

CHAPTER 3

In this chapter we have,

- I.** A promise of the coming of the Messiah, and of his forerunner; and the errand he comes upon is here particularly described, both the comfort which his coming brings to his church and people and the terror which it will bring to the wicked (v. 1-6).
- II.** A reproof of the Jews for their corrupting God's ordinances and sacrilegiously robbing him of his dues, with a charge to them to amend this matter, and a promise that, if they did, God would return in mercy to them (v. 7-12).
- III.** A description of the wickedness of the wicked that speak against God (v. 13-15), and of the righteousness of the righteous that speak for him, with the precious promises made to them (v. 16-18).

◀301▶ MALACHI 3:1-6

EVANGELICAL PREDICTIONS

The first words of this chapter seem a direct answer to the profane atheistical demand of the scoffers of those days which closed the foregoing chapter: *Where is the God of judgment?* To which it is readily answered, “Here he is; he is just at the door; the long-expected Messiah is ready to appear; and he says, *For judgment have I come into this world,* for that judgment which you have so impudently bid defiance to.” One of the rabbin says that the meaning of this is, That God will raise up a righteous King, to set things in order, even *the king Messiah*. And the *beginning of the gospel of Christ* is expressly said to be the accomplishment of this promise, with which the Old Testament concludes, ▶400◀ Mark 1:1, 2. So that by this the two Testaments are, as it were, tacked together, and made to answer one another. Now here we have,

- I.** A prophecy of the appearing of his forerunner John the Baptist, which the prophet Isaiah had foretold (▶230B◀ Isaiah 40:3), as the *preparing* of the

way of the Lord, to which this seems to have a reference, for the words of the latter prophets confirmed those of the former: *Behold, I will send my messenger, or I do send him, or I am sending him.* “I am determined to send him; he will now shortly come, and will not come unsent, though to a careless generation he comes unsent for.” Observe,

1. He is *God's messenger*; that is his office; he is *Malachi* (so the word is), the same with the name of this prophet; he is *my angel, my ambassador*. John Baptist had his commission *from heaven, and not of men*. All held John Baptist for a prophet, for he was God's messenger, as the prophets were, and came on the same errand to the world that they were sent upon — to call men to repentance and reformation.

2. He is Christ's harbinger: He *shall prepare the way before me*, by calling men to those duties which qualify them to receive the comforts of the Messiah and his coming, and by taking them off from a confidence in their relation to Abraham *as their father* (which, they thought, would serve their turn without a saviour), and by giving notice that the Messiah was now at hand, and so raising men's expectations of him, and making them readily to go into the measures he would take for the setting up of his kingdom in the world. Note, God observes a method in his work, and, before he comes, takes care to have his way prepared. This is like the giving of a sign. The church was told, long before, that the Messiah would come; and here it is added that, a little before he appears, there shall be a signal given; a great prophet shall arise, that shall give notice of his approach, and call to the everlasting gates and doors to *lift up their heads* and give him admission. The accomplishment of this is a proof that *Jesus is the Christ*, is he that *should come*, and we are to *look for no other*; for there was such a messenger sent before him, who *made ready a people prepared for the Lord*, [Ⓜ]Luke 1:17. The Jewish writers run into gross absurdities to evade the conviction of this evidence; some of them say that this messenger is the *angel of death*, who shall take the wicked out of this life, to be sent into hell torments; others of them say that it is Messiah the son of Joseph, who shall appear before Messiah the son of David; others, this prophet himself; others, an angel from heaven: such mistakes do those run into that will not receive the truth.

II. A prophecy of the appearing of the Messiah himself: “*The Lord, whom you seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the God of judgment, who, you think, has forsaken the earth, and you wot not what has become*

of him. The Messiah has been long called *he that should come*, and you may assure yourselves that now shortly he will come.”

1. He is *the Lord* — *Adonai*, the basis and foundation on which the world is founded and fastened, the ruler and governor of all, that one *Lord over all* (⁴⁰⁶Acts 10:36) that has all power committed to him (⁴⁰⁸Matthew 28:18) and is to *reign over the house of Jacob for ever*, ⁴¹³Luke 1:33.

2. He is the *Messenger of the covenant*, or the *angel of the covenant*, that *blessed one* that was *sent* from heaven to negotiate a peace, and settle a correspondence, between God and man. He is the *angel*, the *archangel*, the Lord of the angels, who received commission from the Father to bring man home to God by a covenant of grace, who had revolted from him by the violation of the covenant of innocency. Christ is the *angel of this covenant*, by whose mediation it is brought about and established as God's covenant with Israel was made by the *disposition of angels*, ⁴¹⁵Acts 7:53; ⁴¹⁹Galatians 3:19. Christ, as a prophet, is the *messenger* and *mediator* of the covenant; nay, he is *given for a covenant*, ²⁴⁰⁸Isaiah 49:8. That covenant which is all our *salvation began to be spoken by the Lord*, ³¹¹³Hebrews 2:3. Though he is the *prince of the covenant* (as some read this) yet he condescended to be the *messenger of it*, that we might have full assurance of God's good-will towards man, upon his word.

3. He it is *whom you seek, whom you delight in*, whom the pious Jews expect and desire, and whose coming they think of with a great deal of pleasure. In looking and waiting for him, they *looked for redemption in Jerusalem* and *waited for the consolation of Israel*, ⁴¹²⁵Luke 2:25, 38. Christ was to be the *desire of all nations*, desirable to all (³¹¹⁷Haggai 2:7); but he was *the desire* of the Jewish nation actually, because they had the promise of his coming made to them. Note, Those that seek Jesus shall find pleasure in him. If he be our heart's desire he will be our heart's delight; and we have reason to delight in him who is the *messenger of the covenant*, and to bid him welcome who came to us on so kind an errand.

4. He *shall suddenly come*; his coming draws nigh, and we see it not at so great a distance as the patriarchs saw it at. Or, He shall come immediately after the appearing of John Baptist, shall even tread on the heels of his forerunner; when that *morning-star* appears, believe that the *Sun of righteousness* is not far off. Or, He *shall come suddenly*, that is, he shall come when by many he is not looked for; as his second coming will be, so his first coming was, *at midnight*, when some had done looking for him,

for *shall he find faith on the earth?* ^{<428>}Luke 18:8. The Jews reckon the Messiah among the things that come *unawares*; so Dr. Pocock. And the coming of the Son of man in his day is said to be *as the lightning*, which is very surprising, ^{<472>}Luke 17:24.

5. He *shall come to his temple*, this temple at Jerusalem, which was lately built, that *latter house* which he was to be the glory of. It is his temple, for it is *his Father's house*, ^{<416>}John 2:16. Christ, at forty days old, was presented in the temple, and thither Simeon went *by the Spirit*, according to the direction of this prophecy, to see him, ^{<417>}Luke 2:27. At twelve years old he was in the temple *about his Father's business*, ^{<419>}Luke 2:49. When he rode in triumph into Jerusalem, it should seem that he went directly *to the temple* (^{<412>}Matthew 21:12), and (v. 14) thither the *blind and the lame came to him to be healed*; there he often preached, and often disputed, and often wrought miracles. By this it appears that the Messiah was to come while *that temple* was standing; that, therefore, being long since destroyed, we must conclude that he has come, and we are to look for no other. Note, Those that would be acquainted with Christ and obtain his favour must meet him in his temple, for there he *records his name* and there he will bless his people. There we must receive his oracles and there we must pay our homage.

6. The promise of this coming is repeated and ratified: *Behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts*; you may depend upon his word, who cannot lie, he *shall come*, he *will come*, he *will not tarry*.

III. An account given of the great ends and intentions of his coming, v. 2. He is one whom they seek, and one whom they delight in; and yet *who may abide the day of his coming?* It is a thing to be thought of with great seriousness, and with a holy awe and reverence; for who *shall stand when he appears*, though he comes not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might have life? This may refer,

1. To the terrors of his appearance. Even in the days of his flesh there were some emanations of his glory and power, such as none could stand before, witness his transfiguration, and the prodigies that attended his death; and we read of some that trembled before him, as ^{<413>}Mark 5:33.

2. To the troublous times that should follow soon after. The Jewish doctors speak of the *pangs* or *griefs* of the Messiah, meaning (they say) the great afflictions that should be to Israel at the time of his coming; he

himself speaks of great tribulation then approaching, *such as was not since the beginning of the world, nor ever shall be*, ^{<410>}Matthew 24:21.

3. To the trial which his coming would make of the children of men. *He shall be like a refiner's fire*, which separates between the gold and the dross by melting the ore, or *like fuller's soap*, which with much rubbing fetches the spots out of the cloth. Christ came to discover men, *that the thoughts of many hearts might be revealed* (^{<415>}Luke 2:35), to distinguish men, to separate between the precious and the vile, for *his fan in his hand* (^{<412>}Matthew 3:12), to *send fire on the earth, not peace, but rather division* (^{<424>}Luke 12:49, 51), to *shake heaven and earth*, that the wicked might be shaken out (^{<383>}Job 38:13) and *that the things which cannot be shaken might remain*, ^{<327>}Hebrews 12:27. See what the effect of the trial will be that shall be made by the gospel.

(1.) The gospel shall work good upon those that are disposed to be good, to them it shall be a savour of life unto life (v. 3): *He shall sit as a refiner*. Christ by his gospel shall purify and reform his church, and by his Spirit working with it shall regenerate and cleanse particular souls; for to this end he gave himself for the church, *that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word* (^{<456>}Ephesians 5:26) and *purify to himself a peculiar people*, ^{<324>}Titus 2:14. Christ is the great refiner. Observe,

[1.] Who they are that he will purify — *the sons of Levi*, all those that are devoted to his praise and employed in his service, as the tribe of Levi was, and whom he designs to make unto our God spiritual priests (^{<416>}Revelation 1:6), a *holy priesthood*, ^{<415>}1 Peter 2:5. Note, All true Christians are sons of Levi, set apart for God, to do the service of his sanctuary, and to *war the good warfare*.

[2.] How he will purify them; he will *purge them as gold and silver*, that is, he will sanctify them inwardly; he will not only wash away the spots they have contracted from without, but will take away the dross that is found in them; he will separate from them their indwelling corruptions, which rendered their faculties worthless and useless, and so make them like gold refined, both valuable and serviceable. *He will purge them* with fire, *as gold and silver are purged*, for *he baptizes with the Holy Ghost and with fire* (^{<411>}Matthew 3:11), with the Holy Ghost working like fire. He will purge them by *afflictions and manifold temptations*, that the trial

of their faith may be found to praise and honour, ⁽⁴⁰¹⁶⁾1 Peter 1:6, 7. He will purge them so as to make them a precious people to himself.

[3.] What will be the effect of it: *That they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness*, that is, that they may be in sincerity converted to God and consecrated to his praise (hence we read of the *offering up*, or *sacrificing*, of the *Gentiles* to God, when they were *sanctified by the holy Ghost*, ⁽⁴⁵³⁶⁾Romans 15:16), and that they may in a spiritual manner worship God according to his will, may *offer the sacrifices of righteousness*, (⁽⁴⁰⁴⁵⁾Psalm 4:5), the offering of prayer, and praise, and holy love, that they may be the *true worshippers*, who *worship the Father in spirit and in truth*, ⁽⁴⁰⁴³⁾John 4:23, 24. Note, We cannot offer unto the Lord any right performances in religion unless our persons be justified and sanctified. Till we ourselves be refined and purified by the grace of God, we cannot do any thing that will redound to the glory of God. God had respect to Abel first, and then to his offering; and *therefore* God purges his people, that they may offer their offerings to him in righteousness, ⁽⁴⁰⁰⁹⁾Zephaniah 3:9. He makes the tree good that the fruit may be good. And then it follows (v. 4), *The offering of Judah and Jerusalem shall be pleasant unto the Lord*. It shall no longer be offensive, as it has been, when, in the former days, they worshipped other gods with the God of Israel, or when, in the present days, they brought the torn, and the lame, and the sick, for sacrifice; but it shall be *acceptable*; he will be pleased with the offerers, and their offerings, *as in the days of old and as in former years*, as in the primitive times of the church, as when God had respect to Abel's sacrifice and smelled a savour of rest from Noah's, and when he kindled Aaron's sacrifice with fire from heaven. When the Messiah comes, *First*, He will, by his grace in them, make them acceptable; when he has purified and refined them, then they shall offer such sacrifices as God requires and will accept. *Secondly*, He will, by his intercession for them, make them accepted; he will recommend them and their performances to God, so that their prayers, being perfumed with the incense of his intercession, shall be pleasant unto the Lord; for he has *made us accepted in the Beloved*, and in him is well pleased with those that are in him (⁽⁴⁰⁰⁷⁾Matthew 3:17) and bring forth fruit in him.

(2.) It shall turn for a testimony against those that are resolved to go on in their wickedness, v. 5. This is the direct answer to their challenge, "*Where is the God of judgment?* You shall know where he is, and shall know it to your terror and confusion, for *I will come near to you to judgment*; to you

that set divine justice at defiance.” To them the gospel of Christ will be a *savour of death unto death*; it will bind them over to condemnation and will judge them in the great day, ^{<B128>}John 12:48. Let us see here,

[1.] Who the sinners are that must appear to be judged by the gospel of Christ. They are the *sorcerers*, who died in spiritual wickedness, that forsake the oracles of the God of truth to consult the father of lies; and the *adulterers*, who wallow in the lusts of the flesh, those adulterers who were charged with *dealing treacherously* (^{<3025>}Malachi 2:15); and the *false swearers*, who profane God's name and affront his justice, by calling him to witness to a lie; and the oppressors, who barbarously injure and trample upon those who lie at their mercy, and are not able to help themselves: they *defraud the hireling in his wages* and will not give him what he agreed for; they crush *the widow and fatherless*, and will not pay them their just debts, because they cannot prove them, or have not wherewithal to sue for them; the poor *stranger* too, who has no friend to stand by him and is ignorant of the laws of the country, they *turn aside from his right*, so that he cannot keep or cannot recover his own. That which is at the bottom of all this is, *They fear not me, saith the Lord of hosts*. The *transgression of the wicked* plainly declares *that there is no fear of God before his eyes*. Where no fear of God is no good is to be expected.

[2.] Who will appear against them: *I will come near*, says God, *and will be a swift witness against them*. They justify themselves, and, their sins having been artfully concealed, hope to escape punishment for want of proof; but God, who sees and knows all things, will himself be witness against them, and his omniscience is instead of a thousand witnesses, for to it the sinner's own conscience shall be made to subscribe, and so *every mouth shall be stopped*. He will be a swift witness; though they reflect upon him as slow and dilatory, and ask, *Where is the God of judgment*, and where the promise of his coming? they will find that *he is not slack* concerning his threatenings any more than he is concerning his promises. Judgment against those sinners shall not be put off for want of evidence, for he will be a swift witness. His judgment shall overtake them, and it shall be impossible for them to outrun it. *Evil pursues sinners*.

IV. The ratification of all this (v. 6): *For I am the Lord; I change not; therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed*. Here we have,

1. God's immutability asserted by Himself, and glorified in: "*I am the Lord; I change not*;" and therefore no word that I have spoken shall fall to the ground." Is God a just revenger of those that rebel against him? Is he the bountiful rewarder of those that diligently seek him? In both these he is unchangeable. Though the sentence passed against evil works (v. 5) be not executed speedily, yet it will be executed, for he is *the Lord*; he *changes not*; he is as much an enemy to sin as ever he was, and impenitent sinners will find him so. There needs no *scire facias* — *a writ calling one to show cause*, to revive God's judgment, for it is never antiquated, or out of date, but against those that go on still in their trespasses the curse of his law still remains *in full force, power, and virtue*.

2. A particular proof of it, from the comfortable experience which the people of Israel had had of it. They had reason to say that he was an unchangeable God, for he had been faithful to his covenant with them and their fathers; if he had not adhered to that, they would have been consumed long ago and cut off from being a people; they had been false and fickle in their conduct to him, and he might justly have abandoned them, and then they would soon have been consumed and ruined; but because he *remembered his covenant*, and would not violate that, nor alter the thing that had gone forth out of his lips, they were preserved from ruin and recovered from the brink of it. It was purely because he would be as good as his word, ^{<0108>}Deuteronomy 7:8; ^{<0350>}Leviticus 26:42. Now as God had kept them from ruin, while the covenant of peculiarity remained in force, purely because he would be faithful to that covenant, and would show that *he is not a man that he should lie* (^{<0239>}Numbers 23:19), so, when that covenant should be superseded and set aside by the New Testament, and they, by rejecting the blessings of it, lay themselves open to the curses, he will show that in the determinations of his wrath, as well as in those of his mercy, *he is not a man, that he should repent*, but will then be as true to his threatenings as hitherto he had been to his promises; see ^{<0159>}1 Samuel 15:29. We may all apply this very sensibly to ourselves; because we have to do with a God that *changes not*, therefore it is that *we are not consumed*, even *because his compassions fail not*; *they are new every morning*; *great is his faithfulness*, ^{<0302>}Lamentations 3:22, 23.

~~300~~ MALACHI 3:7-12

THE SINS OF THE PEOPLE

We have here God's controversy with the men of that generation, for deserting his service and robbing him — wicked servants indeed, that not only run away from their Master, but run away with their Master's goods.

I. They had run away from their Master, and quitted the work he gave them to do (v. 7): *You have gone away from my ordinances and have not kept them.* The ordinances of God's worship were the business which as servants they must mind, the talents which they must trade with, and the trust which was committed to them to keep; but they went away from them, grew weary of them, and withdrew their neck from that yoke; they deviated from the rule that God had prescribed to them, and betrayed the trust lodged with them. They had revolted from God, not only in worship, but in conversation; they had not *kept his ordinances.* This disobedience they were chargeable with, and had been guilty of, even *from the days of their fathers*; either as in the days of their fathers of old, who were sent into captivity for their disobedience, or, “Now, for some generations past, you have fallen off from what you were, when first you came back out of captivity.” Ezra owns it in one particular instance: *Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day,* ~~400~~ Ezra 9:7. Now observe,

1. What a gracious invitation God gives them to return and repent: “*Return unto me,* and to your duty, return to your service, return to your allegiance, return as a traveller that has missed his way, as a soldier that has run his colours, as a treacherous wife that has gone away from her husband; return, thou backsliding Israel, return to me; and then *I will return unto you* and be reconciled, will remove the judgments you are under and prevent those you fear.” This had been of old the burden of the song (~~300~~ Zechariah 1:3), and is still.

2. What a peevish answer they return to this gracious invitation: “*But you said* with disdain, said it to the prophets that called you, said it to one another, said it to your own hearts, to stifle the convictions you were under; you said, *Wherein shall we return?*” Note, God takes notice what returns our hearts make to the calls of his word, what we say and what we

think when we have heard a sermon, what answer we give to the message sent us. When God calls us to *return*, we should answer as those did ~~2482~~ Jeremiah 3:22, *Behold, we come*. But not as these here, *Wherein shall we return?*

(1.) They take it as an affront to be *told of their faults*, and called upon to amend them; they are ready to say, “What ado do these prophets make about returning and repenting; why are we disgraced and disturbed thus, our own consciences and our neighbours stirred up against us?” It is ill with those who thus count reproofs reproaches, and *kick against the pricks*.

(2.) They are so ignorant of themselves, and of the strictness, extent, and spiritual nature, of the divine law, that they see nothing in themselves to be repented of, or reformed; they are pure in their own eyes, and think they need no repentance.

(3.) They are so firmly resolved to go on in sin that they will find a thousand foolish frivolous excuses to shift off their repentance, and turn away the calls that are given them to repent. They seem to speak only as those that wanted something to say; it is a mere evasion, a banter upon the prophet, and a challenge to him to descend to particulars. Note, Many ruin their own souls by baffling the calls that are given them to repent of their sins.

II. They had robbed their Master, and embezzled his goods. They had asked, “*Wherein shall we return?* What have we done amiss?” And he soon tells them. Observe,

1. The prophet's high charge exhibited, in God's name, against the people. They stand indicted for robbery, for sacrilege, the worst of robberies: *You have robbed me*. He expostulates with them upon it: *Will a man* be so daringly impudent as to *rob God*? Man, who is a weak creature, and cannot contend with God's power, will he think to rob him *vi et armis* — *forcibly*? Man, who lies open to God's knowledge, and cannot conceal himself from that, will he think to rob him *clam et secreto* — *privily*? Man, who depends upon God, and derives his all from him, will he rob him that is his benefactor? This is ungrateful, unjust, and unkind, indeed; and it is very unwise thus to provoke him from whom our judgment proceeds. *Will a man do violence to God?* so some read it. *Will a man do*

violence to God? so some read it. *Will a man stint or straiten him?* so others read it. Robbing God is a heinous crime.

2. The people's high challenge in answer to that charge: *But you say, Wherein have we robbed thee?* They plead *Not guilty*, and put God upon the proof of it. Note, Robbing God is such a heinous crime that those who are guilty of it are not willing to own themselves guilty. They rob God, and know not what they do. They rob him of his honour, rob him of that which is devoted to him, to be employed in his service, rob him of themselves, rob him of sabbath-time, rob him of that which is given for the support of religion, and give him not his dues out of their estates; and yet they ask, *Wherein have we robbed thee?*

3. The plain proof of the charge, in answer to this challenge; it is *in tithes and offerings*. Out of these the priests and Levites had maintenance for themselves and their families; but they detained them, defrauded the priests of them, would not pay their tithes, or not in full, or not of the best; they brought not the offerings which God required, or brought the torn, and lame, and sick, which were not fit for use. They were all guilty of this sin, even *the whole nation*, as if they were in confederacy against God, and all combined to rob him of his dues and to stand by one another in it when they had done. For this they were *cursed with a curse*, v. 9. God punished them with famine and scarcity, through unseasonable weather, or insects that ate up the fruits of the earth. God had thus punished them for neglecting to build the temple (³⁰⁰⁰Haggai 1:10, 11), and now for not maintaining the temple-service. Note, Those that deny God his part of their estates may justly expect a curse upon their own part of them: "*You are cursed with a curse* for robbing me, and yet you go on to do it." Note, It is a great aggravation of sin when men persist in it notwithstanding the rebukes of Providence which they are under for it. Nay, it should seem, because God had punished them with scarcity of bread, they made that a pretence for robbing him — that now, being impoverished, they could not afford to bring their tithes and offerings, but must save them, that they might have bread for their families. Note, It argues great perverseness in sin when men make those afflictions excuses for sin which are sent to part between them and their sins. When they had but little they should have done the more good with that little, and that would have been the way to make it more; but it is ill with the patient when that which should cure the disease serves only to palliate it, and prevent its being searched into.

4. An earnest exhortation to reform in this matter, with a promise that if they did the judgments they were under should be quickly removed.

(1.) Let them take care to do their duty (v. 10): *Bring you all the tithes into the storehouse.* They had brought some; but, like Ananias and Sapphira, had *kept back part of the price*, pretending they could not spare so much as was required, and *necessity has no law*; but even necessity must have this law, and it would redress the grievance of their necessity: “Bring in the full tithes to the utmost that the law requires, *that there may be meat in God's house* for those that serve at the altar, whether there be meat in your houses or no.” Note, God must be served in the first place, and our quota must be contributed for the support of religion in the place where we live, that God's name may be sanctified, and his kingdom may come, and his will be done, even before we provide our daily bread; for the interests of our souls ought to be preferred before those of our bodies.

(2.) Let them then trust God to provide for them and their comfort “Let God be first served, and then *prove me herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, whether I will not open the windows of heaven.*” They said, “Let God give us our plenty again, as formerly, and try us whether we will not then bring him his tithes and offerings, as we did formerly.” “No,” says God, “do you first bring in all your tithes as they become due, and all the arrears of what is past, and try me, whether I will not then restore you your plenty.” Note, Those that will deal with God must deal upon trust; and we may all venture to do so, for, though many have been losers for him, never any were losers by him in the end. It is fit that we should venture first, for *his reward is with him, but his work is before him*; we must first do the work which is our part, and then try him and trust him for the reward. Elijah put the widow of Zarephath into this method when he said (~~1173~~ 1 Kings 17:13), “*Make me a little cake first, and then prove me whether there shall not be enough afterwards for thee and thy son.*” That which discourages people from the expenses of charity is the weakness of their faith concerning the gains and advantages of charity; they cannot think that they shall get by it. But it is a reasonable demand that God here makes: “*Prove me now; is any thing to be got by charity? Come and see;*” Nothing venture, nothing win. Trust upon honour, “And you shall find,”

[1.] “That, whereas the heavens have been shut up, and there has been no rain, now God will *open to you the windows of heaven*, for in his hand the key of the clouds is, and you shall have seasonable rain.” Or the

expression is figurative; every good gift coming from above, thence God will plentifully pour out upon them the bounties of his providence. Very sudden plenty is expressed by *opening the windows of heaven*, ^{<110>}2 Kings 7:2. We find the *windows of heaven opened*, to pour down a deluge of wrath, in Noah's flood, ^{<107>}Genesis 7:11. But here they are opened to *pour down blessings*, to such a degree that there should not be *room enough to receive* them. So plentifully shall their ground bring forth that they shall be tempted to *pull down their barns and build greater*, for want of room, ^{<128>}Luke 12:18. Or, as Dr. Pocock explains it, "I will pour out on you such a blessing as shall be not *enough only*, and such as shall be sufficient, but *more and more than enough*;" that is, a great addition. The oil that is multiplied shall not be stayed as long as there are vessels to receive it, ^{<106>}2 Kings 4:6. Note, God will not only be reconciled to sinners that repent and reform, but he will be a benefactor, a bountiful benefactor, to them. We are never straitened in him, but often straitened in our own bosoms. God has blessings ready to bestow upon us, but, through the weakness of our faith and narrowness of our desires, we have not room to receive them.

[2.] That, whereas the fruits of their ground had been eaten up by locusts and caterpillars God would now remove that judgment (v. 11): "*I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes*, and will check the progress of those destroying animals, that they shall no more destroy the products of the earth and the fruits of the trees." God has all creatures at his beck, can command them and remand them at his pleasure. *Neither shall the vine cast her fruit before the time*; it shall not be blasted or blown off. Or, as some read it, *Neither shall the devourer make your vine barren*, as the locusts did, ^{<107>}Joel 1:7.

[3.] That, whereas their neighbours had upbraided them with their scarcity, and they had lain under the *reproach of famine*, which was the more grievous because their country used to be boasted of for its plenty, now *all nations shall call them blessed*, shall speak honourably of them, and own them to be a happy people.

[4.] That whereas their sin had made their land unpleasing to God (even their temple, and altars, and offerings were so, ^{<103>}Malachi 2:13), and whereas his judgments had made their land unpleasant to them, and very melancholy, "*Now you shall be a delightsome land*, your country shall be acceptable to God and comfortable to yourselves." Note, The reviving of religion in a land will make it indeed a delightsome land both to God and

to all good people; he will say, It is *my rest for ever; here will I dwell*; and they will say the same, ^{<2514>}Isaiah 62:4; ^{<5112>}Deuteronomy 11:12. It should seem that this charge to bring in the tithes had its good effect, for we find (^{<432>}Nehemiah 13:12) that *all Judah did bring in their tithe into the treasuries*, and, no doubt, they had the benefit of these promises, in the return of their plenty, immediately upon their return to their duty, that they might plainly discern for what cause the evil had been upon them (for when the cause was removed the evil was removed), and that they might see how perfectly reconciled God was to them upon their repentance, and how their transgression was remembered no more, for the curse was not only taken away, but turned into an abundant blessing.

<313>MALACHI 3:13-18

WICKED CONVERSATION REPROVED

Among the people of the Jews at this time, though they all enjoyed the same privileges and advantages, there were men of very different characters (as ever were, and ever will be, in the world and in the church), like Jeremiah's figs, some very good and others very bad, some that plainly appeared to be the children of God and others that as plainly discovered themselves to be the children of the wicked one. There are tares and wheat in the same field, chaff and corn in the same floor; and here we have an account of both.

I. Here is the angry notice God takes of the impudent blasphemous talk of the sinners in Zion and his just resentments of it. Probably there was a club of them that were in league against religion, that set up for wits, and set their wits on work to run it down and ridicule it, and herein strengthened one another's hands. Here is,

1. An indictment found against them, for treasonable words spoken against the King of kings: *Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord. They spoke against God*, in reflection upon him, in contradiction to him, as their fathers *in the wilderness* (^{<5113>}Psalm 70:19); *yea, they spoke against God*. What he said, and what he designed, they opposed, as if they had been retained of counsel against him and his cause. Their words against God were *stout*; they came from their pride, and haughtiness, and contempt of God. What they said against God they spoke loudly, as if they

cared not who heard them; they were not themselves ashamed to say it, and they desired to propagate their atheistical notions and to infect the minds of others with them. They spoke it boldly, as those that were resolved to stand to it, and were in no fear of being called to an account. They spoke it proudly, and with insolence and disdain, scorning to be under the divine check and government. They *strengthened themselves*; they would be valiant *against the Almighty*, ~~1825~~ Job 15:25.

2. Their plea to this indictment. They said, *What have we spoken so much against thee?* They deny the words, and put the prophet to prove them; or, if they spoke the words, they did not design them against God, and therefore will not own there was any harm in them; at least they extenuate the matter: *What have we spoken so much against thee*, so much that there needs all this ado about it? They cannot deny that they have spoken against God, but they make a light matter of it, and wonder it should be taken notice of: “*Words*” (say they) “*are but wind*; others have said more and done worse; if we are not so good as we should be, yet we hope we are not so bad as we are represented to be.” Note, It is common for sinners that are unconvinced and unhumiliated to deny or extenuate the faults they are justly charged with, and to insist upon their own justification, against the reproofs of the word and of their own consciences. But it will be to no purpose.

3. The words themselves which they are charged with. God keeps an account of what men say, as well as of what they do, and will let them know that he does so. We quickly forget what we have said, and are ready to deny what we have said amiss; but God can say, *You have said* so and so. They had said it as their deliberate judgment.

(1.) That there is nothing to be got in the service of God, thought it is a service that subjects men to labour and sorrow. They said, *It is vain to serve God*, or, “*He is vain that serves God*, that is, he labours in vain and to no purpose; he has his labour for his pains, and therefore is a fool for his labour. *What profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, or his observation*, that we have observed what he has appointed us to observe?” *What mammon, or wealth*, have we gained, says the Chaldee, intimating (says Dr. Pocock) that it was for mammon’s sake only that they served God, and so indeed not God at all, but mammon. “*We have walked mournfully, or in black*, with great gravity and great grief, *before the Lord of hosts*, have afflicted our souls at the times appointed for that purpose,

and yet we are never the better.” Perhaps this comes in as a reason why they would not trust God to prosper them upon their *bringing in the tithes* (v. 10); “For,” say they, “we have tried him in other things, and have lost by him.” This is a very unjust and unreasonable reflection upon the service of God, and we can call witnesses enough to confront the slander.

[1.] They would have it thought that they had served God and had kept his ordinances, whereas it was only the external observance of them that they had kept up, while they were perfect strangers to the inward part of the duty, and therefore might say, It is *in vain*. God says so (^{<159>}Matthew 15:9), *In vain do those worship me whose hearts are far from me while they draw near with their mouth*; but whose fault is that? Not God's, who is the rewarder of those that seek him diligently, but theirs who seek him carelessly.

[2.] They insisted much upon it that they had *walked mournfully* before God, whereas God had required them to serve him with gladness, and to walk cheerfully before him. They by their own superstitions made the service of God a task and drudgery to themselves, and then complained of it as a hard service. The yoke of Christ is easy; it is the yoke of antichrist that is heavy.

[3.] They complained that they had got nothing by their religion; they were still in poverty and affliction, and behindhand in the world. This is an old piece of impiety. ^{<114>}Job 21:14, 15, *What profit shall we have if we pray unto him?* Elihu charges Job with saying something like this. ^{<149>}Job 34:9, *It profits a man nothing that he should delight himself with God.* The enemies of religion do but set up against it the old cavils that have been long since answered and exploded. Perhaps this refers to the errors of the sect of the Sadducees, which was the scandal of the Jewish church in its latter days; they denied a future state, and then said, It is *vain to serve God*, which has indeed some colour in it, for, *if in this life only we had hope in Christ, we were of all men most miserable*, ^{<159>}1 Corinthians 15:19. Note, Those do a great deal of wrong to God's honour who say that religion is either an unprofitable or an unpleasant thing; for the matter is not so: wisdom's *ways are pleasantness*, and wisdom's gains better than that of *fine gold*.

(2.) They maintained that wickedness was the way to prosperity, for they had observed that the *workers of wickedness* were set up in the world, and those that *tempted God* were *delivered*, v. 15. The outward prosperity of

sinner in their sins, as it has weakened the hands of the godly in their godliness (⁴⁷³Psalm 73:13), so it has strengthened the hands of the wicked in their wickedness. Note,

[1.] Those that work wickedness tempt God by presumptuous sins; they do, as it were, try God, whether he can and will punish them as he has said in his word, and, in effect, challenge him to do his worst, by provoking him in the highest degree.

[2.] Those that tempt God by their wicked works are many times both delivered out of the adversity into which they were justly brought and advanced to the prosperity which they were utterly unworthy of. They are not only set up once, but when we thought their day had come to fall, and they were in trouble, they were delivered and set up again; so strangely did Providence seem to smile upon them.

[3.] Though it be thus, yet it will not warrant us to *call the proud happy*. For they may be delivered and set up for a while, but it will appear that God resists them, and that their pride is a preface to their fall; and, if so, they are truly miserable, and it is folly to call them happy, and to bless those whom the Lord abhors. Wait awhile, and you shall see *those that work wickedness set up* as a mark to the arrows of God's vengeance, and *those that tempt God delivered* to the tormentors. Judge of things as they will appear shortly, when the doom of these proud sinners (which follows here, ³⁰¹Malachi 4:1) comes to be executed to the utmost.

II. Here is the gracious notice God takes of the pious talk of the saints in Zion, and the gracious recompence of it. Even in this corrupt and degenerate age, when there was so great a decay, nay, so great a contempt, of serious godliness, there were yet some that retained their integrity and zeal for God; and let us see,

1. How they distinguished themselves, and what their character was; it was the reverse of theirs that spoke so much against God; for,

(1.) They *feared the Lord* — that is the beginning of wisdom and the root of all religion; they revered the majesty of God, submitted to his authority, and had a dread of his wrath in all they thought and said; they humbly complied with God, and never spoke any stout words against him. In every age there has been a remnant that feared the Lord, though sometimes but a little remnant.

(2.) They *thought upon his name*; they seriously considered and frequently mediated upon the discoveries God has made of himself in his word and by his providences, and their *mediation of him* was *sweet* to them and influenced them. They *thought on his name*; they consulted the honour of God and aimed at that as their ultimate end in all they did. Note, Those that know the name of God should often think of it and dwell upon it in their thoughts; it is a copious curious subject, and frequent thoughts of it will contribute very much to our communion with God and the stirring up of our devout affections to him.

(3.) They *spoke often one to another* concerning the God they feared, and that name of his which they thought so much of; for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth will speak, and a good man, out of a *good treasure* there, will *bring forth good things*. *Those that feared the Lord* kept together as those that were company for each other; they spoke kindly and endearingly one to another, for the preserving and promoting of mutual love, that that might not *wax cold* when *iniquity* did thus *abound*. They spoke intelligently and edifyingly to one another, for the increasing and improving of faith and holiness; they *spoke one to another* in the language of those that fear the Lord and think on his name — the language of Canaan. When profaneness had come to so great a height as to trample upon all that is sacred, *then* those that feared the Lord *spoke often one to another*.

[1.] Then, when iniquity was bold and barefaced, the people of God took courage, and stirred up themselves, *the innocent against the hypocrite*, ~~1878~~ Job 17:8. The worse others are the better we should be; when vice is daring, let not virtue be sneaking.

[2.] Then, when religion was reproached and misrepresented, its friends did all they could to support the credit of it and to keep it in countenance. It had been suggested that the ways of God are melancholy unpleasant ways, solitary and sorrowful; and therefore then those that feared God studied to evince the contrary by their cheerfulness in mutual love and converse, that they might *put to silence the ignorance of foolish men*.

[3.] Then, when seducers were busy to deceive and to possess unwary souls with prejudices against religion, those that feared God were industrious to arm themselves and one another against the contagion by mutual instructions, excitements, and encouragements, and to strengthen

one another's hands. As evil communication corrupts good minds and manners, so good communication confirms them.

2. How God dignified them, and what further honour and favour he intended for them. Those who spoke stoutly against God, no doubt looked with disdain and displeasure upon those that feared him, hectorred and bantered them; but they had little reason to regard that, or be disturbed at it, when God countenanced them.

(1.) He took notice of their pious discourses, and was graciously present at their conferences: *The Lord hearkened and heard it*, and was well pleased with it. God says (^{<218>}Jeremiah 8:6) that he *hearkened and heard* what bad men would say, and they *spoke not aright*; here he hearkened and heard what good men did say, for they spoke aright. Note, The gracious God observes all the gracious words that proceed out of the mouths of his people; they need not desire that men may hear them, and commend them; let them not seek praise from men by them, nor affect to be taken notice of by them; but let it satisfy them that, be the conference ever so private, God sees and hears in secret and will *reward openly*. When the two disciples, going to Emmaus, were discoursing concerning Christ, he hearkened and heard, and joined himself to them, and made a third, ^{<215>}Luke 24:15.

(2.) He kept an account of them: *A book of remembrance was written before him*. Not that the Eternal Mind needs to be reminded of things by books and writings, but it is an expression after the manner of men, intimating that their pious affections and performances are kept in remembrance as punctually and particularly as if they were written in a book, as if journals were kept of all their conferences. Great kings had books of remembrance written, and read before them, in which were entered all the services done them, when, and by whom, as ^{<123>}Esther 2:23. God, in like manner, remembers the services of his people, that, in the review of them, he may say, *Well done; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord*. God has a book for the sighs and tears of his mourners (^{<158>}Psalms 56:8), much more for the pleadings of his advocates. Never was any good word spoken of God, or for God, from an honest heart, but it was registered, that it might be recompensed in the resurrection of the just, and in no wise lose its reward.

(3.) He promises them a share in his glory hereafter (v. 17): *They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels*. When God utterly cuts off the Jewish church and nation for their infidelity, the

remnant among them, that believed his word, and, having waited for the consolation of Israel, welcome him when he comes, shall be admitted into the Christian church, and shall become a peculiar people to God; God will take care of them, that they *perish not with those that believe not*; but that they be *hidden in the day of the Lord's anger* against that nation. *They shall be my segullah — my peculiar treasure* (it is the word used, ^{<195>}Exodus 19:5), *in the day when I make or do what I have said and designed to do*; so some read it. These pious ones shall have all the glorious privileges of God's Israel appropriated to them and centering in them; they shall now be his peculiar treasure, when the rest are rejected; they shall now be the vessels of mercy and honour, when the rest are made vessels of wrath and dishonour, vessels in which is no pleasure. This may be applied to all the faithful people of God, and the distinction he will put between them and others in the great day. Note,

[1.] The saints are God's jewels; they are highly esteemed by him and are dear to him; they are comely with the comeliness that he puts upon them, and he is pleased to glory in them; they are a *royal diadem* in his hand, ^{<258>}Isaiah 62:3. He looks upon them as his own proper goods, his choice goods, his treasure, laid up in his cabinet, and the furniture of his closet, ^{<194>}Psalms 135:4. The rest of the world is but lumber, in comparison with them.

[2.] There is a day coming when God will *make up his jewels*. They shall be gathered up out of the dirt into which they are now thrown, and gathered together from all places to which they are now scattered; he shall *send forth his angels to gather his elect*, who are his jewels, *from the four winds of heaven* (^{<193>}Matthew 24:31), to gather his jewels into his jewel-house, as the wheat from several fields into the barn. All the saints will then be gathered to Christ, and none but saints, and saints made perfect; then God's jewels will be made up, as stones into a crown, as stars into a constellation.

[3.] Those who now own God for theirs, he will then own for his, will publicly confess them before angels and men: "*They shall be mine*; their sanctification shall be completed, and so they shall be perfectly and entirely mine, without any remaining interests of the world and the flesh." Their relation to God shall be acknowledged, and his property in them. He will separate them from those that are not his, and give them their portion with those that are his; for to them it shall be said, *Come, you blessed of*

my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you. They were in doubt, sometimes, whether they were belonging to God or no; but the matter shall then be put out of doubt. God himself will say unto them, *You are mine.* Now their relation to God is what they are reproached with, but it will then be gloried in; God himself will glory in it.

(4.) He promises them a share in his grace now: *I will spare them as a man spares his own son that serves him.* God had promised to own them as his and take them to be with him; but it might be a discouragement to them to think that they had offended God, and that he might justly disown them, and cast them off; but, as to that, he says, *“I will spare them; I will not deal with them as they deserve. I will rejoice over them”* (so some expound it) *“as the bridegroom over his bride,”* ^{<2675>} Isaiah 62:5; ^{<3187>} Zephaniah 3:17. But the word usually signifies to spare with commiseration and compassion, *as a father pities his children,* ^{<1933>} Psalm 103:13. Note,

[1.] It is our duty to serve God with the disposition of children. We must be his sons, must by a new birth partake of a divine nature, must consent to the covenant of adoption and partake of the spirit of adoption. And we must be his servants; God will not have his children trained up in idleness; they must do him service, and they must do it from a principle of love, with cheerfulness and delight, and as those that are therein serving their own true interest, and this is serving *as a son with the father,* ^{<162>} Philippians 2:22.

[2.] If we serve God with the disposition of children, he will spare us with the tenderness and compassion of a Father. Even God's children that serve him stand in need of sparing mercy, that mercy to which we owe it that we are not consumed, that mercy which keeps us out of hell. Nehemiah, when he had done much good, yet, knowing there is not a *just man on earth,* that *does good and sins not,* and that every sin deserves God's wrath, prays, *Lord, spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy;* see ^{<432>} Nehemiah 13:22. And God, as a Father, will show them this mercy. He will not be extreme to mark what we do amiss, but will make the best of us and our poor performances; he will mitigate the afflictions his children are exercised with, and save them from the ruin they deserve. The father continues to spare the son, and does it with complacency, because he is his own; thus God will spare humble penitents and petitioners, *as a man*

sparing his son that serves him, though we do him so little service, nay, though we do him so much disservice.

3. How they will thus be distinguished from the children of this world (v. 18): “*Then shall you return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between sinners and saints, between those that serve God and make conscience of their duty to him and those that serve him not, but put contempt upon his service. You that now speak against God as making no difference between good and bad, and therefore say, It is in vain to serve him (v. 14), you shall be made to see your error; you that would speak for God, but know not what to say as to this, that there seems to be one event to the righteous and to the wicked, and all things come alike to all, will then have the matter set in a true light, and will see, to your everlasting satisfaction, the difference between the righteous and the wicked. Then you shall return, that is, you shall change you mind, and come to a right understanding of the thing.*” This primarily respects the manifest difference that was made by the divine Providence between the believing Jews and those that persisted in their infidelity, at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, and of the Jewish church and nation, by the Romans. But it is to have its full accomplishment at the second coming of Jesus Christ, and on that great discriminating day when it shall be easy enough to *discern between the righteous and the wicked*. Note,

(1.) All the children of men are either righteous or wicked, either such as serve God or such as serve him not. This is that division of the children of men which will last for ever, and by which their eternal state will be determined; all are going either to heaven or to hell.

(2.) In this world it is often hard to *discern between the righteous and the wicked*. They are mingled together, good fish and bad in the same net. The righteous are so distempered, and the wicked so disguised, that we are often deceived in our opinions concerning both the one and the other. There are many who, we think, serve God, who, having not their hearts right with him, will be found none of his servants; and, on the other hand, many will be found his faithful servants, who, because they followed not with us, did not, as we thought, serve him. But that which especially raised the difficulty here was that the divine Providence seemed to make no difference between the righteous and the wicked; you could not know wicked men by God's frowning upon them, for they commonly prospered in the world, nor righteous men by his smiling upon them, for they were

involved with others in the same common calamity. None now knows God's *love or hatred by all that is before him*, ~~2001~~ Ecclesiastes 9:1.

(3.) At the bar of Christ, in the last judgment, it will be easy to *discern between the righteous and the wicked*; for then every man's character will be both perfected and perfectly discovered, every man will then appear in his true colours, and his disguises will be taken off. Some men's sins indeed go beforehand, and you may now tell who is wicked, but others follow after; however, in the great day, we shall see who was righteous and who wicked. Every man's condition likewise will be both perfected and everlastingly determined; the righteous will then be perfectly happy and the wicked perfectly miserable, without mixture or alloy. When the righteous are all set on the right hand of Christ, and invited to come for a blessing, and all the wicked on his left hand, and are told to depart with a curse, then it will be easy to discern between them. As to ourselves, therefore, we are concerned to think among which we shall have our lot, and, as to others, we must *judge nothing before the time*.