

Written Copy: "It's Not Fair...Yet" Malachi 3:13-18

Proper 29-Last Sunday of the Church Year

November 23rd, 2019

Text: Malachi 3:5, 16-18

⁵ "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 sojourner, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.

¹⁶ Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the LORD and esteemed his name. ¹⁷ "They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. ¹⁸ Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.

Exegetical Statement

God's people who He graciously forgave and redeemed from exile in Babylon have returned home. They have rebuilt the temple and the walls surrounding Jerusalem. The LORD had promised that He would one day restore Jerusalem to its former glory and that He would return as a visible real presence to His temple. Neither of these things have been fulfilled yet. God's presence in the Holy of Holies is still absent and the Jewish nation is nothing more than a back-water province of the Persian Empire. God's people become disillusioned. Corruption takes root among the officials and leaders. Intermarriage with the idol worshiping nations begins endangering the same apostasy that drove God to send them into exile in the first place. Even among the priests and religious teachers there lacks serious worship of God as they and the people just go through the motions. They accuse God of being unfair in His dealings with them, allowing and prospering evil and not rewarding and encouraging good. They accuse God of not being fair. Through the prophet Malachi the LORD tells them He will return to His temple one day and HE will establish true justice and righteousness. But who will be able to stand before Him as just and righteous since all people have sinned? He will work to purify His people and cleanse them of their sinful impurities as gold and silver are refined in fire and wash them clean as a launderer uses a cleansing soap on dirty clothes. He will do these things out of mercy because He has promised to be gracious to His people even though they have not remained faithful. Although they change, He does not change. He calls them to return to a life of holy living where they obey His statutes and show their obedient love in their sacrificial gifts to Him in worship. If they do this, He will bring blessing upon their land and crops that He had cursed because of their disobedience. Other nations will see this and call them blessed. The LORD then points to their accusations that it is not worth serving Him because those who obey and serve Him in humble obedience have no gain to show for it while disobedient evildoers prosper. The LORD points to the final judgment day to come when the difference between the righteous and the wicked will be made plain. Those called to be His treasured possession will be spared. But all the wicked will suffer the punishment and wrath their works have earned for them

Focus Statement:

God sent His Son to earth to do what was not fair. Jesus deserved to live forever without suffering. But instead the Father unfairly made Him to suffer for my sins so that I would not receive what I am due for my sin, but instead receive the grace and mercy Jesus won for me. I do not receive what I justly deserve but instead what Christ has earned for me and given to me as the free gift of grace

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

Our kids complain that life is not fair. We see the unfairness in our lives as well as the unfair blessing in the lives of unbelievers and can begin to doubt God's promise of goodness, grace, and mercy.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Hold fast by faith in this world of unfairness to God's promise that vengeance is His and He will repay on the Last Day. Instead of calling for God to be fair to evildoers we pray that He would move them to repent before the suffer His just wrath forever in the eternal lake of fire.

Subject Sentence: God was unfair to Jesus so He could be unfair to us

It's not fair! How many times have you heard that uttered by one of your children or grandchildren concerning some decision you've made? I remember when we let our oldest daughter have a TV in her room because we had an extra one that we weren't using. The response from the other two was: "It's not fair that she gets to have one and I don't!" What they were saying is that in all fairness everyone should get to have a TV in their bedroom or no one should. But in actuality either one would've been fine with them having the TV even if it meant the other two didn't. And they each could have come up with reasons why it should be them.

Have you ever tried to explain to kid's why things don't always seem fair? I remember when we had to buy one of them some shoes for gym class because they had outgrown the ones they'd been wearing. Now the other two had shoes for church, for school, and for gym that fit. And the budget being tight we could only spend on what was needed. But the cry from the other two was that Mom and I "Were not being fair! How come she gets brand new shoes and I don't?" And when we explained the need factor at least one them devised a plan to ruin their gym shoes before there time. We stopped those plans and the final explanation given to them from there on out, whenever the charge of "That's not fair" surfaced was "Life's not fair! Deal with it!" This was a true statement. But totally unsatisfactory for them. And in reality, it's usually unsatisfactory for us too.

As adults we see the unfairness around us when we see those who have less education than we do, didn't have to work as hard as we did, yet have better homes, cars, and more money than we do. They may have been given chances and opportunities that were not afforded to us because of our race, sex, or the social strata we were born into. What should be our response to this fact of life? Luther states in his explanation of the 9th and 10th commandments that we should be happy for them, and work with them so that they keep and improve what they have. Instead, when we complain to ourselves and others about "It's not fair" we actually encourage envy and jealousy to grow in our heart. We end up breaking those commandments. All in the name of it's not fair. And since we as Christians confess that everything we have is from God, how long before our chant of "Life's not fair" switches to "God's not fair"? Perhaps it already has during times when your morning the

loss of something or someone. Or when you've tried to live a healthy life and yet a severe illness is allowed to befall you. You begin to think "Why is God doing this? What have I done to deserve this? This is not fair! God is not being fair!"

This is exactly what the people of Malachi's day were accusing God of. They were the descendants of those who had returned from exile in Babylon. They had joyously travelled toward home until they reached the city and saw the reality of things. A city in devastation and ruin. What had been Solomon's beautiful temple now destroyed. Ezra the Priest and Nehemiah the governor encouraged them to get to work: that the LORD would be with them, would protect them and help them. And the prophets had foretold of one day in the future when the LORD would return and dwell in His temple again as He did in the Tabernacle of Moses days and the Temple built by King Solomon. They also foretold that there would come a day when the LORD would rebuild Israel to be a mighty kingdom again and a King in the line of David would sit on a throne that would last forever. It had been 100 years since the exile and all they had was a temple that was a far cry from Solomon's. And they were still a backwater province of the mighty Persian Empire, a far cry from the nation they'd once been. The people had lost hope. They didn't see any reason to remain faithful to a God who allow such injustice to remain upon them. People were intermarrying with the unbelieving nations that surrounded them. The priests and teachers of God's Law were half-hearted in their work. Bribery and corruption abounded. Those who did such things prospered while those who obeyed the Law suffered.

God had heard what they were saying. And he confronted them with it in **Malachi 2:17** **"You have wearied the LORD with your words. But you say, "How have we wearied him?" By saying, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delights in them." Or by asking, "Where is the God of justice?"** God still loved His people but would not tolerate their faithless complaining or actions. He called them out on what they'd been thinking to themselves and saying to one another. (**Malachi 3:13-15**) ¹³ **"Your words have been hard against me, says the LORD. But you say, 'How have we spoken against you?' ¹⁴ You have said, 'It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the LORD of hosts? ¹⁵ And**

now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape." They reason: why should we bother to obey His commandments or repent of our sins when those who do not fair better than we do. Why should we follow the rules when it only leaves us worse off? Where is the God of justice? Sounds a bit like us at times doesn't it?

Where is He. He is right here, still reigning over all things even when it appears as if He isn't. He is here keeping the earth spinning and the seasons changing and the sun rising and setting. He is the one from which we derive our sense of justice. When He created us and blew the breath of life into our nostrils. He gave to us our sense of right and wrong. As **Jeremiah 31:33** testifies "**But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.**" We have God's laws planted in our hearts. His Law which explains to us sinful fallen people what justice is, what it means to be right with God, what we have to do to be declared obedient. These laws come from Him who is the source of perfection, the source of justice. We demand and seek justice because that desire comes from Him. Without God's Word and commands to explain to us what it means to be right with God we are lost. All we know is what our sinful heart's desire. Yet how arrogant are we to think that we are able to judge God concerning what is just and right and fair?

The LORD hears our cry for justice and fairness and that cry has not gone unheard or unacted upon. He tells us in **Malachi 4:1** "**For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.**" He promises a day yet to come when He will balance the scales of justice, a day when all who live evil and disobedient lives will get what is coming to them. He says in **Malachi 3:5** "**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 sojourner, and do not fear me, says the**

LORD of hosts.” The result will be as he describes in **Malachi 3:18** **“Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.”** No longer will those who are wicked live lives that seem to be blessed. On that Last Day, Judgment Day, all those who lived lives to please themselves in disobedience to the LORD will rise from their graves and be sent to what Scripture refers to as the Eternal Lake of Fire. There they will suffer physically, emotionally, and spiritually for all the ways they dishonored God and hurt His people, the Church. It has been said by those who do not fear Him in our day and age that “I don’t care if I wind up in hell or not. I’d rather party in hell with my friends than be bored to death in heaven.” But who says that they will suffer with their friends? What if eternal hell is suffered in dark loneliness? Or if one suffers together with others, who is to say that the atmosphere will be a party? Eternal Hell is the place where God is not. Even in the worst crime infested drug ridden ghetto God is there at work in His mercy and grace. Imagine a place where God is not, and therefore His love, mercy, and grace are totally absent. And it lasts forever. One cannot even escape the torment in sleep. In this way God’s justice will be served on the Last Day.

But we demand fairness in all things. What kind of an eternal future do you and I deserve? The reality of Scripture in Romans 3:23 states **“for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”** All of us fall short. And if God was to follow our desire that all things be equal than you and I deserve to suffer with the evildoers’ eternal punishment because we are in ourselves no better than they.

But the LORD has promised us a much brighter future. As Malachi 4:2 states **“But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.”** We will be so joyous on Judgment Day that we will run and leap like calves just released from the pen. We will be so not because we have received what we deserve, what is fair. But because we have received what is not fair from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We fear God’s name and worship Him because of Jesus work on our behalf. As Paul writes in **Colossians 1:13-14** **“¹³ He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,¹⁴**

in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” We have been delivered from the domain of darkness that means living in sin now and suffering for sin for eternity. Christ has redeemed us from the kingdom of death and has transferred us into His kingdom: the kingdom of life now with Him and eternal life to come. He has redeemed us, purchased us for the price of redemption that cost Him the death of His body and the shedding of His blood on the cross. Jesus was the only one who could do this for us. **(Colossians 1:19-20) “¹⁹ For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross”** As 100% man He could shed His blood in place of mine and die the death deserve. As the One in whom the fullness of God resides, He could reconcile me and all other men and women to the Father.

Even though I continue to sin His blood continues to cover it and redeem me so that I remain in His kingdom by faith. That faith, which is given not out of fairness or justice but as God’s free gift in the Gospel, that faith keeps me as one who fears and worships His name. The gift of His Spirit through my baptism keeps me as one who desires to live in obedience to those commandments laid upon my heart, even when it means that things are not fair for now.

What Malachi is saying to you and I this day is yes; things are not fair in the world right now. God knows that. He allows injustice and unfairness not because He doesn’t care about us or because He doesn’t love us. He loves and cares for us very deeply. God let’s injustice and unfairness exists because He desires to be gracious and merciful to all people, even those committed to doing evil, who abuse the system to their own advantage. He wants us the Church to come along side them and tell them about the judgment to come for those who don’t believe as well as the eternal paradise for those who do. The unfairness and inequality reminds us that this world is sinful, and broken, and one day will be gone. It will burn up. Christ when He returns will remake creation from the ashes to be just as beautiful and perfect as it was in the 7th day of Creation. And it will be even better since you and I will be there. Until then we must put up with Life not being fair. Knowing that by His grace and mercy God is being more than fair with us. And He is protecting us for a time and a

world where all unfairness, all inequality, all injustice, and all evil are gone forever. He holds on to us by faith so that when we draw our final breath He will whisper in our ear as He did to the thief on the cross, giving to him not the future He deserved, not what was fair, but what is His gracious gift for that thief as well as for you and for me: "Today, you will be with me in Paradise" May that sure and certain promise to you hold your heart and your mind steadfast by faith to Christ Jesus. Amen