

Where is the God of Justice?

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 November 2015

Preacher: Andrew Price

- [0 : 0 0] Well, children have an acute sense of justice, don't they? I saw a picture with a caption underneath that it said, it's not fair.
- I'll show you the picture on the next slide. So one's screaming, one's smiling. I missed the caption, actually. There was a caption underneath that said, it's not fair. Now, I have no idea what was going on in that picture, but I do know last Friday night, it was our family pizza night.
- We make homemade pizzas on Friday nights, and the children have dessert as well. And last Friday, they even got choc ice. Do you know what choc ice is? It's that chocolate sauce kind of thing that you put on ice cream.
- It goes hard like chocolate. It's highly prized, let me tell you. And as soon as we gave out the desserts, they immediately compared. And then came, it's not fair.
- He's got more than me or she's got more than me. They wanted what was fair, you see. They wanted justice. Actually, what they really wanted was to have more than the other person. But if they couldn't have that, at least they wanted justice.
- [1 : 0 2] It's not just children who have this sense of justice. It's adults as well, is it not? I mean, if someone pushes in the queue at the shops, we're indignant. Someone cuts us off on the road, we're furious.
- Because it's not fair. It's not just. Indeed, when we look at the news and hear of the bombings in Beirut, the attacks in Paris, the Russian flight that went down last month, we cry out for justice, do we not?
- We want people to pay for their crimes, for their sins. And if they don't, then it can easily lead us to question God and ask, where is the God of justice?
- In fact, for many atheists, suffering and injustice are the very reasons they don't believe in God. They say, how can a good God exist if there is such suffering and injustice in the world? Where is your God of justice?
- And as we come to Malachi today, this is the question that people are asking. So we're at point one and chapter two, verse 17. Malachi says, you have wearied the Lord with your words.
- [2 : 1 5] And the people say, how have we wearied him? By saying, all who do evil are good in the eyes of the Lord. And he is pleased with them. Or similarly, where is the God of justice?
- Now, we can understand why they might be asking this. Remember, they've returned from exile. Life is hard. They're still under foreign rule. And so they often suffer while those who are evil around them prosper.
- In fact, it is such an issue for them that it comes up again over the page in chapter three, verse 15. He says, but now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly, evil does prosper.
- And even when they put God to the test, they get away with it. These are the kinds of things they are saying and experiencing. There's injustice.

And so when they look around and see it, it feels like God is gone. They say, where is our God of justice? Now, at one level, it is right to cry out to God and to pray for justice, to lament and even ask God, why is this happening?

[3 : 21] How long will it be like this for? But the problem with their questioning is that it has turned into constant complaining. And contempt towards God.

And so they no longer really try and serve God. Do you remember two weeks ago, the priests and the people were offering leftover sacrifices? Whatever was lying around instead of giving God their best.

And then last week, we saw that they were being unfaithful to each other and to God. It seems as though they've just stopped caring. They're just going through the religious motions in an empty manner, as though God is not worth working for, trying to serve.

They showed contempt. But their questioning of God has also turned into, well, cynical accusations against God, which question his very existence.

They say, where is this God of justice? Does he even exist anymore? And all this, even though God has proven himself faithful so many times before.

[4 : 24] Now, if you've ever had to deal with people who are cynical and constantly complaining that nothing is ever good, then you know how wearisome it can be. Some people say it's called having teenagers.

I'm not there yet, so I don't know. But these were adults who should have known better. And so God is weary of them, which says a lot considering how patient God is, doesn't it?

In fact, a weary God means to grieve him, to effectively sin against him. And yet he still graciously answers them. Chapter 3, verse 1. He says, literally, It's as though God says, you want to know where I am?

Well, guess what? I'm coming. And then you'll know where I am. And in case they're not sure when God will come, well, he's first going to send a messenger who will prepare God's way.

As they did, you know, in the ancient times, preparing the way for the kings. Or kind of like the Secret Service does in our times, you know, preparing the way for the president. And then God himself will arrive at his temple, the place he dwelt in and ruled from.

[5 : 50] And with God will come another messenger, the messenger of the covenant, the new covenant, I take it. That the prophets spoke about. But do you notice that God will come suddenly, it says?

Even though a messenger prepares his way, it will still be a bit of a surprise. And what's more, in the Old Testament, the word sudden is often associated with judgment.

And so the first readers would have understood God's answer here to be one where God himself will come and judge. He will bring justice. And this would have been great news initially.

They would have thought the nations are finally going to get what's coming to them. And we're finally going to be back on top of the world again. Yes. But God is not finished speaking.

And what comes next would have been, well, unexpected. An unexpected type of judgment. Point two, verse two. Here Malachi actually speaks first. And he says, but who can endure the day of his coming?

[6 : 52] Who can stand when God appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire and a laundry soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver.

He will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. And 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 days gone by, as in former years.

And then he says in verse five, literally, then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the foreigner.

And those who do not fear me, says the Lord almighty. Here God says he will come and bring justice by judging people for their crimes.

But the thing is, it's going to include you, says God. I will draw near to you Israelites for judgment. Now, I'm pretty sure that's not what they were expecting to hear.

[8 : 06] I remember when I was younger, locking my brother outside the house, which he was not impressed about. It's a terrible thing to do. It's where my children get it from.

And my brother was so annoyed that he actually, he grabbed a hammer from the garage workbench and bashed the door with it. Needless to say, he put a hole in the door. Now, when I saw that, I thought, oh, here's my chance for justice.

Look at what he's done. And so I cried out to my parents and said, look, come and bring justice. And they did. And I got in trouble too. I didn't expect to, but that's what happens with justice.

You see, we're big fans of justice as long as it applies to the other person and not to me. Yet if we are honest, we're all guilty of something. We all deserve to be judged.

So God says, you want justice? Sure. But that's going to include you because you are just as bad. In fact, they are worse because they knew better. Yet they showed contempt for God by offering dodgy sacrifices, as we saw two weeks ago.

[9 : 11] They were unfaithful to each other and to God, as we saw last week. And so in verse two, when Malachi says, who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? We immediately think, well, crikey, no one.

In fact, no one should be able to stand since everyone is guilty, deserves punishment. That's justice. And yet there's another unexpected thing that happens.

Instead of punishing them, God actually comes and purifies them so that, in fact, some people will be able to stand.

Now, that's what verses two to four go on to say. God will act like a refiner's fire, which separates the dross or the impurities from the silver metal. Or he will act like a laundry soap, which separates the dirt from the clothes.

God is going to separate people from their sins punishment and purify them, cleanse them, forgive them. And make them righteous in his sight. This is the new covenant in action, you see, where God will forgive their sins and remember them no more.

[10 : 19] This is how they can enter God's coming kingdom that Jesus announced. And this is how they'll be able to stand when God comes in judgment. For he will purify them. Now, verse three specifically mentions the Levites who were the priests.

But then verse four talks about Judah and Jerusalem, who are the people. And so the idea here is that the Levite priests will be purified by God and they, in turn, will teach the people how God can make them pure, forgive them.

And so then all of Judah and Jerusalem will bring acceptable offerings. And so while the unexpected thing about God's judgment is that it will be for all people, you know, including them.

The other unexpected thing is that when it begins, it begins not with punishment, but with God making them pure. With God enabling them to stand. Now, there is a problem here.

For the God of justice to purify and forgive them, someone has to pay for their crimes. And someone has to pay for their sins. You see, justice demands a punishment.

[11 : 26] I mean, if you can you imagine a judge today just saying to criminals, I forgive you. That's all right. You can just go. Can you imagine a law court saying to an ISIS terrorist?

Oh, you've bombed people. That's all right. We'll forgive you. Just off you go. Now, we would scream out for justice. We would not. Justice demands someone pays for sin.

And so for the God of justice to come and then purify these people, then he must also somehow pay for their sin. So that justice is still served.

Of course, Malachi doesn't tell us how, but we know how, don't we? He's called Jesus. But before we get to Jesus, it's also worth noticing here how God is not willing to give up on his people.

He loves them too much. Humanity is too important to him. And so even though he must judge them, he begins by purifying them rather than punishing them.

[12 : 27] Yet it seems this will only be for those who fear him. For as verse five says, which is on the screen there still, those who do all these things, it's summarized by that last phrase.

All those people are summarized by the fact that they do not fear God. And for those who do not fear God, then God will draw near to them in judgment. He will be against.

Notice how many times the word against comes up there. That is, he will punish them. Those who do not fear him. These are the ones who will be punished and not purified.

Whereas those who do fear him, well, God will purify. Well, the people asked, where is the God of justice? Malachi answered, he's on his way.

He's on his way to judge right behind his messenger. But it's going to include you as well. Yet he will come with an offer to purify first. Then he will draw near to punish.

[13 : 27] But either way, there will be justice. The question for us then is, well, when will God come? I mean, we see injustice in the world, don't we? We just have to turn on the news.

Well, the answer is, he has already come in the person of Jesus. We heard this from our second reading. And remember Mark quotes from Malachi chapter three, verse one.

He actually says Isaiah, which is the next part of the quote. That's because Isaiah is a major prophet and Malachi is only a minor prophet. But he actually quotes from Malachi chapter three, verse one and says, see, I will send my messenger who will prepare the way before me.

And in Mark chapter one, who is that messenger? It's John the Baptist. He comes. And who is it that comes after John the Baptist? Who is it? Jesus.

Yeah, I've got one person. I'm just trying to make sure you're all with me still. Yeah. Give you a hint. It starts with J, ends in Jesus. Jesus. Yeah. And so if Jesus comes after John the messenger, what does that make Jesus?

[14 : 36] God, the Lord. And in fact, in Mark chapter 11, when Jesus enters Jerusalem as the humble king riding on the donkey, where does he go? Straight to the temple. He is the Lord who Malachi prophesied would come.

Yet he's also the messenger of the new covenant. For he is the one who announced in Mark chapter one that the kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news. He's the one whose blood of the new covenant brings forgiveness.

So when he came that first time, he came to purify those who fear God and believe in him. On the next slide is a verse from Titus chapter two.

It is our great God and savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself. A people that are his very own eager to do what is good.

With the focus on Paris in the media. We seem to have forgotten about the bombings in Beirut, which happened just the day before Paris.

[15 : 43] And so you may not have heard of Adul Thamos. There's a picture of him on the next slide. He was with his daughter on that day in Beirut. Adul Thamos. When he saw one of the suicide bombers preparing to detonate his vest and run into the crowd or running to the crowd and then detonate the vest.

And so Adul ran and tackled the bomber before the bomber could reach the crowd. The vest still went off. And Adul took the brunt of the blast and kept it away from the crowd, saving many lives, including his daughters.

Adul's just under two weeks ago. Adul saved dozens of people from what they did not deserve. But Jesus has saved billions of people from what we all deserve.

For he took the full force of our punishment so that we might be saved from it and instead be purified, forgiven, made righteous in God's sight.

This is what Jesus did at the cross when he first came that first time. But it's at the cross we also see God's justice. For our sins are still paid for, you see.

[16 : 53] The punishment our crimes deserve is still taken. Justice is still served. On the next slide is what Paul says in Romans 3. It says God presented Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in his blood.

And he did this to demonstrate his justice. Justice. You see, at the cross we see both the mercy of God where he forgives us, but also the justice of God where sin is still paid for.

This is what God the son achieved when he came to earth the first time. And yet he has not drawn near in judgment to punish all who do not fear God yet.

There is still injustice in the world, isn't there? Isn't there? And so Jesus will come again for judgment and punish those who do not fear God or believe in him. So we read in two Thessalonians.

The next slide. 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.

[17 : 58] He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And they will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes.

You see, Jesus will come again and then there will be complete justice. The world will be put right. So what Malachi describes as one coming of God, Jesus fulfills in two comings.

First, first to purify his people by his blood at the cross. Then a second coming to punish those who refuse to believe. This is how Malachi 3 is fulfilled in Christ.

But the question is, why split the one event in Malachi to two events in Christ? Well, the answer is so that more people will be given a chance to be forgiven, to be purified before Jesus draws near to judge.

And so Peter puts it like this on the next slide. He says, The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise to return and judge. Rather, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

[19 : 17] That's why the one event is split into two. Well, what does all this mean for us? Well, firstly, it means that it matters whether we fear God or not. Whether we take God seriously by believing in Jesus or not.

For it's the difference between being purified or punished for our sins. It's the difference between Jesus taking our punishment in our place when he first came or us taking the punishment when he comes again.

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

It matters your answer to that question. For us who do then, Malachi reminds us what we are to do when we see injustice in the world or when we suffer it ourselves.

There are four things on your outline. And first, we are to lament and cry to God, even question God. Yes, but we are to make sure our questioning does not become contempt. Or cynical accusations like it did for the people of Israel.

[20 : 29] Dietrich Bonhoeffer knew injustice, as you know. He witnessed gross injustice perpetrated by the Nazis. And then he experienced it firsthand when he was arrested and in prison just after he got engaged.

And then later executed. And yet he said that his questioning of God never led him to show contempt towards God. Nor cynical accusations against God.

Rather, this is what he said on the next slide. I think the quote, I think I'd say, yep. You have granted me many blessings. Let me also accept what is hard from your hand.

It's pretty amazing, isn't it? It's the first thing we had to do. Question, but not show contempt. The second thing we had to do is we had to look back to the cross where God the Son came the first time to die.

Not only so that we could be purified, but so that justice could be upheld as well. That is where to look back to the cross and see that God cares more about justice than we do.

[21 : 32] Such that he gave his only son to uphold justice while he forgives us. I mean, here's the thing. Do you not think that if God could just forgive us without having to give up his only son, that he would have done that?

Of course he would have done that. But because God also cares about maintaining justice more than we do. Then Jesus had to die. As we are forgiven so that justice was also upheld.

And this is the thing that the atheist does not understand. I mean, we can give all sorts of reasons for God. But the one I give is that God cares more about injustice than you do, Mr. Atheist or Mrs. Atheist.

For it cost him his only son to uphold justice while forgiving us. That's how much God cares about it. And so when we see injustice, we're to look back and remember that God cares.

And the third thing we are to do, though, is to look forward to the day when Jesus will come a second time and put all things right. Bring all people to justice. We are to trust it will happen.

[22 : 44] Even pray for it. And fourth and finally, until that day comes, we are to be the people whom Jesus purified us to be. People who are eager to do good and seek justice ourselves.

Including also telling others about the forgiveness we have in him. Do you remember the Levite priests were the ones that God initially purified?

So that they in turn could tell others and all of Jerusalem and Judea would bring acceptable offerings to God. Do you remember that? Well, in the New Testament, we are that priesthood who are to tell others.

So that people not just in Jerusalem and Judea, but to the ends of the earth might offer God what he deserves. Our lives as a living sacrifice. For this is why God delays Jesus' return.

That more people might have time to turn to Christ. Be purified and have the hope of heaven we do. I was reading an article this week by an elderly Christian man called Mike Evans.

[23 : 46] Who has 17 grandchildren, which I thought was pretty impressive. Anyone else got 17? More than 17? No, you're not going to tell me. But he had worked in Paris for most of his life.

And after last week's attacks, this is what he said, it's on the screen. Many Muslims cannot identify with the outrageous acts committed in the name of Islam. And this has been God's sovereign means of drawing hundreds of thousands of them to faith in Jesus Christ.

See, questions about evil abound in the face of unimaginable and unjust violence. And so now is the time to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ as never before.

Rather than lamenting at just lamenting at injustice, he does that as well. He recognizes that there's also an opportunity to do what God wants us to do in this time between Jesus' first coming and second time.

And that is to proclaim the gospel of Christ. That more people might receive pardon for sin and hope of heaven. So where is the God of justice?

[24 : 52] Well, look back to the first coming of Christ and his cross and see God's justice there. Look forward to the second coming where he will call all to account. And in the meantime, question without contempt.

Pray for his return and proclaim the gospel that more might be made pure and find hope. For this is the only reason God delays. Let's pray.

Our gracious heavenly father, we do mourn at the injustice we see in the world. Lord, we are still shocked by what happens like in Beirut and Paris.

But Father, we thank you that you are a God of justice. We thank you that you do care about justice. And we see that in the cross of your son. Him you gave not only to purify us from our sins, but to uphold justice.

Father, we pray that you might send your son to return soon. That this world might be put right and there might be justice for all. But until that day, Father, help us to be that people you purified us to be.

[26 : 06] People who are eager to do what is good. And eager to share Jesus with others. That more might come to know Christ and be saved. We ask all these things in his name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.