

The Unsightly Autopsy & the Ultimate Answer (Israel is charged with inaccurate views of God)

Malachi 2:17-3:6

Pastor Michael Lynn / West Hampden Baptist Church

January 8, 2023 a.m.

Introduction: “That’s not fair!” “If God is a good God, why 9-11? Why the gruesome murder of 4 college students in Moscow, Idaho? Why the Buffalo area snowstorm that left nearly 50 dead? Why would a 6 year old first grader in Virginia shoot his teacher? These are not new questions. Three thousand years ago, Asaph the Psalmist admitted, “*For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked*” (Psalm 73:3). Here in our text the Israelites are expressing their disdain with God, sarcastically declaring, “*Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord.*” Then they accusingly ask, “*Where is the God of justice?*” Let’s set the context. Malachi continues his autopsy report of dead religion. He is listing the symptoms of a life-less religion. Previously he has pointed out the sins of ingratitude, insincerity, insubordination, & infidelity. The fifth charge leveled against Israel is found in our text: inaccuracy, or, inaccurate views of God. Our text begins with Malachi’s accusation, “*Ye have wearied the Lord with your words.*” Israel responds (as she has done previously) with a disputation, “*Wherein have we wearied Him?*” Malachi then gives a refutation of Israel’s defense, using Israel’s own words of inaccuracy, “*Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, & He delighteth in them: or, Where is the God of justice?*” What was Israel saying? “Since evil prevailed so greatly in the nation, God couldn’t be very bothered by it, could He? In fact, He must love it, or else He’d do something about it! The level of sin, crime, & corruption was such that it was *as if* God were encouraging it” (Stuart). What follows in chapter 3:1-6 is God’s answer, not only to this particular response of Israel, but to the whole autopsy report. The unsightly autopsy report of dead religion is met with the ultimate answer to dead religion – the return of the God of justice. Consider in our text an answer to the age-old question – Why do the wicked prosper & the righteous suffer?

- I. The **coming** of the God of justice (3:1) > Israel’s inaccurate view of the **Person** of Christ
 - A. The **forerunner** of the God of justice:
 1. God will send His messenger – cf. Isaiah 40:3-5.
 2. God sent John the Baptist – Matthew 11:10 (3:3); Mark 1:2-3; & Luke 1:76.
 - B. The **forcefulness** of the God of justice:
 1. “*Shall suddenly come...*” – speaks of His coming swiftly, unexpectedly.
 2. “At a future point, Yahweh will appear as conquering judge to vindicate the righteous swiftly & decisively defeat the wicked, including the wicked among His own people” (Stuart).
 - C. The “**foresight**” of the God of justice:
 1. **Who** is the Messenger of the Covenant?
 - a. Which covenant? – the O.T. covenant between God & Israel.
 - b. Which Messenger? – “*the Lord*” – meaning, “Master, Owner, Controller – The Sovereign One, Almighty God.”
 2. **When** is the Messenger coming to His temple?
 - a. The first advent – at the time of John the Baptist (Christ came to redeem).
 - b. The second coming in glory – Christ comes to rule & to reign (cf. Isaiah 61:1-2).
- Application: Three “proofs” of the Deity of Christ > (1) He is identified with the Lord; (2) He is indicated as the owner of the temple; (3) He is introduced as “*the Lord.*”

- II. The **consequence** of the coming God of justice (3:2-5) > Israel’s inaccurate view of the **purpose** of Christ

- A. The reality of His judgment (:2a)
 - 1. It is not a question of “if” – but “when” He will come.
 - 2. The answer, in light of the ungodly in that nation, is that no one will abide, be able to stand on his own.
- B. The refining of His judgment (:2b-3a)
 - 1. The refiner’s fire:
 - a. Metals were heated to purge the dross (slag) & leave behind pure silver or gold.
 - b. Israel was to be refined in the fire of God’s judgment to purge out the dross of iniquity (begins with sons of Levi – cf. I Peter 4:17).
 - 2. The fullers’ soap:
 - a. Clothes were cleaned by soaking them in water in which lye had been dissolved; then the clothes were beaten, scrubbed, & hung to dry.
 - b. Israel was to be cleansed of her sins & godlessness (destruction of the rebellious & restoration of the repentant).

Application: The key to both is “separation.” Separating the dross from the pure metals & the dirt from the garments; so, God will purify & cleanse – separating what deserves to remain from that which is worthless.
- C. The reasons for His judgment (:3b-5)
 - 1. The need for acceptable worship (:3b-4).
 - a. These offerings speak of the millennial sacrifices of the nation (Ezekiel 44:15; Zechariah 14:21).
 - b. These offerings were signposts (pointing to Christ in the O.T.) & will serve as memorials (looking back to Calvary) in the Millennium.
 - 2. The nature of abominable wickedness (:5).
 - a. There is a listing of 7 sins – representative of all their sins.
 - b. This provides ample evidence for the need of judgment.

III. The consolation of the coming God of justice (:6) > Israel’s inaccurate view of the *power* of Christ

- A. His unchangeable Person >
 - 1. The immutability of God – Psalm 102:27; James 1:17 & see Psalm 89:34, “*alter.*”
 - 2. The immutability of Christ – Hebrews 13:8, 1:12; Revelation 1:8.
- B. His unchangeable purpose >
 - 1. He keeps His covenant with Israel (Psalm 89) – extends His mercy & grace.
 - 2. He is a forgiving & merciful God – evidences His grace > Acts 26:18; I Peter 2:9.
- C. His unchangeable power >
 - 1. He has the power to consume (cf. Matthew 10:28).
 - 2. He has the power to complete (fulfill His covenant; cf. Philippians 1:6).

Application: See Lamentations 3:22-23.

Conclusion: How could these people want the God of justice to appear? Did they not fear the judgment of God for their sins? Consider the fact that sinners are inconsistent. The thief is outraged when someone steals from him. The liar is offended when lied to. The cheater resents being defrauded. The murderer wants himself & his family to live in peace. The expectations of sinners is always hypocritical. People want justice done *for* them, but not done *to* them. So even in the midst of their sinfulness & rebellion, they cry out for justice. Yet they will bring down the judgment of God upon their own heads. When the Lord comes He will purify the dross & cleanse the filth from the lives of His people. Apart from the grace & mercy of God, they would all be consumed. But the unchangeable God is faithful to His covenant; He always keeps His word. Will you be able to stand at His appearing? The messenger has gone before His first advent. Now the message is being proclaimed again before His second coming, “*Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matthew 3:2). Are you ready for the coming of the Lord?