

How Long?

The closing verse of Malachi chapter 2 presents us with an impossibility - God getting weary. *You have been wearying the LORD with your words* (2:17). But there is one thing that makes the Almighty weary. He gets weary when His people complain, whine, and accuse Him unjustly. They say that He is a God who loves evildoers!

Nothing could be farther from the truth, but that is the blasphemous conclusion made by people who judge things around them and decide that because evil people flourish and God's people suffer, God must love the evil more than the good. The writer of Psalm 73 came to this same conclusion: *"For I was envious of arrogant people. I kept on seeing the prosperity of wicked people. They suffer no pains when they die. Their bellies are fat. They have no trouble like ordinary people. They are not plagued like other human beings... Look! These are wicked people. They are always free from worry. They increase in wealth,"* (verses 3-5, 12). The wicked plays while God's favourite sits on the ash heap scraping his boils with a scrap of pottery!

God is not fair! And the omnipotent God sighs in weariness when He hears it. Judgment is coming, and it is coming quickly, like the lightning that always takes its victims by surprise. The same overpowering right, light, and power of the lightning is God's judgment. *"For as lightning that comes from the east and is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man,"* (Matthew 24:27). Who will be able to stand it?

Jesus' coming at the first Christmas took people by surprise. Mary, Joseph, Herod, shepherds, friends, and enemies - all were surprised when He came. God had promised His Son's coming from the dawn of the world; people had carried the thought and hope with them through all the long years, but what they hoped for they really did not expect. It caught them by surprise, and the second coming of this "desired" One will also surprise us, even though we hope for it and profess to long for it.

"How long?" the saints in heaven cry to the Lord of judgment. The messengers have proceeded on the pavement of time. Their voices have echoed down into the little corners of this world. John the Baptist called out of the coming day of judgment: *"You brood of poisonous snakes, who has warned you to run away from the coming wrath?"* (Luke 3:7). Jesus, God's greatest messenger, spoke of earthquakes and famines, love growing cold, and *"great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now - and never to be equalled again,"* (Matthew 24:21). The day of God's judgment is coming all right! Jesus, the messenger of the covenant whom we desire, has spoken.

The question Malachi asks is: *"Who will endure the day of His coming? Who can stand on the day when He appears?"* (3:2). Certainly, even the hearts of the elect of God will melt like gold in the fire. Self-reliant, strong knees will buckle and sag as the righteous God approaches. The phrase *"Who will endure?"* literally stated says, *"Who can take this in?"* Who can comprehend what is going to happen - the process that must be completed before God's children stand pure and holy before His throne to begin the eternal celebrations?

Malachi presents us with different pictures of the cleansing used to prepare for this day. The refining of heat is one. The picture of a launderer is also used, one who cleans by rubbing, kneading, and beating to make cloth soft, clean, and pliable (2:3). This is the old-ribbed-washboard School of Hard Knocks in which God makes His children bend easily and quickly to His will. There is also the picture in the NT of sweeping clean with a broom. *"He has His winnowing fork in His hand to clean up His threshing floor and to gather the wheat into His barn but will burn the chaff with fire that cannot be put out,"* (Luke 3:17). John the Baptist said these words, and he prefaced them by saying, *"He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire,"* (Luke 3:16).

The Lord desires a pure product. *"You shall be holy because your God is holy"* is a theme played often in the Bible. We can't even be 99-and-a-large-fraction-percent clean. But who can stand if that is the case? Who can bring his offerings to God knowing that he is completely, one hundred-percent pure?

The answer is, God's people can. They have in the past; they do in the present; they will in the future and on that great day when He comes. *"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit,"* (Psalm 51:17), and *"the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of long ago, as in former years,"* (Mal. 3:4). The heart that desires to be scrubbed and scoured clean by the blood of Jesus, the heart encased in the armour of God, stands! *"Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand,"* (Ephesians 6:13). *"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me,"* (Psalm 51:10). These words of David were not said wistfully but certainly - positively. Being children of God, we too can be certain that because of Jesus, we are 100 percent pure.