

The Irony of it All – Malachi 3:1-6

I. Introduction:

- A. Do you remember what the weather was like last Sunday?
1. Were any of you thrown into the building with the door being violently pushed open by the 50 mph winds?
 2. Were you followed into the building by a handful of maple leaves from next door?
 3. Did anyone have their hair standing on end pierced by two or three sets of pine needles?
 4. And yet, did anyone come in and say, *“What a beautiful day?”*
 5. That kind of comment, under those conditions, is called *“irony.”*
- B. *“Irony”* is a figure of speech in which the speaker says one thing, but he means precisely the opposite.
1. No one is going to accuse him of lying, because the irony is so apparent.
 2. Someone spills his morning coffee on this shirt and says, *“This day couldn’t have started out any better.”*
 3. Or after an unpleasant task, he says, *“That was as much fun as a root canal.”*
 4. There is **verbal** irony; **dramatic** irony and **situational** irony.
 5. When the fire station burns down, that is situational irony.
 6. When the man with a broken leg is sitting at the side of the road and an ambulance runs over him, that is situational irony.
- C. Did you know there is irony in the Bible?
1. It is usually to make a point, rather than for the sake of humor, but sometimes it can be funny.
 2. Elijah was at the top of Mt. Carmel, and the prophets of Baal were trying to call down fire from heaven.
 - a. After several hours of useless pleading, Elijah said, *“Cry aloud; for (Baal) is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure, he sleepeth, and must be awaked.”*
 - b. God’s prophet used irony to mock the false prophets.
 3. We find irony in **Job 12:2**, but with no humor whatsoever: Job said to his useless comforters, *“No doubt, but **YE** are the people, and wisdom shall die with **YOU**.”*
 4. There is situational as well as verbal irony in **Mark 15:17**: the soldiers *“clothed (our Saviour) with purple, and platted a crown of thorns, and put it about his head, and began to salute him, Hail, King of the Jews.”*
 5. We also have a case of God-approved irony here in our text.

II. Let’s review: Who are the subjects? Who are the people in these verses?

- A. In the **last verse** of **chapter two**, Malachi, God’s prophet, was the speaker.
1. Under God’s authority he said, *“Ye say, ye say...”*
 2. And what did Israel say? *“Everyone that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them.”* They also asked, *“Where is the God of judgment?”*
 3. In the next verse, when God said, *“behold, I will send my messenger,”* he was speaking about John the Baptist.
 4. And that messenger came to prepare the way before *“the messenger of the covenant.”*
- B. The *“messenger of the covenant”* is none other than the LORD Himself: the Lord Jesus Christ.
1. Among the ways in which we know that this is Christ, are the references to this scripture which we find in the New Testament.
 2. But also, here in the context we have ample of evidence.
 3. This One, who is the Lord, will come suddenly to **his** temple – not to **“the”** temple, but to the temple which belongs to Him: **verse 2**.
 4. And what person, in his own righteousness, will be able to abide the day of the Lord’s coming?
 5. Who will be able to endure the refining fire and the heat? **Verses 3** and **4**.
 6. He will come as judge, prosecutor and swift witness against the sinners of Israel and the world: **verse 5**.
 7. With a little extrapolation, we see in **verse 6**, that this same *“messenger of the covenant”* will consume, bring to an end, and destroy the wicked of the earth.
 8. And yet, **He** is filled with grace and mercy, *“therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.”*

- C. There is no irony to be found in **verses 2** through **6**.
1. Every word is to be understood as clearly expressed, and every word is deadly serious.
 2. Yes, some might be confused about the time table involved, but not even that should be too difficult.
 3. The irony to which I refer is found in two short clauses in **verse 1**.
 4. *“The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in; behold, he shall come saith the LORD of hosts.”*
 5. Do you see it? Can you hear the irony?

III. The Lord, whom ye seek, and whom ye delight in.

- A. Those corrupt Jews, and particularly their priests, wanted God to judge their enemies.
1. They wanted Sanballat and Tobiah to be driven from Jerusalem by the authority of Jehovah.
 2. They wanted the Samaritans to be forced to surrender their wealth and power to the returning Jews.
 3. They wanted the idol worshipers to know that Jehovah is God; that He alone is God.
 4. And they yearned for divine prosperity on their national economy.
- B. But they **didn't want** the LORD to judge **them** for their own corrupt and worthless sacrifices.
1. They didn't yearn to invite Jehovah into their homes where gratuitous divorce was rampant, and where their wives were being abused.
 2. They didn't really want God to be looking over their shoulders as they made their dishonest business deals.
 3. They weren't looking for God who would be listening to their lies, blasphemy and purposeless promises.
 4. In fact, they didn't really want the true and living God at all.
 5. They were only interested in their modified image of deity; the God they perceived through the corruption of their own hearts.
 6. In other words, they were like so many people filling churches in the 21st century.
- C. When Adam fell from his lofty estate before God, terrible, insidious things took place.
1. Along with instant spiritual death, came the slow process of physical dying.
 2. But not only were their bodies introduced to decay, so were their minds.
 3. And one of the ramifications of that mental/spiritual decay was man's perception of the Creator.
 4. The idea of evolution is one of the eventual results of the fall.
 5. So, too, was Cain's idea of offering an unacceptable sacrifice to the God which he no longer understood.
- D. And remember these priests of the post-exile days were guilty of offering their own unacceptable sacrifices.
1. Those blind, sick and lame offerings demonstrated that these people had forgotten the LORD.
 2. They had created a new God in their minds: they had become mental and spiritual idolaters.
 3. So when they said, *“Where is the God of judgment,”* they were not really looking for Jehovah, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. **Nevertheless**, the Lord replied to their statement by saying, *“Here I come.”*
 4. He said, *“You say that you delight in presence of God, but you have no idea what you are asking.”*
- E. Four hundred years later, some in Israel were still saying, *“Where is the God of Judgment.”*
1. **Luke 2:25** tells us, *“And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel...”*
 2. Consider the word *“behold”* in that verse. It is as though this man was strange; unique; out of the ordinary.
 3. He was awaiting the Messiah, and being full of the Holy Spirit, you can be sure he was looking for the same *“messenger of the covenant”* to whom Malachi was referring.
 4. When he saw the child of Joseph and Mary, *“He took him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said... mine eyes have seen thy salvation.”*
 5. Shortly after that the widow Anna came in and *“gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem.”*
 6. If she spoke of Jesus to everyone in the city who was sincerely looking for the Messiah, then it would seem that there were not very many.

- F. The point is: there is more than one way to **seek**, or *“delight,”* in God.
1. There is often a desire to see the God who **judges others**, but not He who judges us.
 2. And there is also the **yearning** for the **God of all comfort** and **consolation**.

IV. It is a dangerous thing to delight in the God of Judgment.

- A. This is the message laying underneath our text.
1. The word *“delight”* in **verse 1** is also translated, *“desire,” “have pleasure”* and to *“wish.”*
 2. I don't think Simeon and Anna were wishing for the God of Judgment per se.
 3. Their hearts were set upon the God of Mercy and Grace; the God of salvation.
 4. The attribute of God which people delight and wish to see, exposes the nature of their hearts.
- B. The prophet **Amos** wrote in **5:18**: *“Woe unto you that desire the day of the LORD; to what end is it for you? The day of the LORD is darkness and not light.”*
1. Please turn to **Amos 5:4**: *“For thus saith the LORD unto the house of Israel, Seek ye **ME**, and ye shall live: a. But seek not Bethel, nor enter into Gilgal, and pass not to Beersheba: for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nought. b. Seek the LORD, and ye shall live; lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and devour it, and there be none to quench it in Bethel.”*
 2. Now skip down to **verse 14**: *“Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the LORD, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken. a. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the LORD God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph. b. Therefore the LORD, the God of hosts, the Lord, saith thus; Wailing shall be in all streets; and they shall say in all the highways, Alas! alas! and they shall call the husbandman to mourning, and such as are skilful of lamentation to wailing. c. And in all vineyards shall be wailing: for I will pass through thee, saith the LORD. d. Woe unto you that desire the day of the LORD! to what end is it for you? the day of the LORD is darkness, and not light. As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him. e. Shall not the day of the LORD be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it?”*
- C. What was the difference between the priests in Malachi's day and those two souls in Jesus' day?
1. One would think that the priests had been trained for their profession by their fathers and others priests.
 2. You'd think they knew the scriptures, so their theology should have been sound and fundamental.
 3. But that was not the case. They were theological liberals and heretics.
 4. Those two people in **Luke 2** may not have had the same scholarly opportunities to know detailed theology. But it appears they had a distinct advantage: they had tasted of the Lord's grace.
 5. They had different hearts than the Sadducees and Pharisees; the priests of their day.
- D. Some people are not ready for God; most people are not ready for Christ's return. They are yet in their sins.
1. Even though they may not understand it, they are under the wrath of Almighty.
 2. Some people are waiting for God to judge others, while awaiting the Lord's blessing for themselves.
 3. Simeon and Anna, on the other hand, were looking for God to glorify Himself and to fulfil the promises.
- E. In irony the Holy Spirit said through Malachi, *“the messenger of the covenant, who ye delight in, behold he shall come.”*
1. They professed to delight and yearn for God, but in reality they didn't, because they didn't know the Lord.
 2. When the Christ Jesus the Lord shall come, those hypocrites will not be as delighted as they professed.
- F. Let us pray that the dangers of this irony don't fall upon us.