

North Summit Church

**Malachi 2:17–3:5**

***Are You Ready?***

May 17, 2026

## **Announcements:**

### **Introduction: The Diagnosis**

- Let me begin with a story about a guy who had been telling himself for almost a year that something wasn't right.
- The fatigue had been getting worse. There was a pain that wouldn't go away. His wife had been after him to go in. He kept saying he would. He kept finding reasons not to.
- Then one day he did. He sat across from a doctor and said the words he had been avoiding for months — ***"Something is wrong. I need answers."***
- The doctor ordered the scans. The scans came back. And what came next was the hardest week of his life. Because the answers he asked for were not the answers he wanted.
- He had a choice in front of him. He could surrender to a treatment that was going to be brutal — surgery, weeks of recovery, months of follow-up appointments. Or he could walk out of that office, refuse the treatment, and let the thing already growing inside him finish its work.
- Two paths. Both painful. One led to life. The other led to death.
- **And the question hanging in the air on his way out was not the question he had walked in asking.** He came in asking, ***"What is wrong with me?"*** The question he had to answer on the way out was, ***"Now that you know — what are you going to do?"***
- That is the moment Malachi is going to put us in this morning. Because the people we are about to meet have been asking God a question for a long time. And in our text today, God is going to answer it. And the answer is going to flip the question entirely back on them.

### **Context: Where We've Been**

- We've been walking through Malachi together for several weeks now, and the picture has been a sobering one.
- The book opened with the question underneath everything — ***"I have loved you," says the Lord. "How have you loved us?"*** The people couldn't trace God's love anymore, because life had not gone the way they expected.
- The fire was lit at the altar, the religious calendar was being observed, but the heart had gone cold. Blind animals. Lame animals. Leftovers. God said, *I'd rather you shut the doors.*
- Chapter two revealed that the priests who had lost the fear of the Lord were multiplying the stumbling in everyone who followed them.
- And last week we followed the corruption home — from the altar to the bedroom, from the priest's robes to the wedding garment. ***The Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, and those relationships had been forsaken.***

- **So here is the arc we've been watching:**

**Doubt God's love and faithfulness → bring Him the leftovers → lose the fear of the Lord → break faith with the ones God has given you.**

Each stage is the fruit of the one before it.

- And now we come to the end of chapter two. Something new happens here. For the first time in this book, the corruption is not in what the people are *doing*. It is in what they are *saying and believing about God*. Which now reveals what has been going on under the surface.

### **Malachi 2:17–3:5**

***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?"***

***3:1 "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.***

**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. 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."**

**The conversation going on in the background:** They were going through the religious motions, but their hearts were far from the Lord. They no longer believed that God was faithful, and as a people they were settling into unbelief.

### **Malachi 2:17 — The complaint.**

- The people have been quietly drifting for a long time, and in this verse the drift surfaces as a full theological statement:

***"Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD."***

- That is not honest wrestling. That is a verdict. They have looked at the world around them — wicked people prospering, life under Persia not improving, prayers seemingly bouncing off the ceiling — and they have concluded that God is either absent or unjust.
- And Malachi tells them: *you have wearied the LORD with this*. The word "wearied" is the language of a relationship under strain — not the honest strain of wrestling, but the strain of someone who has stopped listening and started accusing, and distancing themselves.

### **Malachi 3:1 — God's answer: I'm coming**

- God does not mount a defense. He does not explain Himself. He says, *I'm coming*. A messenger is on the way. And then the Lord Himself will come to His temple.
- Now we read this from this side of the New Testament, for the audience this was future fulfillment, for us it is past, at least partially. The messenger was John the Baptist. The Lord coming to His temple was Jesus. The New Testament writers quote this verse directly — Matthew 11:10 and Mark 1:2 — when they describe the ministry of John preparing the way for Christ.

### **Malachi 3:2-3 — Not the answer they wanted.**

- Then the question flips:  
***"But who can endure the day of his coming?"***
- You asked where the God of justice was — but are you ready when He arrives?
- And notice who stands first in front of the fire. Not the wicked. Not the godless out there in the nations. The **sons of Levi** — the worshippers, the priests, the covenant people. God purifies *the house* first.
- The metaphor is of the refiner. A silversmith sitting with the metal — watching it, holding the heat at exactly the right level, working patiently until the impurities separate out and he can see his own reflection in the surface of the metal. That is what God is doing in His people.

### **Malachi 3:4 — The result of the refining.**

- Once the people are refined, the offerings become *pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old*. Remember chapter one? The polluted offerings, the leftovers, God saying He would rather the doors be shut? Here is the reversal. The refining produces the worship God has been asking for all along.
- And this happened. At Pentecost the fire fell on the disciples — the new royal priesthood, as Peter calls them. The sons of Levi were refined. And the offering of God's people became pleasing again: the sacrifice of praise, the offering of lives laid down in service of the gospel.

### **Malachi 3:5 — The Already but Not Yet.**

- "Then I will draw near for judgment" — against the sorcerers, the adulterers, the false-swearers, the oppressors of workers and widows and orphans and sojourners. That is the final reckoning. That is the full answer to the people's cry of "where is the God of justice?"
- And that day has not arrived yet.
- **So here is what the passage is doing.** Malachi's people were looking at one horizon. They thought the Day of the Lord was a single event that would answer everything at once — His presence *and* His justice, arriving together. But the dot on the horizon was actually two events, separated by centuries. The first advent answered the presence question. The second advent will answer the justice question.
- **We live between them.** And the question that landed on them — ***"Who can endure the day of his coming?"*** — lands on us now from both directions. The fire has already begun. And the final fire is still coming.

## I. God's Silence Is Not Absence — It Is Patience

- The first thing we have to do with this passage is repent of the way we have been reading God's silence.
- Malachi's people read God's silence as absence. They read His delay as injustice. They concluded that since the wicked were prospering and the righteous were struggling, God must not care.
- Peter addresses people doing exactly the same thing in his own day:

### 2 Peter 3:9

***"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."***

- Read that again. The delay is **not slowness**. The delay is **patience**. And the patience is directed toward *you* — the person in the seat right now, the one hearing these words. God is not absent. He is holding the door open.
- This is the move we have to make in our own hearts. The world will look unjust. Your prayers will sometimes feel like they are bouncing off the ceiling. Hard things will happen that don't match what you thought God's love should look like. And in those moments, the temptation Malachi's people fell into is going to whisper to you too: ***God doesn't care. God isn't just. God isn't here.***
- **Peter says:** you are reading the silence wrong. The silence is mercy. The space between now and the final Day is God making room for repentance — yours, your neighbor's, your prodigal child's, even your enemy's.
- **Application question:** Where in your life are you currently reading God's silence as absence — when you should be reading it as patience?

## II. The Question Flips — Are You Ready?

- The second thing this passage does is flip the question on the questioner.
- The people asked, *"Where is the God of justice?"* God replies: *"He's coming."* The people respond: **"But who can endure the day of his coming?"**

- That is one of the most piercing rhetorical moves in the Bible. They were so focused on demanding God show up that they had not stopped to ask whether they were ready for Him to arrive.
- And the New Testament does the same thing. Jesus told parables about this constantly — the wise and foolish virgins, the talents, the sheep and the goats. The question is never just *is He coming?* The question is always, **are you ready when He does?**
- Here is why this matters for us. We can spend a lot of time asking God to fix the world. Fix the politicians. Fix the courts. Fix the culture. Fix the injustice. And the longing behind those prayers is not wrong — Verse 5 tells us God is going to do exactly that. But the question underneath it is: **are you ready for the day when He fixes everything?**
- Because when He fixes everything, He fixes you too. The same Day that addresses the oppressor out there also addresses the contempt I have nursed in here. The same Day that judges the adulterer also judges the wandering eye in the secret room of my own spirit.
- That is why the refiner's fire falls on the sons of Levi first. God doesn't clean up the world before He cleans up His own people. **He cleans us up so we can be part of what He does in the world.**
- **Application question:** If God showed up today to do what He has promised — what would He find in you that He would need to refine first?

### III. Same Fire, Two Outcomes

- The third application is the most urgent one, and it is the one this passage presses on us personally and pastorally.
- The fire is coming either way. The only question is what it finds when it arrives.
- Malachi himself says this plainly, two chapters later:

#### **Malachi 4:1–2**

***"For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze... But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings."***

- Same God. Same Fire. Two completely different outcomes — not because the fire changes, but because of what you are when it arrives.
- Hebrews 12:29 puts it like this:  
***Our God is a consuming fire.***
- He is not two different Gods. He is the same God. And what fire does depends on what it meets. Gold is refined. Stubble is consumed.
- Which means each of us has a choice — and we are making it right now, in the ordinary days of our lives.
- **Have we willingly surrendered to the refiner's fire.** You can yield to the work of the Spirit in you right now — the conviction that comes when you read your Bible, the discomfort when you are confronted with something in your heart, the quiet voice that says *you need to repent of that, you need to forgive him, you need to repair that, you need to confess that.* That is the refiner sitting with you, watching the heat, working out what doesn't belong. Painful, yes. But it leads to life.
- **Or you can resist it.** You can keep guarding the corners of your life that the fire hasn't been allowed to reach. You can keep asking "where is the God of justice?" as an accusation while refusing the justice He is already doing in your own heart. And when the Day arrives — and it will arrive — the same fire that could have refined if you put your faith in Christ, if you are outside of Christ it will consume you.
- **And here is the gospel underneath it all.** You do not refine yourself. The silver doesn't purify itself — it yields to the silversmith. The call here is not *try harder.*
- The call is **surrender.** Let Him do the work. Trust the Refiner.
- **Application question:** What part of your life have you been keeping out of the fire? What is the Refiner sitting with right now — waiting for you to stop resisting?

### **Conclusion: Back to the Exam Room**

- Remember the guy at the doctor's office.

- He went in asking a question. He came out facing a different question. He came in asking, ***"What is wrong with me?"*** He came out having to answer, ***"Now that you know — what are you going to do?"***
  
- **That is the question this passage is putting on every one of us this morning.**
  - **For those outside of Christ, come and welcome to Jesus Christ, receive His mercy and grace and surrender.**
  - **For those of us in Christ, surrender to the refiners work in you, to form you into His workman, so that great will be your reward**
  
- We come to God with our complaints about the world. We come asking where the justice is. We come weary, sometimes wondering if He is even listening anymore. And God answers us. He says: *I'm coming. The fire is on its way. The day of reckoning will arrive. Vengeance is mine declares the Lord.*
- And then He turns the question back on us. **Now that you know — what are you going to do?**
- Will you choose the surgery? Jesus chose the treatment. He chose the painful, refining path. And He lives today because of His finished work on the Cross.
- We can live today because He has offered the cure, take up your cross and follow after Him.
- That is the choice in front of each of us. Not whether the fire is coming — it is. The only question is whether we will yield to it now while it is patient and purifying, or whether we will resist it until it arrives final and consuming.
- The God who said ***"I have loved you"*** at the beginning of this book is the same God who says in chapter 3, ***"I am coming."*** He is coming to refine what can be refined. He is coming to bring justice to what has gone unjust. He is coming as the faithful Bridegroom for His purified Bride.
- And the time between now and then is not absence. It is mercy. It is the porch light left on as the Father waits for His son to return. It is the Refiner sitting with you, patient and watching, waiting for you to stop resisting.

- **Stop asking "where is the God of justice?" as an accusation. Start praying "refine me" as a surrender.**
- Yield to the fire now. Let Him do His work. Let Him sit with you until He can see His own image in your face.
- That is the invitation underneath every hard word in this book.

**[Closing Benediction]**

## Malachi 2:17–3:5

### Small Group Discussion Questions

#### 1. From Honest Wrestling to a Quiet Verdict

The people in Malachi 2:17 are not simply asking hard questions about a hard world — they have moved past wrestling and arrived at a verdict. "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD." They have looked at the prosperity of the wicked, at life that has not improved under Persia, at prayers that seem to bounce off the ceiling, and they have concluded that God is either absent or unjust. Malachi tells them this has wearied the Lord — not the strain of an honest seeker, but the strain of someone who has stopped listening and started accusing. There is a real difference between Job's questions and the kind of quiet verdict Malachi confronts here.

**Discussion: Where in your own life have you slipped from honest wrestling with God to a quiet verdict about Him? What has been the evidence you used to reach that verdict — and what has Scripture or this passage given you to reconsider?**

#### 2. Reading God's Silence Rightly

When the answers we wanted do not arrive on the timeline we expected, the temptation is to read God's silence as absence. That is what Malachi's people did, and Peter addresses people doing the same thing in his own day: "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" (2 Peter 3:9). The delay is not slowness — it is patience. The space between now and the final Day is God making room — for your repentance, your neighbor's, your prodigal child's, even your enemy's. Malachi's people had misread the silence. We do the same.

**Discussion: Where in your life are you currently tempted to read God's silence as absence? What would change in your prayers, your patience, or your endurance this week if you genuinely received that silence as mercy and as an invitation to repentance?**

#### 3. The Question That Gets Flipped

The people demand, "Where is the God of justice?" God answers: He's coming. And then the question flips on them: "But who can endure the day of his coming?" They were so focused on demanding God show up that they had not stopped to ask whether they were ready for Him to arrive. The same God who will address the oppressor out there will also address the contempt nursed in here. The same Day that judges the adulterer also judges the wandering eye in the secret room of my own spirit. Jesus told parable after parable about this —

the wise and foolish virgins, the talents, the sheep and the goats. The question is never just is He coming? The question is always, are you ready when He does?

**Discussion: If God showed up today to do everything He has promised to do — both the comforting and the confronting — what would He find in you that He would need to refine first? Be specific.**

#### **4. Same Fire, Two Outcomes**

The fire is coming either way. The only question is what it finds when it arrives. Malachi says it plainly two chapters later: "For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven... But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings" (Malachi 4:1–2). Same Day. Same fire. Two completely different outcomes — not because the fire changes, but because of what you are when it arrives. Gold is refined. Stubble is consumed. And the gospel underneath this is essential: you do not refine yourself. The silver does not purify itself — it yields to the silversmith. The call is not try harder. The call is surrender. Trust the Refiner.

**Discussion: What part of your life have you been keeping out of the fire — what corner have you been guarding from the Refiner's hand? What does "surrender to the Refiner" look like in the practical, ordinary moments of this week — in your work, your home, your conversations, the secret room of your own spirit? Where is the Holy Spirit currently working, and what is one specific way you can stop resisting Him?**