

Sermon: Malachi 2:17-3:5 Wearying the Lord or Fearing the Lord

I think one thing that all us hate is to have our character sullied. Consider these scenarios. Scenario 1. You run a successful company with uprightness, integrity and honesty and getting good government contracts but you start hearing slander that you got those contracts by bribery. Scenario 2. You work 2 jobs, 6 days a week, to earn enough money put food on the table, clothe your family and put a roof over their heads, only to have to your son in his teenage years call you a negligent father who had no time for him. Scenario 3. You are a new headmaster in a school with deteriorating discipline and academic performance. Putting in reforms and motivating the teachers and students, things began to turn around. But then you start hearing complaints from among some poorly performing teachers that you are a tyrant, uncaring and only looking out for the next promotion. In all of these situations, wouldn't you feel weary from the lies you are hearing?

We are in the middle of our series of sermons from the book of Malachi. In today's disputation, Malachi tells the Israelites in 2:17 "You have wearied the Lord with your words". What? Come again, "How have we wearied him?". Hello, have you been hearing yourself lately? You are saying, "All who do evil are good in the eyes of the LORD, and he is pleased with them" or "Where is the God of justice?"

The post exilic nation of Israel was a shadow of its former glory. It was now a tiny province under Persian rule. Even though the 2nd temple has been built and Jerusalem was relatively peaceful and while there was still an expectation of the promised Messiah, there was spiritual discouragement and growing indifference to God's law. They had forgotten their "chosen-ness". They doubted God's love for them. They presented contemptuous sacrifices, and regarded worship and service to Yahweh as burdensome. Their priests were unfaithful and defiled. They treated their marriage covenant lightly, divorcing their wives or marrying unbelievers who lead them to worship other gods. All these acts betrayed their loss of reverence for God, they did not fear God. They became smug, proud and careless. It resulted in the disgraceful way they treated one another in the community at large. Mal 3:5 gives us a glimpse of the kind of people Malachi observed behaving badly in the community, doing things forbidden in the Torah.

They practised sorcery. You could hear Leah say "A little bit of incantation, a wee bit of portion XYZ and a summoning of the spirits should keep Hannah on her death bed". Committing adultery was no big deal. They ignored their exclusive, one flesh covenant made with their spouse. They swear falsely (NIV Perjurers). "I am telling truth, Joe didn't do it. God is my witness!" "Psst! Actually I bluff only. Don't want to get Joe into trouble mah." Others cheated labourers of their wages. Still others were oppressing the widows and the fatherless. Widows and the fatherless have a special place in Yahweh's heart. God called himself "A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows". They were the most vulnerable groups in society often living hand to mouth. Yet there were ruthless types who would oppress them. And finally, there is another group of people in the community who are often marginalised. They are the "pendatangs". The Israelites were told by God to treat the foreigner who is living among them the same way they are to treat the native born. However they were not to marry them unless they followed Yahweh too. But no. They

deprived the foreigner of justice. Hmm, we heard last week, they would happily marry the foreigner, but this week we know they would oppress their in-laws nonetheless.

When people saw these things taking place in their community, they cried out to God for his justice. God had revealed himself as a holy God who judges justly, who punishes sin. They wanted to see God's justice served. When this did not happen they became unhappy. It doesn't seem that God is doing anything about this evil.

After reading 2 Pet 3 this morning we should not be surprised that God delays his judgment. Peter tells us that God delays his judgement because he is patient, not wanting anyone to perish but come to repentance. He is Yahweh, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

Those who were sinning and getting away with it were trading on God's patience, they thought that it didn't matter to God whether they sin or not. They lost the fear of God. This led them to sin even more. And others who were observing them were confusing God's patience with God delighting in evil. How can God let the wicked prosper? They shook their fist at God, saying cynically "All who do evil are good in the eyes of the LORD, and he is pleased with them" implying that God is not holy or just. God is not who he says he is. They have smeared the Lord's name. "Where is the God of justice?" they said. If He exists, he certainly quiet. Perhaps He doesn't care. Those criticisms tempted even the faithful to lose trust in God's justice. God finally says through Malachi, you have wearied me.

Certainly, we can be impatient people too. We would like God's justice to come swiftly against wrong doers. As a nation we follow the corruption trials with impatience, fasterlah, find them guilty and jail them already! In 2019, the Human Right Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam) concluded that the police Special Branch was involved with the enforced disappearances of Ps Raymond Koh and Amri Che Mat. Until now no one have been brought to justice. Suhakam just began another enquiring into the disappearance of Ps Joshua Hilmi and his wife Ruth. All these 4 individuals disappeared within weeks of each other in late 2016 and early 2017. We cry for justice. And of course, all Malaysian were binge watching the 9th season of Game of Thrones set in Kuala Lumpur the last week. There is a still possible twist coming up according to last night's news. What a mess. Some cannot help but feel cheated. We continue to pray for his will to be done. Hopefully none of us say things like what the Israelites then were saying. But we long for justice to be done. We pray, "How long, O God!" Note that we do not weary God when we pray to Him. When the Psalmist or Job cry out to God, "Where are you God? Why are you silent? Where is your justice?" or when Jesus cried out "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" God hears and doesn't take offence. However, God becomes weary when our remarks are contemptuous, when we complaint about him to one another and slander His good name and character.

In Chapter 3:1-5 God answers their question "Where is the God of justice?" Basically God says "Here I come!"

3:1 "I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty.

Let examine the messengers in this verse. The first messenger who will prepare the way, could be Malachi himself (that's what his name meant, my messenger). Or it could be an angel because the word "messenger" in Hebrew is also the word for angel. Ok, so God may send Malachi or an angel. This messenger's job is to prepare the way before "me" before Yahweh himself. Reading in context, this messenger obviously has a message from Yahweh which will prepare the people for his coming.

But then Yahweh says "the Lord you are seeking" and "the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire." will come to his temple. This 2 titles describes the same person. But the word Lord here is not LORD (Yahweh), it is Adon. This word means lord or master and can be used to describe both a divine lord or a human lord. But the things that this Lord does when he comes can only be done by a divine being. It starts to get a little blurry who is coming. Is it Yahweh or Adon? Or are they one and the same and yet different? (Glimpse of the Trinitarian God?)

And the people go, "Hallelujah, finally, God is going to enact justice!" They had been seeking him and desiring him to show up. They thought, we will be blessed but those people, those people, over there, they are going to get it!

With the next sentence, Malachi sobers up his audience. Malachi goes V2. ²"But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears?" Wait, that sounded like a rhetorical question. You mean no one can endure his coming? No one can stand when he appears? Yes, no one. No one will be spared, everyone will be found wanting. He will purify and refine some and will judge others.

²For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. ³He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Once the refining process is complete, the metal is free of impurities. The launderer's soap will separate dirt from clothes. Both images show us the thoroughness and severity of the purifying and cleansing process the Levites would undergo so that at the end of it, sin will be purged. Then God will have a righteous people bringing him the right offerings, offerings that are acceptable to Him as in the years gone by. He was going to get rid of their corrupt worship and practises.

V5 He will come to put you on trial. The Lord is saying "All those people you are complaining about, I will now put on trial. Everyone's sin will find them out. I see everything. Nothing will escape my judgment. You will find that I am be quick to testify against the wicked. I will judge those who persist in their sins and do not fear Me. You will know that "All who do evil are bad in My eyes, and I am angry with them"

These words were originally given to the Israelites of Malachi's time. We do not know whether this was partially fulfilled in Malachi's time or in the 400 years before the NT era. We are people living after the Messiah had come. Malachi was not the last messenger to prepare the way. When we look through the lens of the NT we know that the last messenger was John the Baptist. Matt 11:10, Jesus when talking about John the Baptist, confirmed that he was the one about whom it was written " 'I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.' John the Baptist is the messenger who will prepare the way for the Lord.

And who is this Lord who will come? Who is this Adon (the divine and human Lord) they were seeking or the messenger of the covenant, whom they desire? Right from OT times, this Lord has been identified as the divine messianic king from the line of King David. The NT identifies him as Jesus the Messiah. The one who is fully God and fully man. Heb 8:16 says that Jesus brings in the new and superior covenant of promise. Jesus as he took the cup during the last supper with his disciples, said “Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins (Matt 26:28)”. Or as Paul would later phrase it “This cup is the new covenant in my blood.” Jesus, the messenger of the covenant came to inaugurate the New Covenant prophesied by the prophet Jeremiah.

Mal 3:1 Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple. “Suddenly” doesn’t mean “quickly”. Rather, it refers to the way He will come – at a moment the Israelites least expect. When you least expected it, the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among you. Then when you least expect it, the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple.

Jesus would make his appearance at the temple as a baby. It was a small event noticed by a few people. Simeon who was waiting for the Messiah to be revealed, saw Jesus being presented at the temple. Moved by the Spirit of God he proclaimed “Thank you God, my eyes have seen your salvation, a light to the gentiles and the glory of your people Israel.” The prophet Anna who was also there, confirmed that this child would be the redemption of Jerusalem.

But it would be John the Baptist who will truly prepare the way for Jesus to public ministry. How did he do it? He warned the people to flee the coming judgment. He called them to repent because the Kingdom of heaven is near. He testified that Jesus was the Son of God. He said Jesus would baptise with the Spirit. He identified Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He told the people that judgment had already started, that Jesus was already holding his winnowing fork to separate the wheat from the chaff, the righteous from the wicked. Jesus is the God of justice.

Like most OT prophets, Malachi, in his prophesy of the coming Christ, mingled the two advents. While Mal 3:1 refers to his first coming. Mal 3:2 describe things that happen both at his first coming 2000 year ago and his second coming in the future. When Jesus started his public ministry he started purifying and refining the priesthood. See his confrontations with the priests, the Pharisees and the Sadducees. See how he cleansed the temple of money changers who did their business in the outer court. This is the only area at the temple where gentiles are allowed. This business prevents gentiles from worshipping Yahweh. He declared as he drove them out that his Father’s house is a house of prayer for all nations. Jesus’s numerous appearance at the temple fulfilled this prophesy of Malachi. In fact Jesus will show that He is the new temple. He came to replace the temple and its sacrificial system.

By his finished work on the cross, dying as an atoning sacrifice on our behalf, Jesus is able to justify sinners. Anyone who trust in his redemptive work and repent, will be declared righteous in the sight of God. Through his saving work, he transforms people into a new royal priesthood, a holy nation of people seeking to please Him, purified not by fire or soap but by his own cleansing blood. He continues to refine us through the work of the Holy Spirit. And on the day of the Lord, when He comes again, he would accomplished his final

work of purifying and refining of his people, we will be made perfect, all traces of the sinful nature will be removed. We will then be able to serve and worship Him in perfect righteousness. That day will bring vindication and purification for the righteous. It will be the fulfilment of Malachi prophecy of a purified priesthood.

But that day will also bring condemnation and punishment for those who do not fear Him, the wicked. He will come and put them on trial at His judgement seat. That is when they will realise that it was so foolish to think that God does not care about their sin or that he delights in those who do evil.

But today is not that day. In our reading from 2 Peter 3, Peter reminds you that the day of the Lord, the day Jesus returns will certainly come. But It is still not here yet because Jesus is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But mark this, the day of the Lord will come like a thief, at a moment you do not expect.

Today is the day of salvation. If you are not a follower of Jesus, today is your chance to believe what He has done for you, that he took your sins on the cross and can give you his forgiveness and righteousness. And he calls you to follow him.

If you are a Christian today, the question is not “Why has the Lord not come yet” but “Am I ready for His coming?” The people during Malachi’s time were not ready. We are to take an inventory of our lives. Peter says, “Make every effort to confirm our calling and election. What kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. Since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him. Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation.”

You know what makes God weary besides having his name and character sullied? In Isa 43:24 God says: But you have burdened me with your sins and wearied me with your offenses. As God’s chosen people, royal priesthood and holy nation, let us be careful how we live. The HS gives us the power, through the gospel, to live lives pleasing to the Lord. His grace teaches us to say no to sin.

3:5 Look again at the evidence that showed that the people of Malachi’s time did not fear the Lord. How do we measure up to the same set of evidence? You say surely we are not involved with sorcery? Would you in desperation go to manangs and bomohs? Would you use protective charms and amulets. Do you consult the fung shui masters when you set up your house? Does astrology or horoscopes rule your life? You say you do not commit adultery but Jesus says even looking at someone else with lust is adultery. Sexual purity is not just about not committing adultery, what is your standing on sex outside of marriage, cohabitation, homosexuality and transgender issues, pornography? Are you striving to be honest in all your dealings. Are you taking care of and paying your employees fairly. How are we treating and supporting the socially disadvantaged? The widows, the orphans, the single parents, the lonely elderly, the homeless? How are we treating our pendatangs? The refugees, our migrant workers and maids? Yes, let’s take stock of our lives.

But I want to remind you that the good news of this morning’s passage is that the “Messenger of the Covenant” would come. Every time we partake the Holy Communion, we proclaim that the messenger of the covenant HAS come and He WILL come again. He sealed the new covenant with His blood. We now rest in His mercy and grace. When the day of

the Lord comes again, His blood remains be our plea. Today by his Spirit, with full conviction that He will return, we live lives that are pleasing to him. Amen.