

Roy's Sermon for January 1, 2023.

## Malachi 3:2-5 'Prepared To Meet The King!'

Last time we looked at chapter 2:17-3:1 of Malachi: 'Men Rail, But God Comes!', only two verses but with deep implications. We saw how the words and prayers of both priests and people alike had "wearied the Lord." I explained that it is not that God can actually get physically tired, He's God. He was speaking in a manner in which the people could understand. As He said to them, 'You've worn me out having to listen to all of your cynical and hypocritical words.' So all of their useless prayers and talk. And do you remember the slant which they put upon the character of God? "All who do evil are good in the eyes of the Lord." Yes God loves, (not the humble, the upright and the righteous, no) He loves the "evildoer and he is pleased with them."

In chapter 2 God had slammed their lip service and hypocrisy. He had revealed their sin to them, but instead of repentance their response was to deride and rail at Him, to even shake their fist in His face so to speak. And the second part of their arrogant reply. "Where is this God of justice?" And remember this can be taken in two ways. That God is so far away from caring for and upholding the cause of the innocent, the upright and the downtrodden, that He is nowhere to be seen. And worse still, that this God whom Israel had worshipped and followed for over 1000 years, doesn't exist at all!

Yes, show yourself to us O Yahweh, God of the Hebrews, and we will believe in you. And friends let's remember this is not coming from those idol worshipping nations around them, no! And these things were coming from the very people which God had claimed for His own "treasured possession" and had "carried on eagles wings" the Bible tells us, again for over 1000 years! 'You think I don't exist. You think that you can rail at me without fear or consequence. You say show yourself and you will believe in me. Well let me tell you something, "See." Or perhaps better understood, You will see you fools. You arrogant fools who say in your hearts, there is no God. "See I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me." And as I said last time, either God is saying of Jesus, in Him you have Me completely, or it is Jesus Himself who is speaking of His first appearing! And I pointed out brothers and sisters true wisdom the Bible says, begins and ends with "the fear of the Lord." Ecclesiastes 12:13 "Now all has been heard, here is the conclusion of the matter. Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man" And I also mentioned that "Wisdom" says when God speaks, we listen. And not only this, we respond!

And the final, but overriding message, is that God proclaims the future, and then it comes. He condemns the city, and then it falls. He says He is coming, and in His time he comes!

Well, so to this morning's text Malachi 3:2-5 'Prepared To Meet The King!' Verse 2 "But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears?" You see such was the vanity of the nation of Israel at that time, that even though God rebuked them and they refused to respond to His chastisements in repentance, they even fooled themselves to believing that in some way God was bound to them or obligated to them. And that though their collective behaviour, (as we have seen, was appalling) they still deluded themselves into believing that they were living in a manner that would hold them in good stead when the promised Redeemer came! Yes they thought all would be well and that they would rejoice in the presence of the promised Messiah. But no. "Who can endure the day of his coming?"

Brothers and sisters as I have said many times over the years, God is not your mate. When Jesus returns He will not say g'day, as the old TV commercial used to say. And you know, may I suggest that though it is true that these verses are certainly speaking of Jesus' first coming, to find their ultimate conclusion we must look beyond His life of suffering, sacrifice, obedience, even His death

on the Cross, resurrection and ascension into heaven. Yes beyond His Cross, and to His second coming!

We read in Revelation chapter 6:12-17 "I watched as he opened the 6th seal and there was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs dropped from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, 'fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the lamb. For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?' Yes 'Who can endure? Who will stand?' Before the very throne of God!

Do you remember Psalm 24, that Psalm of Christ's ascension? As we read in verses 3-5 "Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false. He will receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from God his saviour." And of course Jesus Himself elaborates upon these very things in His Sermon on the mount in Matthew 5: "Blessed are the poor in spirit"; "Blessed are those who mourn"; "Blessed are the peace makers"; "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness"; "Blessed are the merciful"; "Blessed are the pure in heart"; "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake." And in verses 11-12 of Matthew 5 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

So with these words Jesus takes ownership of the whole of the Old Testament scriptures. He is saying they were all about me. Here I AM, the One who you have been waiting for. You need look no further! But I believe we do need to see these two comings of Christ held together, to fully understand this text. Last time we saw from Isaiah 40:1-3 that God said of John's "preparing the way" for Jesus. "Comfort, comfort my people." So it was to them a message of a little longer my precious ones. Yes you've been paying the price for past sins, but soon the one for whom you've waited will come! And yet 300 years later in Malachi's day, it is "Who can endure? Who can stand?"

So we have the imagery of the self sacrificing Lamb of God, who would bring "comfort" and reconciliation to God for His people but also, the infinite power and glory revealed in His triumphant return of Judgement! Yes, "Who can endure?" and "Who can stand?" in the presence of such things? Yes, we have the two edges of the Sword of His mouth, the gospel. "Who can endure? Who can stand?" Well the answer is quite simple. No one! No of themselves no person. From king to beggar, politician to priest, rich man too poor man, will be able to stand in the presence of God. Even Christ the Lord!

And the reason is also simple. Because within our genetic makeup, within our DNA we have a problem, and it's called sin. So we will not, indeed we cannot approach the throne of the King, without having first being cleansed, even by His Own Blood! Praise the Lord O my soul, O my soul, worship His Holy Name. Sing like never before, O my soul, I will worship His Holy Name! Yes "Who can stand when He appears for he will be like a refiners fire or I launder's soap." Now the Old Collins dictionary defines the word "Refine" as to reduce to a fine or pure state. To free from impurities, to purify"; "To reduce crude metals to a finer state. To clarify, to Polish. To make more elegant, to free from coarseness and vulgarity!

Well what a great way to explain what Jesus does for us, the Sinner. He reduces us to a fine and pure state. He polishes us and improves us. Freeing us from all coarseness and vulgarity. Even from all sin! And of course the interesting thing about the refiner's fire is that it had a twofold effect. It was heated to a temperature which would burn away all the dregs, all of the impurities, while leaving behind the precious metal.

What does the Cross and the Blood of Jesus do for us beloved? Burn away all the effects of sin, and wash us clean! Revelation 7:13-14 "Then one of the elders asked me, 'These in white robes who are they, and where did they come from?' I answered, Sir, you know. And he said, these are they who have come out of the great tribulation, they have washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb." And can you see, that these words have implications for us not only as individuals, but also for mankind as a whole? Because individually the impurities of our sin can be washed away, as we are made pure and clean by Christ's Blood. But also, collectively as the whole of mankind, as the impurities of our species, (those who have rejected the truth and forgiveness which Jesus offers) will be burned away as it were, and cast into hell!

Friends, these are sobering things. This is the Gospel which Jesus proclaimed. It was not lolly gobble bliss bombs or bubble gum Christianity. And as it speaks here of "a launderers soap" it's not soap as we understand it today, apparently they didn't have such things. Baker's Bible encyclopaedia explains that this soap was extracted from a group of alkali bearing plants, one of which was called salt wart. The plant was burned, then water was poured on the ashes with that water becoming a kind of detergent, specially used for getting bad stains out of wool or cloth. But clearly, the message is the same isn't it. The people of God are putrid. They need to go through the fires of cleansing, they need to be washed with the ashes and water of the salt wart plant. Yes they need to be made clean!

Now brothers and sisters, I know that I've said these kinds of things before, but we really do need to consider our sin. Not be weighed down to the grave by them, (that's why Jesus came, to purify us, and to deliver us from the consequences of such things) but certainly, if you're anything like me, there will be times throughout your days or weeks, when your own sin, does seem to rest too easily upon your shoulders! Perhaps it's a problem with bad language. Or that you are easily angered. Maybe resentment or jealousy are the demons which you are struggling with. Maybe it's pride and vanity. Perhaps apathy and laziness in Bible study and prayer, are your problems.

Friends, whatever those things may be, (and we've all got them) they should never rest easily upon our shoulders, as though they don't exist. Because we need to remember, yes we need to be constantly reminded from the scriptures, that it was for just such things did Jesus have to die. Living with an attitude and heart of repentance, is what Jesus calls us to. Anything less, is to be as the Jews in Malachi's day, to have contempt for what Jesus has done for us! "He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years." So the Levites (or we might say Christians today) will be purified, refined, and of course by the Blood of Jesus. "No one comes to the father except by me," He said. But also, in a practical sense, through living as followers of Christ, in a sin ridden world!

You see, it's that day by day abiding in the Son of God, that we become more like Him, and seek to know more of Him. Yes it's that, putting of one foot in front of the other every day, as we seek Him out in His Word! It's not about the spectacular, it's not about modern day Apostolic miraculous signs, (which do not exist) it's about walking the walk with the Spirit of God as our guide, not simply talking the talk! And what are "offerings of righteousness" today? Well, Romans 12:1 says "Therefore, I urge

you brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship.”

So it's clear then, that simply seeking to be obedient to the things of God, as they are found in the scriptures, is the major part of our offerings up to Him, as it were, in gratitude, for what He has done for us through Jesus. This is what he seeks from us. It's not a complicated equation, a simple life of simple faith, in God through Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit! “As in days gone by” he writes, “as in former years” he says.

You know I really believe we have complicated the message of the cross with many things. The spectacular, the so called miraculous, the feel good message, and the theologically obscure, just to mention a few. Whereas God has made it so very clear. Micah 6:8C “To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” It's the same truth as Romans 12:1 isn't it! And in verse 5 of Malachi 3 we read “So I will come near to you for judgement. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud labourers of their wages, who oppressed the widows and the fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice, but do not fear me, says the Lord Almighty.” Yes “But do not fear me says the Lord Almighty.” Again, we need to remind ourselves that this is not being spoken to the Pagan world around them, it is directed at the very people of God. All of these things existed among God's people.

So I guess we do need to ask ourselves, are any of these things, (even degrees of them, as Jesus explained the true intent of God's law in his sermon on the mountain Matthew 5) yes, are any of these things who I am? And let me just explain that this is not speaking of someone who is truly wrestling with sin. As I said earlier, we've all got areas of our lives that we struggle with. And for some of us, those same things might even plague us all of our days. No this is speaking of those who have given themselves over to, and wallowing in such ways of life. And the bottom line is, they do this because like the Pagan world, there is “No Fear of God in them.” Now it's one thing to live in such a manner because there is no acceptance in our lives and our hearts that God even exists. But it is another thing altogether to claim with our lips that yes Jesus is Lord, but then with our lives, that He is not Lord over me! Which is what the Israelites were doing in Malachi's time!

So how do we tie all these things together so we can walk away today, with something by way of a practical application for us? Well, it's not a deeply hidden thing that we need to dig out. I began this morning with Ecclesiastes 12:13 “Now all has been heard, here is the conclusion of the matter. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.” But this fear is not a Revelation 6, run and hide kind of fear, it is one that remembers who God is, and who we are. That remembers yes, his great love for us that for us He gave His Only Son. But also, that we are but dust which He has given breath to, and if He takes it away, we return to that which we were!

Beloved, a sober reflection upon the power and holiness of God, will always help us to approach Him aright. So in closing, The question remains dear friends, are you prepared to meet the King today? Only you in your heart can answer that brothers and sisters. But remember, the days are short and increasingly evil! And remember also Jesus` final words. Revelation 22:20 “And lo, I am coming soon!”

So let us pray Amen.

Come Lord Jesus come! Let's pray!