

# The Great Distinction

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Date: 11 August 2019

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Malachi chapter 3. Malachi 3 and verse 13, and we're going to read through chapter 4 and verse 3.

But now we call the arrogant blessed.

Certainly the evildoers prosper, and even those who challenge God escape. Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard.

A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored his name. They shall be mine, says the Lord Almighty, in the day when I make up my treasured possession.

I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him. And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.

[ 1 : 1 5 ] Surely the day is coming. It will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire, says the Lord Almighty.

Not a root or branch will be left to them. But for you who revere my name, the son of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings, and you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall.

Then you will trample down the wicked. They will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things, says the Lord Almighty. The promises of God, they are meat and drink for the Christian.

We live upon them. Indeed, it's by those promises that we become partakers of the divine nature and escape the corruption that is in the world because of evil desire.

Well, our text today is from the last book of the Old Testament, God's word through the prophet Malachi. And as the Old Testament comes to a close, we have this encouraging promise left to us.

[ 2 : 3 4 ] You will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those that serve God and those that do not. Right off the bat, we can learn from this text that as God looks at the world, he sees two categories of people, and only two, the righteous and the wicked.

All other differences among us that we have are insignificant to God compared to these two. So whether you're rich or poor, young or old, black or white, sick or healthy, male or female, slave or free, the most important thing to God is whether you are righteous or wicked.

Those are the two categories of people in the world. And that's not just from Malachi chapter 3 and verse 18. As you read your Bible, you find that that's the most common way that God divides humanity.

He sometimes refers to the godly and the ungodly, to the believer and the unbeliever, those that fear God and those who do not, and so on. But never do we find the population divided in categories as often as this designation of the righteous and the wicked.

The book of Psalms begins in the very first chapter, doesn't it? With that introduction, you're going to meet two kinds of people in the Psalter. And who are they?

[ 4 : 1 3 ] Well, the wicked. They will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord looks with favor upon the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Again, you see these two compared. And that's who you meet throughout the 150 chapters of the Psalms. The book of Proverbs often contrasts these two as well.

In chapter 10 alone, they're contrasted 11 times. You see how God takes this designation and compares them. So, the problem with this classification of the Bible is finding people who know they fit into those two categories of the righteous and the wicked.

It's hard to find a wicked person. God talks about them all the time in the Bible, 363 times, but few claim the title.

Wicked? Oh, I know I'm not perfect. I know I sin. I sin. Who doesn't? But, surely I'm not wicked. Those are the guys that are on death row or doing life somewhere.

[ 5 : 32 ] No, I'm not. I'm not wicked. And it can be nearly as difficult to find people who would call themselves righteous. Even the most Christ-like disciples of Jesus may feel a bit uncomfortable defining themselves or describing themselves as the righteous.

And yet, God uses this description of his people all the time. So, we're faced with this, these two categories. Right now, as God looks upon you, he sees you as either righteous or wicked. Those are the two categories. So, let's, let's be sure we have our terms defined before we come to this promise in the text. How does God define these two groups of people in the Bible?

We're not asking People Magazine what they think about people. We're not asking Oprah Winfrey. We're not asking our Supreme Court. Who are the righteous? Who are the wicked?

We're asking God and he's told us in the scriptures. So, first of all, the wicked. Who are they? Well, they're all of us from birth.

[ 6 : 48 ] We're all born wicked. Now, to be sure, God created man upright or righteous, but man has gone in search of many schemes.

Ecclesiastes 7.29. So, God made man righteous. Adam and Eve came from his hand, pure and upright and righteous. But you remember how they fell and rebelled against God.

And ever since then, all of us have been born wicked. That's the teaching of scripture. Psalm 57.3, even from birth, the wicked go astray.

From the womb, they are wayward and speak lies. Now, that's all of us. Nobody ever taught us to lie or to go astray. We've got to be taught to tell the truth and to stay in line, don't we?

But, the wicked go astray from the womb. Our first step in life is with our back toward God, going astray from him.

[ 7 : 53 ] That's the nature we inherited from fallen Adam and Eve. We all, like sheep, have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way.

And the Lord has laid on him the iniquities of us all. So, that's what defines the wicked. We've gone astray and that includes all of us. We've said no to God and yes to our way.

We've said not your way but my way. And, that's what defines the wicked. Paul says it plainly in Romans 3 and verses 10 to 12, there is none righteous.

Okay, so that's the, that's the evaluation he's quoting from the Old Testament. That's the evaluation of God as he looks upon the earth. There's none righteous, not even one. There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.

All have turned away. They have together become worthless. There is no one who does good, not even one. So, who are the wicked according to God? Well, they're all of us as we come into this world.

[ 8 : 57 ] None righteous, all wicked. Now, to be sure, they're not all the same. Not all wicked people are the same. There's a great diversity among the wicked.

But what they have in common is that they've, each one, chosen their own way. Now, the own way for one is going to differ from their own way for another. But they all are in agreement and in lockstep unity in that it's not God's way.

It's their way. So, Romans 8, 7 says that the sinful mind, and that's the mind we're born with, is hostility against God.

Just the mind of the unconverted person is against God. And you see it in this way. The verse goes on. It, that is that hostile mind against God, it does not submit to God's law, neither can it do so.

Now, you can refuse to submit to God's law with a smile on your face in a polite no thank you to God. Or you can refuse to submit to God's law with your fist in his face.

[ 10 : 07 ] Both are wicked. Both refuse to submit to the law of God. So, you can do it as a respectable church member or as a raving atheist.

My way, not your way. Remember, in Jesus' day, the most wicked people were the most religious people, weren't they? It was the religious leaders of Israel that lied about Jesus, that falsely accused him, that hired false witnesses to tell their lies in court, and then that crucified him.

Yes, it was the religious that were the most wicked in Jesus' day. Jesus says, the tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of heaven before you.

they will acknowledge their sin and repent, but not you. You think you're righteous, but you're really wicked. So, that's the wicked.

All of us by birth, and we show it by our refusal to bow our will to God, his law, his gospel, his son. [11:18] So, the righteous, who are they? Were there all the rest? Because there's only two categories, right?

There's the wicked and the righteous. Well, who are the righteous? Were there, they were once the wicked. We must start with that, right?

We just saw that. So, the righteous, whoever you are, you were once wicked. But these are the wicked who by faith in Jesus Christ have been declared righteous.

And by the spirit of Jesus are being made righteous. And those two aspects of the righteous are always found together. They're like Siamese twins where you see those who have been declared righteous, you will always find them to be being made righteous.

God never does the one without the other. And so, we must not be confused by these two. We must not confuse them being declared righteous and being made righteous.

[12:24] We must understand how they differ but neither should we neglect one or the other. So, who are the righteous? First of all, they're the wicked who have been declared righteous.

Now, if that doesn't sound a bit strange into your ears, you didn't hear me right. Who are the righteous? They are the wicked who have been declared righteous. This is a legal term to justify, to declare righteous.

It's something that takes place in the courtroom of heaven. It's like what we have in our courtrooms on earth where a judge after examining and trying a person comes to the conclusion and finds that the man is innocent.

He brings the gavel down and he announces his judgment and says, not guilty. Not guilty. So, what does that mean?

Well, that means that in the eyes of the law, he's done everything right. He's righteous. He's in a right standing with the law.

[13:33] He's not left anything undone. He's not transgressed the law in any way. The sentence or the conclusion of the judgment is, he's not guilty.

He's declared then to be just, to be right, to be right with the law. But the question is, how can God be a just judge and still declare a wicked sinner to be not guilty but righteous?

How can God bring a sinner into his court and see this is a wicked man and yet bring the gavel down and say, not guilty to declare him righteous before God in perfect good standing with the Lord?

Well, it's only because of what Jesus Christ has done for wicked sinners who put their trust in him. There's this double exchange on the books in heaven.

Remember, the Bible tells us that the books are being kept and everything that we do is being recorded in heaven and we have this double exchange if we've trusted in Jesus.

[14:41] Jesus takes our sins off of our page and puts them on his page and his righteousness and obedience is taken off of his page and put onto our page.

He takes our sins and gives us his righteousness. All the failures, the F's on our report card are put over to his account.

It's an accounting term. They were credited to him. They were imputed to him. They were put on his tab and all of his righteousness was credited or imputed to our report card.

And so, as we stand before God on the record books in heaven, all of our sins are gone. In fact, all of Christ's righteousness is now standing there on my record. So, why wouldn't God say, not guilty, but righteous?

righteous. And that's precisely what he does. He declares us not guilty, but right with God. Not through our works, but through Christ's works.

[15:48] For no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law. Why not? Because we've all broken the law. Rather, Romans 3.20 and following, righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

And so, when we come as a wicked sinner, knowing that we're lawbreakers and we are the wicked and we have nothing good to say for ourselves, but we put all of our trust in Jesus to save us, this great exchange takes place.

My sin to him, his righteousness to me. And on the basis of that righteousness, God remains a just judge and yet he justifies the wicked. He says, not guilty.

He's right with me. He stands good with my law. And so, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.

Romans 4.5. God justifies the wicked because he's looking at Christ and his righteousness, his obedience.

[16:59] as to this declaring righteous, he's not even looking at your works. He's not even considering, well, let's see how she's done.

Has she obeyed this command? Has she obeyed that command? He's not even looking your way. When you put faith in Jesus, he's looking at Jesus' obedience to those commandments. and if Jesus kept them, then you're declared righteous because that's the righteousness that you receive by faith alone, not by works.

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. So that's who the righteous are. They are those who have put their trust in Jesus Christ and therefore have been declared righteous because of Jesus' perfect obedience and atoning death.

But now, for all who have been declared righteous in the courtroom of heaven, there is a second way in which they are called the righteous in the Bible and that is that they are made righteous. They are made righteous. This is not justification. This is sanctification. This is not Christ's work for us, but Christ's work in us by His Spirit.

[18:18] This is not a legal declaration that is made in the courtroom of heaven and a switching of our books in heaven, but an actual work of God in our hearts and in our lives here on earth.

We are made righteous. He changes us from the old person we were to the new creations that we become in Christ from wicked to righteous, living as a wicked man to living as a righteous man, from going astray to following Christ in His word, from disobeying His laws to obeying them, from doing what's wrong in God's sight to doing what's right in God's sight.

He changes us. None who are declared righteous in heaven continue the same on earth. They are changed here from wicked to righteous.

Now, this is a process. The justification that we spoke of is an act that's once and for all, you can never be more justified than the day you first put faith in Jesus Christ because you can't get more holy than the righteousness of Jesus.

That's what justification is. You're declared righteous because of His perfect righteousness. But now when we're talking about being made righteous, we've not yet been perfected. This is a process.

[19:37] And so how does it begin? Well, it begins with the new birth. It begins with the Holy Spirit changing our hearts and taking out that heart of stone and putting in a pliable heart, putting His Spirit in our hearts.

That's where it begins. A whole new direction is given to our hearts. So instead of going my way, we now have a mind to go God's way. Instead of a mind to hate God and His way, we have a mind to love God and His way.

Our desires are changed from my way to His way. My will and my choices are changed. Not perfectly, but radically in the new birth.

We become a new creation. The old is gone, the new has come. But then it continues, this being made righteous continues as the Holy Spirit lives within us and wars against the flesh that remains in us and the Spirit moves us, Ezekiel says.

He moves us to follow His decrees and to be careful to keep His laws. That's an actual change, you see, in our lifestyle. It's because of His work in us that we begin to think and desire and do what is right, righteous, in God's eyes.

[21:00] So, the process begun in the new birth, continued the whole of our lives by the Spirit is one day going to be perfected when we see Christ and we will be made like Him, as morally righteous as Jesus is righteous.

With no immoral thoughts, no unrighteous desires, no unrighteous will and choices, we will be as righteous as Jesus as far as His moral righteousness goes.

So, that's who the righteous are. They are the wicked who've been declared right with God in the court of heaven because of putting their faith in Jesus and His righteousness makes us righteous in

the courtroom of God.

and then we're those who are being made righteous in heart and life by the Spirit of God who works within us. And no one has any solid reasons for thinking that they are righteous, thinking that they have been declared righteous in the courtroom of heaven who is not in this life being made righteous.

Let me read what John says because God never does the one without doing the other. John says in 1 John 3, 7, Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous just as He is righteous.

[ 22 : 26 ] He who does, this has everything to do with your deeds, your works, He who does what is right is righteous. That's the one that God has declared righteous in heaven because of the righteousness of Jesus.

That's the one He's making righteous on earth by His Spirit. So the righteous, the wicked.

I don't want to spend all of our time on that. We haven't got to the promise yet, have we? But these are the two groups of people populating the planet at any given time in history, the righteous and the wicked.

Which are you? That is the most important thing about you. But let's come to the encouraging promise here at the end of the Old Testament. Malachi 3.18 says, you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked.

Between those who serve God and those who do not. There again, you have a help in knowing who are the righteous and who are the wicked. The righteous are those who serve God in their lives.

[ 23 : 32 ] They're not living for self. They're serving God. The wicked, they're the ones that are serving themselves. Well, what's the promise? Well, the promise is you will again see a distinction between these two groups.

There have been times in history when the distinction between the righteous and the wicked has been very obvious to all. God's treatment of them in this life, there's been differences, very clearly defined differences that fall out according to whether they're righteous or wicked.

think of Israel down in Egypt in cruel bondage and God comes to set them free and sends his servant Moses to bring them out that they might serve him in their own land and you remember Pharaoh was not willing to let them go and so God will make him willing to let them go by the ten plagues.

We have the first three plagues, water to blood, frogs and gnats, but then with the plague of flies, we notice something new is introduced. There's a clear distinction made between God's people and the Egyptian people.

Here's the word Moses brought to Pharaoh. This is what the Lord says, if you do not let my people go, I will send swarms of flies on you and your officials on your people and into your houses.

[ 25 : 03 ] The houses of the Egyptians will be full of flies and even the ground where they are. But on that day, I will deal differently with the land of Goshen where my people live.

No swarms of flies will be there so that you will know that I, the Lord, am in this land. I will make a distinction between my people and your people.

Exodus 8, 20 to 23. Well, it happened like that and Pharaoh hardened his heart and would not let them go. Well, it's the same with the fifth plague of livestock. But the Lord will make a distinction between the livestock of Israel and that of Egypt so that no animal belonging to the Israelites will die.

The next day, the Lord did it. All the livestock of the Egyptians died, but not one animal belonging to the Israelites died. Pharaoh sent men to investigate and they found that not even one of the animals of the Israelites had died.

But again, he refused to let Israel go. Same is said of the seventh plague of hail. Hail that struck everything in the fields, both men and animals, beat down everything, growing in the fields, stripped every tree.

[ 26 : 17 ] The only place that did not hail was the land of Goshen where the Israelites lived. The ninth plague of darkness, total darkness would cover all of Egypt for three days, no one would be able to leave their home or see anyone else for three days.

Yet, all the Israelites had light in the places where they lived. Same distinction seen in the tenth plague of the death of every firstborn son in Egypt, from the royal family of Pharaoh to that of the slave girl at her hand mill and the cattle as well.

Loud wailing throughout Egypt such as never been or ever will be again, but among the Israelites not a dog will bark at any man or animal and then you will know that the Lord makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.

Exodus 11, 4 to 7. So there were times in history, and that's just one example that many others could be cited, when God has made it obvious this distinction, this drawing, separating between His people and those that are not His people.

Good things have happened to the righteous and bad things to the wicked. But more often than not in this present age, that was not the case and still is not the case, is it?

[ 27 : 46 ] Though the Lord knows those who are His, the distinction in how He treats them outwardly is not always seen to be the same. It's not the righteous alone who enjoy blessings in this life.

Remember, Jesus says that God causes His reign to fall on the righteous and the wicked. He causes His sun to shine on the righteous and the wicked.

Both categories receive the same blessing. and again, we could multiply that, the blessing of family, the blessing of food, equal blessings, many blessings that are meted out equally to the righteous and the wicked.

And the same is true on the other side of suffering. That usually comes to both, the righteous and the wicked in this life. It's not only wicked people who died in mass shootings last week.

It's not like if you were a wicked person the bullet hit you square and took your life but if you were a righteous person it somehow just swerved around you and spared you.

[ 28 : 54 ] It doesn't happen like that. Not usually. it's not that cancer and accidents only take the wicked while the righteous are spared.

Tornadoes do not always lift and go over the house of the righteous like the angel of death did do the night of Passover and only struck the Egyptian homes.

That distinction was made clearly back then. Not so much anymore, is it? The tornado takes all in its path righteous and wicked floodwaters don't come over the land and when they come to a righteous field and farm suddenly stop and stand up and only flood the wicked.

No. Righteous and wicked alone and wicked alike suffer together in this present age. He does distinguish God does distinguish between the righteous and the wicked.

He knows who is who but that difference is not usually seen by men in the way of God's providential rulings in their lives. In fact, it's a world where, according to Psalm 37, the wicked plot against the righteous and gnash their teeth at them.

[ 30 : 13 ] The situation is such that the wicked are actually the aggressors and their prey is the righteous and they gnash their teeth at them.

It reminds you of what happened in Acts chapter 7 when righteous Stephen was preaching and wicked Jewish rulers of the religion of the Jews gnashed their teeth against him and took him out and stoned him to death.

The wicked plotting and carrying out their persecution of the righteous. Now, that situation that I've just described of the righteous and wicked sharing alike in many of the outward blessings and the outward sufferings of life has caused a real problem for many believers.

It's been a real temptation even for God's people to think ill of God, to speak harshly about him and to criticize the way that he is policing the moral world.

It's interesting, as early as it is Genesis 18, you have Abraham questioning that kind of business. When he learned that the Lord was going to come down and destroy Sodom, the city of Sodom, what's his response?

[ 31 : 35 ] Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Far be it from you to do such a thing. To kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike.

Far be it from you. Will not the judge of all the earth do right? God, if you do that, I will not be able to call you just, call you righteous.

You're familiar with Asaph's struggle with this very thing in Psalm 73. He's ready to give up the most basic truth about God that he is good and he's good to his people.

Nothing's more clear than the goodness of God to his people. And that's, he says, I almost slipped, I almost fell, I almost gave up on the most fundamental and obvious thing about God, that he's good to his people.

Why? Because I saw the wicked prospering and I saw the peck of problems that I woke up to every day while I'm trying to be holy and trying to keep God's commands and the proud and arrogant wicked don't give a hoot about God's commands.

[ 32 : 47 ] And they're having all the fun and I'm having all the bitterness of life to the point where he started envying the wicked, wanting to trade places to count them blessed and to count himself cursed.

You see, and Asaph's no slacker Christian. He's a leader in the worship of Israel. Beautiful psalms that he wrote and led the congregation in singing, especially that Psalm 73 where he's honest enough to share his struggle because it's not just Asaph.

I believe that there's more of the health, wealth, and prosperity gospel in all of us than we're probably aware of. I mean, some people actually preach that and say, God wants you healthy, wealthy, and rich, and well off in every way here and now.

And if you follow him faithfully and seek to be true to him and his commands, then you will be blessed. And it's only the wicked who have fallen away from God in some way, and the Christians that's backslidden, only they are the ones that will suffer poverty and sickness and death and so on. But again, we see in Asaph, it's not just those who are preaching that kind of health, wealth, and prosperity gospel. It's all of us. What happens when tragedy strikes us?

[ 34 : 14 ] What happens when unusual blessing comes to the wicked? Maybe even the wicked who are persecuting us or other righteous people.

Job's friends believed that doctrine, didn't they? And they accused Job. Job, you've obviously done something very wicked here because of all that God did to you in taking your health and your children and your wealth.

No, not at all. God himself goes on the record. Speaking to the devil about his servant Job, there's no one on earth like him. He's blameless and upright.

Righteous. A man who fears God and shuns evil. Wasn't that? But Job's friends thought it must be that because God's just and he surely wouldn't do something bad to the righteous.

The wise man of Ecclesiastes complains of this in his observations of life. He looks over the world and listen to him. 715.

[ 35 : 19 ] In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these. A righteous man perishing in his righteousness and a wicked man living long in his wickedness.

Isn't that a bummer? That the righteous who are doing good in the land perish and the wicked who are destroying the land live on. It's old age.

Ecclesiastes 8:14. There's something else meaningless that occurs on earth. This is even worse perhaps. righteous men who get what the wicked deserve. And wicked men who get what the righteous deserve.

This too I say is vanity. Ezekiel is given God's word to announce judgment in the land of Israel and he says this is what the Lord says.

This is a message that will cause the ears of those who hear it to tingle in their knees to turn into water. They won't be able to stand up under the weight of this message of God's judgment. This is what the Lord says.

[ 36 : 21 ] I'm against you and I will draw my sword from its scabbard and I will cut off from you both the righteous and the wicked because I'm going to cut off the righteous and the wicked.

My sword will be unsheathed against everyone from south to north. Everybody who's in the land will taste the sword that I'm bringing righteous or wicked alike.

Jeremiah. These are dear prophets of God. These are men who spoke to God and listened to God, received direct revelation from God and here's Jeremiah and he can't help but ask God about what he sees happening in his world.

He says, you're always righteous, oh Lord, when I bring a case before you, yet, yet I would speak with you about your justice.

Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease? Habakkuk, God's prophet, complains justice never prevails.

[ 37 : 33 ] The wicked hem in the righteous so that justice is perverted. And that was the problem in Malachi's day. We're back to Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament.

The same problem, the same thinking harsh thoughts about God because of the way he's governing his world and not punishing the wicked and blessing the righteous in a way that's visible

to all.

Malachi 2.17 God's word to these in Israel. You have wearied the Lord with your words.

Us? How have we wearied him? You ask. By saying all who do evil are good in the eyes of the Lord and he's pleased with them.

Or by saying where is the God of justice? I don't see it. So they call evil good and good evil and since God doesn't immediately destroy evildoers but blesses them, God must be pleased with them.

[ 38 : 38 ] They've changed their view of God because of what they're seeing in the way of his moral government of the earth. The wicked are getting away with murder, adultery, robbery, and every other evil.

Even those who challenge God escape. So why should we serve God anyway? What has God ever done? What has it ever done for us? What have we ever gotten?

How have we gained from obeying his laws? It's the evildoer that's prospering and having fun and challenging God and getting away with it. why do we even continue to keep up the charade?

So what we see is that even within Israel there is this mixture of the righteous and the wicked. Many were keeping the outward forms and bringing their sacrifices and mourning before the Lord and taking confessions upon their lips, but still God's heavy hand was upon them, and so they complained to God.

God says, you're sinning, and this is part of my discipline against you. You don't want to keep your wife, you just divorce her.

[ 39 : 50 ] You mistreat the widow, you mistreat your neighbor's wife, you mistreat the orphan. He had his reasons why he was doing what he was doing, so they conclude it's futile, it's worthless to serve God.

They had religion without the heart of religion, no love for God, which is at the very heart of all true religion. They were in it for themselves. What do we get out of it? And if I don't get much, why should I even keep up the act?

So God's judgments were falling upon this nation, and that meant that the righteous were suffering right along with the wicked, but rather than complaining, those who really feared God and really were the righteous, they gathered together and they spoke well of God's name.

What a different response. Same outward circumstances, but what a different response. They praised God. They spoke well of him. No, God took notice of it, and he wrote their names down in his book.

He was pleased. These were the truly righteous remnant among the wicked nation. They will be mine, he says, in the day when I make up my treasure possession. I will spare them just as in compassion a man spares his own son who serves him.

[ 41 : 09 ] And here it is. And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not serve him.

Here's that encouraging promise for the suffering righteous remnant. The time is coming when you'll see this distinction again, just as you saw it back in the plagues.

We're tempted to think it's always going to be this way. The righteous are always going to get what the wicked deserve, and the wicked are always going to get. No, no. Here's the encouraging promise.

You'll once again. There will come a time again when you will see clearly this distinction that God makes between the righteous and the wicked. it's in the day when I make up my treasured possessions.

Surely the day is coming. It'll burn like a furnace. All the arrogance and every evildoer will be stubble and that day that is coming will set them on fire, says the Lord. Not a root or branch will be left to them.

[ 42 : 15 ] But for you who revere my name, the son of righteousness will rise with healing in his wings and you'll go out and leap like calves released from the stall and so on.

a distinction will be made in that day that everyone will see. A great separation is coming. It's the day of the Lord.

It's the day of final judgment. You will be there and you will see it. Now the Lord Jesus then follows on these words doesn't he as you turn the pages just a few pages into the book of Matthew and you find Jesus teaching the same truth that you will again see the distinction between the righteous and

the wicked.

Matthew 13 he's telling the parable about a net the kingdom of heavens like a net that was let down into the lake and it caught all kinds of fish and when it was full the fishermen pulled it up on the shore and then they sat down and collected and what did they do?

They put the good fish in baskets but they threw the bad fish away. This is how it will be at the end of the age the angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

[ 43 : 37 ] You see Jesus is just building on what God's prophet said in Malachi 3 18. You will again see the distinction the separation between the righteous and the wicked together now in the same net but one day a separation is coming for the righteous and the wicked.

The same truth is taught in the parable of the tares the wheat and the tares or the weeds and the wheat the kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field but while everyone was sleeping his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away when the wheat sprouted and formed heads then the weeds also appeared the owner's servants came to him and said sir didn't you sow good seed in your field where then did the weeds come from an enemy has done this he replied the servants asked him do you want us to go and pull them up no he answered because while you're pulling up the weeds you may root up the wheat with them let both grow together until the harvest at that time I will tell the harvesters first collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn it sounds clear to us by now but the disciples didn't get it and so later in the house they asked

Jesus to explain the parable and he said the one who sowed the good seed is the son of man the field is the world and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom the true sons the weeds are the sons of the evil one and the enemy who sows them is the devil the harvest is the end of the age and the harvesters are angels and as the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire so it will be at the end of the age the son of man will send out his angels and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil they will throw them into the fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their father he who has ears to hear let him hear wheat and weeds now growing up together righteous and wicked in the same church pews in the same families in the same communities growing up together but one day to be separated you come to

Matthew chapter 25 and verse 31 and Jesus drops the parables and he just talks straight up this is how it's going to be in the day of judgment he says when the son of man comes in his glory and all the angels with him he'll sit on his throne in heavenly glory and all the nations will be gathered before him and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats and he'll put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left judgment is separation of the righteous and the wicked and you will all be there and you will all see the distinction as clear as this aisle is here and all of you are on my right and all of you are on my left it will be that clear in the day of judgment when all the people that have ever lived appear before their judge Jesus Christ and then you'll also hear the distinction for then the king will say to those on his right whom he calls righteous come you who are blessed by my father inherit the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world and then he will say to those on his left not come but depart from me you who are cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels and then they will go away to eternal punishment but the righteous to eternal life and nobody in that scene will ever be saying God is pleased with evil doers God doesn't care what we do even those who challenge God get away with it where is this God of justice no one will be asking those questions no one will be saying what is to be gained by serving God heaven and hell are the ultimate application of Malachi 318 you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked between those who serve God and those who do not two finishing words first a word to the wicked and it's a word of warning you will again see this distinction between the righteous and the wicked in this life you may have it pretty good everything might be falling into place for you even as you're ignoring

[ 48 : 53 ] God's laws that you don't like and ignoring his son that he sent from heaven for sinners ignoring his law ignoring his gospel content to live without him you might have it even better than many of the righteous who are worse off than you this text says not forever a change is coming the day is coming and you will see it your eyes will see it not another you yourself will be there in other words it's not an empty threat do you know why God warns the wicked it's because he loves them it's because he loves them he had no love for them he wouldn't warn them he'd let them just fall off

the cliff into hell no it's his love for the wicked sends his prophets over and over to warn them of a coming day of judgment that finally sent his son and they did to him what they had done to all the rest of the prophets oh but it's love that wants you to repent

I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked but that they repent that they turn and live why will you die why will you not rather turn and live so all things going well for you now don't misinterpret God's silence as if it means God's approval no God didn't strike you dead after you stole that no God didn't make you have an accident in your car when you sinned against him in some grievous way no but don't think that he didn't care about what you did and nothing's more common than misinterpreting God's kindness to the wicked and nothing is more wrong he's not easy on sin he's just being patient with you that you might be brought to repentance so why is God kind and good and patient his kindness and goodness and patience is meant to bring you to repentance not to a hardened heart that says well

God must not care wow I got away with that I guess I'm doing good no no it's his warning shot across the bow I love you turn I love you turn the day is coming I want to tell you that the wicked can become righteous and I am exhibit number one wicked but declared righteous for Jesus sake and being made righteous by his own Holy Spirit in my heart don't despair if you're one of the wicked this morning Jesus Christ will save you everyone who was righteous was once wicked he can change your status from wicked to righteous so seek the Lord while he may be found don't don't don't just put it off say well I've got time no you don't know what 24 hours will bring what a day will bring forth the day is coming today is the day of salvation right now heed is warning of love and then there's the same word is not only a warning to the wicked it's it's a word of encouragement to the righteous isn't it the

Lord knows the troubles you have and he has a word of encouragement for you what is it you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked you may often suffer worse than the wicked in this life you may even suffer at the hands of the wicked but hold on to the promise a change is coming surely!

Be sure of it in your heart by faith hold on to it you're going to see again this distinction between those who serve God and those that don't he's coming as a fire to consume the wicked but he's coming as the son of righteousness with healing in his wings for you healing for all that is wrong in your life he's coming to heal it to restore!

[ 53 : 26 ] it and he will spare you as a man spares the son in compassion that serves him and in that day you'll be so happy you'll go out like a calf released from the stall kicking up your heels for sorrow and sadness will flee away gladness and joy will overtake you forever and ever you'll see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked you'll hear the distinction from Jesus own mouth come come you who are blessed by my father and as you stand on the right hand with all the other righteous and you hear his welcome home you'll know that you owe it all to the Lord Jesus Christ for Christ died for sins once for all the righteous for the unrighteous that is the righteous for the wicked why in order to bring us to

God here we are there will be and we'll look at each other why are we here and not over there one reason Christ died for sins once for all the righteous for the wicked and we embraced him we received him and we were declared righteous and given his spirit to make us righteous if that will not make us love him if that will not make us serve him if that will not make us trust him and obey him what will let's sing of that great exchange of him for me from the overhead his robes for mine it all comes back to this great exchange that made the great distinction moving me from wicked to righteous stand with me as we sing it from the!

Bush