

Roy's sermon for August 9th, 2020

Malachi 3:2-5 Prepared To Meet The King!

Last time we looked at Malachi chapter 2:17-3:1 - only two verses but with deep implications! We saw how the words and prayers of both priests and people alike had "wearied the Lord". God was speaking in a manner that the people could understand as He told them 'you've worn Me out having to listen to all of your cynical and hypocritical words', referring to their useless prayers and talk. Remember the slant which these people put upon the character of God? "All who do evil are good in the eyes of the Lord." So God loves, not the humble, the upright and righteous, no, He loves the evildoer and "He is pleased with them"!?

In chapter 2 God slammed their lip service and hypocrisy. He had revealed their sin to them but instead of repentance their response was to deride and rail at Him; to shake their fist in His face so to speak.

The second part of their arrogant reply: "where is the God of justice?" And remember this can be taken in two ways. Either God is so far away from caring for and upholding the cause of the innocent, the upright and downtrodden, that He is nowhere to be seen. Or even worse still, that this God whom Israel has worshipped and followed for over 1000 years, doesn't exist at all! And friends let's remember this is not coming from the idol worshipping nations around them, no. These things were coming from the very people whom God had claimed for His own and cared for, and carried as though on "Eagles wings" the Bible tells us.

Remember that God had been patient with His people for over 1000 years. He replies 'You think I don't exist. You think that you can rail at Me without fear without consequence. You say 'show yourself and you will believe in Me'. Well let Me tell you something: 'See', or perhaps "you will see" you fools. You arrogant fools who say in your hearts 'there is no God'. 'See, I will send my Messenger, who will prepare the way before me.' I said last week that either God is saying of Jesus 'in Him you have Me completely', or it is Jesus himself who is Speaking of His first appearing.

And I pointed out last time that true wisdom (The Bible says) begins and ends with the "fear of the Lord". Ecclesiastes 12:13 "now all has been heard, here is the conclusion of the matter. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." I also mentioned that wisdom says when God speaks, we listen. And not only that, we respond.

And the final, but overriding message from last week: God proclaims the future, and then it comes. He condemns the city, and then it falls. He says He is coming, and in His time, He comes!

Well, so to this morning's text: Malachi 3:2-5 Prepared To Meet The King?

Malachi 3: 2 "but who can endure the day of His coming? Who can stand when He appears?" You see, such was the vanity of the nation of Israel at that time, that even though God rebuked them and even though they refused to respond to His chastisements in repentance, that they even flattered themselves into believing that in some way God was bound to them. That he was indebted to them. And that though their collective behaviour, as we have seen, was appalling, they still deluded themselves into believing that they were living in a manner that would hold them in good stead

when the promised Redeemer came! Yes, they thought all would be well and that they would rejoice in the presence of the promised Messiah. But no. "Who can endure the day of his coming?"

Brothers and sisters, as I have said many times over the years God is not our 'mate'. When Jesus returns, He will not say 'g'day', as the old TV ad used to say. And may I suggest that though it is true that these verses are certainly speaking of Jesus' first coming, to find their ultimate conclusion we must look *beyond* His life of suffering, His sacrifice, His obedience, even His death, His resurrection and ascension into heaven. Yes, beyond the cross and to His second coming. Revelation 6:12-17: "I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to the earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the Kings of the earth, the Princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the lamb. For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

Yes, "Who Can endure?" "Who can stand?" Who can live through, who can survive such things? "Let the mountains fall on us." Now again, please don't misunderstand me. Without question this does speak of Jesus' first appearing, as prophesied in chapter 3 verse one, and also some 300 years earlier in the book of Isaiah. Both pieces of scripture speak of John the Baptist who would be that one who would "prepare the way before me". But to find their ultimate fulfilment and conclusion we must look even beyond the cross to the King's return!

Our question for this morning is: *are you prepared to meet the King?*

Malachi 3:1: "then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to His temple." Remember, as we saw earlier in the series temple worship had become a whole lot of sacrificing hypocrisy. A lot of lip service and dead animals, and that's all. But contrast with when Jesus comes to His temple: "who can endure?" "who can stand when he appears?" And this is why I say we need to look beyond His first appearance, because humanly speaking, many did endure His first physical coming. Many did in that sense, physically stand in His presence. The scribes and Pharisees did conspire to physically have Him killed. But of course the eternal and spiritual implications of that coming meant so much more, and went so much further than simply the physical. Because "who will endure?" And "who will stand?" before the very throne of God?

Do you remember Psalm 24: that Psalm of Christ's ascension? Psalm 24:3-5 "Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God his Saviour."

Jesus Himself elaborates upon these very things in His sermon on the Mount, in Matthew chapter 5. "Blessed are the poor in spirit. Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the peace makers. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed are the persecuted for righteousness sake." Verses 11 to 12 of Matthew 5: "blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

With these words Jesus takes ownership of the whole of the Old Testament scriptures. He is saying that 'these things were all about Me. Here, I Am come. The One whom you have been waiting for. You need look no further!'

Yet I believe we do need to see these two comings of Christ held together to fully understand this text. Last time we saw from Isaiah 40:1-3 God said of John's preparing the way for Jesus "Comfort, comfort my people." So it was to them a message of 'a little longer my precious one. Yes you've been paying the price for past sins, but soon the One for whom you've waited will come.' Yet 300 years later in Malachi's day it is "Who can endure? Who can stand?"

So we have the imagery of the self-sacrificing Lamb of God, who would bring comfort and reconciliation to God for His people, contrasted with the infinite power and glory revealed in the triumph of His return! "Who can endure? Who can stand?" in the presence of such things. So we have the two edges the sword of Christ's mouth, the Gospel. (I'm referring to the imagery of Christ portrayed in the book of Revelation)

"Who can endure? Who can stand?" Well, the answer is quite simple: no-one. No, *of themselves*, no person. From king to beggar, politician to priest, rich man to poor man, no-one can stand. And the reason also is quite simple, because within our genetic makeup, within our DNA, we have a problem, and it's called *sin*. And we will not; indeed we cannot approach the throne of the King without having first being cleansed, even by His own blood! Praise the Lord O my soul.

Yes "Who can endure?" Who can stand when He appears, for He will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap." The old Collins dictionary explains the word "refine": *To reduce to a fine or pure state. To free from impurities. To purify. To reduce crude metals to a finer state. To clarify. To Polish. To make more elegant. To free from coarseness and vulgarity.* What a great way to explain what Jesus does for us, the sinners. He reduces us to a fine and pure state. He polishes us and improves us, freeing us from all coarseness and vulgarity. So all sin. And of course, the interesting thing about the refiner's fire is that it had a twofold effect. It was heated to a temperature which would burn away all the dross, all of the impurities, while leaving behind the precious metal. What does the cross and blood of Jesus do for us beloved? Burn away all the effects of sin, and wash us clean!

Revelation 7:13-14: "Then one of the elders asked me, 'these in white robes, who are they, and where did they come from?' I answered, 'Sir, you know'. And he said, 'these are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb.'" And can you see that these words have implications for us, not only as individuals, but also for mankind as a whole? Because individually the impurities of our sin can be washed away, as we are made pure and clean by Christ's blood. But also, collectively as the whole of mankind, as the impurities of our species, (those who have rejected the truth and forgiveness which Jesus offers), will be burned away as it were, and cast into hell!

These are sobering things. This is the gospel which Jesus proclaimed. It was not bubble gum Christianity. And as it speaks here of "a launderer's soap". Not soap as we understand it today; apparently they didn't have such things. Baker's Bible encyclopaedia explains that their soap was extracted from a group of alkali bearing plants, one of which was called salt wort. The plant was burned then water was poured on the ashes. That water then became a kind of detergent, specially used for getting bad stains out of wool or cloth. But basically the message is the same: the people of God are putrid. They need to go through the fires of cleansing, they need to be washed with the ashes and water of the salt wort plant. They need to be made clean.

Now brothers and sisters I know I've said these kinds of things before, but we really do need to consider our sin. Not to be weighed down to the grave by them, (that is why Jesus came to purify us, and to deliver us from the consequences of such things), but certainly, if you're anything like me, there will be times throughout your days or weeks when your own sin does seem to rest easily upon your shoulders. Perhaps it's a problem with bad language. Or that you are easily angered. Maybe resentment or jealousy are the demons that you are struggling with. Perhaps pride and vanity. Perhaps apathy and laziness in Bible study and prayer are your problems. Friends, whatever those things may be, (and we've all got them), they should not rest easily upon your shoulders as though they don't exist. Because we need to remember and be constantly reminded from the scriptures, that it was for just such things did Jesus have to suffer and die. Living with an attitude and heart of repentance is what Jesus calls us to do. Anything less is to be as the Jews in Malachi's day: to have contempt for what Jesus has done for us!

"He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; He will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness." So the Levites, (or today we might say Christians), will be "purified, refined" by the blood of Jesus. "No one comes to the Father except by me" He said. But also, in a practical sense, through living as followers of Christ in a sin ridden world! You see, it's that day by day abiding in the Son of God that we become more and more like Him, and seek to know more and more of Him. Putting one foot in front of the other every day, as we seek Him out in His Word!

It's not about the spectacular. It's not about modern day apostolic miraculous signs. It's about walking the walk with the Spirit of God as our guide. Not simply talking the talk! And what are "offerings of righteousness"? Romans 12:1: "therefore, I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God; this is your spiritual act of worship." So it's clear then that simply seeking to be obedient to the things of God, as they are found in the scriptures, is the major part of our offerings up to Him, in gratitude for what He has done for us through Jesus. This is what He seeks from us. It's not a complicated equation. It's a simple life of faith in God through Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit! Verse 4 "and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years", He says.

You know, I really believe we have complicated the message of the cross with many things. The spectacular, the so-called miraculous, the feel-good message, and the theologically obscure, just to mention a few. Whereas God has made it so very clear. Micah 6:8c "to act justly and to love mercy and walk humbly with your God." It's the same truth as Romans 12:1 isn't it? And in verse 5 of Malachi 3 we read "So I will come near to you for judgement. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud labourers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice, but do not fear me", says the Lord Almighty."

"But do not fear me", says the Lord Almighty." We need to remind ourselves that this is not being spoken to the pagan world around them, it is directed at the people of God. All of these behaviours existed among God's people. So I guess we do need to ask ourselves: does this describe me? Even to a degree? (Jesus explained the true intent of God's law in his sermon on the mountain Matthew 5)

Friends, let me just explain that this is not speaking of someone who is wrestling with sin. As I said earlier, we've all got areas of our lives that we struggle with. And for some of us, those same things might even plague us all of our days. No, this is speaking of those who have given themselves over

to, and are wallowing in such ways of life. And the bottom line is: they do this because like the Pagan world, there is “No Fear of God” in them.

Now it's one thing to live in such a manner because there is no acceptance in our lives and our hearts that God even exists; but it's another thing altogether to claim with our lips that yes Jesus is Lord, but then with our lives that He is not Lord over me. Which is what the Israelites did in Malachi's time.

So how do we tie all these things together this morning so we can walk away today with something by way of a practical application for us? Well, it's not a deeply hidden thing that we need to dig out. I began this morning with Ecclesiastes 12:13 “now all has been heard, here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.” Now this “fear of God” is not a run - and - hide kind of fear as described in Revelation chapter 6. It is a fear that remembers who God is and who we are. That remembers His great love for us, that for us He gave his only Son, but also, that we are but dust which He has given breath, and if He takes that breath away, we return to that which we were!

Beloved, a sober reflection upon the power and Holiness of God will help us to approach Him aright.

So in closing the question remains: are you prepared to meet the King TODAY? Only you in your heart know dear friends!

Let's pray.