

Malachi 2:17-3:5, John 5:22-30

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 September 2024

Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] It's the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi chapter 2. If you've got a Black Church Bible, it's page 802. And if you want one there, just by the door.

And we're just looking at the last verse of Malachi chapter 2, and then into verse 5 of chapter 3. Before I move to Ealing, I lived in Camberwell in South London, and opposite our house in Camberwell, there was graffiti.

You get better quality graffiti in South London. And the graffiti said this, Justice just is. Justice just is.

It's profound, isn't it? Justice just is. Think back on this last week. Hugh Edwards, the BBC news reader, convicted of crimes, serious crimes, but not imprisoned.

The cry was, where's the justice? Because of overcrowding in prison, prisoners released early, and victims of those crimes saying, where was the justice?

[1 : 16] Rioters handed severe sentences, custodial sentences, and the cry went out, where is the justice? Open any newspaper, on any day of the week, in any country of the world, and you'll find familiar stories, because justice just is.

You children, you children, some of the words, the first words that you ever spoke were, it's not fair. Children learn those words very, very quickly, don't they?

It's not fair, because justice just is. In fact, pursuing justice, is, I'm really trendy, isn't it, at the moment? It's really fashionable, in our day and age.

And that's for good reasons. Justice is a good thing. It's a right thing. And the Bible would say, to you and I this morning, yes, justice is good and right.

Why? Because God is just. And justice, is something to be pursued. And what we find in this section of Malachi, is that the Israelites, who were living, about 400 years before Christ, were likewise pursuing justice.

[2 : 34] And it's part of their, kind of ongoing, and foolish argument with God. A dispute that God is getting, tired of, isn't it? My father, one of his stock phrases, is, I'm getting a little bit, sick and tired.

That's what we heard as children. I'm getting a bit, sick and tired, of being sick and tired. Look at verse 17 of chapter 2. God is getting, sick and tired. You've wearied me, 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?

That's our question. You see, the Israelites' pursuit of justice, took the form of an accusation. And it was an accusation, directed towards God. They knew that God, claimed to be just.

But they wanted to know, where are you? Where are you? They were accusing God, weren't they, of being absent. And when it came to justice, where is the God of justice?

[3 : 37] But it's even more than that, isn't it? They went as far to, and suggest that God, was actually pleased, with people doing evil. They were seeing, wicked people, getting away, with their wickedness.

And so they accused God, you look after the evil people. You even take pleasure, in what they were doing. And so it's no wonder, is it that God, is wearied with their words.

He's sick and tired of them. On one level, I think we can understand, what drove the people, of Malachi's day, to that point. They looked at the world, around them, and they saw that, the evil people prospered.

But the people around them, got away with it. And their question was, well where is the justice?

Where is the justice, in that? If God is so just, why do the wicked, seem to get off scot free?

And of course, humans have asked that question, repeatedly. Right down through the centuries.

And so it's being asked today. It's not only, an ancient question is it?

[4 : 43] It's a modern question. In fact, it's a very, very modern question. If you've had your ears open, I would be surprised, if you've not, heard that yourself.

The more that the world, confronts us, with the reality, of injustice, the more people ask, well where is your God, of justice? And what is more, we ask that question, don't we?

Your experience, our experience, may be the same as the Israelites. It seems to us, doesn't it, that incredible evil, is occurring, in our world, and in our culture, and it keeps on occurring, unchecked sin.

And for some people, that accusation, that observation, leads them to accuse God. Like the Israelites did, to be angry with God even. But for others of us, and maybe we don't want to be angry, with God this morning, we want to trust him, but it's still a troubling question, isn't it? It's still a genuine question, where is the God of justice? Well as we look at the first five verses, of Malachi chapter three, we will see how God answers that question.

[5 : 55] And along the way, what I hope this sermon will achieve, is it will speak to us today, who might be asking, that similar question, or who might be hearing, others ask it. And God's answer, to Israel's question, I think comes in two words, in two parts.

The first part, is in the first half, of verse one, and the second part, is in the second half, of verse one, and it's explained further, in verses two to five. So the first answer, is in verse one, he says this, he says see.

See, that's our word, see. Behold. Behold, look. See, I will send my messenger, and he will prepare, the way before you, and the Lord whom you seek, will suddenly, come to his temple, and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, see, he's coming.

Says the Lord of hosts. The first part, of God's answer, is see, look. I will send my messenger. If you want to see my justice, says the Lord, keep your eyes open, and you will see.

And the first thing, you will see, will be my messenger. And my messenger, his task will be, to prepare the way, for the Lord. It's a description.

[7 : 12] Who is it a description of? Well, if you know the gospels, it's clearly a description, of John the Baptist. John the Baptist, who came before, the Lord Jesus, to prepare the way, for him, to point to him.

Let me read to you, from Matthew 1, 17. As they went away, Jesus began to speak, to the crowds, concerning John. What did you go out, into the wilderness, to see? A reed, shaken by the wind. What then, did you go out, to see a man, who was dressed, in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear, soft clothing, they're in the king's houses. What then, did you go out, to see? A prophet. A messenger. Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet, this is he, he of whom it's spoken. Behold, I will send my messenger, before you, who will prepare, your way, before you.

Jesus himself, it's really clear, that it was John, who fulfilled, this promise, this prophecy, from Malachi. It was John the Baptist, whose role it was, to prepare the way, for the Lord.

[8 : 16] But of course, the main event, was the coming, of the Lord. And that's what, the second half, of Malachi chapter 3, verse 1, is about. Let me remind you of it, look down with me.

Behold, chapter 3, verse 1, behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare, the way before me, and the Lord, who you seek, will suddenly, come to his temple, and the messenger, of the covenant, whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.

We learn a few things, about him, in those verses. We learn that, the Lord Jesus, he is the one, whom they are seeking. He's the one, actually, whom they desire, the Messiah.

He is the one, God had promised to send, from hundreds of years before, and he will come, to his temple. And he is the messenger, of the covenant. Then verse 2, opens, doesn't it, with a couple, of really powerful, rhetorical questions.

He asks these questions, of which, there's no answer. But who can endure, the day of his coming, and who can stand, when he appears? For he's like, a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap.

[9 : 26] He will sit, as a refiner, and a purifier of silver, and he will purify, the sons of Levi, those priests, and refine them, like gold, and silver, and will bring, offerings, and righteousness, to the Lord.

And then the offering, of Judah, and Jerusalem, will be pleasing, to the Lord. As in the days of old, as in former years. When the Lord comes, Malachi tells you, he will come, to purify, to clean up. He will do away, with what is impure, and he will leave, what is pure. Like a refiner's fire. He will burn, away the dross, and leave the pure gold.

Like a launderer's soap, like vanished soap, he will get rid, of all the dirt, and he'll leave, a bright clean garment. There are images, aren't there, of purification?

In particular, he says, he will purify, the Levites. Do you remember? Those are the people, that Malachi's been, really talking to, in his book. The priests. And as we've seen, isn't it, the leaders of Israel, in those days, they needed, lots of purifying.

[10:32] They were corrupt. They were leading, people astray, they were offering, blemished sacrifices, they were treating, the worship of God, like a burden. But says Malachi, when the Lord comes, he'll put a stop, to all of that.

And the coming of the Lord, will make it possible, again, for acceptable sacrifices, to be offered, like in the good old days. Priests will be righteous, not wicked, when the Lord comes, because he will purify.

But then verse five says, it won't just be the priests, the Levites, who will encounter, the purifying fire of the Lord. It will be all people. Look at verse five. Then I will draw neity, for judgment.

I will be a swift witness, against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress workers, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the Lord.

There will be justice, God is saying. You're looking for justice, we'll see. See, justice is coming. It will come when the Lord comes.

[11:44] It will come when I come, and I will bring the justice, that you long for. And when that happens, God says, actually your questions will dry up.

Because they will have been answered. Where is the God of justice? On that day, the answer will be, I am here. And of course, Malachi is ultimately talking, about the Lord Jesus.

It was Jesus, that John the Baptist, prepared the way for. It was Jesus, wasn't it, who came as the perfect priest, offering the perfect sacrifice, which was himself. It was Jesus, who was the Messiah.

It was Jesus, who they were looking for, the one whom they desired. It was Jesus, who was the ultimate, ultimate messenger, of the covenant. It was Jesus, who brought God's justice.

Jesus. And what is prophesied, in our Bibles, in just a few pages, we all know, don't we, that Jesus came, as the saviour of the world.

[12:50] But as the New Testament, makes clear, Jesus didn't just, come as the saviour, he came also, as the judge. He came as the one, whom God had appointed, to judge.

And in that passage, Reuben read for us, from John 5, Jesus says this, he says, the father has entrusted, all judgment to the son, that's himself. And he's given him, authority to judge.

And a time is coming, when all who are in their graves, will hear his voice, and they'll come out, some to life, and some to condemnation. Jesus Christ, is God's appointed judge.

So it's in Jesus, we see justice. By his judgment, that all people, will be judged. And when Jesus came, 2000 years ago, he began that process.

He began to purify his people. He began, didn't he, righting the world's wrongs. He began, making right, that which was wrong.

[13:53] But you see, the work of judgment, and purification, isn't finished yet. And just as the Israelites, in Malachi's day, they had to wait patiently, for it. So do we, for judgment to come, in all its fullness.

Because all is not well, with the world, is it? All is not well, in your world. And that is still true. God waits, patiently, for men and women, and boys and girls, to turn away, from their sins.

But while God is waiting, people seem to do terrible things, and get away with it. Sometimes the wicked, get off scot-free. But God's word is this, they will not always, get away scot-free.

The wicked, will not get away, scot-free. One day, Jesus Christ, will return, and on that day, there will be, perfect justice.

You will see it. You will see justice. God confronted, the Israelites, didn't he? Those who were, pursuing justice, with this message, God says, I'm pursuing justice too.

[15:12] And God answers, our modern question, this morning too. God says, you're looking for justice, God says, I'm looking for justice too.

But unlike you, I will deliver it perfectly, on that day, when no secrets, will be hidden. There will be, perfect justice.

And on the one hand, that is a message, isn't it? Of great comfort to us. Wonderful, wonderful comfort. That our God, is in pursuit of justice.

For some of you, who've been, who've been wronged, terribly, and bear the scars of that, and bear the scars of injustice, one day, God promises you, there will be justice.

It's so comforting. And yet, it's also disturbing. It's disturbing. It's disturbing. I don't want you to miss that. I don't want you to miss, how disturbing this message is, for us, and for our world.

[16:20] You see, there's a real twist, in this part of Malachi. When the Israelites, they were pursuing justice, their big concern, can you see it? In chapter 3, verse 17, it is others.

They're really concerned with others. It incensed them, other people's wickedness. The wickedness they saw in the lives of other people, and the world around them.

It made them mad. And our modern question this morning, is very much the same. It's about if and when, God is going to deal with the wickedness in others.

It incenses us. The wickedness we see in the circumstances of our world, and in the lives of our other people. But here's the second word, that Malachi has for us, this morning.

The first was see, but the second word, is a more chilling word, and it is the word you. It's there in verse 5. Then I will draw near, to you, for judgment.

[17:26] To you, for judgment. The Israelites questioned God's justice, and God's answer was far more unsettling, than they could have ever expected.

And what they discovered, is there is a great danger, in pursuing justice, and that is that you might get it. You might get it. You might also find, it may also mean justice, for the one who is pursuing it.

And see, Malachi 3, here's the question, where is the God of justice? And it gives us a very good answer, but it's an answer that challenges us, about the wisdom of the question, in the first place.

It's an answer that reveals, just how very dangerous, the question itself actually is. The Israelites were really quick, to accuse God, weren't they?

quick to accuse God, but very slow, to realise, that in calling for justice, they ran the risk, of the judgment of God.

[18:34] Falling on their own heads. And when I think today, of our modern question, where is the God of justice? In the light of that challenge, I like you, begin to feel a little bit nervous.

Because I'm quick, to cry out for justice, when I see evil, in the world around me. But I'm not, so sure that justice, is what I really want, for the evil, that's in my own heart.

Because I know my life, and I know my sins, and I know that on that day, when the hidden secrets, of my heart, are revealed, there will be a lot, to be ashamed of.

And I hope, that you are honest enough, this morning to admit that. To know the same thing. You see, Malachi chapter 3, makes me realise, that the pursuit of justice, is actually very dangerous indeed.

Like I was saying, next time you want, to shake your fist at God. Next time you want, to vigorously call out, for justice. Just take a moment, to ask yourself.

[19:52] Do you really, want God, to be just, perfectly just? Do you really, want God, to punish, all evil, all evil?

Do you really, want to come, face to face, with the God of justice? Do you? And perhaps, the next time, somebody who's not a Christian, amusingly asks you, where your God of justice, is in the world.

You might, gently want to point out, how nervous, they ought to feel, at crying out, to the God of justice. And that of course, is what Malachi, thinks about, in verse 2, when he says, can you see it?

Just look with me, at verse 2. Who can endure, the day of his coming? Who can stand, when he appears? If the God of justice, comes, will anybody, be able to escape, his wrath?

Who will be able, to stand on that day? Do you see what's happening? In the place of that, very dangerous question, of chapter 2, verse 17, Malachi suggests, a different question, a better question, for you to ask.

[21:08] And it's a quite, excellent question, for you and I, this morning, isn't it? Who can endure, the day of his coming? Expressed in a different way, who can stand, when he appears? And that's a telling question, isn't it?

Because deep, in all of our hearts, the answer, if you are willing, to be honest, with yourself, this morning, is no one. At the very least, not me.

And Malachi leaves, that telling question, ringing in our ears. It's actually, a terrifying question, isn't it? We find ourselves, powerless, to do anything, about it.

See, justice is coming. But justice is coming to you. Of course, though, Jesus, Jesus Christ, Jesus of Nazareth, is the judge who came.

And he brought with him, didn't he, words of terrific comfort. And having called out, for God's justice, we realise, all too late, actually, we're condemned ourselves, to face the full fury, of God's anger.

[22 : 26] Unless, unless, the son of God, should feel, the full fury, of God's anger, in our place.

Unless, the justice of God, falls upon him, instead of me.

Unless, the one, God sent, made it possible, for us, to be forgiven, all our sin. Come with me, to Romans chapter five.

Romans chapter five. And in Romans chapter five, verses one to eleven, we find the apostle Paul, rejoicing, because, that is precisely, what God has done.

And I want you, to feel the weight. It's really important, you feel the weight, of these stunning words. Chapter five, in verse six. Listen to these, stunning words, and feel the weight, of them.

Verse six, you see, for while, we were still weak, at the right time, Christ, died for the ungodly. For one will, scarcely, scarcely die, for a righteous man, though perhaps, for a good person, one might dare, even to die.

[23 : 48] But God, shows his love, for us, in that while, we were still sinners, as Christ, died for us. Since therefore, we've been justified, by his blood, much more, shall we be saved, by him, from the wrath of God.

Those verses, are saying, that Jesus, did feel, the full fury, of God's anger, in our place. The justice, of God, fell on him, so that it doesn't, need to fall on you.

Jesus, did bring us, full forgiveness, for all our sins. And so, in response, to our questions, about God, and his justice, Malachi, asks us a terrifying, question in return.

He says, who can stand? Who can stand, when he appears? And the apostle Paul, gives you this, incredible, and liberating answer, to Malachi's question.

Who can stand? Romans 5, verse 1, therefore we are justified, by faith. We have peace, with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom, we have also obtained, access by the faith, by faith, into this grace, in which we stand.

[25 : 04] In which we stand. Paul is picking up, the language of Malachi 3. And so, by the grace of God, this morning, those of us, who've come to put our faith, in the Lord Jesus Christ, the great news is, we can endure, the day of his coming.

By the grace of God, through faith, in Jesus Christ, you and I, can stand, when he appears. The miracle of the gospel, is this, that while God, relentlessly pursues, perfect justice, he also pursues, you and me, in relentless, relentless, relentless love.

Who can stand, when he appears? We can stand, by faith, in his grace. Since we've been justified, by faith, we have peace, with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Through him, we have also obtained, access by faith, into this grace, in which we stand. Since therefore, we've been justified, by his blood, much more, shall we be saved, by him, from the wrath of God.

Let's pause for a moment, and then I'll pray. Amen.