



Malachi 2:17-3:5

The Day of the Lord's Appearing

17 You have wearied the LORD with your words; Yet you say, "In what way have we wearied Him?" In that you say, "Everyone who does evil Is good in the sight of the LORD, And He delights in them," Or, "Where is the God of justice?"

NKJ Malachi 3:1 "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, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," Says the LORD of hosts.

2 "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 launderer's soap.

3 He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the LORD An offering in righteousness.

4 "Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem Will be pleasant to the LORD, As in the days of old, As in former years.

5 And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness Against sorcerers, Against adulterers, Against perjurers, Against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, And against those who turn away an alien -- Because they do not fear Me," Says the LORD of hosts.

There is a general tendency amongst men to believe that when judgment is deferred or put off, it means that it will never come. So that if we are not immediately destroyed by doing something, it means that we never will be. You see this in the way that men approach sin, it is rarely the case that if you sin you will be immediately destroyed. So that one can get away with a period of drunkenness or debauchery and appear to have gotten off scot-free.

Someone will say something exceptionally blasphemous or wicked, and the men around them will joke that they don't want to stand next to them because they don't want to get hit when the lightning bolt from heaven strikes the evil doer. Of course the lightning bolt out of heaven doesn't come and men assume that this is an indication that no judgement will ever be rendered. To put it quite frankly, we could invite an atheist in here to speak to us, and he could rail against God and his existence for a few hours, and we shouldn't expect him to be judged on the spot, but does that mean that there will never be a reckoning for his statements? ***Well not according to Jesus who told us in Matthew 12:36 "But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. 37 "For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."***

Judgment will not be metted out instantly, for the pattern that the Lord has established in his dealings with men is one not of "instant karma" as the world puts it, but of longsuffering. This has been the case from the very beginning. You remember that Adam was warned in ***Gen. 2:16 And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; 17 "but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."***

Adam indeed put forth his hand and took from the fruit of the tree, but did he instantly die? Not at all. Although in that moment of disobedience he spiritually died, yet he continued to live on. God would have been justified to judge Adam and Eve the instant they disobeyed, and yet the physical death that was promised from that action did not come until over nine hundred years later. God commonly holds off his judgment till later, this is why he is described as "longsuffering and abundant in mercy" because it is commonly his intention to provide time for those who have sinned to repent and seize upon the mercy he offers.

But this is not the interpretation that Israelites of Malachi's day had taken, they had by and large split into two camps.

The first camp concluded that the Lord's longsuffering was actually evidence that the Lord was in fact Ok with evil. If men sin, and yet they prosper, this must be evidence that the Lord is ok with it. This is a common misunderstanding in our day when men conclude that all sorts of hideous moral evils must in fact be good, and thus call good, evil and evil, good because they are not instantly condemned. Thus by this argument because moral deviancy is ok with us, and it is not instantly punished, it must also be ok in the eyes of God. Thus all kinds of wickedness advance in our nation. Even Christians fall into this pattern arguing that because an aberrant theology or practice of worship prospers and is not destroyed it must be ok. Thus because Mormonism, Roman Catholicism, the New Perspective on Paul, or Charismatic worship practices and so on are not responded to in exactly the same way that God dealt with the worship innovations of Nadab and Abihu, he must be fine with them! Thomas Watson pointed out the foolishness of taking this approach when he wrote:

"God's providence is greatly to be observed, but we are not to make it the rule of our actions. 'Whoso is wise will observe these things.' Psa 107:73. It is good to observe providence, but we must not make it our rule to walk by. Providence is a Christian's diary, but not his Bible. Sometimes a bad cause prevails and gets ground; but it is not to be liked because it prevails. We must not think the better of what is sinful, because it is successful. This is no rule for our actions to be directed by."

The second camp meanwhile chose to interpret this lack of instant judgment as evidence that there was no justice in this world. Like the people who during the Second World War pointed to the Concentration Camps and said "How could a good God allow this to happen?" they concluded that either he didn't exist or he didn't care. ***Where, they asked despairingly, is the God of justice if he can allow this to go on?***

The Lord had become weary in heaven from hearing from both those camps, neither of whom understood him or the promises of his word.

So he gives them his assurance that contrary to their expectation, he is indeed coming. In the fullness of time, he will send his messenger, his prophet who will prepare the way for his coming. Not the way he puts it, He gives them his assurance that this messenger will come to prepare the way for *me* - He Himself is coming. We know that the messenger who came to prepare the way for God was John the Baptist, the one who came to make straight the pathways of the Lord.

And that he himself came as the messenger proclaiming good news of a new and better covenant: God came near He was Emmanuel – God with Us – Jesus Christ and he came not only to be the messenger of the covenant but to ratify it with his blood:

God proclaimed the coming of the day of this new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31 " ***Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah --***

32 "not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD.

33 "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

34 "No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

Jesus himself refers to this in Luke 22:20 Likewise He also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the **new covenant** in My blood, which is shed for you.

And again and again his role as the mediator of the new covenant between God and man is affirmed by the author of Hebrews:

Hebrews 9:15 ***And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.***

But what is emphasized here about Christ's redeeming work is as a divider, this is what John emphasized when he said in Matt. 3:12 that "His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

He was going to be a purifier, a divine launderer who removes the spots from the fabric of his church, a refiner who not only purges iniquity from individuals but out of the visible church, so that wheat is ultimately divided from chaff.

We are reminded that this process occurs not only in the final judgment but even as the gospel is being preached by ministers: The Gospel goes forth and incenses some, they hear it and are hardened, while others are melted by it and saved so that Paul is able to declare:

2 Cor. 2:15 For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.

16 To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things?

So Christ divided wheat from chaff in three different stages of his appearing,

1st in exposing the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, those whitewashed tombs of the visible church of his day

2nd as his ministers proclaim the gospel gathering in the harvest of the elect and hardening the reprobate

3rd when he reappears he shall sit in Judgment dividing the Sheep from the Goats:

Matt. 25:31 " When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.

32 "All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.

33 "And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.

So what is the application of this?

Well first a warning against misusing the longsuffering and patience of God – No one gets away with anything, they only make it worse.

Romans 2:2 But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things.

3 And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?

4 Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?

5 But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,

6 who "will render to each one according to his deeds":

7 eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality;

8 but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness -- indignation and wrath,

9 tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek;

10 but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

11 For there is no partiality with God.

12 For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law

Secondly to not misinterpret his longsuffering as evidence he has forgotten and is not coming back:

NKJ 2 Peter 3:1 Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder),

2 that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior,

3 knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts,

4 and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation."

5 For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water,

6 by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water.

7 But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

8 But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.

Thirdly and finally:

NKJ 2 Corinthians 6:1 We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain.

2 For He says: "In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you." Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

If we wait till the day of his appearing will be too late:

Luke 13:24 24 "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able.

25 "When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open for us,' and He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know you, where you are from,'

26 "then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.'

27 "But He will say, 'I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.'

28 "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out.