

Malachi 3:1-5

INTRODUCTION

It has been said that silence is golden... and it is indeed... except when you have little children; then it is just suspicious. Sometimes we as parents or grandparents or teachers or carers need to say, “What’s happening there? Do I have to come down and deal with you?”

To a certain extent and in certain ways, God’s people are suspiciously ‘silent’ in the way they are dealing with him. They are wearying God. And again he says, “What’s happening there, do I have to come down and deal with you?”

What is God going to do?

But before we push on into the passage let’s just go back to review what Malachi has had to say so far

These questions have been asked in our series:

How can I be sure God loves me?

Is my worship barren?

How can I lose touch with God?

Life ain’t what it should be!

And now - What’s God going to do?

The Sequence of Malachi’s Prophecy

The Disputation: 2:17

The pattern of disputation continues here in Malachi.

Previously the disputation has been about

Malachi 1:2 “I have loved you,” says the LORD. But you ask, “How have you loved us?”

Malachi 1:6 "... where is the respect due me?" says the LORD Almighty. But you ask, "How have we shown contempt for your name?"

Malachi 1:12 But you profane it by saying, "The Lord's table is defiled," and, "Its food is contemptible." ¹³ And you say, 'What a burden!' and you sniff at it contemptuously," says the LORD Almighty.

Malachi 2:10 Do we not all have one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our ancestors by being unfaithful to one another?

The people are constantly questioning God; now it is about wearying the Lord.

Malachi 2:17 You have wearied the LORD with your words. "How have we wearied him?" you ask.

They are wearing him out by their neglect, their complaining and indeed their accusations. And God has a huge capacity for the complaints of Israel - note the Exodus.

By saying, "All who do evil are good in the eyes of the LORD, and he is pleased with them" or "Where is the God of justice?"

They complain about the injustice around them, leading them to an expressed atheism. Peter Adam suggest six problems with this.

First, God's people had ignored God's words, which meant that their lives were getting further and further away from God's will.

Secondly, they spoke their words to one another, not to God. They talked about God, complained about God, but did not tell God what was on their hearts and their silence was suspicious.

Thirdly, when they said, 'All who do evil are good in the sight of the LORD, and he delights in them', and 'Where is the God of justice?' (2:17), they contradicted the character of God as revealed in his words and his ways.

Fourthly, they spread their unbelief to each other and to the

community.

Fifthly, this meant that they were failing to do what they should have been doing, that is, encouraging each other in their daily conversations to love God and trust God.

Sixthly, they were quite unconscious of what they were doing: You have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet you say, 'How have we wearied him?' (2:17). Their repeated sin had blinded them to its presence.

Finally, as we will see in 3:13–15, these words they spoke led them to even stronger words against God. As we have already seen, failing to do what is right leaves room for doing what is wrong.

God's Answer

a. I'm coming 3:1-5

"Don't make me come down there..."

The LORD, Yahweh himself will act among them; he will come to them (and perhaps they won't like it...)

First a messenger 3:1

3:1 *I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me.*

From our post New Testament perspective this is most likely John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus, with his message of repentance and judgement.

Then 'the Lord' himself... 3:1-2

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.

Then the Lord will come... himself!... to the temple. Remembering that in chapter one the Lord had said that it would be better if they did not come into the temple:

Malachi 1:10 *"Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you," says the LORD Almighty,*

...the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple...

This is almost a poetic account/prophecy/picture of Jesus cleansing the temple.

Mark 11:15 On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, ¹⁶ and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. ¹⁷ And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"

And he will act – not a with pat on the head though. Rather for these people it is a message of difficulty and judgment.

b. I will act... 3:2-4

2 But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears?

But do they really want the justice they say is missing? For God will begin with them!

Isaiah 66:15 See, the LORD is coming with fire, and his chariots are like a whirlwind; he will bring down his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire.

...to purify people 3:2-3

For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. ³ He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver.

The Lord will come to refine them... to bring them, forcibly and not necessarily pleasantly... to purify them. Heat and harsh cleansers are involved.

The picture of the refiner is a persistent one in the prophets (Isa. 1:25; 48:10; Jer. 6:29, 30; Ezek. 22:17–22). 'The beauty of this picture is that the refiner looks into the open furnace, or pot, and knows that the process of purifying is complete, and the dross all

burnt away, when he can see his image plainly reflected in the molten metal.'

...to purify worship 3-3-4

Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, ⁴ and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years.

This will have the effect of purifying their worship practices. It will have them bring right praise and worship to the LORD their God which, of course, addresses many of the problems raised earlier in the prophecy

...to prosecute... 3:5

...those who persist in sinfulness. 3:5

5 So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice...

But for those who persist in their sin – they will be brought to trial (not God as in 2:17).

What is a refining process for some will for others brings judgment. It is the community that is being refined and, as in the case of metal, the base elements must be removed. The Lord is both witness and judge in the law suit against those who refuse to take correction and so are condemned 'in that day'.

Note the range – a sample as in other Bible lists of sins.

Against God

Sorcery - seeks another source of power other than the Lord God. It seeks to know spiritual things without turning to God, Yahweh, who is the only source of true spiritual power.

Against neighbours

Adultery and perjury - the sort of sin and faithlessness which is mentioned in the previous passage where it is specifically related to marriage and adultery.

Against the Disadvantaged

Workers...

Deuteronomy 24:14 Do not take advantage of a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether that worker is a fellow Israelite or a foreigner residing in one of your towns.

The needy...

Exodus 22:22 Do not take advantage of the widow or the fatherless. ²³ If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. ²⁴ My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless.

Foreigners (refugees)

From the Exodus on God has been concerned for those non Jews who are attaching themselves to Israel. (see verse from Deuteronomy above)

"...but do not fear me," says the LORD Almighty.

They will do those things which are clearly addressed as sinful in their Law and yet do not respect or 'fear' God. This summarises all their ills and rebellion. God will bring them to trail. Those who persist will face his eternal judgment.

Baldwin: All who ride roughshod over other people reveal that they do not fear the Lord of hosts, but when he 'draws near for judgment' the question 'Where is the God of justice?' (2:17) will be answered.

Charles Bridges defined the fear of God as "the grand fundamental of godliness."⁹ To fear God is to recognise his might and majesty. It is to acknowledge that he is in Heaven and we are on earth, that he is God and we are not. It is to say, "Who among the heavenly beings is like the LORD, a God greatly to be feared in the council of the holy ones, and awesome above all who are around him?" (Psalm 89:6–7).

*We may wonder at God's patience with evil people. But of course we praise him for his patience with ourselves! And we must remember that, as Peter tells us: **not [to] ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day ... But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home. Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. 2 Peter 3:8,13-15***

An unchanging God 3:6

And (bleeding into next week's passage) this God has not changed.

6 *"I the LORD do not change."*

His demands are the same, his grace is the same, his love is the same. And to those who persist in their rebellion and disobedience, his judgement remains the same.

CONCLUSION

So – What is God going to do?

God will act; he is working his purposes out. He has a plan and it will come to fruition.

He did 'come down there' and deal with our sin and rebellion. This side of the cross we know that that plan involved a messenger and then JESUS.

Jesus the son of the living God who was made man was born into a human life, lived a perfect life, was then betrayed, crucified, died and was buried; he then rose from the dead and ascended to rule his Kingdom all for the salvation of those who turn to him... those who respond to the refining in Malachi's prophecy and those who put their trust in Jesus - a perfect finished plan.

So – What is the ‘take home’ from all of this?

First – don’t leave God out! Don’t weary him by...

Ignoring God’s words.

Complaining to one another, not to God.

Contradicting the character of God by our words and actions.

Spreading our doubts to each other.

Failing to encourage each other to love God and trust God.

Being unconscious of what we are doing.

Then worship him in truth and humility and live as he would have you live - Respecting / Fearing him / Loving your fellow man.

Let’s let this passage sum up for us...

1 Peter 1:17-25 Since you call on a Father who judges each person’s work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear ...

22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.

23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.