

12-13-2015

Message: "Where Is the God of Justice?"

Text: Malachi 2:17 - 3:5; 4:1-6

Introduction

- A. We have been working our way through this second letter of Christ's apostle, where in 2 Peter 3:3-4 we read the skeptical, mocking question of false teachers:
- 2 Peter 3:3 Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with *their* mocking, following after their own lusts,⁴ and saying, "**Where is the promise of His coming?** For *ever* since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation."
- B. Lord willing, in January we will continue to unpack the Lord's message to us in chapter 3. But during these first three Lord's Days in December as we look to celebrate Christ's coming to us by being conceived in the womb of the virgin Mary and born as a babe in Bethlehem, we are using the skeptical question of false teachers in 3:4 as an opportunity to explore the Old Testament promise of Christ's coming and to answer the question, "Where is the promise of His coming?"
- C. Pray that in doing so, God will give us reason to trust Christ, worship Christ, and rejoice in both what elements of His promised coming He has fulfilled in His first coming to earth, and in what He will complete in His coming a second and final time.
- D. We saw last week that such skepticism and mockery of the promise continues in our own day, as illustrated by the New York Daily News from page in response to political leaders offering prayers for the victims and families of the San Bernardino terrorist attack. ("God Isn't Fixing This")
- E. But such skepticism is not merely a New Testament era phenomenon. Israelites, to whom the promise of Messiah's coming was given, were charged by God's prophet Malachi with expressing the same cynicism about 500 years before Peter wrote.

Outline

- I. God charges Israel of cynicism toward God's promise.
- II. God's response to the cynics.
- III. What is our response to God?

I. 2:17 God charges Israel of cynicism toward God's promise to come to them, bringing justice and righteousness.

- A. By the time of the prophet Malachi roughly 450 years before the birth of Christ, the Hebrews had for centuries been singing of the Lord's coming to judge the world in righteousness in the Psalms, their Spirit inspired hymn book and prayer book. E.g., ...

Psalm 96:11 Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; Let the sea roar, and all it contains;¹² Let the field exult, and all that is in it. Then all the trees of the forest will sing for joy¹³ **before the LORD, for He is coming, for He is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in His faithfulness.**

Psalm 98:8 Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy⁹ **before the LORD, for He is coming to judge the earth; He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with equity.**

- B. But a substantial number of Israelites had become cynical of the promise of the Lord's coming to intervene in their lives and circumstances, and so God lays this charge upon them.

Malachi 2:17 You have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet you say, "How have we wearied Him?" In that **you say, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them," or, "Where is the God of justice?"**

1. Their first comment, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of Yahweh" is an expression of impatience, frustration, and perhaps resignation that nothing will change. They likely did not really believe God delights in those who do evil, but charged God with being inconsistent with His revealed character by His apparent inactivity. Thus, they challenged and grumbled against the way God was providentially governing the world, their nation, their personal circumstances. They became impatient and cynical over God's willingness to come and judge the wicked.
2. Their second comment, "Where is the God of justice?" is a straightforward summation of the people's frustration with the sinfulness of society and personal behavior in their day. They sang in their Psalm that Yahweh was supposed to be a God of righteousness and justice and wanted to see the sort of action such a God should provide.

Psalm 89:14 **Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne;** Lovingkindness and truth go before You.

- C. And so their critical, cynical comments and attitudes wearied God. Why?

1. They were sitting as judge over the Creator and judge of the universe, who has been managing world history long before they arrived on the scene.
2. But perhaps even more so, they were heirs of a wealth of "evidence" that God detests sin rather than delighting in it, and that God judges sin. Was it not God who ...
 - a. cursed Adam and Eve and their descendants with death for sinning in the garden and believing Satan's lie that God wouldn't kill them, wouldn't judge them for eating the forbidden fruit?
 - b. destroyed the earth with a flood for its wickedness, while delivering righteous Noah?
 - c. destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah for their wickedness, while delivering righteous Lot?
 - d. delivered the children of Israel from Egyptian bondage with mighty acts?
 - e. slew overnight 185,000 Assyrian soldiers surrounding Jerusalem in response to king Hezekiah's prayer?
3. These cynical comments would render people guilty who were ignorant of these facts. How much more are the Israelites of Malachi's day sinful for insisting on evidence that God punishes sin and blesses the faithful, when their history is full of such evidence?

- G. The further into redemptive history we progress, the more redemptive acts of God we discount when we make such comments. So how much more would we today weary God and try His patience should we complain about the circumstances in our lives and suggest He doesn't bless the faithful and judge the unrepentant sinner? Look what He did that had not been done in Malachi's day.

1 Peter 3:18 **For Christ also died for sins once for all, *the just for the unjust*, so that He might bring us to God**

Romans 5:8 **But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.**

II. 3:1-5 God's response to the cynics.

A. 3:1,2a He will come

1. He will send a messenger before Him to prepare the way.

Malachi 3:1 **"Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear 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.

- a. This messenger, identified as Elijah in 4:5, will prepare the way of the Lord, not by preparing highways of dirt and stone, but by preparing hearts of repentance and faith in the Lord.

Malachi 4:5 "Behold, **I am going to send you Elijah the prophet** before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. ⁶ **"He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers,** so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse."

- b. Where is the promise of His coming? This preparatory messenger has now come in the person of John the Baptist, who came in the spirit and power of Elijah.

Matthew 11:7 As these men were going *away*, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John, "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? ... ¹⁰ **"This is the one about whom it is written, 'BEHOLD, I SEND MY MESSENGER AHEAD OF YOU, WHO WILL PREPARE YOUR WAY BEFORE YOU.'**" ¹¹ "Truly I say to you, among those born of women there has not arisen *anyone* greater than John the Baptist! Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. ... ¹⁴ **"And if you are willing to accept it, John himself is Elijah who was to come.**

Luke 1:13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and **you will give him the name John.** ... ¹⁶ "And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ "It is he who will go before Him **in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN,** and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

2. The Lord, the messenger of the covenant, will come to His temple.

Malachi 3:1 "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear 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.

- a. Following the forerunner will come the Lord, the messenger of the covenant. The Jews were very familiar with the promise of a new covenant.

Isaiah 55:3 "Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live; And **I will make an everlasting covenant with you,** *according to* the faithful mercies shown to David.

Jeremiah 31:31 "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when **I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,**

Ezekiel 37:26 **"I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them.** And I will place them and multiply them, and will set My sanctuary in their midst forever.

- b. Jesus Christ is the Lord, the messenger of the covenant, who came to us as promised and put into effect the New Covenant in His blood.

Luke 22:20 And in the same way *He took* the cup after they had eaten, saying, **"This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.**

Hebrews 8:6 But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as **He is also the mediator of a better covenant,** which has been enacted on better promises.

- c. Where is the promise of His coming? He came to His temple ...

- (1) Luke 2:22 as a baby

Luke 2:22 And when the days for their purification according to the law of Moses were completed, **they brought Him up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord**

- (2) Luke 2:46 as a boy

Luke 2:46 Then, after three days **they found Him in the temple,** sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions.

- (3) John 2:13 as a man when He cleansed the temple

John 2:13 The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And **He found in the temple** those who were selling oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers seated *at their tables*. ¹⁵ And He made a scourge of cords, and drove *them* all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen; and He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables; ¹⁶ and to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a place of business."

- (4) most notably, when He came at the Passover to die for His people's sins.

Mark 11:9 Those who went in front and those who followed were shouting: "Hosanna! BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD;" ¹⁰ Blessed *is* the coming kingdom of our father David; Hosanna in the highest!" ¹¹ **Jesus entered Jerusalem and came into the temple;** and after looking around at everything, He left for Bethany with the twelve, since it was already late.

B. 3:2-4 He will purify

Malachi 3:2 "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 smelter and purifier of silver, and **He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver,** so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness. 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.

1. Christ's 1st and 2nd coming are not clearly separated in OT texts.

2. 3:2b The purpose of His first coming is to purify His people, likened to a refiner of metals and a fuller who removes dirt from clothing by soaking them in water with lye.
3. 3:3a The image is of the purifier, sitting over His refining pot, scraping away the impurities that come to the surface, until he can see in the purified molten metal the reflection of his own image. Christ has come as purifier of His people.

Titus 2:11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men,¹² instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age,¹³ looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of **our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus,¹⁴ who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession,** zealous for good deeds.

4. 3:3b,4 The purpose of purification was so that God's priests could offer Him acceptable offerings.

Romans 12:1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to **present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God,** which is your spiritual service of worship.

C. 3:5 He will judge the world in righteousness

Malachi 3:5 **"Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me,"** says the LORD of hosts. ... 4:1 **"For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze,"** says the LORD of hosts, **"so that it will leave them neither root nor branch."**

1. 7 violations of God's law are listed in 3:5, representative of the whole. This final judgment of the wicked and deliverance of the righteous will be completed with Christ's second coming.

Acts 17:30 "Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent, ³¹ because **He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead.**"

Romans 2:16 on the day when, according to my gospel, **God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.**

2. In His first coming, Jesus is separating the righteous and wicked by His Word of the gospel. How we respond separates us. When He returns, He will separate us by His word of destruction or redemption.

III. What is our response to God?

- A. Purify ourselves as He is pure, offering Him ourselves as acceptable offerings through Christ by faith.

Malachi 3:3 "He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and **He will purify the sons of Levi** and refine them like gold and silver, **so that they may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness.**

1 John 3:2 Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.³ **And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.**

B. Fear the Lord, being careful to please Him in all things.

Malachi 4:2 "But **for you who fear My name**, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall.³ "You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing," says the LORD of hosts.

Jeremiah 32:40 "**I will make an everlasting covenant with them** that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; and **I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me.**

C. Remember His Word, responding to what we recall.

Malachi 4:4 "Remember the law of Moses My servant, *even the* statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel.

Psalms 103:17 But the lovingkindness of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting **on those who fear Him**, and His righteousness to children's children,¹⁸ **to those who keep His covenant and remember His precepts to do them.**

Conclusion: Where is the promise of His coming? May God give us grace, peace, hope, joy in believing He has come to us as promised in the person of His Son, Whom He will send a second time as promised for all who by faith live and wait for Him.

Hebrews 9:28 so **Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without *reference to sin*, to those who eagerly await Him.**