

## ***THE PROMISE OF JUSTICE, MALACHI 2:17-3:5***

A Love that won't Let Go #4

◆Intro: Charlie seethed with anger, swept the air and smacked Jeff across the back with his plastic BB gun. The stock splintered from the force and Jeff howled off in a frenzy to finger Chuck to Dad. But all Dad did was mumble from behind his newspaper that they'd deal with it later. Jeff was unsatisfied and demanded justice against the perp! Where was justice?! Did Dad not care about justice? Either Dad was uncaring, or Dad was unable to mete out justice for if he was either of these he would certainly do exactly what Jeff wanted done when he wanted it done! The scene has been repeated millions of times in human history. Many if not most of our TV shows hinge on our human demand for fairness, opportunity, and punishment of wrong. A good plot paints a despicable villain, and then has the hero do him or her in with all manner of darkness and violence in the name of justice. And we feel good about it.

◆It's not hard to understand. Think of WW2 and the Jewish Holocaust; the extermination of six million Jewish human beings, not to mention the German civilians also deemed unfit to live. Eli Wiesel, Nobel Peace Prize winner, and noted author lived through the horror but his faith went up in the flames of the furnaces in

Auschwitz and Buchenwald. In this picture Eli is the second row from the bottom, seventh from the left. It was taken April 16, 1945 five days after the liberation of the camp. Wiesel writes, "Never shall I forget that night, the first night in camp, which has turned my life into one long night, seven times cursed and seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the little



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faces of the children, whose bodies I saw turned into wreaths of smoke beneath a silent blue sky. Never shall I forget those flames which consumed my faith forever. Never shall I forget that nocturnal silence which deprived me, for all eternity, of the desire to live. Never shall I forget those moments which murdered my God and my soul and turned my dreams to dust. Never shall I forget these things, even if I am condemned to live as long as God Himself. Never." He reasoned that if God existed he certainly could not stand by while such atrocity went on among men. Therefore God must not exist. Many come to the same conclusion. Interestingly, Eli's people, the Jews, were nearing that conclusion in Malachi's day.

◆ In Malachi's day, the Jews were but a small remnant of a nation, that had straggled back to Canaan from Persia in 538BC. Now after 100 years home they were still nothing to be reckoned with, still ruled by soldiers of another country. Could still be shot in the street. And they began to question God. So far in the book of Malachi we've seen that they

- ◆ -doubted that God really loved them,
- ◆ -let their worship degenerate into listless ritual that moved nobody, much less God,
- ◆ -had fallen into the unbelievable habit of divorcing their jewish wives for foreign babes who believed in different gods,
- ◆ -and also had some serious doubts as to whether their God was really all that good or fair because he hadn't exalted

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them put on a red cap and "made Israel great again." Lets read the text...

◆1. **When God seems slow, it's really his long-suffering, patient goodness at work.** God is not slow. God is faster than lightning. God is Creator and Sovereign over every atom. He is not slow. So then what's going on in suffering? God is being long suffering, or "patient". It's what the word means. And it's love that does it.

◆At this point in Malachi, unlike Wiesel, Israel at least hadn't concluded that God must not exist due to the atrocity their nation had experienced. We can tell because they are at least still arguing with God through his prophet Malachi. Verse one shows us that they are still "seeking" the Lord, and that they "desire" his messenger. What they have concluded is that God isn't really all that good, or he wouldn't let so many get away with so much obvious evil. They are starving inmates disillusioned because of unbelievable tragedy.

◆""You have said, 'It is futile to serve God. What did we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the LORD Almighty? But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly the evildoers prosper, and even those who challenge God escape.'""  
Malachi 3:14, 15, NIV.

◆This wasn't the first time God's people felt this way.

◆"*For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked...This is what the wicked are like--always carefree, they*

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*increase in wealth. Surely in vain have I kept my heart pure; in vain have I washed my hands in innocence." Psalms 73:3, 12, 13, NIV.*

◆ Secretly, haven't you felt it? Its easy to miss God's goodness in the presence of badness. You try to be godly in your business, honest about prices and faithful to promises. But that snake of a competitor, who you *know* cheats and pulls shady deals gets ahead while you're still scrapin' by! You're pressed for time, but a sense of obligation causes you to stop and pay a visit to, truth be told, not your favorite relative. But God says to have compassion on the lonely, so you stop, only to hear the whole time how you don't really stop all that often! You try to take Jesus advice in Matthew 5 and "turn the other cheek" only to have it slapped too. Now you hurt on *both* sides of your face and are wondering, "Tell me again how this is a good thing?" The drug lords have the big houses and the fancy cars. The Dirty Harrys of the world put people in their place with delightful satisfaction. How is there good in these? we wonder.

◆ So, maybe you can feel Israel. They hadn't given up all belief of God, but their view of him had dimmed severely. To Israel God had become in their minds the postponed God, the God of someday, but not for now. The God of Judgment Day when all the hoodlums will finally "get theirs". (Can you sense the distortion taking place in their minds?) God would be their Dorothy who someday drops a house on the wicked witch of Persia; who will someday hammer the heads of all the beer-

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drinking turds watching football while I had to trudge off to church. (Are you noticing the bent thinking going on here?) "All you sinners! You're gonna fry someday!" Do we see? These type of so called God-followers seem to know almost nothing of a God whose love won't let go. You might see them picketing or shouting hate at gay parades –something Jesus probably would not have done. You might see them in the mirror, gritting teeth at the riffraff moving into the neighborhood. But you won't see them in Jesus face. It is God's goodness that makes him patient with the darkness of men.

◆Here's a shock, when God does come to set the record straight he starts with his own! Do you really want God to appear in force, battle-ready, hungry for the destruction of all evil? That puts you in danger too!

◆3:2 *who can stand when he appears?*

◆v3. God is going to come and "purify the Levites." Who are they? The priestly family, those who represent God to the rest of the people. Sound a lot like, who? The church, right? So that's where judgement begins; with God's people!

◆"Woe to you who long for the day of the LORD! Why do you long for the day of the LORD? That day will be darkness, not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear, as though he entered his house and rested his hand on the wall only to have a snake bite him. Will not the day of the LORD be darkness, not light--pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness?"  
Amos 5:18-20, NIV.

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◆ Amos goes on to urge Israel to do some shaping up before they long for the Day of the Lord. So what are these prophets saying? basically, "Don't complain that God isn't solving everything right now. He's giving you and everyone else opportunities to make some changes first, to take some next steps in your own walk with God. There are always next steps to take in the spiritual life. In the church people move from the community, to the crowd (attending), to the congregation (members), to the committed (learning to give, know God's word) to the core (actually serving God with their life somehow.) What's the next step God is calling you to? Don't waste time while waiting for the Day of the Lord. The growth of your spiritual life on earth affects your experience in heaven. Set up treasure in heaven by making changes on earth! Do some self-examination.

◆ "By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. *The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.* But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, 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. That day will bring about the

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destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat." 2 Peter 3:7-12, NIV.

◆ Friends, maybe making everything fair and just isn't God's first priority. Maybe he cares more about your character than your career. Maybe your holiness is more important to him than alleviating your anxiety. When we face hardship we need to remember that God is forming us for himself. Not one ounce of it is beyond his control or engineering. And his purpose is only and always to bring us to beauty. You and I can cooperate with that!

### **◆2. When God passes judgment, it is for the purpose of restoring beauty and goodness.**

◆A. Lots of folks think that God passes judgement as payback, that he is like us: wants bad people to suffer like their badness caused suffering. God is not like us. He doesn't feel better because he got to punch someone back who punched him first. God's purpose is far deeper than mere vengeance. Is God angry about sin? Sure he is, but it's because he is in love with his children like any good parent is when their child endangers himself.

◆ This is captured by the "refiners fire" image in Malachi. A refiner of silver or gold, for example, heats the metal up until it's liquid, and since different elements have differing weights, impurities can float to the top, or sink to the bottom and the pure silver can be poured off, or scraped

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clean of the slag on top. A refiner does not destroy his gold, he purifies it. Then when you wear the gold it doesn't turn green or tarnish. Soap the same way. Soap doesn't destroy your clothes, it refines/cleans your clothes by removing impurity. But soap is supposed to leave the clean shirts and pants behind! Similarly, God's judgment will be to remove all evil and sin and its damages, but not to destroy what is good in his creation.

◆B. Now what might this mean for us? Philip Yancy puts it, "The prophets never called the people of God to merely mark time, waiting for God to step in and set right all the wrong. Rather to model the new heaven and earth, awaking a longing for what God will someday bring to pass."

◆"If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labour for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith," Philippians 1:22-25, NIV.

◆So think about it. If God is intent on purifying and restoring his creation, then everything we do toward that same end has eternal consequences that last into the new age!

◆Since everything will be destroyed in this way, 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. 2Pet. 3:11-12

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◆C. The reverse is also true. Back to Malachi, verse 5. ““So I will come near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud labourers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice, but do not fear me,” says the LORD Almighty.” Malachi 3:5, NIV.

◆Are you a sorcerer? Do you play with the spirit realm, demonic games, cursings, rituals? You'll want to repent of this and put it away! That's something that will burn. Are you an adulterer? Are you addicted to porn, or sexual escapades, or do you think more about another person than the one you married. You're gonna want to make some changes because according to God's plan that kind of stuff will burn. It is producing in the reality of human life nothing that will continue on into the next world. You are wasting yourself. Are you a defrauder of laborers wages? Well, are you raking in the money while people who work for you never really get ahead? You've got multiple homes and your employees can barely pay their bills? Time to give more of earth the shape of heaven. That's what God's people do.

◆**Conclusion:** The people of Malachi's day were mistaken. God is just and judgment is coming, and all sin will be wiped out. If you or I do not have something done about our sin, we will be lost as well. But friends, the burn of that destruction was laid on Christ on the cross. He took the punishment we were owed so we could live on at Judgment Day. All we need to do is ask him for

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the gift by faith in his name. Is there anything greater? And after receiving Christ as your God, invite him to make further changes in you. You know if you take a styrofoam cup and fill it half with water and put it in a camp fire, the part of the cup with water will not burn, but the part that's empty will. Our lives, our days, our time on earth is the cup. Jesus is the water that can prevent our destruction. Fill your life up with him and his ways. Ask him into more parts of your world.