

“MAJOR THEMES FROM THE MINOR PROPHETS: MALACHI.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Sermon Texts: Malachi 2:17 – 3:5

Introduction.

Have you ever wondered why good things seem to happen to bad people and bad things seem to happen to good people? Have you ever thought that it seems like God is awfully quiet in light of all the evil and wickedness and immorality in our world? Have you ever wondered if God really is a just judge given how people seem to be getting away with murder?

Here we are again reading modern Malachi as he speaks another relevant word to our culture that is sliding back into paganism.

Malachi 2:17.

The people of Judah brought *two complaints* to God concerning the inhabitants of the land. *First*, from everything they could see the wicked were prospering. Prosperity was generally regarded as a sign of blessing and the wicked seemed to be especially blessed, while the poor inhabitants of Judah were suffering affliction and need. Furthermore, it seemed God went so far as to delight in them.

Second, with sarcastic skepticism they questioned whether the God of justice was just or even present and engaged.

There comes a time in cultures when things get so bad for so long that people come to two conclusions.

The wicked come to the conclusion that God must not care about evil or that He even thinks it's fine. The god fearers come to the conclusion that God must not exist or that He's not really a God of justice since He isn't doing anything.

Either God likes the wicked since they prosper or He's no longer interested in the affairs of men. Either way there's no profit or benefit in keeping God's commands or serving Him.

The more our culture gets away with the more wicked it will do. And the more cynical and unbelieving it becomes.

Eccl. 8:11 Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil.

When the wicked seem to prosper and the righteous seem afflicted is great spiritual danger for the righteous. The Psalmist Asaph went even further and admitted to envying the wicked and when he considered the way of the wicked his feet almost slipped:

Psalm 73:1-2, 12-17 Truly God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart.

2 But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped.

3 For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

12 Behold, these are the wicked; always at ease, they increase in riches.

13 All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence.
14 For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning. ...
16 But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task,
17 until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end.

Only in a true and right relationship with God can we begin to get perspective on our circumstances and our future and our hope.

Is God just? Is He present or absent? Does He speak or is He silent? Is He involved and engaged and doing something, in other words, is He active or passive?

The question asked in 2:17, "Where is the God of justice?" is answered in 3:1-5. God is just and His justice will be seen, it will be displayed for all to see.

Malachi 3:1-5.

God answers from the silence. This is a dramatic announcement. God is not absent, God is not silent, God is not dead. God is not indifferent to the sins of believers or unbelievers. He has a purpose and a plan. He has already decided what He will do and when. Even though it's 400 years away, don't be put off or confused about who God is and what He is doing.

God is the just judge and He will execute judgment but before He does He's going to do two things. He's going to send a messenger of judgment to announce the coming day of judgment and He's going to provide a way out of judgment, a deliverance.

Messenger.

God always warns before He comes, God always announces His day of judgment before it arrives. If God sends a messenger, then you can know that a great and fearful day of judgment is coming.

God sends Malachi, whose name means messenger, to be the last of a long line of prophets to announce that God is preparing a plan to send two messengers, one who will prepare the way for the Messiah and the other who will be the Messiah.

First, in Malachi 4:5 we see the prophecy of a messenger who will come in the spirit of Elijah.

Malachi 4:5-6 "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. 6 And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction."

And in the Gospels we see that this messenger is John the Baptist.

Luke 1:16-17 And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, 17 and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."

Matthew 11:11-14 Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 12 From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. 13 For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, 14 and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.

John's preparation is a moral and spiritual preparation. Sort of a spiritual housecleaning like you do in your home before important guests arrive.

Second, in Malachi 3 God announces another messenger, a greater messenger. How can we tell he will be greater? Notice the text.

He is called Lord.

He will come suddenly.

The temple is said to belong to Him.

He is equal with the Father who is speaking.

He is called the messenger or mediator of the new covenant (Heb. 12:24).

He is the refiner to tend the refiner's fire.

God Himself is coming. It's one thing to send messengers, it's quite another to come Himself. He is Lord and He is coming to His temple.

Jesus is the messenger and mediator of the new covenant. "He is the communicator, executor, administrator, and consummator of that divine plan" (Walter Kaiser, quoted in Anthony Selvaggio, *The Prophets Speak of Him*, p. 181).

Who will endure the day of the Lord's coming?

Who can endure the great and final day of the Lord? Who can stand before so holy a judge?

Psalm 24:3 Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place?

4 He who has clean hands and a pure heart.

And how does one get clean hands and a pure heart? Only those who submit to the purifying work of the refiner's fire, and the cleansing work of the fullers' soap.

Malachi 3:2-4 But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. 3 He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver ...

Refiner's Fire.

There are different kinds of fires.

A forest fire burns everything. It destroys everything in its path.

A burning barrel fire burns everything completely, like an incinerator.

A refiner's fire is different, it burns to refine, to purify. Something is left behind and what's left behind is better than before it was put to the heat.

We are warned as children never to play with fire, it can burn and destroy and cause pain.

Christianity is playing with fire, it's a dangerous and painful thing. God is like a fire, a consuming fire. He's not to be played with or trifled with. We are all impure, so we must all submit to the refiner's fire or we will fall into the consuming fire.

Only those refined will stand that day. There will be no alloys or impurities in heaven, no dross, no sin. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8).

The refiner sits at his work with deliberate diligence and concentration, the work is hot, hard and necessary, he can't take his hand or eye off the gold or silver until all the dross is burned and he can see his reflection in the pure metal like a mirror.

The refiner's fire is of two kinds, the furnace of affliction and discipline done by God and the furnace of self-discipline and self-denial done by us.

Listen to the Word of God speak to these two kinds of furnaces.

First, there is the furnace of affliction and discipline:

Zechariah 13:8-9 In the whole land, declares the Lord,
two thirds shall be cut off and perish, and one third shall be left alive.
9 And I will put this third into the fire,
and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested.
They will call upon my name, and I will answer them.
I will say, 'They are my people'; and they will say, 'The Lord is my God.'"

Titus 2:14 [Christ Jesus] who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

Hebrews 12:5–10, 14, My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord . . . for the Lord disciplines him whom he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives . . . If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children . . . he disciplines us for our good that we may share his holiness . . . Pursue holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

James 1:2–4, Count it all joy, my brethren when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

I Peter 4:12-13 Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

II Corinthians 3:18 And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

Fire is painful and so is the refiner's fire. There is no way around it. Discipline is painful for a time. The furnace of affliction, no matter how painful, is always for refinement and not destruction. He will bring us through the fire into joy, through the fire yet not destroyed.

This is the meaning of verses like those we read in Isaiah 43:

Isaiah 43:1b-3 "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.
2 When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.
3 For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.

It's a refining fire, not a consuming fire. It's the fire of deliverance, not judgment.

Second, there is the furnace of self-discipline and self-denial:

Matthew 5:29–30, "If your right eye causes you to sin pluck it out . . . and if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away."

Romans 8:13, "If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live."

1 Corinthians 9:27, "I pommel my body and subdue it."

II Corinthians 7:1 Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

Judgment on those who do not fear God.

Malachi 3:5 "Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and *do not fear me*, says the Lord of hosts.

Malachi is a faithful prophet and pastor to his people. He tells the truth, he warns them of a coming judgment in the hope that some will respond and repent and return to the Lord.

God's judgment is on all who take advantage of others or use others for their own selfish purposes or run over others; all who show by their actions that they have themselves as their gods and have no fear of the Lord.

The day is coming when the God of justice will no longer be silent, but will speak. His judgments will be swift.

Malachi's message to us and to America is don't think God winks at evil or smiles on it. And don't think that He has given up caring. He has acted, He has spoken, He has warned us and told us everything He will do and everything we need to do.

Does it seem like evil has the upper hand? Does it seem like the non-Christians are in control of our world's agenda, in control of the public square? Does it seem like God is silent, and not defending Himself and His good name and reputation? Does it seem like the church is getting weaker in the face of stronger opposition?

Jesus is the Word of God, the Word made flesh. The God of Justice has spoken in His Son and by His Spirit in His Word and He will not speak again until that great and coming Day of Judgment.

There is a great judgment coming and there is only one way to avoid it, to repent in the name of Jesus and believe in the name of Jesus.

Those who will not have God as their Savior will have Him as their Judge.