

Jason Upchurch - Malachi 3:1-5 - Judgment Will Come One Day

Those of you who are familiar with the gospels - especially Mark and Matthew - know that the passage we're looking at today is quoted in both of those gospels. In **Vss. 1-4** the "messenger of the Lord" is mentioned. Do you remember who that is? John the Baptist. John is the messenger that the Lord will send to prepare his way for judgement.

Now, just to connect some dots here. If you remember, Malachi was written maybe maybe 450BC or 460BC. John the Baptist didn't show up on the scene until maybe 30AD give or take a little bit. So if you do some quick math you get that this prophecy that God gave about the messenger who would prepare his way didn't show up for 480-490 years after God gave it. That's a long time. That's almost twice as long as we've been a country.

I'm reading Calvin's Institutes with some guys and the version we're reading was written in 1541 - that was 484 years ago. That's about the same time distance between Malachi and John the Baptist. That's a long, long time.

I mentioned the length of time because I want to use that tidbit of information to front load the application of this passage which is: God often takes a long time to accomplish his purposes.

Now, more accurately, God takes a long time according to our standards of time.

I quoted **2 Pet. 3:8-9** last time that the Lord is not slow to fulfill his promises as some count slowness. The stretch of time that God does something is not slow. When we say something is slow, we're saying we have an expectation of speed compared to something else.

I have a Toyota Prius, it goes 0-60 in just under a minute and a half. **Compared** to a Ferrari F1 - which goes 0-60 in 3.9 seconds, that's slow. Compared to a Tesla model S Plaid which goes 0-60 in 1.99 seconds that's slow. Slowness is a comparison.

It might even just be a comparison to our expectation. The phrase slow as Christmas, is sort of nonsense if you think about it. Christmas is at the same time, and we can track it. It just seems slow.

Hab. 2:3 For still the vision awaits its appointed time, it hastens to the end-it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay.

God has set the time, it's appointed. It may seem slow but it's exactly when God wants it to happen.

God works on his set timeline and that timeline is often different than our expectation or desire. It seems slow to us because we want God to move faster. Or we expected him to move faster.

The **2 Pet 3** verse goes on to say that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years is as a day. What does that mean?

It means that our timelines are irrelevant to God. It's not that time is meaningless; the meaning is that we need to trust that God's timeline is perfect.

Some people want to say that God is outside of time - I don't really know what that phrase means to be honest because God acts within the bounds of time constantly. We don't ever get the impression that he goes back in time or time travels. He made time and operates within it on his schedule.

But again, the point I want to make here is that God often works a lot slower than our expectations.

There's a lot of things I want to happen like right now, but clearly it's not in God's appointed time. There are many injustices we want punished that aren't happening right now. There are many times where we've worked hard for an outcome and it just doesn't happen like what we planned.

Maybe you want something in life - maybe it's a really good thing - but it's not happening as fast as you'd like. But it is happening on God's timeline.

Abram was promised a son when he was 75 years old. Grandpa Abe. And there was nothing for ten years. He was 85. It was so long that he decided he needed to take matters in his own hands and have a son with his concubine Hagar. God said, "That's not it." And made Abram wait another 15 years until he was 100 before Isaac was born.

God made Israel wait in slavery for 400 years before delivering them out of Egypt.

He made Israel wait 40 years in the desert before going into the Promised Land.

The fruit of the Spirit is: love, joy, peace, what? Patience. What is patience? To some extent it's the ability to reorient our timeline around God's and be happy about his timeline.

So God often takes a long time to accomplish his purposes from our perspective. And specifically with our passage, that includes judgement. A lot of times we want judgment to come very quickly. But God has other plans.

So let's break this down - 4 parts.

The Question
The Judgement
The Prophecy
The Fulfillment

1) The question. Read 2:17

As I mentioned last week, this whole section is connected together. There were two accusations that Israel was making against God and both were dead wrong. One was that God was delighting in those who did evil. Israel was inverting morality and calling it good.

The second accusation is what carries the rest of this section: Where is the God of justice? When is God going to judge the wicked? Where is he at?

To which God responds that he's going to come very quickly. The word for "justice" in **Vs. 17** is the same word for judgment in **3:5**. So the people are asking "when is God going to judge?" And God responds "It's going to happen swiftly."

And just a little side note of application here because I think it's appropriate. We are going to go through times in life where injustice is happening. Where things are bad and there seems to be no remedy.

Just in the news we've seen crazy terror plots, multiple events where trucks are driving through people, the horrors going on in Britain against girls, on and on.

Maybe you've got stuff in your own life happening that seems unjust. How you're being treated, how others are being treated and there seems to be no remedy. Even in a small church there are usually plenty of people who have experienced some of the worst things this world has and looking forward to justice is the right thing.

The first encouragement is that sometimes the remedy does come in due time. The wicked do lay a trap and fall into it. They are ensnared in their own devices. Sometimes it takes a while for the trap to be set with them in it. They go to jail, they get found out, they are stripped of their power, they experience retribution. But not always.

The second encouragement is that the ultimate reckoning is Judgement Day when all will stand before the Lord of Glory and give an account for everything they've done - good and evil.

This is at the resurrection when the Lord returns and all people great and small of all ages will stand before Jesus and be judged. And he will set all things to right. The unrighteous will be cast into hell forever and ever.

And I know that for many Christians it seems uncouth for us to look forward to that day but sometimes that is the proper encouragement: that God will catapult the wicked into hell what they've done.

Paul encourages the Thessalonians in **2 Thes. 1** that their persecutors will be destroyed by God in a flame of fire and cast into eternal destruction when Jesus comes back. He says that to comfort them.

We often think that's not Christian. Shouldn't we want their salvation? Maybe. But often times it's right to rejoice in God's judgement.

Turn to Psalm 58. I call attention to the Psalms because this is the song book of the saints. And we're often uncomfortable with these, because we've been taught that we should just overlook every offense as though it didn't hurt us and just sweetly hope for their salvation. What these psalms remind us is that there is a time for

A time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted
A time to kill and a time to heal
A time mourn and a time to dance
A time to seek and a time to lose
A time to tear and a time to sew
A time to keep silence and a time to speak
A time to love and a time to hate
A time for war and a time for peace

The psalms remind us because they are to be sung. We sing these truths. Notice what David sang. **Read 1-11**

He wants God to punish them. He wants God's vengeance. **Look at 59:1-5 Read**

Same kind of thing. David wants judgement on the wicked. He wants the utterly destroyed and punished by God.

But what does it mean that it will come fast? There's a phrase that was popularized by Earnest Hemingway in his book *The Sun Also Rises*. One of the characters in the book is asked how they went bankrupt and his response was "Two ways: gradually then suddenly."

Look at Psalm 94:1-7. Read

These are wicked things. And we should rightly want justice done. **Read 16-23**

There is a time to want God to wipe out the enemies. That's not contrary to the gospel. That's not contrary to love. Christians are not one dimensional in our understanding of our enemies. And neither is God.

Look back at Mal 2:17 the problem with the question here is not asking for justice. It's good and right to ask for justice. To ask that God would do to his enemies what his enemies deserve. The problem with the question was how it was framed. **Read**

Where are you God? What are you doing? Why are you not judging? That was the problem. It was the problem that Job fell into half way through the book where he began to think God was unfair for his treatment and wanted to demand an audience with God.

Judgment will come, we have to be careful how we ask for it. So that's the question.

2) Here's the prophecy in response. Read 3:1-4

So God actually responds to the question. "Where is the God of justice?" "Oh I'm coming." And he gives a prophecy of what will happen. And there are basically 3 elements to the prophecy.

First, is that before the Lord comes there is a messenger. **Read 1**

In ancient times, before a great king would come and visit a city they would send a messenger - or herald - several days or weeks before the king came. And the idea was to clean the place up. A mighty king coming to visit was an honor and you wanted your city to look as nice as possible.

Isaiah talks about the one who prepares the way of the Lord and people fill in valleys and level mountains. The idea is really you just smooth out your roads.

You know how by the end of winter gravel roads around here all have the washboards and potholes and it's like torture to drive on? Well roads fell into disrepair in ancient times as well. And just like we talk about the lake that's in the post office parking lot or grand canyons that flow through down town Spokane, ancient roads could become like valleys or mountains.

So you sent a messenger ahead of time to allow people to get themselves cleaned up. And that's what the Lord is promising. Before he comes - before Jesus came - God sent a messenger to get the way cleaned up.

And just to connect the dots: God wasn't primarily concerned about the roads being nice or the lawn being manicured, he was concerned about the spiritual state of the people. He wanted them joyfully obeying the Law that he had laid down. He desires repentance in his people.

And interestingly, this is a double preparation. The messenger prepared the way for the Lord. But this prophecy prepares the way for the messenger. So the people were doubly warned that the Lord was coming.

The second element to this prophecy is that the goal was purification. **Read 2**

So the Lord is coming and it's going to be intense. Who can stand it? That's a rhetorical question - no one can stand the Lord's purification. He is awesome and powerful and demands allegiance in everything.

Malachi uses 2 analogies. A fuller and soap. We're sort of spoiled with modern washing machines and dryers. We have all these temperature settings and special soaps Agitation settings. In ancient times they had soap and a scrub brush. And a fuller - the person cleaning a garment - would basically just scrub and scrub and scrub a garment with soap until it was clean. It could be a rather harsh treatment but the goal was purity.

Same thing with refining. If you get a chunk of gold, not all of it is gold. There might be a fair amount of other stuff in there and the way you make sure it's just gold is to melt it. So you heat the gold up to over 2,000 degrees and because gold is so heavy, the gold sinks to the bottom and the impurities float to the top and you skim the top to ensure you have pure gold.

That's what God is going to do with his people. In both analogies, he is going to purify us. He's going to purge us from sin.

When God saved you, when he brought you into the Kingdom, it wasn't just to rescue you from sin and hell and death. Those are all part of it. But part of it is that God wants a people who are pure and desire righteousness.

Tit. 2:14: Jesus gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession.

You ever go buy something off of Facebook or Craigslist and it's in decent condition. But then you get it home and you scrub it down or wipe it off or give it a thorough cleaning?

That's kind of what happens in the gospel. Jesus saves - he redeems us, purchases us - but never leaves us in the same condition. He purifies us, cleanses us.

That's why the biblical writes like **James 4:8**: say to cleanse your hands, you sinners, purify your hearts you double minded.

Because once we're saved we're part of the cleansing process. God cleaned us and works in us, but we work with him in purging ourselves.

The messenger that's coming to prepare the way of the Lord - the first coming of Jesus - wants the people to cleanse themselves. Because when Jesus comes it's absolutely going to happen.

And the reason for it is for pure offerings to the Lord. God wants pure worship. He doesn't want half hearted worship, he doesn't want fake worship, he doesn't want us to just give him lip service of go through the motions. He actually wants us to worship in the purity and righteousness.

So there's a messenger, his coming is to cleanse. Third element here is that the this will happen suddenly. Notice the words about the quickness. **Read 1-5**

The Lord says behold - which is a word that's to get our attention. And he will suddenly appear - fast, quick, seemingly without warning. And there's swiftness mentioned in **Vs. 5**.

God says he will come quickly. Now, remember: how many years between this prophecy and John the Baptist? Maybe 480? How is that quick? How is that sudden?

Again, things happen on God's timeline. But there's also an element in the Bible that's summarized by the phrase "gradually then suddenly." That was the response in Hemmingway's novel. Things can happen gradually for a long long time and you not even realize it. Then the tipping point happens all of a sudden.

The Israelites were in slavery 400 years, then in the course of 1 year God brought them out.

In the book of Judges we see the people cry out for decades and decades then suddenly the Lord brings relief. We see the societies of Israel and Judah gradually go into decline decade by decade until in a moment they're overtaken by the enemy.

Here, the people will wait almost 500 years. God will be at work during that time. The time of the Maccabee's and Greece's rise and fall and the Persians rise and fall and Rome's rise to power were all in the sovereign providence of God.

But the people were to be looking for a messenger. And real quick, we'll look at it when we get to chapter 4 but notice that there the person is identified as Elijah. **Read 4:5**

This person is going to be a messenger and his power will be like Elijah. And Jesus makes the connection in **Luke 1:17** that John did indeed come in the spirit and power of Elijah.

So we've got the question, the prophecy.

3) Here's the Judgment. **Read 5**

God has already mentioned other sins he is angry about so far, here he mentions some specific things that are causing him to come in judgment.

Sorcery - witchcraft, magic. Using charms and incantations to influence the spiritual world. And let me tell you guys, all that stuff is real and demonic at the basest level. People who invite spirits to come and work often get way more than they bargained for. It's dark and evil. It's not fun Harry Potter. It's not happy and smiley. It's dark and sinful and satanic.

Matthew Henry notes that often witchcraft is lumped into those who sacrifice their sons and daughters in the fire, who do all manner of evil deeds. The first sorcerers in the Bible were the witches in Egypt who tried to

mimic Moses and Aaron and if you remember, they were able to drop those things for a while. They really turned the Nile into blood. It doesn't appear to be a hoax. They really turned their staffs into snakes and made frogs. There's no mention that it was illusion. There was demonic powered miracles.

In **2 Thessalonians 2:9** the lawless one is said to come with all activity of satan with power and false signs and wonders and with wicked deception.

You guys, we need to stay far away from that stuff. New age nonsense, crystals, chanting, breathing, yoga - yoga has roots in Hinduism. The word Yoga means to "yoke" - to join yourself to a spiritual entity. To the divine. But we know it's not connecting to God.

I'm okay with stretching, if you want to do stretching. But don't connect yourself to anything spiritual.

God also condemns adultery. **Read 5**

All adultery needs to be abandoned, you guys. Whether physical adultery, or pornography, masturbation, or just simply lusting in your heart - it all needs to be put away. God's people are to be pure, modest, clothed.

God is also going to purge the false witnesses. **Read 5**

A false witness is anyone who lies. It's a violation of the 9th commandment - you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. And it's one of the things God says he hates.

Prov 6:16-19 God hates 7 things and 2 of them are a lying tongue and a false witness who breathes out lies.

We are to be committed to the truth. We are to be brutally honest. It's easy to tell "small lies" to make yourself look better, or to avoid some consequence, or whatever. We are to be people who always speak the truth.

Read 5

God is often concerned for those who are oppressed. Hired workers were often day laborers. They had no land or savings or means so they relied on the day to day payment for their work. It was easy for land owners to promise money for work and then not pay. Laborers had very little recourse.

God also wanted widows and orphans to be protected. These were the most vulnerable in society because there was no husband or father to protect them. They didn't have the overreaching state to help them either. Neither did the sojourner - the traveler.

People traveling long distances relied on the charity and kindness of locals to keep them safe and provide for them. They could easily be robbed or injured or sold into slavery because they could only carry a very little with them.

And the worst were those who didn't fear the Lord. **Read 5**

The wicked have no fear of God. No fear judgement, no fear of consequence. They sin boldly and just don't care. And God will make them care in judgment.

4) How was this fulfilled? **Turn to Matthew 11**

This is an interesting part because John was sure he was the messenger, and early in his ministry he was sure Jesus was the Lamb of God. But later John was thrown into prison and then he wasn't so sure if Jesus was the Messiah after all. Things weren't going how he thought they'd go. **Read 1-15**

Jesus confirms two things: John is the messenger and he is the Lord. He also confirms that John is the Elijah that Malachi promised.

If you remember John the Baptist was something of an oddity when he showed up out of nowhere preaching repentance. He was unusual, fiery and there was a turning to the Lord - 480 years after God promised him.

And many of the promises of God for the first coming of Jesus are the same for his second coming.

Jesus is coming again. We don't know when but it will be suddenly. He will judge as promised. He will set every wrong to right. And we should be ready for him in purity and holiness. And trust in his timeline. **Pray**