

The sermon

Intro

We're back in Malachi. Let's recap where we've been.

The people of Israel have returned to Jerusalem from Babylonian exile. The exiles were given numerous promises. Promises like:

- 1) A king from David's line would arise, regain the throne, and rule over them forever.

Meaning defeat of their enemies, sole possession of their land, and the end of international threats forever.

These promises hadn't come to pass so the people doubted God's love. And fear of God waned. Resulting in casual performance of sacrificial laws. And men were marrying women who worshipped foreign gods and divorcing their Jewish spouses.

Summing up Malachi, wrong beliefs led to wrong attitudes. Wrong attitudes led to wrong practice. Resulting in deficient spirituality. That's the big picture of Malachi.

This morning more wrong ideas about God result in deficient spirituality.

READ PASSAGE

Body

Passage Focus

The people misunderstand God in two ways. God answers, correcting their thinking by announcing two actions he'll do in the future.

We're going to do some apologetics (defense) with doctrine.

Charge # 1: God delights in evildoers (2:17)

You have wearied the LORD with your words.

Malachi accuses the people of wrongdoing.

Wearied = exhaustion from hard labor. Israel has exhausted God with their words. God doesn't get tired and need sleep, so it's figurative language. Meaning God is tired of false charges and misunderstanding his ways. God's displeased, annoyed. His patience is running out. In 2:2 the priests were already being cursed.

Wrong thoughts about God is a problem!

But you say, "How have we wearied him?"

The people are unaware of their wrong ideas about God.

By saying, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delights in them."

The people have concluded God actually delights in evildoers. Or God helps evildoers. Or at least God isn't punishing evildoers. The logic is if God isn't punishing the wicked, he must approve of them.

Who are the evildoers? They're not named. Disobedient Jews are prospering? Gentiles who worship false gods are ruling over Israel?

Modern day illustrations

Today think human traffickers and drug cartels. Human traffickers force, deceive, or coerce people into prostitution or forced labor, including children. Evildoers are making money off of kidnapping, prostitution, intimidation, etc.

Drug cartels are highly organized operations that traffic drugs. They're responsible for bringing destructive substances like cocaine, heroin, fentanyl, meth into Maine. Evildoers are destroying individuals, marriages, families, and getting rich on it.

Some (not many!) might conclude God delights in human traffickers and drug cartels. Their success and prosperity being the evidence. This worldview assumes a God who is so sovereign that he has a hand in who prospers and who doesn't.

The wrong takeaway is if God doesn't care what they're doing, God doesn't care what I do = I don't have to fear God and I can live however I want.

Charge # 2: God has disappeared (2:17)

Or by asking, "Where is the God of justice?"

Others conclude the evildoer prospers because God is absent. This is the view of 18th century deism. God created the world. God set natural laws in motion to ensure creation's ongoing existence. God left the creation to itself never to intervene.

The insinuation is God should be acting, but he isn't. Maybe God isn't acting because:

- 1) Because he's wicked and doesn't care.
- 2) His relationship with Israel is done. He's hands off with Israel now.
- 3) He doesn't exist (atheism).

The people were acting like he doesn't care, he's hands off, and he doesn't exist.

Apologetics

This gets us to the classic atheist charge against the Christian faith. The problem of evil. In his book *Apologetics to the Glory of God* (pg. 150), John Frame lays out the charge of skeptics:

“Premise 1: If God were all-powerful, he would be able to prevent evil.

Premise 2: If God were all-good, he would desire to prevent evil.

Conclusion: So, if God were both all-powerful and all-good, there would be no evil.

Premise 3: But there is evil.

Conclusion: Therefore, there is no all-powerful, all-good God.”

Evil exists so God isn't all-powerful and all-good as the Bible claims. The existence of human trafficking and drug cartels proves the God of the Bible doesn't exist.

The takeaway is why bother with God? Why bother with the Bible? Why bother with the church? God doesn't care about sin, so why should we?

Resolution?

How should we answer the charge? A good technique is to answer charges, questions in the way the Bible answers them.

Answer # 1: God transforms the conduct of sinners (3:1-4)

Verses 1-5 are God's response to wrong conclusions.

"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. – 3:1

Eschatology

- 1) 3:1 = 1st coming.
- 2) 3:2-5 = 2nd coming.

I = God.

My messenger = John the Baptist.

Me = God in Malachi, but identified as Jesus in the NT. Meaning Jesus is equated with God.

The Lord who comes to his temple = Jesus.

Messenger of the covenant who will come = Jesus.

Covenant = New covenant. (we're celebrating Malachi 3:1 when we do the Lord's Supper)

New Testament clarification

How do I know this? The New Testament.

This is he of whom it is written, "' Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.'
– **Matthew 11:10**

Jesus is speaking and he's speaking about John the Baptist. God's messenger is John the Baptist. Jesus changes the "me" to "you." John prepares the way for Jesus so "you" = Jesus. The me in Malachi (God) is revealed to be Jesus in the New Testament.

*As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, "Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, ³ the voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'" – **Mark 1:2-3***

Mark only mentions Isaiah, but 1:2 is Malachi 3:1 and 1:3 is Isaiah 40:3. Mark 1:4 continues...

*John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. – **Mark 1:4***

So John is Jesus' messenger who comes before Jesus.

When John's father Zechariah prophesied, he said this about John:

*And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, ⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, – **Luke 1:76-77***

John is the prophet (messenger) who goes before Jesus to prepare the way for Jesus' work.

Conclusions

So from these gospel accounts, I conclude Malachi 3:1 refers to the 1st coming. God's messenger is John the Baptist. The one who is God is Jesus. Jesus is the Lord who came into the temple. For example, clearing the temple several days before his death. And Jesus is the messenger of the New covenant, because he announced the arrival of the New covenant. In Luke 22:20, at the last supper, Jesus said, "*This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.*"

Second coming

3:2 begins an announcement of Jesus' 2nd coming. It's the 2nd coming because it's a coming in judgment (3:5; 4:1).

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. – 3:2

His coming = the messenger of the New covenant = Jesus. Note what's going on here. The 1st and 2nd comings of Jesus are mentioned as if they are one event that happens at the same time. No hint of an inter-advent, or church age, (advent means coming) that separates them. Isaiah 9:6-7 does the same thing.

3:3 continues.

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. – 3:3

Refining process:

- 1) Metal subjected to high temperature.
- 2) Metal liquefies.
- 3) Dross (impurities in the metal) floats to the top.
- 4) The refiner skims off the dross.

Metal refining pictures God's removal of moral impurity from the priests (sons of Levi, which results in righteous conduct (acceptable offerings). **This isn't removal of guilt. It's transformation of conduct.**

Fullers' soap = a washing process that pictures removal of sinful conduct.

Illustration: gojo soap

Maybe you've worked on cars or cleaned the pellet stove or worked with greases and normal hand soap won't get the stain out. So at Portsmouth Naval Shipyard we had gritty soap called Gojo. That got the stain out. God will get the sinful conduct out of his people.

Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years. – 3:4

God's cleansing results in changed, obedient conduct.

How does God transforming Israel's conduct fit with the 2nd coming?

- 1) Maybe it's glorified bodies that can't sin anymore (see Rom 8:18-25, 30; Rev 21:27; 22:3)?
- 2) Romans 11:25-32 speaks of a present hardness on ethnic Jews that will be lifted once "*the fullness of the Gentiles has come in*" (11:25), resulting in a mass conversion of Jews at the time just prior to the 2nd coming.
- 3) Ezekiel 37:21-28 speaks of a time when David will rule over the people forever in which the people will be cleansed and they will obey God.
- 4) Zechariah 12:10 speaks of a time when God will pour out a spirit of grace on the people of Jerusalem such that they mourn over piercing Jesus.

I think a reference to God pouring his converting grace upon Israel at the end of time is likely in view.

- 5) Additionally, cleansing is going on in the present because Jesus brought the New Covenant and its effects at his 1st coming. One of the effects being the indwelling Holy Spirit (Ezek 36:25-27).

The God who will refine and cleanse the people at the end of time is cleansing people today. Throughout the globe. Theologians call this “already-not yet” (or realized eschatology). A foretaste of the final cleansing to come is happening today. Sinners are being refined today. Sinners will be perfectly refined on that day.

Apologetics

The first answer to the charge that **God delights in evildoers** or **God has disappeared** is that **God transforms the conduct of sinners**. The fact that God transforms sinners indicates God isn't indifferent to sin, supportive of sin, or absent from his creation. The new birth says God cares about evil.

Answer # 2: God will judge evildoers at the 2nd coming (3:5)

"Then I will draw near to you for judgment.

Judgment coincides with the moral reformation of the priesthood. Some in Israel will be refined. The rest will be judged.

I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers,

God singles out some heinous sins. Yes, God cares about sin! Sorcerers performed miracles (Exod 7:9-11). Yes Satan can enable people to perform miracles (2 Thess 2:9).

What's the problem? Attempting to rival God's power. Maybe self-glory. The sorcerer himself turns to sources other than God. The sorcerer causes others to look to sources other than God.

against the adulterers,

Those who violated the marriage covenant when:

- 1) A married person had sexual relations with someone other than their spouse.
- 2) An unmarried person had sexual relations with a married person.

against those who swear falsely,

- 1) Dishonest speech.
- 2) Dishonest business practice.
- 3) Not keeping oaths/promises.
- 4) False prophecies.
- 5) False testimony or perjury.

against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner,

Disadvantaged and vulnerable classes. The worker needed his daily wages to keep eating. The widow and the fatherless had no one to provide for them. The sojourner (foreigner) didn't have the support of family, contacts, etc.

James 1:27 says that true religion is “to visit orphans and widows in their affliction.” God has shown mercy to us in Christ. We should deal mercifully with those who are needy and suffering.

and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.

This is the root cause behind every sin ever committed! A lack of trusting respect for God's will and authority as Creator, and a lack of fearful anxiety over the final judgment results in sinful lives. **When God is treated casually, sin abounds.**

Gospel connection

Final judgment = need for Christ's salvation. That's rescue from the wrath to come. Jesus is both substitutionary sacrifice and the final judge.

In his 1st coming Jesus died on the cross such that all who repent and believe, turning from sin to trust in him will be forgiven of their sins. Fear God by acknowledging your sin, trusting in Christ's sacrifice, reading the Bible, and joining a Bible-believing church.

In his 2nd coming, Jesus will return as judge.

Fear is the right response to God. Don't treat God casually!

Application

The problem with those who wearied God was they complained about the sins of others while being blind to their own sins. People who cry out, "Judge them but don't judge me." God says "*I will draw near to you for judgment*" indicating those who wearied God were unbelievers who didn't fear him.

Do I fear God?

Christian, beware of fixating on the sins of the world while neglecting your own soul. The Christian man who rails on homosexuality while using pornography. The Christian parent who rails on abortion while neglecting to raise their own children in the instruction and discipline of the Lord.

We can have blind spots. Be fixated on your own walk before decrying injustice in the world!

Conclusion

The second answer to the charge that **God delights in evildoers** or **God has disappeared** is that **God exacts judgment on evildoers at the 2nd coming**. The fact that God exacts final judgment on sinners indicates the God isn't indifferent to sin, isn't supportive of sin, isn't absent from his creation. The final judgment says God cares about evil.

What's our response to the claim that evildoers prospering means God is evil or absent?

- 1) God transforms sinners (even drug dealers!)
- 2) God punishes sinners (there will be a final judgment)

God is good because he deals with evil. Whether transforming or punishing sinners.

These realities instruct us to fear God and not treat him casually.