

Sermon Title: **“Justice, Fire, and Soap”**

Series: *Learn, Live, Lead*

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Text: Malachi 2:17-3:5 / Matthew 5:17-20

Introduction

“Stand firm, and you will win life.” -Luke 21:19

We began this year with a look at what Kingdom endurance is. **Standing Firm** here means *Endurance* and is a very rich word embodying an **upward, consistent, contagious, and outward** motion that goes against the current. *It is swimming upstream after Jesus.* We saw this is the work the Spirit of God does in our lives, just as He did in Jesus’ - He leads us upward to higher ground and a higher life in Him.

We also looked at some of the outward challenges we face when going upward with the Spirit, including the spiritual forces of darkness which our on their way downward. As they are being cast out of God’s Kingdom, we are being brought in. This is the nature of our Spiritual Battle. Unlike the generations that came before Jesus since His Ascension the Spirit has now come upon us to take the battle to where it truly is at.

What does this look like lived out in or lives? Following Jesus as His Disciples.



“Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will send you out to fish for people.”

-Matthew 4:19

This series is set to be a journey answering this question- *what does it mean to follow Jesus?* How do we today answer His invitation and see this journey with Him unfold as it did for the first-generation followers of Jesus? Together we will discover anew what it means to follow Jesus- *to be a disciple making disciples culture that **learns, lives, and leads!***

I. Learning from Jesus (Malachi 2:17)

“You have wearied the Lord with your words. But you say, “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?” -Malachi 2:17

In Malachi's day, the Nation of Israel was at a place of both personal and spiritual defeat. After some returned to Jerusalem from Babylon, rebuilding proved a constant reminder of what was lost. Defeat within brought out the fruit of defeat- asking the question of why? Why continue to repair the Temple, offer sacrifices, live beyond the Law, or even expect the miraculous in their lives. They had failed God big time.

Like some of us- when we fail, lose out, or just seem to never get ahead, what's the point of reading the Bible, praying, going to church? Why?

Yet, they still followed through. The Temple was rebuilt, homes rebuilt, following the Law reestablished, and no more idol worship. Still, where was God? *We built the Temple, God, you should have shown up!*

God sent them the prophet Malachi to direct their focus on what God is doing, and even greater, how everything is coming to a climax for the Messiah's entrance into our world. It was not about a temple made by human hands- that was a shadow of the greater desire of God to abide within each of His people, filling them with His Spirit to overflow from them into all the world bringing His Blessings.

The Law was not the relationship; the Law was meant to be a help to grow in the love of God in their lives. While following the letter of the Law, their hearts longed for and searched out the opportunities to walk away from God. They did what God asked, but their faith had become a dead religion.

Israel, as did the rest of humanity, bore the *Image* of God. God wanted to restore His *character* in them to balance both the ***Image*** and ***Character*** of God we share in. That is *His Kingdom Come*. That is *His Will done on earth as it is in Heaven*.

God responds to their cry of *disconnect* with an affirmation of their *disillusionment*. God has not changed; but they have. Seeing good things happen to bad people is nothing new; to choose to live in ways that dishonor God and then blame Him because it seems like He blesses the bad was the fault. In short, Israel was blaming God for the injustice in how they were living. Why good things happen to people who live with complete indifference or disregard to God is another sermon for another day.

The concern here is that while Israel may have been delivered from Babylonian Captivity, their behaviors were shackling their children to a generational enslavement. Living a pattern of loving God outwardly but inwardly pursuing and embracing sin shapes our children in ways we may not even realize. God is a good Father, and He knows what He is talking about. He knows how to raise kids.

God isn't talking about the neighbors' kids; He is talking to His kids in His home. To change the world, He needs to change their hearts.

II. Living like Jesus (Malachi 3:1-4)

“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. 2 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.[a] 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.”

-Malachi 3:1-4

A greater measure of God's Glory is coming; in fact, it's so important that God is sending a herald to prepare the people so that no one will miss it! Malachi's name means “my messenger” and his address of 6 issues in the book bearing his name moves everyone's gaze to the coming Glory that will descend upon the Temple.

John the Baptist would fulfill this role of the herald, Jesus the long-awaited Messiah. What I want to draw our attention to here are as follows:

- 1) *Messenger of the Covenant in whom you delight* is a phrase that captures their disillusionment; Jesus' coming would indeed be good news but not for everyone. God's mission had not changed; bless and fill His children to overflow that blessing into the world around them. If those unwilling to repent (remember: to change direction and swim upstream after Jesus) stay that course, Jesus' coming will not be as they expected.

“Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord!

Why would you have the day of the Lord?

It is darkness, and not light,

19 as if a man fled from a lion,

and a bear met him,

or went into the house and leaned his hand against the wall,

and a serpent bit him.

20 Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light,

and gloom with no brightness in it? -Amos 5:18-20

- 2) *Jesus and His message* will have a two-fold application for the world. The stress from both descriptions of the Gospel leaves the immediate audience and us today without doubt that Jesus will see this work through in everyone's life. It will be thorough and severe; in the end there will be no more sin (and all that it brought: suffering, disease, brokenness, death)

- a. **Refiner's Fire.** This refers to a heat of such intensity that it dissolves impurities, burning away dross from the metal in its purest, molten state.
- b. **Fuller's Soap.** This alkali soap would be applied to get the toughest of stains (sin) out of fabric (lives). Once it was applied, the fabric would be laid against rocks and beaten with sticks to drive the soap deep; the deeper the stain the harder the washing cycle.

*“It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. **-Hebrews 12:7-11***

Being transformed by God through our circumstances is not always easy. Whether it's a situation we have control over or not, we control the ease or difficulty God's Spirit has in us in order to work through us. What is more, we have His promise that there is no refinement outside of His purpose for our lives.

How do we know God's Will in our lives? I want to look at it from a God's Presence perspective. I believe we have an incredible illustration of this with a man named Jacob and his wives Leah and Rachel.

“Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed.” So Laban gathered together all the people of the place and made a feast. But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob, and he went in to her. (Laban gave his female servant Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her servant.) And in the morning, behold, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, “What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?” Laban said, “It is not so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years.” Jacob did so, and completed her week. Then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel to be his wife. (Laban gave his female servant Bilhah to his daughter Rachel to be her servant.) So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years. “

-Genesis 29:21-30

Now Jacob did not love Leah; she was not attractive to him. Yet Laban carried a custom and in the end Jacob the trickster was “tricked” himself. He still pursued Rachel, for she was who he desired. If we look at the two wives (not an endorsement of polygamy) as God's Will, there are parts of what God says and asks of us that will be ugly, unattractive, and perhaps avoided by us.

Then, there will be parts of what God says and asks of us that are beautiful, attractive, and sought after by us.

*“So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.” **-Romans 7:21-25***

As Leah was fruitful for Jacob, and Rachel was not, (the two even became jealous of each other) **often the undesirable or harder areas of God’s Will for our lives yield the greatest Kingdom Fruit in us and overflow out into the world.**

For, Leah gave birth to a son named Judah who was an ancestor of Israel’s greatest King, David. David was an ancestor to the greatest King of the Greatest Kingdom- Jesus. Jesus came through the ugly, unattractive, and avoided Leah.

- 3) *Jesus and His people.* The sons of Levi refers to the portion of Israel that served between God and the Nation. They drew closer into the presence of God in order to bring more of God’s goodness out into the world to bless everyone. While some believe this may refer to a later period of time, I’m of the mind and conviction that this refers to the era of the Church; the Living Body of Jesus Christ. *We are being refined as His priests to carry His presence into the world around us!*

*“You yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. **-1 Peter 2:5***

- 4) *Pleasing Offering.* When God’s people are refined and purified, they will serve as His Priests bringing His Kingdom according to His Will into all the world. This has always been the offering God has desired.

*“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” **-Romans 12:1-2***

This now brings us to the heart of the passage in Malachi which answered their cynical attitude toward God’s apparent disregard to the evil in the world around them. If we want to see the world around us change, we must be willing to embrace the change God offers to do in us first. We, each of us who name the Name of Jesus in our lives, are called to be the presence of God in this world.

“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.” -[Malachi 3:5](#)

III. Leading to Jesus (Matthew 5:17-20)

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven”. -[Matthew 5:17-20](#)

Before we begin looking at the Beatitudes, it is important to understand that Jesus has not come to do away with the Old Testament. Jesus has come in fulfillment of what was written. *Jesus is the destination all roads of the Old Testament have led to; and from which all roads in the New Testament reach out into all the world from.*

Following Jesus everyday is what Discipleship is all about. What difficulty in your life is God refining you through? What circumstances is He using to bring healing and renewal through?

God’s Spirit is always refining with fire and sanctifying our lives- this is the Will of God for us. This is how His Kingdom is coming into this world, and at the same time already here.

This week, I want you to begin reading [Matthew 5:1-12](#) and make notes on what seems *attractive* to you, *unattractive* to you, *easy* for you, *hard* for you- and journal the reasons why. Invite the presence of the Spirit to bring a fresh wind into you for the Kingdom work God desires to do in and through you.

*The world is crying out for God’s **Justice**.*

We are His answer.

*He is refining us with **fire** and washing us with **soap** for this role.*

All of Jesus for all of the world.

Learn from Jesus. Live like Jesus. Lead to Jesus.

