

Ancient Truths for Modern Times – Justice WILL be Served

Malachi 2:17-3:7

Situations like this, temptation is to minimize the Word of God – we’re not doing that
Been good to take a break from Mal, but I’m eager to get back to it – hope you are too
If you remember . . .

Learned about God’s unconditional love for us; Warned about half-hearted worship
Rebuked for poor leadership; Discovered God’s intent for marriage and divorce
Brings us to the passage at hand – Does it really matter?

Does God’s love, living right, leading right, and worshipping right really matter?
Does any of that really make any difference?

Or do the wicked prosper without any thought of God or fear of reprisal?

Situation in Mal’s day is like the story line of an old western

Rowdy’s rule the town/ravage the countryside – lye, steal, and cheat unchecked
Deputy is either non-existent, lives in fear, or is one of them

Townpeople wonder if there’s any justice

Think nobody cares; Or can’t do anything about it if they do

Despair of any relief; Conclude: that’s just the way it is

Until the sheriff rides into town; Deputizes every man who can walk

Promises the townspeople that justice *will* be served

Eventually a showdown at the OK Corral – good guys win, the bad guys lose –
everybody lives happily ever after

While the setting here in Mal 3 is not a dusty town in the western United States . . .

Nor is it make believe . . .

The principle is the same – the wicked will not prosper and get away with their sinful
deeds forever

Justice *will* be served

That’s part of the ancient truth for modern times that we find in this passage . . .

Ancient Truth #8 – God does not change – Justice WILL be served (2:17; 3:6)

Apparently, some people were so *bitter* that the wicked were prospering, that they started
calling them good, and saying that God actually delights in their wickedness

Everyone who does evil is good . . . (17)

Others were so *cynical* due to the prosperity of the wicked . . .

They questioned whether God cares enough to respond, or even exists –

Where is the God of justice? (17)

Have you had thoughts like that?

Are there people you know who have the scruples of a villain and the money of a
millionaire – and you wonder if God knows or cares?

Or how about . . .

When terrorists strike – Are you prone to ask, “Where are you God?”

When abortionists prosper – Do you think, “Is God ever going to do something?”

When someone falsely accuses you, or sues you, and prospers at your expense – Do you
wonder where the justice is in all that?

Let’s face it – sometimes it looks like there’s no difference between . . .

Those who strive to live holy lives, and those who could care less

Those who follow God and those who don’t

And we are prone to ask, *Where is the God of justice? (17)*

God responds to those questions in this passage with the reassurance that in fact he does
know, he does care, and justice WILL be served because he has not changed

I the LORD do not change (6)

He is still a holy and just God who cannot, nor will not, turn a blind eye to sin

Nor will he backtrack on his promises to those who love and fear him

Evil and sin *will* be dealt with – now, or in the future, or both

We don’t need to weary him with our doubts, or provoke him with our accusations of
indifference

Justice WILL be served because God does not change

When justice is served . . . Christ himself will do it (1)

Jesus will be the judge who carries out the justice that will be served

The one who will punish the wicked, and purify the righteous

God lays out for us in v1 how this will come about

My messenger will prepare the way before me (1)

Says the same thing in 4:5 – *I will send you Elijah the prophet before the . . .*

Both refer to John the Baptist – Read Mt 11:7, 10, 13-14

Now, don’t miss the *me* of v1 – God refers to the coming one as himself . . .

But then distinguishes between himself and the one who is coming with 2 statements:

The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple

God is referring to someone distinct from himself because he uses the *title* Lord to
refer to the coming one, instead of the *name* LORD that translates his proper
name of YHWH that he usually uses to refer to himself

The messenger of the covenant . . . he is coming says the LORD of hosts – the one
who will deliver on the promise that I, God, have made to save and preserve you –
he is coming

Putting all that together, God is referring to the one who is coming *as* God, yet distinct
from himself in person, and . . .

Preceded by one who would prepare the way for him – a.k.a. John the Baptist

It’s another OT glimpse into what we know full well today – that Jesus wasn’t just God’s
human agent of change . . .

But he was God himself, God in the flesh

When justice is served, Christ himself will do it, and it will be . . .

When justice is served . . . It will be overwhelming and unavoidable (2)

You delight in him and look forward to his coming, but have no idea what you hope for
Cause *who can endure the day of his coming and who can stand when he appears? (2)*

Awesome time for some; Terrible time for others, that no one can resist or escape

For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap (2)

Just like metal can’t avoid the purifying influence of a refiner’s fire

And clothing can’t avoid the cleansing influence of fuller’s soap

So we can’t avoid the overwhelming influence of God’s justice brought to bear on our
lives through the power and presence of Jesus

That influence is felt now, *spiritually*, causing many, but not all to surrender their lives

But when he comes again, it will be felt *physically*, causing *all* to surrender to him
Ph 2:9-11 – Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess
That’s overwhelming and unavoidable

And it’s made even more explicit in 2 Pet 3:1-13
People will say, “Where’s the promise of Christ’s coming? Nothing has changed!”
Rest assured, the heavens and earth are stored up for fire until the day of judgment
You better live holy lives ahead of it as you wait for the new heavens and new earth

When justice is served it will be overwhelming and unavoidable, but it’s not all bad news,
because . . .

When justice is served . . . The righteous will be saved (v3-4, 6)

The righteous are the people of God, and the people of God are those who fear him, trust
him, and obey his Word
They referred to as . . .
The *sons of Levi* (3) – representative of those who fear him; and . . .
Judah and Jerusalem (4) - personified
The *children of Jacob* (6)
God’s people by virtue of their faith and trust in his word

God is saying, when justice is served, you, my people, my righteous ones – are *not*
consumed (6)
Instead, you are *saved* by the refining/purifying work of this coming One

That process is going on now – v3
He [Christ] will sit as [like] a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the . . .
He will save us by purifying and cleansing us
And we will act like it
They [righteous ones] will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD (3)

If you are a child of God by virtue of your faith in Christ . . .
You will respond to Christ’s refining work of righteousness in your life by offering
yourself as a living sacrifice (Rom 12:1-2) *that is pleasing to the Lord*, just like those
who have gone before you *in days of old* (4)
And that refining work of righteousness will be *completed* when Jesus comes again to
bring final and complete justice to bear
When justice is served, now and later, the righteous are saved

That’s the good news; The bad news is that . . .
When justice is served . . . The wicked will be punished (5)
Judgment – punishment, retribution
Swift witness – When the time comes, God won’t belabor the point
No more evidence will be needed – He will already know your deeds and heart

Gives an abbreviated list of the wicked –
Sorcerers – those who indulge in witchcraft, the demonic, satanic things
Oppress – treat unfairly, keep the less fortunate under their thumb
Thrust aside . . . – ignore the needs of the homeless, displaced, disadvantaged
Do not fear me – don’t acknowledge God for who he is; or worship him as Lord
The all-inclusive characteristic of all those whom God will judge and punish

This verse doesn’t indicate the punishment, but if it’s in this life, we know that it’s
difficult and painful at best – intending to turn us from our sin
And if the punishment is on the other side of Christ’s return, Scripture is very clear in . . .
2 Thess 1:7-10 – *When the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in*
flaming fire, [he will inflict] vengeance on those who do not know God and on those
who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of
eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his
might.

When justice is served, the wicked will be punished – the key is that . . .

When justice is served . . . Repentance makes all the difference (7)

7 – *From the days of your fathers . . .* – you’ve been disobedient; turned your back on me
7b – *Return to me and I will return to you* – the implication is that if you don’t return to
me (repent of your sins), you’re going to be on the wrong side of the justice that WILL
be served

That’s why repentance makes all the difference –
It’s the main distinguishing feature between the righteous and the wicked
It determines whether you will enter into the joy of God’s salvation when Christ returns,
or the suffering of his punishment

Repentance means . . .
To turn from your own self-sufficient and sinful way of living . . .
To relying on God and his righteous way of living

Repentance involves . . .
Confession – Asking God to forgive you of your sin
Change – Stopping the indulgences, the rebellion, the disobedience
Pursuit – Running to Jesus and establishing or renewing a personal relationship w/ him
Trust – Trusting him to save you from the consequences of your sins, to a guilt-free
life of peace, joy, and purpose
Commitment – Following Jesus your whole life by living according to his word

Take that first step of humility and confess your sin to God
He will help you change your desires
He will meet you at your first step toward him
He will strengthen your commitment to follow him all the days of your life

Your repentance or lack thereof determines whether the justice that *will* be served, results
in your salvation, or your punishment

Pray – Lead them in a prayer of salvation; Ask for hands