be revealed as He punished His people who felt so smug and content in their sin.

In the list here, commentators note that the first 3 sins were in the context of marriage - sorcery would have been involved in their marriages to pagan wives; often adultery was involved, as was perjury - saying false things to easily enable these divorces and remarriages to go ahead - as the Jewish men took up with their dolly-bird foreign-idol-worshipping wives.

Yet there were also other out workings of the formalised religion – wrong or missed payments to labourers, cruel treatment of those who

should have been cared for. We are to realise that as a sense of God, as a sense of the fear of God evaporates or trickles away from a nation, then such things will occur. In our personal and private lives, we need to be exemplary in both our public conduct and lives; also in our innermost private lives too.

Our God is not fobbed off by grand words, prayers or appearances. He knows our hearts, desires and intentions. He is concerned for our love and devotion for Him being expressed in the good works He has ordained we should do. He is looking for worship and adoration that prompts, is the basis of such love centred acts of obedience. Does He find such in us? This is the basis, the foundation of our serving God. We will see it affects even our attitude to giving to the Lord's work - not how much, but the attitude in which we give!

Do we fear the Lord? If so, it should cause us to have wisdom to seek this God as our God. Do our hearts throb with a love and reverent fear for our God and Saviour which governs our lives - so that our greatest fear is His frown and our greatest delight His smile? I pray it would be so for all our lives and God would be pleased to use and bless us for His glory and honour.