

Main Idea: In today’s text, in Malachi 2:17-3:5, we learn what wears the God of justice. We also learn that God responded to what wears Him by revealing two bottom line realities.

- I. The Lord reveals the human problem (2:17).
 - A. The Lord is wearied when people question His commands.
 - B. The Lord is wearied when people question His character.
- II. The Lord reveals the divine plan to address the human problem (3:1-5).
 - A. The Messiah is coming (1).
 1. He is preceded by a messenger.
 2. He is the Lord Himself.
 3. He will come suddenly to His temple.
 4. He will be the messenger of the covenant.
 - B. The day of the Messiah is coming (2-5).
 1. It will be a day of refining (2-4).
 - a. He will clean up the priesthood.
 - b. He will clean up the people.
 2. It will be a day of judgment (5).
 - a. The Lord Himself will be both witness and judge on that day.
 - b. The Lord Himself has given us this day to prepare for that day.

Make It Personal: Am I ready for what is coming?

Theme Song of Series: “Great Among the Nations” (Malachi 1:11)

My name will be great, great among the nations.

My name will be great, great among the nations.

*From the rising to the setting of the sun, my name will be great,
great among the nations.*

There’s a lot of talk these days about justice, which makes today’s text quite relevant. In Malachi’s day there was a lot of talk about justice. Here’s the question we want to think about as we open our Bibles. What wears the God of justice?

Scripture Reading: Malachi 2:17-3:5

You may not notice them in our area, but in the farm country of west-central Ohio where I grew up, we saw them all the time. You’d see them as you were driving along the country road and glanced out your window. Often, they were located out in the middle of a field. We had one on our farm at the end of our long, third-of-a-mile lane. It was a large wooden post (others were made of concrete).

I remember my dad telling me, “You know what that is, don’t you? That’s a boundary marker. Years ago, the land in this area was divided into square sections. The marker was put there as a point of identification. Stay on this side of the post, and you’re on our land. Go beyond it, and you’re on the neighbor’s property.”

That boundary marker represents a lot more than we might first think. It communicates a community’s world view. It says that I don’t take what’s on your side of the post, and you don’t take what’s on my side of the post. It says that if my neighbor’s animals come to my side, that’s a problem, and vice versa. It also says that if my neighbor has a heart attack and can’t care for what’s on his side of the post, the rest of us in the community may choose to help him by giving our time and resources. But he won’t just take them from us.

What do you think would happen if one night someone went out and cut down all the boundary markers? Just imagine. The next day, your neighbor would be out on his

**Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ For a previous look at this passage, see the Malachi series preached in 1994.

tractor plowing, and you'd notice he was on your property. You'd run out, waving your arms, shouting, "Stop! You're on my land!" And he'd say, "Says who? How do you know it's *your* land? I've decided it's mine." And you turned to point to the boundary marker, but it was gone. When that boundary marker was there, you had an objective, non-partial, absolute standard. Without it, it's his opinion against yours.

When I traveled to Ukraine for the first time, I didn't see any corner posts, and that too was indicative of a worldview. It was 2003, just a little over a decade after the fall of communism. As we drove through the breadbasket of the former USSR, I saw continuous fields of black soil, thousands and thousands of acres (hectars I believe they called it). Supposedly, under communism, the people owned the land equally. But in reality, the government owned the land. This meant there was no need for border markers, for there was no *your land* and *my land*. Nor was there any lasting incentive for hard work, nor for caring one's neighbor either. That was the government's job.

Were there corner posts in Israel? Actually, there were. When the Lord redeemed two million Jews and prepared them for life in the promised land, He did something quite significant. He divided the land into twelve parcels and gave each tribe a parcel (essentially, He put some posts in the ground).

He also gave His people laws, very specific laws which were to govern how they lived in the land. An entire set of laws had to do with giving tithes of what their land and animals produced. Why? Their giving was an act of worship for Him, yes. But their giving was also to care for the Levites and the priests.

By God's instruction, the tribe of Levi didn't own any land. God was their inheritance, not land. How did they survive if they didn't raise crops and animals? They depended on the people's gifts for their livelihood. This was by God's design.

God gave His people 613 commands in the Torah, and they applied to all aspects of life. There were laws regarding how to treat God's name, how to treat one another, how to treat the poor, how and when to bring offerings, about priests and who could be one, and much more.

Here's one of the commands. Deuteronomy 19:14 says, "You shall not move your neighbor's landmark [NIV 'boundary stone'], which the men of old have set, in the inheritance that you will hold in the land that the LORD your God is giving you to possess."

Deuteronomy 27:17 takes it further, "'Cursed be anyone who moves his neighbor's landmark.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen.'" The command is repeated in Proverbs 22:28 (and in Proverbs 23:10), "'Do not move the ancient landmark that your fathers have set.'" The prophet said in Hosea 5:10, "The princes of Judah have become like those who move the landmark; upon them I will pour out my wrath like water."

To put it simply, God's people moved the boundary markers literally and figuratively. They violated God's commands again and again for centuries. So, the Lord took them to court. If the book of Malachi sounds like a court case, it essentially is, with the prophet Malachi acting as the Lord's prosecuting attorney. Malachi confronts the people of God with six covenant violations.

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| 1:1-5 | God's people questioned God's love for them. |
| 1:6-14 | God's priests defiled God's altar. |
| 2:1-10 | God's priests failed to keep their fiduciary responsibility. |
| 2:11-16 | God's people were faithless in their marriages. |
| 2:16-3:5 | God's people questioned the God of justice. |

3:6-12 God's people robbed God by neglecting their tithes.

Today we're looking at the fifth covenant violation, and it's quite relevant. In Malachi 2:17-3:5, we're going to see what wears the God of justice. We're also going to see how God responded to what wears Him, as He reveals two bottom line realities that apply to us

I. The Lord reveals the human problem (2:17).

II. The Lord reveals the divine plan to address the human problem (3:1-5).

I. The Lord reveals the human problem (2:17).

Malachi the prophet speaks in verse 17, "You have wearied the LORD with your words." That's an intriguing charge. How can an omnipotent God be *wearied*?

Remember the setting. Malachi ministered about four centuries before Christ. The Babylonian exile is over. A remnant of Jews is back in the land. The temple is rebuilt, and the sacrificial system is functioning again. But God is displeased.

Why? We've just seen four reasons, four covenant violations. In short, the priests were corrupt, and the people had followed suit. The priests tampered with God's Word, lowered God's standard, and essentially told the people, "It's no longer necessary to do what the Book says. God doesn't seem to be too concerned about us these days anyway. Just look around. We're under pagan rule, and the land is in shambles. So go ahead and keep the best lambs for yourselves and bring the lame ones for sacrifice."

And the people followed the priest's counsel. They modernized their interpretation of the Book. They did it in their worship in chapter 1, and in their family relationships in chapter 2. They didn't think God cared.

But He did. And Malachi told them, "You have wearied the Lord."

Notice how the people responded in verse 17 (AV), "Yet ye say, In what way have we wearied Him?" Those are the words of a pious, self-righteous people who are blind to their own faults. "Who, us?"

What was their problem? It was revealed by their *words*. "*But you say*," said the prosecuting attorney. You have wearied Him "*by saying*." Malachi uses the people's own words as exhibit A for the court to consider.

What were they saying? Two God-focused complaints in verse 17. First, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delights in them." And second, "Where is the God of justice?" The people were wearying the God of justice with two sins, as do we so often. They were questioning God's commands and character.

A. The Lord is wearied when people question His commands. Think of it. The people were saying, "All who do evil are good in the eyes of the LORD, and He is pleased with them." Talk about moving boundary markers!

Why would they say that? Again, consider the background. Things were tough in Malachi's day. Economic conditions were horrible and had been for nearly two centuries.² It seemed to the people like God had forgotten them. Yet their pagan oppressors (people like the Persians) seemed to prosper. That was too much to handle.

So they came to the conclusion, "Those who do evil (like the Persians) are good in God's eyes. God is pleased with them." Was God pleased with the wicked Persians? Certainly not, and their day was coming.

² The prophets Haggai and Zechariah preached a hundred years earlier, but in the people's eyes of Malachi's day, not much had happened.

There's a difference between asking God questions, and questioning God. At times even righteous people cry out to God about the seeming unfairness of life. Men like Asaph (Ps 73) and Jeremiah (12:1) and Habakkuk (1:2-4) asked why the wicked prospered, and God didn't seem to care.

But the people of Malachi's day went even further. They had become cynics who questioned the very commands of God, and reversed those commands, by saying that the person who does evil is pleasing to the Lord. They had moved the boundary markers.

I'd like to share with you some old sermon notes I found last week. I'm citing some statistics provided by Josh McDowell:³

"Early in 1994, we surveyed 3,795 kids (ages 11-18)... More than 80% of those surveyed attended an evangelical church weekly, and 86% said they had made a commitment to trust Christ as their Savior and Lord [in other words, these are "our" kids]. The findings indicate serious problems when it comes to values and absolutes:

*66% said they had lied to their parents or another adult in the last 3 months.

*45% watched MTV at least once a week.

*55% said they are confused. According to the survey, many others are cheating, smoking, gambling, watching X-rated movies and engaging in premarital sex.

I asked the question, "What's happened to our kids?" And then again cited an answer provided by Josh McDowell, "In past decades, children grew up in an atmosphere that communicated absolute standards for behavior: Certain things were right and certain things were wrong...A clear standard of right and wrong gave society a moral compass to measure crime and punishment, business ethics, community values, character and social conduct...Yet in the 1990's, our children are being raised in a society that rejects a standard of truth and morality, of right and wrong. Truth has become a matter of taste; morality a matter of preference."

That was 1994. Now it's 2024, and those young people in the illustration are now in their 40s and 50s. They are the teachers and doctors and entertainers of our society. And what are they doing now? They're still questioning, but not just God's commands. Now it's His character.

B. The Lord is wearied when people question His character. "Where is the God of justice?" the people were asking.

Last week I was taking my morning run/walk when I saw a bumper sticker that made me do a double take. It said, "*Have the day you deserve.*" I read it, then walked over and read it again. ***Have the day you deserve?*** Yes, that's what it said. I remember thinking, "I don't want a day that I deserve." Do you? The Creator declares in the Owner's Manual, "The soul that sins shall die." I sinned last week. Didn't you? If we received what we deserved, we wouldn't be here this morning. That's how justice works.

So the Jews were asking, "Where is the God of justice?" Usually, the people who ask that question have *other* people in mind. What they really mean is, "Why isn't the God of justice doing something to deal with *those* people?"

Keep in mind, these are the same people who said, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and He delights in them." These were God's chosen people, yet they questioned God's commands and now His character. "If God is just, why doesn't He do something? He must not care about good and evil, since He doesn't judge

³ Josh McDowell, in Focus on the Family, Nov 94

wicked people like the Persians. If He lets them get away with terrible crimes, He must not really be a God of justice.”

Is God just? Indeed, He is, and He will deal justly with transgressors. That includes *those* people *and us*, as Malachi will soon make clear.

Friends, there’s a lot of questioning of the commands and character of God going on these days. Politicians are doing it. Public educators are doing it. Certainly, the entertainment industry is doing it, as it glorifies evil and mocks what is good. When was the last time you turned off your television and said to your children, “We will not be entertained by what God says is wrong.”?

Churches are doing it too. Are you familiar with the homosexual hermeneutic? If you’re wondering how someone could justify homosexuality after reading biblical data that forbids it, here’s how. Those who claim to believe the Bible have developed a “hermeneutic” (a way of interpreting the Bible) that justifies what the Scriptures forbid.

Ed Welch explains the position, “The Bible does not speak about ‘natural’ homosexuality [like we have today]. It addresses only ‘unnatural’ cultic male prostitution or ‘unnatural’ homosexuality practiced by heterosexually oriented people. The Bible does not speak specifically to people who are *oriented* toward homosexuality. Therefore, in order to develop a biblical theology of homosexuality, other, more relevant Scripture must be examined. These relevant texts, it is argued, can be found in teachings about heterosexual relationships.”⁴

Again, it’s nothing new. Malachi heard his people saying the same thing. “Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them.”

This wearies the God of justice, and He said so again and again. In Isaiah 5:20, the Lord pronounced “woe to those who call evil good, and good evil.” Proverbs 17:15 says that justifying the wicked is “an abomination to the Lord.” Psalm 5:4 says God is not One “who takes pleasure in wickedness.”

Friends, this is the human problem, and it plagues all of us. We are sinners, and as sinners we have all questioned the commands and character of God. We just don’t like boundary markers. And this wearies the One who put them there for our good.

Is there a solution? Thank God, there is. Malachi is going to tell us what it is.

II. The Lord reveals the divine plan to address the human problem (3:1-5).

While the Bible is inspired, the verse numbering and chapter breaks are not. They were added later. Here’s a case where some scribe made a poor choice, in my estimation. Malachi 2:17 really belongs with chapter three, not chapter two. The Jews had just said in 2:17, “Where is the God of justice?” And now in 3:1ff He answers, “You’ll see. He’s coming, and you won’t miss Him.”

This is a prophetic text, and in this particular prophecy God reveals His plan to address the human problem. His plan involves a coming person (verse 1) and a coming day (verses 2-5).

A. The Messiah is coming (1). Listen to verse 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.”

⁴ Ed Welch, *Blame It on the Brain*, pp. 155-6.

While Malachi doesn't use the term "Messiah" here, he certainly has Him in mind, for the Messiah is the divine solution to the human problem. In this one verse, God Himself gives us four insights into the identify of the Messiah.

1. *He is preceded by a messenger.* God announces that before the arrival of the Messiah, a messenger will arrive. In Hebrew, the words "my messenger" are actually "Malachi". Malachi's name means "my messenger". While it's true that the prophet Malachi helped prepare the world for the arrival of the Messiah, the Lord has in mind another messenger in verse 1.

Who is this messenger? Malachi later gives us another piece of information about him. Notice Malachi 4:5, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes."

Jesus Himself quotes this verse and gives the identity of this messenger. He says in Matthew 11:9–11, "What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.' Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist."

So, John the Baptist is the messenger. What did God say His messenger would do? Notice verse 1 again. "And he will prepare the way before Me." In the ancient world of what we call the Middle East, whenever a king was going to arrive at a city or town, he would send messengers ahead. Their job was to make the necessary preparations for the royal guest. The messengers leveled the roads, filled in the potholes, and removed the boulders.

God says His messenger will likewise prepare the world. The prophet Isaiah said this of the Messiah's forerunner, "The voice of him that cries in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight (Isaiah 40:3-4 AV)."

When John the Baptist came, he essentially did spiritual housecleaning in Israel. He preached repentance. To put it another way, he reminded his people where the property markers used to be, and then confronted them for moving them. He preached a hard message, yes, but a hope-giving message too, for he said there's a solution for people who move property markers, a Lamb who would be slain for the sins of the world.

This will be the messenger's job, says the Lord through Malachi. He will prepare the world ready for the Messiah. And who is this Messiah? Hold on to your seats.

2. *He is the Lord Himself.* Notice the pronouns in verse 1, "Behold, **I** send **my** messenger, and **he** will prepare the way before **me**." Who is "I"? He identifies Himself at the end of verse 1 as "the LORD of hosts". He says the messenger will prepare the way before *ME*." The One coming to deal with the human problem will be the Lord Himself.

And to what location will He come? Malachi gives the shocking answer in the next part of verse 1, "And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple."

3. *He will come suddenly to His temple.* Interesting destination. Of all the places where Messiah could go, why the temple? Why not to Persia to get rid of the oppressors? Why the temple? Think carefully. What was the temple? It was the place of sacrifice, where lambs were slain for sinners. It was also the place where the priests and people in Malachi's day were offering God their despising leftovers.

That's where I'm coming, says the Lord through Malachi. To my temple. Your biggest problem isn't what people are doing to you. It's what you are doing to Me.

The Lord reveals His triune nature in verse 1. Notice how He shifts pronouns from "me" to "he". Again, God is speaking and says, "**I** will send my messenger, and **he**

will prepare the way before **Me**. And **the Lord** will come to his temple.” “Lord” is the Hebrew *adon*, the divine title which speaks of ownership (*adonay* is “my Lord”). *Adon* shall come to *His* temple, for He owns the temple. Indeed, the coming Messiah is the owner and master of everything.

This is the second person of the Triune Godhead, the Son of God. The Messiah is both *God* and *One sent by God*. And He’s coming to His temple.

4. *He will be the messenger of the covenant*. Notice the rest of verse 1, “And the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.” So who is the messenger here? Is this the same messenger mentioned at the beginning of the verse, the one who will prepare the way for the Messiah? Or is this the Messiah who Himself is the messenger of the covenant? I think the latter.

As one commentator explains, “This is one of those enigmatic Old Testament passages in which God and his unique angel/messenger (“the angel of the Lord”) are spoken of as if they are one and the same (Gen 16:7–14; 18:1–19:1; 22:12; Exod 3:1–6). From a Christian perspective its meaning is elucidated only in the New Testament through the coming of Jesus, God’s Son, the Sent One.”⁵

Malachi says he will come “quickly” (meaning unexpectedly), a word that appears twenty-five times in the OT and is nearly always connected with disaster or judgment. He also says He is the One “in whom you delight”, though Baldwin says this is probably meant as an irony, and explains, “The coming of the messenger of the covenant would be less than welcome when the implications of his coming were experienced.”⁶

Who is coming? The Messiah is. And you won’t miss Him, says the Lord through Malachi. He will be preceded by a messenger. He is the Lord Himself. He will come suddenly to His temple. He will be the messenger of the covenant. Indeed, He is the One who will fulfill all previous covenants, including the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic, and establish the “new covenant” (according to Jeremiah 31:31).

In the plan of God, this is the person. The Messiah is coming. And of course, as the New Testament makes clear, He has come, and will come again!

To accomplish what? This is second part of Malachi’s prophesy.

B. The day of the Messiah is coming (2-5). Notice verse 2, “But who can endure the day of his coming?” What “day” is Malachi talking about?

The Old Testament takes a very simple, straightforward approach to eschatology. There is the “present age.” And there is “the age to come.” The “age to come” would be inaugurated by the coming of the Messiah who would bring about a period of time known as “the day of the Lord.”

The prophets announced that the day of the Lord would be an awesome day. Joel wrote in Joel 2:11, “For the day of the LORD is great and very terrible, and who can abide it?” Amos warned (Joel 5:18), “Woe unto you that desire the day of the LORD! To what end is it for you? The day of the LORD is darkness, and not light.” Malachi 4:5 calls it “the great and awesome [AV ‘terrible’] day of the LORD.”

In verses 2-5, the Lord through Malachi reveals two marks of the day of the Lord.

⁵ Taylor, R. A., & Clendenen, E. R. (2004). *Haggai, Malachi* (Vol. 21A, p. 385). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁶ Baldwin, J. G. (1972). *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary* (Vol. 28, p. 265). InterVarsity Press.

1. *It will be a day of refining (2-4).* Listen to verse 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.”

God uses two images to depict this refining work of the Messiah. *Fire* and *soap*. First, He is compared to a refiner's fire. Fire burns. Fire tests. Fire purifies. Fire removes impurities. How does the refiner know when his task is done? When he looks into the liquid-hot silver and sees his own reflection.⁷ Then the refining is done.

That's what the Messiah will be like, a refiner's fire. He will also be like *fullers’ soap*. The “fuller” was the laundryman. His job was to clean the clothes. He did it by trampling on them until the dirt was removed.

Malachi's people were saying, “We can't wait for the day of the Lord. The Lord is going to deal with our enemies and then everything will be just great.” But the Lord through Malachi says, “Your eschatology is way too self-exalting. When the Messiah comes, He’s going to deal with you too.”

And what will He do? He’s going to take you to the cleaners, says Malachi. He will clean up the priesthood (that’s verse 3) and clean up the people (that’s verse 4).

a. He will clean up the priesthood. Verse 3 says, “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.”

Who are the sons of Levi? They are the priests, the ones Malachi just confronted in 1:6-2:9, who for centuries shirked their fiduciary responsibilities by failing to uphold the glory of God and teach the Word of God. They needed to change, yes. But how would it ever happen? The prophets gave them stern pep talks time and again. Clean up your act! But the reforms never lasted. The priests simply could not change themselves.

So the Lord said, “I’m sending Someone who will do it for you. He will refine the priesthood, and once He does, I will receive the righteous offerings I desire.

b. He will clean up the people. Verse 4 says, “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 describes a coming day when there will be no more hypocrisy in the temple, no more cheap offerings presented by the people.

But how? Who will clean up the people who keep moving the boundary markers? Will they self-reform? No, they can’t, any more than the priests could. He will do it, says Malachi. Who? The Messiah will refine His people inside and out.

But again, how? How will the Messiah accomplish the miraculous task of transforming sinners into God-pleasing saints? Malachi doesn’t answer that question for us. But the messenger did.

“Behold, the Lamb of God,” says John the Baptist, “who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29)!” There is how He did it. The Messiah came to *take away sin*. How? I’ll let the writers of Scripture answer that question for us.

- Isaiah 53:6 “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has *laid on him the iniquity of us all*.”

-1 Peter 2:24 “He himself *bore our sins in his body on the tree*, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”

-2 Corinthians 5:21 “For our sake he *made him to be sin who knew no sin*, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

⁷ Observation by Kaiser, p. 85.

Fellow sinners, know this. Messiah Jesus possesses the power to cleanse, purify, and make sinners righteous. He is the refiner and launderer. On His cross He took the sins of all who will repent and call upon Him in faith and washed away those sins. By walking out of His tomb alive, He secured our justification forever (Romans 4:25).

Oh, my friend, are you sick and tired of your sin? Mere religion isn't the answer. Trying harder isn't the answer. Messiah Jesus is the answer. Believe in Him today.

Yet there's something else Malachi wants us to know about this coming day. Not only will it be a day of refining, but something else too.

2. *It will be a day of judgment (5)*. The Lord makes an announcement in verse 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."

I've mentioned that in the book of Malachi, the Lord is taking His sinful people to court. He's also giving them the opportunity to repent and change. Now He says there's another court date coming, and there will be no opportunity for change at that tribunal.

a. The Lord Himself will be both witness and judge on that day. "I will draw near you for judgment," says the Lord in verse 5. He will be the *Judge* in that courtroom, and the witness as well. "I will be a swift witness against them," says the Lord, the perfect witness, who sees all and never forgets what He sees.

The people said they wanted justice (2:17). You will get it, says the Lord. And then He identifies six types of sinners that He will prosecute on that day. Each violated the terms of the covenant. Also, each refused to receive the cleansing of the Refiner.

He says that *sorcerers* will be judged. Sorcery is "the attempt to control the physical and spiritual world through magical incantations, charms, and rituals."⁸ Sorcery is still around in the form of ouji boards, horoscopes, and new age trinkets. Witchcraft was forbidden by the Lord in Exodus 22:18.

Adulterers will stand before His all-knowing gaze as well. Adultery of course was forbidden in the ten commandments (Exodus 20:14), yet this sin plagued every generation. Malachi just confronted the men in his own day who were leaving their wives for younger women. Their day is coming, says the Lord.⁹

Next, He will judge *those who swear falsely*. Perjurers. Literally, "those who swear to a lie." False swearers will be judged. Lying under oath was denounced by Moses in Leviticus 19:12.

Fourth, He will bear witness *against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages*, The Lord had said it was a serious offense to cheat a laborer out of his wages in Leviticus 19:13. What's more, He'll testify *against the one who oppresses the widow, and the fatherless*. If you are a businessman, what's your primary aim? Is it financial profit, or to honor the Lord in your business? And the Lord pays particular attention to what we do with the assets He grants us. Do we allow our workers to share in the profits? Do we find ways to help widows and orphans?

⁸ Taylor, R. A., & Clendenen, E. R. (2004). [Haggai, Malachi](#) (Vol. 21A, p. 392). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁹ Paul says in Ephesians 5:5-6, "For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience."

Then He says *against those who thrust aside the sojourner*. The Hebrew is *ger*. The stranger. The alien. The person who comes from a foreign country and does not speak the native language. It's what Abraham was, a sojourner. It's what you the Jews were when they were slaves in Egypt. It's what so many first century Christians were, sojourners scattered throughout the Roman Empire without a place in this world to call home. The Lord sees the way we treat people who don't have a place to call home, and He will bear witness to what He sees on that day.

And one more category of sinner. *And do not fear me*. In a sense, this is the heart sin that produces the previously mentioned sins and all other sins. You do not fear Me, reverence Me, honor Me, says the LORD of hosts. If I fear God, I won't dabble with sorcery, leave my wife, lie, cheat my workers, and take advantage of the helpless. Why not? Because if I fear God, then everything else I do will be affected by the realization that His day is coming.

b. The Lord Himself has given us this day to prepare for that day. So let's be crystal clear about this. *You don't want to have the day you deserve*. Not today, and certainly not on judgment day.

Messiah is coming, says Malachi. And the day of Messiah is coming too. What Malachi (and the other prophets) didn't see clearly was that the Messiah would come not once, but *twice*, separated by a period of at least 1900 years and counting. At His first coming, Jesus the Christ began His work of refining, in the lives of His people. Yet what He began then He will culminate at His second coming.

Charles Wesley penned the following...

*Lo he comes in clouds descending,
Once for helpless sinner slain!
Thousand, thousand saints attending
Swell the triumph of his train:
Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah,
All the Angels cry amen.*

*Ev'ry eye shall now behold him,
Rob'd in dreadful majesty,
Those who set at nought and sold Him,
Pierc'd and nail'd him to the tree.
Deeply wailing, deeply wailing, deeply wailing,
Shall the true Messiah see.*

*Ev'ry island, sea, and mountain,
Heav'n and earth, shall flee away;
All who hate him, must confounded,
Hear the trump proclaim the day;
Come to judgment, come to judgment, come to judgment,
Come to judgment come away.*

*Now redemption long expected,
See, in solemn pomp appear!
All his saints by man rejected,
Now shall meet him in the air!
Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah,
See the day of God appear.*

Make It Personal: Am I ready for what is coming?

Closing Song: #241 “*Lo, He Comes with Clouds Descending*” (all four verses)

Closing charge: Let the redeemed of the Lord...SAY SO.

Community Group Discussion:

1. The book of Malachi sounds like a court case, with the prophet Malachi acting as the Lord's prosecuting attorney. He shows that God's people had violated God's covenant. Take time to review what we've seen thus far in the legal docket. What did Malach say the people's crime was in 1:2-6? In 1:6-14? In 2:1-9? In 2:10-16?
2. In today's text, Malachi 2:17-3:5, Malachi confronts yet another crime. After reading the text, discuss this question. What wearies God? What were Malachi's people doing that wearied God, and what might we do that wearies Him?
3. In 2:17 we learn that the people were asking, "Where is the God of justice?" Why were they asking this question? What do we learn about God's view of justice from the answer He gives in 3:1-5?
4. In 3:1-5 the Lord reveals His plan for addressing the human problem. What is His plan? What details does He give regarding this plan in this passage?
5. What does Malachi mean when he says the Messiah's work will be "like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap" in verse 2? How is this a hope-giving announcement?
6. In the book of Malachi, we see the title "the LORD of hosts" used more than twenty times. Use your study Bibles to explore what this title means. Why does Malachi use it so often? How should knowing the *Lord of hosts* personally affect us this week?