

Title: God is Just - Even When You Doubt Him

Text: Malachi 2:17-3:5

Have you ever looked at the world and thought, *“This just doesn’t seem right”*?

People do wrong and seem to get ahead.

Others try to do what is right, and they struggle.

And if you are not careful, a question starts forming...

“Where is God in all of this?”

That is not a new question.

That is an old one.

And it is exactly where the people in Malachi are.

This is now the **fourth** time in this short book that God confronts His people.

They questioned His love.

They dishonored His name.

They broke His covenant.

And now they question His **justice**.

And here is what makes this so serious.

They are not just confused.

They are speaking about God in a way that is not true.

They look at the world around them, and instead of going back to what God has said, they start drawing conclusions about Him based on what they see.

And God responds to that directly and decisively.

So, what happens when we begin to question God’s justice?

And what will God do about it?

Main Idea: God’s Justice May Seem Delayed, But He Will Come to Purify and Judge.

Malachi shows us where this starts.

It starts when we grow **weary** waiting for God to act.

1. We Grow Weary Waiting for God's Justice — vs. 17

Malachi 2:17 ESV

You have wearied the LORD with your words. But you say, "How have we wearied him?"

This verse is the fourth **disputation** that the Jewish people bring to God.

If it were not so sad and infuriating, this would almost be humorous.

God sounds like a worn-out parent.

"I am just so weary of your talking back to Me!"

And their response is like an obnoxious junior high student.

"How have we worn you out with our words?"

God's response exposes the hypocritical heart of the people.

If you remember, we are dealing with the kind of men who turned their backs on their covenant wives and chased after pagan women from the nations around them.

They were not the holy and godly men they were supposed to be.

And now look at what they say...

Malachi 2:17 ESV

... "How have we wearied him?" By saying, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delights in them." Or by asking, "Where is the God of justice?"

Do you hear what they are saying?

They are looking at the world, seeing evil, and instead of examining themselves, they are redefining God.

In their minds, God must approve of this.

And then they go further.

"Where is the God of justice?"

This is not a humble question. This is an accusation.

They are saying God is not doing His job.

And when you put it all together, it is breathtaking.

They are living in sin, ignoring God's Word, and then questioning God's character.

That is a dangerous place to be.

This is not new.

[Isaiah 5:20](#) warns about calling evil good and good evil.

And that is exactly what is happening here.

When a person blurs those lines, everything else falls apart.

You can think of it like this.

It is like someone ignoring the instructions, breaking the system, and then blaming the designer.

The problem is not with the designer. The problem is with the one who refused to follow what was given.

Listen, we may not say these exact words, but we can think this way.

When life does not make sense, when we see evil around us, we can begin to question whether God is just.

And if we are not careful, we will form our view of God based on what we see instead of what He has said.

2 Peter 3:1-10 (ESV)

¹ This is now the second letter that I am writing to you, beloved. In both of them I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, ² that you should remember the predictions of the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior through your apostles, ³ knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. ⁴ They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation."⁵ For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, ⁶ and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. ⁷ But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. ⁸ But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the

heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

And when that happens, we will always end up with the wrong view of God.

They ask, *“Where is the God of justice?”*

God answers that question clearly.

He says, *“I am coming.”*

These three words are quite chilling!

But first comes a messenger...

Look at chapter 3, verse 1...

2. God Promises the Coming of His Messenger — v. 3:1

Malachi 3:1 ESV

“Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.

God answers their question directly.

They ask, “Where is the God of justice?” The answer is clear: He is coming.

Verse 1 begins with the word...

Malachi 3:1 ESV

“Behold...”

This is a call for attention. God is saying, *“Listen up! Do not miss this!”*

He promises...

Malachi 3:1 ESV

“Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me...”

This points forward to John the Baptist, who comes ahead of the Lord to call people to repentance and prepare their hearts.

This forerunner is mentioned elsewhere in the Old Testament...

Isaiah 40:3 ESV

³ *A voice cries: "In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*

This is fulfilled in John the Baptist.

John 1:23 ESV

²³ *He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."*

Matthew 11:7-10 ESV

⁷ *As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind?"⁸ What then did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses.⁹ What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.¹⁰ This is he of whom it is written, " 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.'*

So there is one who will come before.

Remember, this is an Old Testament prophecy that we now know has come true.

But now the focus shifts.

This is where the verse expands and takes us further than we might expect.

Malachi 3:1 ESV

"Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple..."

Malachi presents the coming of the Lord as one unified event, but we now understand that it unfolds in two stages.

The first begins with the coming of John the Baptist, who prepares the way, and Jesus Christ, who comes just as God promised.

But the language quickly stretches beyond that moment.

It speaks of a day no one can endure, a refining fire, and a judgment that exposes sin.

That was not realized in Christ's first coming.

So what Malachi presents as one coming, we now recognize as two: the first coming, where Christ begins His work, and the future day of the Lord, where He brings that work to completion in full purification and judgment.

This helps us understand why God's justice can seem delayed.

But it is not missing. It is unfolding exactly according to His plan.

Picture of how prophets see the future...

Then God calls Him...

Malachi 3:1 ESV

...the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.

But Malachi does not only help us understand when this will happen. He also helps us understand who is coming.

When he says, "*the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight,*" he is still speaking about the same person, the Lord who is coming.

This is not someone different, but another way of describing Jesus Christ Himself.

He is called the "*messenger of the covenant*" because He brings, establishes, and fulfills God's covenant promises.

He does not just announce the covenant; He is its mediator.

And notice the phrase, "*in whom you delight.*"

There is a clear note of irony.

They claim to be looking for Him and act as if they are ready.

But the rest of the passage shows they do not understand what His coming will actually mean.

So when God says, "*behold, He is coming,*" it is both a promise and a warning.

The One they say they delight in will come, and His coming will expose what is really in their hearts.

So, John the Baptist is clearly identified as the messenger who prepares the way.

In [Matthew 11:10](#), Jesus directly applies this prophecy to John.

And in [John 1:23](#), John himself says he is the voice crying in the wilderness, preparing the way of the Lord, just as Isaiah had foretold.

But then, when Malachi says the Lord will come to His temple, we see this begin to be fulfilled in the first coming of Jesus Christ.

In passages like [John 2:13-17](#), He enters the temple and confronts sin, showing that God's presence exposes what is wrong.

But Scripture also makes it clear that this promise is not yet complete.

[Acts 17:31](#) tells us that God has fixed a day when He will judge the world in righteousness.

And [Revelation 19:11-16](#) describes Christ coming again in power to carry out that judgment.

So, the Bible presents one clear picture.

Christ came the first time to accomplish redemption, and He will come again to bring full purification and judgment.

God's justice is not absent.

It is unfolding exactly as He has promised.

[Q&A at AIA - Why does God not remove all evil?](#)

[We should be careful what we ask for.](#)

[If God were to remove all evil all at once, He would have to remove you.](#)

It is easy to say we want God to act. But this passage forces a better question.

Am I ready for Him to come?

God is not absent. He is not indifferent. He is coming.

Jesus Christ came the first time as the Lamb, humble and innocent, led to the slaughter to bear the wrath of God for sinners.

But when He comes again, He will come in power to bring justice.

So, meet Him now for salvation, while there is still time.

Because when He comes again, it will not be to bear wrath, it will be to bring it.

Examine your heart. Are you ready to stand before Him?

The only safe place is to be right with Him now.

This is why God's justice can feel delayed.

We are living between what Christ has already begun and what He will fully complete.

3. God Will Purify His People and Judge Evil — vs. 2-5

The second time the Lord Jesus Christ comes to this earth, it will be for judgment and purification.

Look at the language Malachi uses in verses 2-3.

Malachi 3:2-3 ESV

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, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD.

The first questions are rhetorical.

“Who can endure the day of his coming?”

“Who can stand when he appears?”

And the answer? NO ONE!

This shows the power of God. None can stand against Him.

God's Plans Cannot Be Thwarted

Job declares that God *“can do all things”* and that *“no purpose of yours can be thwarted.”* ([Job 42:2](#))

Joel 2:11 ESV

The LORD utters his voice before his army, for his camp is exceedingly great; he who executes his word is powerful. For the day of the LORD is great and very awesome; who can endure it?

The point?

God will accomplish His will during this future time of judgment.

What will this judgment look like?

Malachi shows us with vivid imagery.

He is like a...

Refiner's fire - a blazing heat used to melt metal so that every impurity rises to the surface and is removed, leaving what is pure and valuable. It is intense, it is precise, and it reveals what is real.

Fuller's soap - a strong cleansing agent used to scrub and wash cloth until every stain is removed. It is thorough, it is penetrating, and it leaves nothing hidden.

Malachi uses this imagery to show that when God comes, He will not deal with sin on the surface.

He will deal with it at the deepest level.

Like fire that melts metal and exposes what is hidden, and like soap that scrubs away every stain, God's work is thorough and intentional.

This is precise judgment and purification.

And for the Jewish people, this is necessary because they had corrupted worship and broken covenant faithfulness, especially the sons of Levi, the priests who were responsible to lead the people in true worship.

God begins with them.

He refines them so that they will once again bring righteous offerings and lead the people to worship Him rightly.

This ultimately points forward to the future Day of the Lord, a time that includes the tribulation and the return of Christ, when God will judge sin and purify His people completely.

He exposes what is false, removes what is sinful, and restores His people to faithful covenant worship.

This leads directly into the next verse...

Malachi 3:4 ESV

⁴ Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

So God deals with the sons of Levi first and restores proper worship.

In a sense, the future will reflect the past.

Verse 4 points us forward to a time when worship will finally be what it was always meant to be.

After God purifies the sons of Levi, the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord again, in clear contrast to the corrupted worship Malachi has been confronting.

And the prophets give us a fuller picture of that future.

In [Isaiah 56:7](#) and 66:20–23, we see worship restored and offerings brought before the Lord.

[Jeremiah 33:18](#) speaks of the ongoing ministry of the Levitical priests.

[Ezekiel 40–43](#) describes a restored temple and the return of God’s glory.

And [Zechariah 14:16–21](#) shows the nations coming to worship the King.

All of this points to a future kingdom where Christ reigns, Israel is restored, the priesthood is purified, and worship is offered rightly before the Lord.

What Malachi promises here finds its fullest expression in that coming kingdom, when what was once corrupt will be made right and worship will be pleasing to God again.

In verse 5, we see judgment language again.

Take a look...

Malachi 3:5 ESV

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.

Verse 5 shows a clear shift. God’s focus moves from the Levitical priests to the people as a whole. The purification that began with the leadership now extends to the entire nation.

“And I will draw near to you for judgment.”

That is a sobering statement. The God they questioned in verse 17 now says He will come near, not to explain Himself, but to judge.

And notice how personal this is. *“I will be a swift witness.”*

God Himself testifies.

Nothing is hidden. Nothing is overlooked.

Then He names the sins.

Sorcery - spiritual rebellion.

Adultery - moral corruption.

False swearing - dishonesty.

Oppressing workers, widows, the fatherless, and the sojourner - injustice against the vulnerable.

This is not a random list. It shows a people whose lives no longer reflect the character of God.

And then the root issue is stated.

"They do not fear Me."

That is the problem underneath all the others.

God will not tolerate sin in His Kingdom.

So, He purifies His people, beginning with the priests and extending to the nation, so that they can live under His righteous rule.

This points forward to that future kingdom when Christ reigns, and everything that is opposed to Him is exposed and dealt with.

This is exactly how Scripture describes the coming of the Lord.

When He comes, no one can stand on their own.

[Joel 2:11](#) and [Nahum 1:6](#) ask the same question, who can endure the day of His coming?

That is the language of the Day of the Lord, a time when God steps in to judge and to purify.

And notice where that work begins.

Scripture consistently shows that God begins with His own people.

[First Peter 4:17](#) tells us that judgment begins with the household of God.

That is what we see here as He purifies the sons of Levi, restoring the priesthood so that worship becomes pleasing again.

But this purification is not the end.

It is preparation.

God is preparing a people who will live under His rule.

And Scripture shows how this will unfold.

The future time of tribulation will be a period when God purifies the nation of Israel and brings them to repentance.

As [Romans 11](#) teaches, God will be faithful to His promises, and a restored Israel will turn to Him.

That prepares the way for Christ to return, defeat His enemies, and establish His kingdom.

So, when Malachi speaks of purification and judgment, he is pointing forward to that future time when God refines His people, brings them to repentance, and establishes a kingdom where righteousness defines everything.

God will not abandon His people.

He will purify them, bring them back to Himself, and fulfill every promise He has made.

A refiner does not walk away from the fire.

He watches it carefully, because the goal is not to destroy the metal, but to purify it.

Zechariah 13:9 ESV

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.'

This passage was written to Israel, but the God behind it has not changed.

He still refines His people.

So where is He doing that in your life right now?

What sin is He exposing?

What attitude is He putting His finger on?

Where has your worship become routine instead of real?

Do not push back when God brings those things to the surface.

Because God is not trying to destroy you.

He is working to make you right.

Turn from what He is exposing.

Take sin seriously.

Pursue worship that is genuine, not just external.

Because God is serious about the purity of His people, and He is working in you right now.

Do not wait for that future day to deal with what God is already showing you today.

Conclusion

God's justice is coming, and none of us can stand on our own.

Every one of us will stand before the God whose justice we have questioned and doubted.

Be ready for His coming by getting right with Him now.

When Jesus came the first time, He came to bear judgment.

Jesus Christ came as the Lamb, humble and obedient, going to the cross to take the wrath of God that we deserve.

But when He comes again, He will not come to **bear** wrath. He will come to **bring** it.

So, the question is not if you will meet Him.

The question is how.

Will you meet Him as your Savior, or will you meet Him as your Judge?

You cannot stand before Him on your own. But you can stand in Him by His grace alone!