

God's Crucible

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[0 : 0 0] Malachi chapter 3 and verse 3 of this chapter, And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

And he shall sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver, and purify the sons of Levi and Pertham as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

Now the first verses of this chapter, the first words indeed, seem to be a direct answer to the profane atheistic demand that was made, where is the deity or the God of judgment?

That was the question profanely asked by the enemies of the Lord. And now the answer is given, here he is, the Messiah, the messenger of God, the vindicator of God's cause, the judge of all the world.

As our Lord himself said, for judgment have I come into this world. Here is God's messenger, the Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in, the soul ye shall come, says the Lord of hosts, but who may abide the day of his coming.

[1 : 5 7] The messenger of the covenant, of the messenger, of the mediator of the covenant, the angel of the covenant of grace.

Who else is this but our Lord Jesus Christ? These are words which refer to him who alone is the messenger of the covenant, who alone is the angel of the covenant, who is indeed the awaited one.

He is the one who is to come. You will remember in the chapter we read this morning, the messengers that were sent to our Lord by John the Baptist, asking, Art thou he, him that should come? And the evidences that our Lord gave, indeed that it was he.

He didn't say or state categorically, yes I am he, but he says, go back and tell John what's happening. The eyes of the blind are being opened, the lame walk, the deaf hear, the dumb speak, the gospel is preached unto the poor.

All evidences of Messiah's reign. And here we have, in this last book of the Old Testament, again, we have this prophetic word concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, the messenger of the covenant.

[3 : 1 4] You'll notice the end of his coming, that who may abide the day of his coming, and who shall stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap.

Who shall cope with this situation when he appears? Who shall stand when he appears? That is the great question.

He is to come. There are no two ways about it. God has said so, and it shall be, and it wants to be so. And you'll notice in verse 3, verse 3, how he will separate the gold from the drop, and he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver.

He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. This is he whose sand is in his hand.

And again now, Lord himself manifested this, did he not? On that occasion when he entered into the temple and overturned the moneychangers' table. And I think perhaps we fail to recognize what really took place there.

[4 : 26] We don't stop to consider the authority Christ manifested on that occasion. Here was a man who was despised generally by the Jews and by the leaders of the people.

And he walked into the temple. And instantaneously, his authority is recognized by those who hitherto had refused to recognize it.

And he scattered them with a word from his mouth. Because on that occasion, he manifested for a moment the authority that was his.

No one questioned his authority to do what he did. And this is what is so wonderful when God speaks to us. When Christ efficaciously works, he impresses upon such as we are the fact that he is the one who has complete authority and that his word is authoritative in all matters.

He shall sit as a refiner, we are told here. And this is how our Lord always was. Today by the gospel, he purifies and reforms his church, his people.

[5 : 47] To this end, he gave himself for the church that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word. Now our Lord's first coming was a testing time.

Indeed, a trying time. A time of trial to the Jews. His ministry tried and shifted their religion and their orthodoxy. And how many of them were suited who indeed may abide the day of his coming when the time of testing came.

The Jews in general were shown in their true life. But who shall abide his second coming? Who shall abide the day of his coming again?

That is a question we ought to ask ourselves, all of us. When this judge shall come to judge the quick and the dead, for now, Lord Jesus Christ, who for a time was made lower than the angels, yet now is crowned with glory and honor, when he comes again, which of us, who of us, will stand?

When he will be revealed from heaven, in flaming fire with his mighty angels, seeking vengeance upon those who know not God and have not obeyed the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and yet on the other hand, to be made perfect in them that believe, on which side will we be?

[7 : 22] Who will stand the day of his coming? Will we be prepared? Today, he invites all to come to be sanctified, to be prepared by the gospel.

Christ loved the church and gave himself for it that he might present it to himself, a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

How does he so prepare his people? how does he so purify such as you and I are?

Well, as we are told here, he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he shall purify the sons of Levi and purge them as gold and silver, that in the offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

And I wish to consider with you this refining or this purification or this sanctification which goes on in the church of Christ in every age as Christ sanctifies his own.

[8 : 48] The doctrine of sanctification is one that is not popular in our days in the church of Christ. Oh yes, we like the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

We rejoice in that. We exult in that. We thank God tonight that we are justified by faith in Jesus Christ alone. We thank God tonight that Christ alone is our righteousness.

That we are perfect in Christ Jesus. And every believer does. that I have a sneaking suspicion that in our day there are many who will be justified but not sanctified.

That is who like to know that they are accepted as righteous in God's sight only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to them but yet do not like the idea of being holy.

When God says be ye holy for I am holy saith the Lord and without holiness no man shall see the Lord. There are many who would like to get to heaven but nothing shall enter that place let us remember that defile us.

[10 : 06] Let us notice then the purpose of his refining. The purpose is that of purification of course. He shall purify the sons of Levi and purge them as gold and silver.

Now you will remember that the tribe of Levi was specifically chosen for the service of the sanctuary.

They were to be the priestly tribe and they were to perform the work of the ministry of the sanctuary. the word of God here tells us that he will purify even them the sons of Levi.

This shows us surely our need of cleansing. When the holiest tribe must be purified under the Old Testament economy is it not true that thereby we learn that all God's people must be purified?

The holiest need cleansing even the Levites need purifying. I wonder how much impurity is in your life and my life.

[11 : 30] I wonder how fit we are to approach the service of God. in our willingness to serve do we consider whether we are prepared to serve?

There is a text there that says prepare to meet thy God O Israel for there is never a moment in the service of God when we ought not to seek to prepare ourselves whether it be in private or in public.

To minister unto the Lord is a solemn duty. It is a joyous duty. It is a privilege. A privilege that is unspeakable but by nature we are not fit for this.

We are not prepared for it. We need to be prepared. We need to be purified. We need to be sanctified as the Levites had to be. And as all God's people in every age must be.

And notice how they are to be purified. They are to be purified as silver and gold are. An outward veneer of purity is not sufficient for God.

[12 : 44] There were none more prepared for God's service in their own estimation and in the estimation of others than the Pharisees. They cleansed the outside of the cup looking at their lives outwardly.

You and I would have considered them to be holy men indeed. But Christ said concerning them they were white and sepulchers.

They were not clean at all. They were unclean. They were unfit for a service. No outward veneer of respectability and holiness will suffice God.

for he searches the heart. He tries us for what we are. He digs deep if you like. He looks into the hidden recesses of your heart and my heart and he sees us for what we are.

We sang together tonight from thy spirit whither shall I go or from thy presence fly. How many of us meant that as we sang it. How many of us felt indeed that we are in the presence of such an omniscient God.

[13 : 53] How many of us feel each day that we are in the presence of this holy God from whom we can hide nothing and yet we live as if we can hide things from him.

We marvel perhaps that we no longer enjoy the blessing of God as once we did. But the servant of God of old knew if he was denied the blessing of God there was good reason why.

Because he said if in my heart I sin regard the Lord will not hear me. He will purify them.

He will do this on his own. As I said no outward veneral suffice. They must go into the fire. They must go through the fire in order to be cleansed.

In order to be purified. In order to be sanctified. In order to be sanctified. it is not the washing of the outside of the cup.

[14 : 57] It is the cleansing of the soul. It is the purging of the inward parts that is essential for our acceptance with God.

The purging of the inward parts. You know how it is with fire. It penetrates right into the metal.

It doesn't just act as acid does on iron. You pour some acid on iron and it will affect the outside.

The surface only. But fire, continuous fire, penetrates right through it. Right to the very center of it.

And this is how God's spirit works. It penetrates right through the soul. And it affects the whole man. The inward man.

[15 : 58] It purifies the being of man. Right into his very being. gold. And you see how it is.

Gold and silver, once they are pure, they are always pure. The gold may be tarnished, the silver may be tarnished, but it's still silver.

Once it's purified, once it's cleansed and purified, it is silver or it is gold. All the dross has been taken away and as I said, it may for a time tarnish, but yet it is still silver, it is still gold.

And so the work wrought by God's spirit will endure forever, throughout eternity, because it is God's work. And because it is God's spirit who has performed this work and recreated this soul and sanctified this soul, it will last forever.

And that is why it is so wonderful that it is God's work. That is why we rejoice tonight in God's work. But how does God refine his people then?

[17 : 16] How does go about this work? Well, we believe first of all and primarily he does this by his word. Our Lord himself prayed thus to God the Father in the days of his flesh he prayed thus, sanctify them through the truth or by the truth.

Thy word is truth. Sanctify them thus, purify them, cleanse them by thy word. My friend, is the word of God precious to you tonight?

Do you turn to this word in your need? Yes, in your sin. And as you're convicted of your sin, do you turn to it? If you do, you're a fortunate man, you're a fortunate woman.

Oh, yes, you see, I do, but when I turn to it, what do I find? The word of God shows me up to be even worse than I thought I was. Well, praise God if it does, because that is part of the work of sanctification.

Is not my word like a fire, says he? Is it not like the hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces? And oh, how hard our hearts would be forever were it not for this word of his, which is as the hammer breaking it, which is as the fire burning right into our very beings, and showing us ourselves for what we are.

[18 : 41] And when it does this, we stop trying to justify ourselves and make ourselves out to be so good. This is what's wrong with us today. This is what's wrong with the world in general today. Of course, they refuse to accept yet they are sinners.

We're as good as the other man. We're better than my neighbour even. Who do things I would never do. Well, fair enough, you leave them alone. What about me? This is what you and I ought to say.

What am I? Am I honest with myself when I say I'm as good as the other man? I'm not, because I know I'm not. What does the man of God say? I say, I remember him. What does he say? He says, woe is me, for I am undone.

I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. But I, first of all, am undone. These people are also undone. We're all undone. We're all sinners, because all have sinned to come short of the glory of God.

But not only is this true of the world, sad to say, in the church in our day, people go about justifying themselves, making themselves out to be so good. And my friends, we must be honest with ourselves, things are not what they ought to be, in the church, in general.

[19 : 46] There is a lot of sin in the church. There is a lot of apostasy in the church. There is declension in the church. There is coldness in the church.

And it is only God, by his word, that can indeed rectify the wrong that is in the church. And it is his prerogative to do it.

By his word, and then again, by his spirit. By his spirit. You will remember what was true of our Lord's ministry, as compared with John the Baptist.

John the Baptist spoke of our Lord as one whose shoes latched he was unworthy to unloose. Why? Because this was the one who was coming, who would baptize, not with water, but with fire.

He would baptize with fire. That is, he would baptize with the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit, with the word, works as fire does, in purifying, in cleansing, in burning away the dross and taking away all that is offensive.

[21 : 06] You will remember at Pentecost what took place. The Holy Spirit came down upon them in clothing tongues of fire. And this is what we need today. The blessing of Almighty God upon his church.

in the person of the Holy Spirit to burn away the dross that is tarnishing the church of God and its witness in the world. Instead of being a shining light, our light is dimmed.

Instead of reflecting the glory of Jesus Christ, her glory is tarnished. Ikebod is written over us. The glory has departed but God is still on the throne and ever blessed be his name for his promise tonight that he will refine, that he will purify, that he will cleanse.

But who shall abide is coming. We pray for revival. How many of us would know what to do in revival? How many of us are ready for revival were it to come?

How many of us would know how to deal with conscience stricken souls among us? If the Holy Spirit descended upon us and there would be this cry for salvation here and there, what would we do?

[22 : 21] My believing friend, would you know how to deal with them? No. Why? Because we have lost our way, because we have lost our place, because we are tarnished, because we are unprepared.

This is why the prayer that was uttered by the man of God was this, revive thy work. In the midst of the years, in the midst of the years, make known, revive thy work, begin with thy people, those upon whom thou have already wrought a work of grace, begin with them, revive them.

And when they are revived, we can look for revival in others. This is, my friends, what God does.

By his word and spirit, he purges believers from their love of sin, and their likeness for sin, rather. And he gives them what? To like the Lord, to love the Lord, his word, his day, his cause, his people, everything that belongs to him.

And our wandering feet will be turned back again into his ways, when he purifies the sons of Levi. How else does he work?

[23 : 29] Well, he works by providence also. He brings heavy trials of different kinds upon his people at times. He brings them into bondage.

We must be salted with fire. Every sacrifice had to be under the Old Testament economy. Well, so it is what God's people must also be. Be it physical sufferings, perhaps, bereavement, depression of spirit, sorrow of soul, all these God at times uses in the sanctification of his people.

But let us remember, affliction of itself is not necessarily sanctified. Affliction can embitter us. It is not itself necessarily used for our sanctification.

It is only so insofar as God uses it to that end. Nowhere in the Bible will you read that affliction of itself sanctified. The Holy Spirit, yes, the Word of God, yes.

And affliction, yes, insofar as the affliction drives us to the Word. I am sure you have met them, I have, who in time of affliction, God's people have become very embittered, complaining against God.

[24 : 43] Just like the children of Israel of old, when they met with difficulties, it wasn't always to their good. It ought to have been, but it wasn't. They complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness.

And God's people in time of affliction at times are sanctified thereby, at times they're not. It's all in the hand of God. And this is how God works.

But let us notice secondly the attitude of the refiner here. Notice his attitude. How does he conduct himself? Well, we notice he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he shall purify the sons of Levi.

silver. This is his attitude. Sitting down. Sitting as if he is indifferent. Ah, my friend, the soul, sinking in pain, in trouble, cries out to God and there is no answer.

Remember the disciples in the boat. Save us, said they, we perish. He was in the boat, but he was sleeping. Indifferent it would seem.

[25 : 58] Unconcerned about the plight. Do you feel like that, my friend? As if God doesn't care. As if God has forgotten you. And after all our crying, despite all our prayers, it seems as if he disregards our prayers.

He just sits. But it must be so. Yes, my friend, it must be so. The metal refiner would not remove the metal from the fire.

Why? Because he wishes to have a pure product in the end. That is why. He sits still. He knows what he is doing as he sits there and watches.

The metal in the fire. And if that metal could speak, what would it be saying? Oh, the fire is hot. It is unbearable. It is going to break me.

But what is happening? That metal is being purified. God knows what is best for us. He knows we must be parched.

[27 : 16] And he knows how to do it. He knows what is best. He sits. And he sits to watch. To watch and he will not go away and leave the crucible for a moment.

Why? Because the content of the crucible is too precious. it is as silver and gold. As precious as that these metals were to the refiner of old.

Do you think that metal refiner with a crucible full of gold would on any account go away and leave it? Oh, no. What's in that crucible is much too precious.

Well, so it is with God. The souls of his people are much too precious to God for him to leave them. I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.

As they pass through the fire they have the promise that he is with them and that it will not take hold upon them. He is watching you in the fire and is sitting down.

[28 : 29] It's not because he forgets, my friend. It is because he remembers and it is because he cares. It is because he has a good purpose. And what is it?

your sanctification. He sits patiently, patiently watching. As if he is saying, I must sit here patiently and wait until I have made something of this.

Until I have made something of this selfish, self-centered, arrogant, complaining sinner. God says, that is me. Yes, and me.

And God says that he will refine, he will purify the sons of Levi. and as he sits and watches, he is not discouraged.

We must never consider Christ discouraged in that respect, because it is his work. And speaking with reverence, he is proud of his work.

[29 : 43] Behold I, or behold me, and the children whom God hath given me, said he. Thine, thy, where, and thou gavest them me. He is proud of his own people.

And as I said, he sits and he is not discouraged. Although there is much in us to discourage him, my friends, again and again, we have failed him, is it not true? Think of the declension in our lives, think of our state and so on, our backslidings, they are many.

But we are returned by him. And he sits there and he watches and he waits. And he sees all these things working together to the good of those who love God, even to the called, according to his purpose.

And that is what we must always keep in mind, his purpose, his glory, in the church. And notice finally the result of this refining.

That they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. How is it possible for a sinner to offer righteous offerings to God?

[31 : 02] Those who are so unrighteous, so unclean, well, God will ensure that we shall. this is the purpose God has, the refinement, the purification of his people, that in the end there will be this offering in righteousness to him, that he may have the preeminence, that we may live, not unto ourselves, but unto him.

Because if left to ourselves, what will happen? You and I will become all the more proud and more arrogant, even with grace, and we will abuse the gifts, the talents, the graces that God has given us.

Or you say, is it possible for a child of God to abuse grace, to abuse talents, to abuse gifts? Remember Paul, lest I be exhausted above measure, I received a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet me.

He knew he had to be humbled, he had to go through the fire, he had to suffer. And what does he say? Oh, he says, rather will I glory in my infirmities.

Why? Because Christ is going to have the glory and offerings, righteous offerings are going to be given to Christ by me on account of this. Christ is going to have the glory, Christ is going to have the preeminence.

[32 : 26] I will decrease, he will increase. What place does Christ have in your life, and my life. Christ will have his proper place in so far as we are holy.

The more holy we are, the more Christ, the greater place he will have in our lives. The more holy we are, the more active shall we be in serving him.

The less holy we are. We may be active, we may be giving offerings, but not righteous ones. You see, at this stage in the history of Israel, there was plenty activity in the church.

They were offering, the burnt offerings, but they were using the lame of the flock in their offerings. They were giving to the Lord what was left over after they had satisfied themselves.

And that was why the cleansing was necessary. One reason why. They were giving the lame of the flock. They were not giving the tithes as they ought to have done.

[33 : 46] Therefore, he says, bring you all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house. that is proper meat.

The law of God commanded that the best, the fatlings of the flock, be given in offerings. And although they went through the ritual of offering unto God, that hadn't ceased. The spirit of it all was lost in them.

They were giving God what was left over at the end of the day. Isn't that through the church in general in all days? God says, as he said to Israel, bring your tithes, bring your proper offerings to me, both offerings of heart, offerings of soul, and service, and of what you have.

And give it to the Lord. Is it not true? Sad to see that so many of us, when we consider what we're going to give to the Lord, what do we do? We'll say, well I need this and I need that and I need the other thing.

How much is left over? I'll give that to the Lord. Well, as Christians, if that's the way we think there's something wrong, that is true as far as our money is concerned, that is true as far as our serving him is concerned, in public, and that is true insofar as our servicing him, serving him in private is concerned, is it not?

[35 : 12] but when this happens, things will be so different. There will be an offering to the Lord in righteousness and of righteousness, a right offering, given by righteous people, righteous in Christ, yes, but also bearing the fruits of righteousness.

They shall cease from their labors and their works shall follow them, the word of God tells us, works of righteousness. But there is a final result, of course, and that is the perfection of the saints.

And that ultimately is what he has in view. That where he is, we may be also. Father, I will that those whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory.

And because of that, I pray you to sanctify them through the truth. Thy word is truth. Because he knew what was essential for they're going to be with him.

And he knows it still. Who then may abide the day of his coming? Who shall stand when he appears? He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver.

[36 : 28] He shall purify the sons of Levi and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. Oh, that we would remember our responsibilities, that we would realize what God requires of you and I is the best.

Give him his proper place. Put him first in everything. And you can rest assured, you will be the richer thereby.

Spiritually, I mean. Perhaps the other way also. But I mean primarily spiritually the better off. oh, why should we waste our time, our substance, our talents on anything pertaining to this life in any case?

Because there's nothing here to satisfy. But in thy presence is fullness of joy. May God bless his word with let us pray.

Oh, eternal God, we beseech thee to bless to us thy word and teach us to remember our accountability to thee. May we not be satisfied with giving thee lip service, having a form of godliness and yet denying the power thereof.

[37 : 48] May we not be satisfied with gathering as we do here twice in a Sabbath and once or twice during the week. But may we, oh God, give our whole lives to thee.

Son, daughter, give me thine heart. Oh, Lord, teach us, we pray thee, by thy spirit, that we may indeed bring our tithes to the storehouse.

For we have the promise that if we so do, thou wilt prove. We can prove thee thus, if thou wilt not open the windows of heaven, pour out thy blessing upon us.

Oh, that is what we need in our day and generation, that thou would pour out thy blessing upon us, as a people, as a generation, as a nation, as congregations.

Oh, have mercy upon us, we pray thee, and come to do us good. We are unworthy, Lord, we are poor sinners, but we plead the merits of Jesus Christ, and ask thee in his name to bless us, to be with us as we part one from the other tonight.

[38 : 57] Take us safely to our respective homes. O keep us by thy power in the world, and prepare us for eternity. For Jesus' sake, Amen.