

Where is the God of Justice?

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[0 : 0 0] How about I pray for us and then we'll get into it. Let's pray. Gracious Father, thank you again for your word, the Bible. Thank you that you speak to us through it. And so we do pray that you would give us ears to hear, our minds to understand and hearts that would live in light of your word to us this evening.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, there's a phrase that I think that everyone in this room has uttered at least once in their life. A phrase that you often hear children in particular say.

And to show you what I mean, I thought I'd start with a short video clip. Thanks, Emma. That's not fair. That's, that's fair.

That's, that's fair. Someone had lots of time on their hands. Fair. Fair. Fair. That's not fair. That's not fair. That's not fair. There is a line for cookies.

I was the first one in line and you gave it to everybody else except for me. That's not fair. I love that story. There's a line. I was in the first in the line for a cookie. You gave it to everyone else except for me.

[1 : 0 6] That's not fair. It's something kids around the world have said. Even in our house when we have dessert, we have to make sure that we give each of our children the exact same amount.

Otherwise, that's not fair. Of course, it's not just kids who cry out for fairness or for justice. Adults do it too. If someone cheats at university on an exam, I bet you, well, if I bet you, if I was a betting person, I would bet you money that you would say that's not fair.

Or if someone cheats at a sports game of basketball or whatever, or jumps in ahead of you in a queue or cuts you off on a road, you are indignant because that's not fair.

We are inbuilt, it seems, being made in God's image with a sense of justice. In fact, a study published in 2015 suggested that children as young as three years of age, on the next slide, have, this is the ABC report, have an innate sense of justice.

We are inbuilt with it. And because of this, we all want justice in life. And this ought to be especially true for us as Christians because we claim to follow a God of justice.

[2 : 2 6] But what do we do when there seems to be no justice? And so on the next slide, officials last year stole food aid that was meant for refugees in Nigeria, victims of Boko Haram.

And the government said that you can't read the fine print or you might be able to down the bottom. The government said that the food was diverted, which is code for stolen. They have since assigned more troops to guard food convoys, but no one was brought to justice.

Where is the justice in that? Or what do we do when there's injustice against Christians in particular? At the beginning of this month, Muslim extremists on motorbikes rode past a church in Pakistan, opened fire on Christians leaving church.

And they killed four that time. And they were not brought to justice because just two weeks ago, they did the exact same thing again. At this time, killing two and injuring four. Where's the justice?

Or take in China. In February this year, so not long ago, there was new laws introduced, which has made it harder for Christians. On the next slide, here it is.

[3 : 36] Bibles are pulled from China's online books. You can't buy a Bible now. And what's more, believers have been arrested on the pretext that they are undermining the state.

In fact, it's got so bad that some people from our own church who have booked a trip back to China later this year are now wondering whether it's actually safe for them to go. Where's the justice? Well, as we come to Malachi tonight, it seems that this lack of justice has led Israel to ask the same question.

Where is the God of justice? So point one in your outlines and chapter two, verse 17 in your Bibles. Malachi says, You have wearied the Lord with your words.

How have we wearied him, you ask? Well, by 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?

Now, again, we can kind of understand why Israel has asked this. So remember, they've returned from exile and life is hard back in Israel. And given their question, it seems injustice is rife.

[4 : 48] What's more, God promised to fill his house, the temple, with his glory in a greater way than he filled Solomon's temple. We saw this a few weeks ago from the book of Haggai, which I think is on the next slide, Emma.

Here it says, I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord Almighty. The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house, Solomon's temple, says the Lord Almighty.

And this place I will grant peace. And instead of peace, there is injustice. The people have rebuilt the temple, but God has not filled it with his glory.

And instead of peace, they seem to suffer while the evildoers prosper. So not only do they feel like God has lost that loving feeling towards them, but they feel like God is just, well, gone.

Evildoers get away with evil as though God is either pleased with them or is simply no longer around. And so they ask, where is God the God of justice? Where's he gone?

[5 : 50] He's MIA. And we can feel like this too sometimes, can't we? Again, in Nigeria, Muslim Fulani herdsmen, Muslim Fulani herdsmen, who have been killing people over land squirrels for years, but have now seemed to have started targeting Christians.

In fact, they've now killed more and are of greater threat than Boko Haram is in Nigeria. I received an email, or saw an email yesterday from one of the bishops working in Nigeria, Bishop Jacob, who was actually here at Holy Trinity while he was studying at Ridley a number of years ago.

And he sent an email saying, asking us to pray for their Christian communities because Fulani herdsmen are attacking them more and more. And he says, the president is doing nothing because he is also Fulani.

Where is the justice? We can feel it too, can't we? But for Israel, their question has really become an accusation now, which has wearied the Lord. You see, it seems that their pleading and lamenting to God has now turned into contempt and accusations against God.

You see this in verse 17, chapter 2, verse 17, where they say, all who do evil are good in the eyes of the Lord, and he is pleased with them. Now, to say that about God is to speak falsely about his character.

[7 : 16] It's to show contempt towards his character and accuse him of being dodgy or unjust. We see this again in chapter 3. Just turn over the page for a moment to the bottom left-hand corner, chapter 3, verse 13.

The bottom of the page, chapter 3, verse 13. And even when they put God to the test, they get away with it.

You see, Israel is now speaking arrogantly against God, saying it's a waste of time serving God and accusing God of, well, blessing evildoers.

You see, their pleading and lamenting has turned to accusing and showing contempt. And it seems to be constant because back in our passage, back over the page, God is now weary of their constant complaining.

I mean, if you've ever had to deal with people who are constantly complaining that nothing is ever good and constantly accusing you of being unfair, some say it's called having kids, actually, then you know how wearisome it can be.

[8 : 44] And God is weary of Israel. And that says a lot when we remember just how patient God is. And so this is the first point of application for us, I think.

When life's not fair, when we suffer or see injustice in the world, when we feel like God has gone, then by all means, cry out to God.

Lament. Even question God and ask why or how long. That's what the psalmists do. That's what the martyrs in Revelation do. But we must not let our pleading and lamenting turn into constant complaining and accusing against God, especially when God has proven himself faithful so many times before.

Well, after they question God, God now answers them. In point two, chapter three, verse one, he says, 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.

[9 : 59] They asked, where is the God of justice? God's answer is firstly, I'm on my way. And to help them get ready for his arrival, God will send a messenger. In the ancient world, it was common to send a messenger to prepare the way for a king's arrival.

It still happens a bit today, doesn't it? Like the secret service preparing for the president's arrival in a town or whatever. And after this messenger, God himself will arrive at his temple.

The place he ruled from and dwelt in. The very place he promised to fill with his glory, as we saw from Haggai. But did you notice that there's another messenger here too, isn't there?

He's called the messenger of the covenant. That's a reference to the new covenant, I think, that the prophet spoke about. Now, it's hard to know if this messenger of the covenant is God himself or someone else.

The way it's written here is hard to tell. Though I wonder if this might end up being the one same person when we get to the New Testament. Hint, hint. Either way, God says he will come suddenly.

[11 : 07] And the word suddenly in the Old Testament is often associated with judgment. And so the first readers would have understood that God's answer here was where God would come and judge.

He would bring justice. This would have been great news. They would have thought the nations are finally going to get what's coming to them and we'll be finally on top of the world again.

But then comes a surprise. Do you see verse 2? But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears?

For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver. He will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver.

Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness. And the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord as in the days gone by, as in former years.

[12 : 07] And then God speaks himself in verse 5 and says, So I will come and put you, Israel, on trial. And I'll be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers, perjurers, against those who defile laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless and deprive the foreigners among you of justice.

And do not fear me. Don't know why the NIV has a but. It's and do not fear me, says the Lord Almighty. You see, God says he will come suddenly to judge, but it's going to include you, Israel, too.

Now, I'm pretty sure that's not what Israel was expecting. I remember when I was younger, locking my older brother out of the house. It was a bit of a game. He was not so much impressed about it.

So you can see where my kids get it from. But he got a hammer from my dad's workbench and came up to the back door and started smashing the back door with a hammer.

Needless to say, he put a big hole in the back door. Now, when mum and dad got home, I was very quick to cry out to mum and dad for justice. Look at what my brother has done. He deserved to be punished.

[13 : 16] And that's what I expected to happen. But when they came, he was not the only one who was punished. You see, that's the way with justice, isn't it? We're big fans of justice.

So as long as it applies to them and not me. And yet, if we're honest, we're all guilty of something. And we're all guilty of ignoring God.

We all actually deserve judgment. And so God says, you want judgment, justice? Sure. But it's going to include you, too, because you also are guilty, Israel.

And so in verse 2, when Malachi says, Who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? The just answer is no one. No one should be able to stand since everyone deserves punishment.

That's justice. And yet, did you notice what God will do in verse 3 before he judges in verse 5? Verse 3 says he will purify them so that some will be able to stand.

[14 : 26] Do you notice? God will act like a refiner that purifies metal or like a laundry soap that purifies clothes. He will purify his people, cleansing them or forgiving them of their sins, enabling them to offer acceptable worship.

He says, verse 3 and 4. This is the new covenant in action where God brings unlimited forgiveness and his spirit to enable his people to worship him rightly.

And notice here, it says in verse 3 that it starts with the Levites or the priests. These were the ones who, in chapter 2, verse 8, had led the people astray by their teaching and caused many to stumble.

Mark preached about that a couple of weeks ago. But now God will purify them so that they, in turn, can teach others of the new covenant and lead them to forgiveness.

Then, verse 4, the offerings of the people, Judah and Jerusalem, will be acceptable to God. This is how they'll be able to stand when God comes.

[15 : 33] They'll be able to stand by God's grace, which purifies them. But there is a problem with this. For the God of justice to purify and forgive them, then someone has to pay for their sins.

You see, justice demands that someone takes the punishment. That's justice, isn't it? I mean, imagine today if a law court judge said to a criminal, Ah, don't worry about your crime, just, you're free to go.

Imagine an ISIS fighter is brought before a trial. Oh, he's guilty and the judge says, Oh, don't worry about it. You can kill as many people as you like. You're free to go. I mean, there'd be a public outcry, wouldn't there?

See, it's not justice. Justice demands that someone pay for sin. And so for the God of justice to come and purify these people, then someone must still pay for their sins.

I wonder who that someone might be. Hint, hint. But this purification will come only for those who fear him.

[16 : 36] For in verse 5, God will judge those who don't fear him. I think on the next slide, I think I've got a more literal translation of verse 5, Emma. Yeah, there we are.

God actually literally says, And I will draw near to you for judgment, and I will be quick to... The rest of verse 5. And those who do not fear me.

So he's judging all these groups of people, including those who don't fear him. He will judge and be quick to testify against all evildoers and those who don't fear God.

And again, I wonder if the way God will judge these people is through this same person who might come. Hint, hint. You see, in our first reading, we heard that John the Baptist was the messenger who prepared the way.

And who came after John the Baptist? Starts with... Ends with... Isis. You with me? Yeah? Yeah.

[17 : 35] And Jesus is the Lord himself. And in John chapter 2, we read that he did come to his temple. And then he replaced the temple with himself. Jesus is the new temple in whom God's glory dwells in a greater way than Solomon's temple.

What's more, Jesus is the messenger of the new covenant. Do you remember what Jesus said at the Last Supper? It's on the next slide from Luke chapter 22. I don't think I'm up to that bit.

Was there another one before that, Emma? Never mind. Luke chapter 22, Jesus says, This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

For it's by his blood that forgiveness of the new covenant comes to us. And so Jesus is the one that purifies people as the Titus one goes. So back to the Titus one, Emma.

So Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that his very own, eager to do what is good.

[18 : 39] Just over two years ago, there were some bombings in Beirut. And they didn't get much airplay at the time because they're around the time of the Paris attack.

Do you remember the Paris attack? Which the media kind of covered ad nauseum. It was serious. Don't get me wrong. But they kind of neglected everything else that was happening in the world. And so you may not have ever heard of a man called Adel Tomas.

Here he is on the next slide. He was with his daughter when he saw one of the suicide bombers preparing to detonate his vest. And so Adel ran and tackled the bomber before the bomber could reach the crowd.

The vest still went off. But Adel took the brunt of the blast and kept it away from the crowd, saving many lives, including his own daughters. On the next slide is one of the news headlines at the time.

Dad is a martyr. How Adel Tomas became a savior in the Beirut bombings. He saved dozens of people from what they did not deserve. But here is Christ who saves billions of people from what we do deserve.

[19 : 51] For Jesus took the full force of our punishment so that we might be saved from it. His blood purifies and forgives us so that we might be acceptable to God.

But the cross didn't just purify us. It also showed God's justice. For at the cross, our sins are paid for. At the cross, the punishment of our crimes, the punishment our crimes deserve is taken.

Justice is served. And so I think on the next slide, Emma, from Romans chapter 3, Paul writes this. And you need to kind of concentrate on this. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement.

And he's just explained how it brings us forgiveness. But then he explains something else. He did this to demonstrate his righteous, his righteous character. Why? Well, because in God's forbearance, he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished.

And so that's not justice. But he sent Christ to take it so that to demonstrate his righteousness so as to be just, a God of justice, and the one who justifies or makes us right by having faith in Christ.

[21 : 03] In other words, at the cross of Christ, it doesn't just bring us forgiveness. It also proves that God is righteous and just. For someone did take our sins.

Christ. Christ. In the words of a great hymn that we'll sing in a little while, God the just is satisfied to look on him and pardon me. You see, Jesus is God's great answer to the question, where is the God of justice?

For in Jesus, God dwells and deals with justice, the justice we deserve. What's more, in Jesus, God will draw near again for judgment. He will send Jesus again to judge the living and the dead and to put all things right, to bring complete justice.

And so we read in 2 Thessalonians on the next slide. It's God is just. He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled and to us as well.

This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

[22 : 10] They will be punished with everlasting destruction. You see, when Christ returns, there will be complete justice. The world will be put right. What Malachi describes as one coming of God to his temple to both purify and to judge, Jesus fulfills with two comings.

Firstly, to purify and then secondly, to judge. I conducted a funeral some time ago. It was one of the first funerals I conducted here, actually.

And it was of a lady who was in her late 40s, which is relatively young. Yes, I know it seems old to you, most of you. It's relatively young. Her mother was a member of our church, but her husband of the lady who passed was not a Christian.

In fact, for the husband, his wife's death only confirmed there was no God. He said, if God really existed, then why hasn't he done something about all the injustice in the world?

And why didn't he save my wife? There is no God, he said. So at the service, I tried to explain as gently as I could that God has actually done something about injustice and suffering.

[23 : 29] He sent his only son to bring us forgiveness and the certain hope of a new creation where there will be no more suffering. And he will come again to bring about complete justice.

The point of the story is that many people will see injustice in the world as a reason to believe that God does not exist. But when you look at Christ, we can see not only that God exists, but that he cares much more about justice than you or I or any atheist ever would.

For he willingly gave up his only son to not just bring forgiveness, but justice. That's how much God cares about it. And God will send him again to bring complete justice.

Now, the only reason the Bible says that God is waiting is to give more people time to repent. As Peter puts it, I think on the next slide, from 2 Peter chapter 3, he says, The Lord is not slow in to fulfill his promise, as some understand slowness, but he is patient with you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

So what does all this mean for us today? Well, first, it means that it matters whether we fear God or not. Because we're going to be held accountable for it. Or rather, more importantly, it matters whether we trust in Jesus or not.

[24 : 50] For he is the one who purifies us. It's the difference between being purified or punished. The difference between Jesus taking our punishment when he came the first time, or us taking our own punishment when he comes the second time.

In other words, it's the difference between heaven and hell. So the first question I need to ask is, Do you believe in Jesus? Do you trust in him and his death for you?

And for us who do, then, when we experience or see injustice in the world, we are to do four things. First, cry out to God, pray, lament, even question God, but make sure our questioning doesn't turn to accusing.

I pointed this out earlier. Second, we are to look back to the cross where God the Son came, not only to purify us, but also to demonstrate God's desire for justice.

We are to look back and see that God cares more about justice than we do. I mean, do you not think that if God could have forgiven us without giving up his only son, he would have done so?

[25 : 57] But because God cares more about justice than we do, then Jesus had to die so that we could be forgiven and justice upheld.

Third, we are to look forward to the day when Jesus will come again a second time to bring people to justice and put all things right. We are to trust it will come and even pray for it.

And fourth, until that day comes, we are to make use of God's patience by sharing the message of the new covenant, the gospel, with others.

I like the Levite priests. We Christians are a royal priesthood who are to teach others so that we, with all of Jerusalem and Judah and the ends of the earth, might offer ourselves as a living sacrifice acceptable to God.

Well, last Sunday during our mission for a minute, we heard about the pastor in Sudan who was killed.

[26 : 57] Sandra was telling us about that, if you remember. His name was Stephen Abua. What we didn't hear was how these Muslim extremists made him watch them kill his two daughters, Rachel and Priscilla, and then his wife, Beatrice.

And not just kill, but cut into pieces, all while a young boy working for them hid in the ceiling above, listening to their screams. And as far as I know, their murderers are still roaming free.

Now, when we hear of such injustice, what are we to do? Cry out to God. Lament. Pray.

How long? Until you send Christ to return. But we're not to accuse God of injustice or absence, for God cares about it more than we do.

Indeed, we had to look back at the cross and see just how much God cares about justice. And we had to look forward to Christ's second coming, where he will hold these murderers to account.

[28 : 03] And in the meantime, we had to pray that God will use such injustice to bring many more people to repentance and faith. In fact, that's what God did, didn't he?

We heard about it last Sunday. We heard how, as a direct result of this injustice, God brought 468 Sudanese to faith in Christ, and they were baptized on Good Friday.

Where is the God of justice? He has come in Christ, and he will come again. And in the meantime, he is working through injustice to bring more people to faith.

So do question, but don't accuse. Trust and pray. Look to Christ's first coming, and look forward to his second, when God will put all things right.

And in the meantime, proclaim the gospel. That's the only reason God delays. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you that your word speaks into real life and real situations in the world.

[29 : 13] It raises real questions and gives us real answers. And so, Father, we pray that when we see injustice, you would help us to do these things that we see from Malachi, and that Christ fulfills.

Help us to look back to the cross. Help us to look forward to Christ's second return. And in the meantime, help us to keep trusting, praying, and proclaiming your gospel.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.