

Malachi 2:17-3:1 Men May Rail At God: But He Comes

Last time we looked at Malachi 2:12-16: breaking of faith in marriage, and divorce. And we saw that many of the priests and people in Malachi's day were sacrificing hypocrites. God was telling them that they could bring a truckload of sacrifices to His altar but those things would do them no good, because unless their heart had changed their outward forms of religiousness would simply add up to hell! Going through the motions means nothing to God. It's all about the heart, it's all about the heart, it's all about the heart!

We saw how in verse 13 that they "flooded the Lord's altar with tears," they did a whole lot of weeping and wailing but it was not in repentance over their sin, it was simply over those evidences of God's displeasure with them. So in their sacrificing hypocrisy they were completely blind to their own sin. (Whilst I'm sure they were quick to point out the sin and shortcoming of others). God's indictment against them was the vile and despicable way that the priests and people were treating their wives. They were breaking those marriage covenants, those promises, "with the wives of their youth." After years of faithful support and devotion from their wives, bearing their children, keeping their home and being all that those marriage covenants which they swore before God to be, the men had then cast them aside even as putting down an old animal! Verse 14: "The Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth." In verse 15 the argument that Malachi uses "has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his."

Jesus himself takes up this same argument in Matthew 19:4-6 "what God has joined together let not man put asunder." Jesus is saying that it is even God himself who joins the two together. So the two halves have become one complete person. Both body and soul they belong to God. So then to cast aside their wives so they could go chasing the idolatrous whores of the nations around them was of the most despicable of things which they could have done in the sight of God! Verse 16 "I hate divorce" says the Lord God Almighty. "And I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment", says the Lord Almighty." So such was the ease and total lack of any conscience with which they did these things, that for them it was as easy as taking off and putting on an old coat. Yet in reality they had covered themselves with violence. They had violated their wives; it were as though they had even raped them!

Verse 15c-16: "So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth." Yes "Guard yourselves" by being together in prayer as you study the scriptures. Spend that precious currency of your intimacy only ever on one another, and not on those to whom you are lustfully drawn.

Well so to this morning's text: Malachi 2:17-3:1 Men May Rail At God: But He Comes.

Verse 17: "you have wearied the Lord with your words. How have we wearied him you ask?" In this verse the Prophet speaks to the people of their gross and cynical view which they held of God. Now when it says "you have wearied the Lord", it is not that God can get tired like a man, He is God. The Prophet is simply speaking in a manner which the people could understand. We call this speaking anthropomorphically. So he's saying it's as though they had worn God out with their words, with their useless talk. And this was the evil slant which they had put upon the way God worked in the world. "All who do evil are good in the eyes of the Lord."

Now let's just think about this statement for a moment. There they were the supposed people of God. Those ones who for 1000 years had been carried and looked after by God. They claimed

Abraham, Isaac, Moses, David and all the other key people of biblical history to their own advantage. And yet now, as their hypocrisy is revealed and as they are caught in the depths of their sin, they will not bend the knee and submit the heart before the rebuke of this God, whom they claim as their own! They do not confess their obvious wickedness with which they have been confronted, no. They actually accuse God with the most heinous assault against His Character and Nature. That He even loves the evildoer, and hates and neglects those who are good and upright in His sight.

Well, now, surely it is time for God to act. Surely it is time for Him to wipe out all of those accusing wretches. Psalm 2:11-12 "serve the Lord with fear and trembling. Kiss the Son lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for His wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him." And also Deuteronomy 6:14-15 "do not follow other gods, the gods of the people around you. For the Lord, your God who is among you is a jealous God and his anger will burn against you and he will destroy you from the face of the land." Yes surely it is time for Him to extinguish this affront to the holiness of His Name. "I am who I am" He said to Moses. Yes I Am God and there is no other. I Am all sufficient and self-sustaining. I have no beginning and no end. I Am in need of no one and no thing. I Am God!!

But Beloved, we need to thank and praise God for some of His other characteristics too. Exodus 33:6-7a: "And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness." Brothers and sisters, when we reflect upon our own life, what we've been and done in the past and what we are even now at times, how grateful should we be that God does not punish us as our sins deserve? How grateful should we be that He is "compassionate, gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love and faithfulness"? To even ones such as ourselves! Yes, "all who do evil are good in the eyes of the Lord." This is what they accused God of. "And he is pleased with them" they say. So again, the first part of their accusation against God in contradiction to His Word and Character, is that he loves (not the holy and upright) but the wicked and the evil. And to compound their vile taunt they now say, "where is the God of justice?" And there are two ways we could take this. Firstly, God is so far away from upholding the cause of the upright that he is nowhere to be seen. Or perhaps worse still, that this so called God doesn't even exist! Where are you? Show yourself to us Great Yahweh, oh God of the Hebrews! Again can you see, they received those harsh words of rebuke from God through the Prophet Malachi, but instead of falling before Him in fear and repentance, they basically say He can't hurt us, He doesn't even exist. And if He does exist where is He anyway? Well how wrong they were. And at death each one of them would have been horrified at how eternally wrong they were! Friends, "wisdom" The Bible says begins and ends with "the fear of the Lord." To live as Levi did in awe and reverence of who God is. And "wisdom" also says that when God speaks, we should listen.

If we are wandering or meandering in our faith, (perhaps prayer and Bible study are long lost companions or even distant memories to us); if we find ourselves in just such a situation, and through whatever means God comes to us and speaks to our conscience to wake us up and come back to him (as He does here to His people through Malachi), "wisdom" says that we should listen, and "wisdom" also says that we should respond. Not with taunts but with repentant filled actions!

Ezekiel 18:25-32 we read "Yet you say, the way of the Lord is not just. Hear, O House of Israel: is my way unjust? Is it not your ways that are unjust? If a righteous man turns from his righteousness and commits sin, he will die for it; Because of the sin he has committed he will die. But if a wicked man turns away from the wickedness he has committed and does what is just and right, he will save his life. Because he considers all the offences he has committed and turns away from them, he will surely live; he will not die. Yet the House of Israel says, the way of the Lord is not just. Are my ways unjust, O House of Israel? Is it not your ways that are unjust? Therefore, O house of Israel, I will

judge you, each one according to his ways", declares the sovereign Lord. "Repent. Turn away from all your offences; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offences you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die, O House of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone", declares the sovereign Lord. Repent and live."

Yes, "repent and live." Brethren to get into a chest beating contest with God is not a wise thing. As I have said before if we think we can have the last word with God we are seriously mistaken. There was a song which was sung many years ago and the foolish singer made this claim: 'You can stand me up at the gates of hell but I won't back down'. Yes, it was written by an ignorant fool and also sung by an ignorant fool.

In contrast: do you remember Saul on the road to Damascus to kill Christ's church? Struck down by his encounter with Jesus, and his words "who are you Lord?" And Isaiah's words when he met the Lord in Isaiah 6:5: "Woe to me", I cried "for I am undone, for I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell among people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, The Lord Almighty." You see, Isaiah was unravelling at the seams in the presence of God.

I bet those words of Gough Whitlam's will ring in his ears through all eternity. He said 'nothing will save the Governor General', in his arrogant atheist voice. Well, at his death, having died apart from Jesus, nothing will save his soul from hell! 'So you think I don't exist, or Am nowhere to be seen?' God is saying. 'You think that you can rail at me without fear, without consequence? Well, let Me tell you something. This God which you arrogantly cry out to show himself to you, will do just that.'

Malachi 3:1: "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 whom you desire, will come", says the Lord almighty." You know, the first thing which I believe that we learn from these words is that the time for the Lord's second appearing, like the first, will come. Matthew 24:36-39 we read "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the Ark, and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of man."

You see, mankind has always challenged and rejected the Word of God. That was the original sin in the garden "Did God really say?" So is what God says true? Well, according to man of course all of this Bible talk is just a bunch of lies, myths and legends. But if people would actually dare to study the scriptures and see the historicity of it all, they would see that the future is announced, and then it comes. That a judgement was coming, and then it came. That the city was condemned, and then it fell. 2 Peter 3:1-10: "Dear friends, this is now my second letter to you. I have written both of them as reminders to stimulate you to wholesome thinking. I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and saviour through your apostles. First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, where is this coming he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation. But they deliberately forget that long ago by God's word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and by water. By these waters also the world of that time were deluged and destroyed. By the same word, the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgement and destruction of ungodly men. But do not forget this one thing friends: with the Lord a day is like 1000 years, and a 1000 years are like a day. 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. But the day of the Lord will

come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare."

Yes, throughout the ages the judgments have been proclaimed, and then they came. And likewise throughout the ages people have mocked, ridiculed and scorned saying 'where is this God? If He appeared right now I'd tell him to his face get out of here. You have no power or authority here. You see everyone, He doesn't even exist at all', they say. And that's what the Israelites were saying in Malachi's day. God answers them with "see" or in other words you will "see", you arrogant and proud fools. The psalmist is right in saying "the fool says in his heart there is no God" for so you are all fools. "See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me." And notice that He says "before me"; so we can then gather that either God is saying that in Jesus it is as though I were there, or it is indeed Christ Himself who is here speaking. But either way, we can clearly see the harmony and equality between God and Jesus, even Father and Son.

You know, there are many who deny such things. They deny the evidence of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. But we need to see these things of assurance when they are presented to us. Yes "see, I will send my Messenger, who will prepare the way for me." Isaiah 40:1-3: "comfort, comfort my people", says your God. "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins. A voice of one calling in the desert, "prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God." And Matthew 3:1-3: "In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the desert of Judea and saying, "repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is near. This is he who was spoken of through the Prophet Isaiah: a voice of one calling in the desert, prepare the way of the Lord, make straight paths for him."

Yes friends, the future foretold, and then it came. John came in the fulfilment to Isaiah and Malachi's words from God. And he did prepare the way. He went as the one who would go and clear the roads of all the rocks and stones, all of the obstacles in the way of the King's visit. This was actually somebody's occupation. Men would go like road gangs to the areas where the King was going to visit on those Royal occasions. But what John did was far more important. He prepared the hearts of men, women and children to hear the message of eternity from the eternal King. And what's interesting is in Isaiah 700 BC the message of John's coming to prepare Christ's way is one of comfort after suffering for their sin. But in Malachi's day, 300 years later, it is one of God's wrath!

So clearly, we have yet again that two edged sword of Jesus, cutting to both heaven and hell. "Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple, the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come", says the Lord almighty." So although Jesus' first coming was predicted, how unexpected by men, and how unprepared they were for His message before John came? And it will be just the same when He returns.

Brothers and sisters, how proud and arrogant mankind is. As in Malachi's day, we go about our daily lives consumed with what we want, more than what we need and even more importantly what our eternal needs are. And today, as we live in this modern world with all of its scientific and amazing medical breakthroughs, less and less are we even concerned about that eternal reality and obligation to this God who has created all things, including ourselves!

Where it says "whom you desire" I believe we can read it two ways. Firstly, that yes we "desire" to SEE. So we "desire", we have a sinful curiosity, our hearts of flesh are curious to see. We want to know as it were. Perhaps like watching the latest Space launch or other scientific documentaries, God holds an interest for us on an even sceptical level. But there is no inner "desire" to truly know

God. Yet Secondly, there are those who as Paul writes in 2 Timothy 4:8: “those who have longed for his appearing.” So their “desire” is not one of curiosity but of a confirmation to all that they have believed and trusted in and lived for, since they began to follow Jesus. They live each day in the midst of the reality of their own sin plagued lives, being grateful to God for each day's mercies, but with a longing in their hearts of come Lord Jesus come ! Because, yes, life is a gift and a blessing, but it is also difficult in a pain filled and sin ridden world.

So in closing, dear friends, I guess the question is: which one of these are you? Does this Christian stuff simply hold for you a vague interest by way of curiosity? Or does this God hold for you your very life and breath; and even more than that, your life and your family's life eternal in the palm of His Hands. Bought and paid for upon His cross.

Because of one thing we can be sure (as in the thousands of years which have come and gone), it has been the future announced by God, and then it comes. Men mock and rail at the truth of and by God, but then it comes! Yet as Paul writes in Romans 3:4 “let God be true and every man a liar.”

Yes Beloved judgement proclaimed, and then it comes. Even so, Come Lord Jesus come !

Let's pray.