

While we really appreciate and are just so grateful that our Lord is patient with us, doesn't it seem he's too patient with the wicked? He lets them get away with things. They even prosper while doing it.

Corrupt people in business and politics grab things and nobody does anything about it. Athletes act like pigs, and yet have those gigantic piggy banks. Entertainers live shameful lives and then become even more famous because of it.

You probably never told anyone, but you've thought about the Lord splitting heaven open one afternoon, and unleashing a couple of well-placed thunderbolts on some, haven't you?

Is the Lord letting the wicked get away with things? Will he ever balance the scales? Those are good questions, so good, in fact, that God recorded questions like that in today's lesson. And, best of all - he provides a response. His answer: **THE MESSENGER OF PEACE IS COMING!** 1) To burn off non-Christian dross, and 2) to refine Christian silver.

The Book of Malachi is the 39th book of the OT. It would be God's final word for 400 years. One last opportunity for God's people to prepare for the Lord's first coming. Malachi is only 4 chapters, but it's this constant whining and complaining of God's people. Today's lesson is one of those complaints and the Lord's response to it.

Is it possible for the Lord's patience to reach a breaking point? You tell me, as the Lord comments in our lesson: **You have wearied or worn out the LORD with your words.**

Like always, we play dumb: **"How have we wearied him?"** The all-knowing God heard them mumbling under their breath: **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?"**

See, same questions we have today. They not only saw evildoers get away with things, but they

prospered. So, they assume, since God didn't do anything about it, he must be ok with it.

To their whining, the Lord Almighty quickly responded: **"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."** There's quite a bit of messenger talk packed in those two sentences.

First, you have the messenger **who would prepare the way before** the Lord himself. That's John the Baptist. He cleared away the underbrush, straightened and smoothed out the path by calling the people to repent – to confess their sins and trust in the coming Christ.

Second, you have the **"messenger of the covenant"** himself: That's Jesus Christ! His arrival would bring a whole new covenant or agreement between God and his people.

To what seemed like a lack of response on God's part, he promises: **Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple.** The God you thought wasn't paying attention, was on top of things all along. He's not going to send one of his angel-messengers to do this work. He's going to care of things personally – by executing justice, punishing the evildoers and burning off the non-Christian dross.

And sure enough, 4 centuries after God promised it, Jesus came. Twice he drove evildoers out of the same temple at which Malachi and his people worshipped - flipping over their tables. On another occasion he gave specific details of the temple's demolition: *Not one stone from the temple would be left standing on another.* Complete and utter destruction by the Romans. That took place in 70 AD. And don't forget, he'll return one final time to judge, to balance the scales. You know how stores have grand openings? Well, Jesus will have the grandest closing ever – when he shuts down the world.

What the people of Malachi's day wanted so desperately to see happen – God coming to punish evildoers – would take place. And he had a message for his people: *Be careful what you wish for! Make sure you're not among the evildoers you want punished!*

But who can endure the day of his coming? God asks, and **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.** A refiner's fire is good news for metal, but not for the dross, the impurities that get skimmed off the top and thrown away. A launderer's soap is good news for clothes, but not for the dirt that gets washed away.

God's answer for the people of Malachi's day: You want me to come and judge the wicked? I'll do that, just make sure you're not among that wicked, unbelieving dross that gets skimmed off the top and thrown away. And, keep your eyes and ears open for a couple of messengers: one will **prepare the way** for the other one who is the **Messenger of Peace!**

And, here's God's answer for us today: You want me to come and judge the wicked? I'll do that, just make sure you're not among that unbelieving, non-Christian dross. And, keep your eyes and ears open, the **Messenger of Peace**, Jesus, will return at any time.

Be ready! Trust Jesus! He brought a peace so incredible that an angel choir had to sing about in that Bethlehem sky on Christmas Eve. A peace so wonderful, that in spite of our sins we know that God will never declare war on us. This peace treaty was signed with Jesus' own blood on the cross. His covenant or promise reads: *There is now no condemnation, only peace, for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

Jesus, **The Messenger of Peace Is Coming** to refine Christian silver, like you and me. Jesus treats us like precious metals. Purifying or refining precious metals requires intense heat to allow the pure metal - in liquid form - to sink, while the impurities, the dross float to the top so they can be removed. It's a long and difficult process.

Purifying or refining faith is also a long and difficult, and more times than not - a painful process. Our Savior removes the impurities in our lives which threaten our faith by heating things up. It could be removing the things we love, because they hurt our relationship with him. It could be the hardships of living as sinners in world of sin. Those hardships seem like such a nuisance and pointless, but in the hands of God, they work for good. Our weaknesses force us to rely on his strength. Our sadness forces us to look for a peace which only he can provide.

This is the kind of God we have - one who allows and sometimes brings the painful heat which burns off the impurities of our faith, so we can avoid the greatest heat – the fires of hell.

A Bible study group was digging into Malachi when they came across one of our verses, Malachi 3:3: **"He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver."**

They all wondered what that statement meant. So, one from the group offered to find out about the whole process of refining silver, and then share it with the group the next time they met.

So, he called a silversmith and asked if he could watch him work. He saw how the silversmith took a piece of silver and held it over the fire, heating it up. The silversmith explained, *"In refining silver, you need to hold the silver where the flame is the hottest to burn off all the impurities."*

Soon, the man began to think about their Malachi verse, and how God holds us in a hot spot as a **refiner and purifier of silver.**

Then, he asked the silversmith if it was necessary to sit so close to the fire the whole time the silver was being refined? *"Yes,"* he said, *"Not only do I have to sit there holding the silver, but I have to keep my eye on it the entire time it's in the fire. If the silver was left for even a moment too long in the flames, it would be destroyed."*

So, if you've felt, are feeling or will be feeling the heat of the refiner's fire, just remember this peaceful truth – it's Ok, your Lord and Savior Jesus has his eyes on you!