

## Malachi 3:13-4:6 — Why Follow God When I Don't See Results?

**March 18, 2018**

Good morning. Before we start, we need a few minutes of family business. Last week, Tami Gravert, our secretary, was limping around church. It was so bad that Pastor Dave took her to the emergency room Sunday morning. This week, she was able to get an MRI in Sioux Falls, SD. They discovered a cancerous tumor in her spinal cord. They are treating it with radiation. Later, they also found cancer in her lungs, liver and brain. We want to keep her in our prayers plus do anything we can to help her and her family during this difficult season.

In addition, I am thankful to bring Dawn Timmer to the CrossWinds team as our financial secretary. I hired her on Monday. Less than 24 hours later, at her regular cancer checkup, tests reveal some fluid on her heart and growth in one of the cancerous tumors they were successfully keeping in check. Thankfully Dawn feels healthy. After subsequent doctor visits, since she feels well, they didn't ask her to slow her busy routine while they craft a different chemo regiment. I am grateful we will have her skills as our financial secretary.

Given so much sickness, it is appropriate we take the time to pray for both Tami and Dawn before we begin this morning's study.

[Prayer]

This morning, we finish the book of Malachi. Last week, we were in a very practical section of the book where God challenged his people to honor him with their wealth. God challenged them to honor him not with extraordinary giving but just with ordinary giving. If they did, God promised to take care of them if they put him first in their finances.

While Malachi's words were encouraging and challenging, we learned we need to be careful how we apply them. Malachi's promise of extraordinary crop blessings from simply giving regular tithes and offerings was a one-time promise given to God's people in the old covenant at that time in history when God's people lived in the Promised Land. We need to be careful about simply applying the promises made to God's people in Malachi's day directly to ourselves in our day. This is not a promise that if farmers put enough money in the offering plate, they are guaranteed to have an abundant harvest.

While Malachi 3 was a one-time promise to God's people in that day, there are still things for us to learn. Behind that one-time promise is an all-time principle that is still valid for us today. The principle is that God honors his people when we worship him with our wealth and God withholds his hand of blessing from his people when they don't worship him with their wealth. It is impossible for God's people to truly worship him without our wallets. God's people are always to give of their wealth sacrificially, generously and proportionately in worship to Jesus.

Last week, we learned that as a rule of thumb God honors those who honor him. The question for this week is, "Are there exceptions to that rule? Are there times when God's people honor him but God doesn't seem to come through?" Instead of feeling blessed by God, are there times when God's people find themselves suffering for no apparent reason?

What should we do when worship doesn't work? What should we do when worship doesn't feel like it is worth it? That is what we are going to look at this morning.

In these final verses of Malachi, we will meet two groups of people. One group is the complainers. The only reason they worshipped God is because of what they hoped to get from God. They were not happy. Their worship wasn't working. It wasn't producing the wealth they wanted. The other group we meet are the believers. They worshipped God, but even though they are not getting wealthy, they were grateful to have God. Having God is the greatest treasure of all. Having God is enough.

Lastly, we will see the final fate of those who love God and those who just want to get gifts from him.

### **The complainers: Worshipping God because of what we can get from him.**

"Your words have been hard against me, says the Lord. But you say, 'How have we spoken against you?' You have said, 'It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the Lord of hosts? And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape.'" Malachi 3:13–15 (ESV)

God said this group of people were speaking hard words against him. This means they were saying things to God and about God that really hurt. They were hard words. Many times people will say things about us that are mean or untrue. They slander our names, but it doesn't irritate us because we know their words are foolish and untrue since they don't really know us.

Sometimes people say things that are nasty and those words hurt us. Instead of being like water off a duck's back, their words crush our spirits. They hurt. That is because those hurtful words are spoken to us by people we love and

people we care about. The words they say to us attack the character. This is like a husband telling his wife she is a terrible cook or a wife telling her husband he is a lazy. Those kinds of words deeply hurt.

That is exactly what is happening. God said, "The things you guys are saying about me really hurt. After all I have done for you, after saving you and not destroying you, the things you say about me really hurt me."

Let's see what they said about God.

1. **It is vain to serve God.** That means they believed it was futile to serve God. Worship is useless. It didn't matter if they prayed or didn't pray. It didn't matter if they gave or didn't give. God was not there. It didn't matter if they lied or told the truth. God didn't care. Stop wasting your time on Sunday. Go to the beach.
2. **What is the profit of keeping his charge?** This literally means they believed God was not paying them what he owed them. The term literally means God is refusing to pay his bill. They claimed that they did their part in worship and sacrifices and holidays but God wasn't doing his part and giving them the wealth and success they deserved. God was not paying them the life he owed them.
3. **Why walk in mourning?** This literally means they wore dark cloth. They dressed in black like they were at a funeral to mourn for their sin. While they dressed in black on the outside, apparently they didn't genuinely mourn for their sin on the inside. They went through the motions of sorrow but it wasn't

true, heart-level sorrow. God said that simply wearing black didn't mean God owed them anything.

4. **The arrogant are blessed.** They were convinced God's character was backward. He was blessing the wicked, not the righteous. They seriously thought God was rooting for the other team. They accused God of changing sides.
5. **Evildoers prosper. They test God and escape.** They claimed people get away with great evils and God wouldn't step in to stop them. People can murder and get away with it. People can steal and don't need to worry about God's wrath. People can cheat on their taxes, and as long as the government doesn't catch them, God doesn't care.

Remember who was saying this. This was God's own people saying God couldn't be trusted. It doesn't matter if you are crook or a boy scout. God doesn't care. God doesn't judge sin. He doesn't stop sin. He doesn't reward right living.

Do you see why God was hurt when these were the words coming from the people he loved?

The honest question is, have you ever felt that way? Have you ever felt God is silent, because after trying to walk with God for years, instead of enjoying blessing, you are facing suffering. In the meantime, godless people are the successful people. Have you ever felt that way and been angry with God?

In the Psalms, Asaph wrote of the same struggle.

**But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled, my steps had nearly slipped. For I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. Psalm 73:2–3 (ESV)**

Why are you here this morning? Are you here in hope that if you give enough, attend enough, help enough that God will owe you a good life? The switch between loving God and loving his gifts is a subtle, but deadly, shift.

Let me share an observation on why God was not giving his blessings to the people of Malachi's day. The first thing I want to point out is these very questions revealed the true nature of the heart of these people. These people were honoring God not because they loved him but because of what they hoped to get from him. They were looking for God's gifts more than they were looking for God himself.

Once God took his good gifts away, it revealed they really didn't love God at all. They just wanted him to give them success life. They were worshipping success, not the God who loved them.

This morning, is that you? Why are you in worship? Is it because you are hoping that if you go to church enough and give enough and do enough that God will bless your life? If you have made sacrifices for God but not experienced success, are you angry at God because you think God owes you and he didn't come through? Are you here to worship God or to bribe God into blessing you with his gifts? This is a subtle but very important shift when we move from worshipping God to worshipping his gifts.

If God took away his gifts, would you be like the people in Malachi's day where you turn on God and attack him for failing you or would you still turn to him and trust him?

While it is a general principle that God honors those who honor him, it isn't a promise that God will always give success to those who honor him.

We see this tension lived out in a man named Job. It was actually because he loved God so much that his life wasn't easy. Satan asked to ruin Job's life because Satan claimed someone could not love God just for who God is. Satan claimed the only reason Job loved God was because of God's good gifts. If Job's life was ruined, Satan claimed Job would his back on God, just like these people in Malachi's day. God gave Satan permission to ruin Job's life to show the entire universe that someone can love God even when God takes away his good gifts.

Remember the incredible suffering Job endured was not because he was a wicked guy but because he was someone that loved God who was tested by God.

Imagine walking in Job's footsteps. Tonight your children die in a car accident. During the night, your house catches fire and burns down but insurance won't cover it. Through a hacker, your entire savings account is swept clean. What would you do? Would you hate God and question his character or would you still trust God and be grateful that you still have the most important possession of all, you have him. He loves you and promises to never let you go.

Look what Job said after he lost everything.

Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." Job 1:20–21 (ESV)

There was another group in Malachi's day that responded differently when the world fell apart. Rather than speaking against God and his character, they trusted God and his character.

**The believers: We worship God for who he is.**

Then those who feared the Lord spoke with one another. The Lord paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed his name. "They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him. Malachi 3:16–18 (ESV)

This group, instead of speaking against God's character in tough times, continued to trust God in those times.

**They feared the Lord.**

They didn't understand why times were tough but they feared the Lord. That means they respected God. They admitted they didn't understand why God allowed difficulty into their lives but rather than insulting God's character, they chose to trust him even when they didn't understand him. They understood that God's wisdom and ways are beyond our understanding. Even if we don't understand why God allows difficulties into our lives, we can still trust him. The Bible tells us this attitude is the beginning of wisdom.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction. Proverbs 1:7 (ESV)

The beginning of wisdom in life is not to mock God or attack God but to respect him and trust him. Let's see what else the believers group did.

### **They met together.**

Not only did they honor God but they met together to encourage one another in hard times. Encouragement is one of the most important things we can do for one another when life is tough. Call one another. Meet together for worship. Bring meals to one another as we face hard times. Every time we have an opportunity to show love to someone in a practical way as they struggle, we should take advantage of that opportunity. That is the character of God's people.

### **God paid attention and heard them.**

While the complainers thought God wasn't involved, thought God didn't see and didn't hear the wounds and evils in life, here we find the opposite. God was watching the believers. God was listening to their prayers when they cried out to him in pain. God was watching Job when it looked like God was silent. He is watching us when he appears silent and we cry ourselves to sleep. He cares. He pays attention. He listens.

Right now God is watching how we handle our suffering, and he promises to reward us for how we handle suffering, especially when in his wisdom and for reasons unknown to us, he appears to be silent and ignoring us.

Remember God doesn't just see our action and our words but he even knows our thoughts when we suffer. He knows if we are attacking him, slandering him or trusting him. He may appear to be silent, but he is watching.

And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Hebrews 4:13 (ESV)

## God writes our names in a book of remembrance.

Not only does God take notice and hear our cries in tough times but he writes our names in his book of remembrance. What is a book of remembrance? In the ancient world, kings used to have books of what people did that was memorable or noteworthy. These deeds were written down so the king would remember to reward these people in the future. We see this most clearly in the book of Esther.

On that night the king could not sleep. And he gave orders to bring the book of memorable deeds, the chronicles, and they were read before the king. Esther 6:1 (ESV)

God doesn't just see his people turn to him in the hard times but he records our trust in him in his books so he can be sure to reward us for that trust in the future. When many other people are angry at God, they are fed up with God, and they are slandering his character, God sees those who trust him and he writes down their trust so he is sure to reward them in the future.

Another thing God records in his book of memorable deeds are those tough times when we are heartbroken and we turn to him, rather than against him.

You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book? Psalm 56:8 (ESV)

How many of us have experienced the bottom dropping out of life and we turned to God in our brokenness and cried ourselves to sleep? In those moments when you trusted in God instead of turning against him in anger, God remembers. He keeps a record of your tears. He will reward you for that trust in the future.

**These were the people that esteemed his name.**

What does it mean to esteem the name of God? Esteem literally means to set your mind on God's name because God himself is the one that is the great value. God is the great asset of their lives. Instead of living to have God's gifts, these folks were grateful they had the one gift that is the most important of all, God himself. They had the God of the universe that loved them, even when they didn't understand his ways, they knew they could still trust him. How did God think about these people who loved him more than just his gifts?

**They were God's treasured possession.**

God said, on the day when God returns, he would literally take these people, and spare them from his wrath. They would be known as God's most precious possession.

As Christians who love Jesus, this is who we are. We are called God's treasured possession in the Old and New Testament. Let me show this to you in the Old Testament.

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; Exodus 19:5 (ESV)

For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. Deuteronomy 7:6 (ESV)

This is true not just of God's people in the Old Testament, but it is also true of us in the New Testament.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 1 Peter 2:9 (ESV)

who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. Titus 2:14 (ESV)

God says we may not see a great distinction right now between the wicked and the righteous. Right now we may not see a great distinction between those who are just loving God in hopes of receiving his gifts and those who love God because they actually are grateful just to have him, but there is coming a day when that blurred distinction will finally be made clear. That is the day when Christ returns.

Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him. Malachi 3:18 (ESV)

Those who love God for who he is will be known as God's most treasured possession on the day Christ returns. Those who are wicked will be the opposite.

What will happen to the wicked when Christ returns?

### **What will it be like for those who do evil when the Lord returns?**

For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. Malachi 4:1 (ESV)

### **What is the Day of the Lord?**

Later in Malachi, the day of Christ's return is called, the Day of the Lord. In the Bible, the Day of the Lord ultimately refers to Christ's return and the final wrapping up of history for salvation and judgment. Incidentally, the Bible also speaks about the Day of the Lord in a different way. Whenever God breaks into history, either for salvation or for judgment in a lesser way, it is called a mini Day of the Lord, a preview of the end.

For example, the book of Obadiah, which talks about the destruction of the nation of Edom, called their destruction a Day of the Lord. The book of Joel, which talks about a great destruction of Israel's crops from locusts, called that event a mini Day of the Lord. Here in Malachi, this is talking about the great final Day of the Lord when Christ returns for final blessing and judgment. What will it be like for those apart from Christ?

**It will be a day of fire.**

As for the wicked, that great day when Christ wraps up history will be like an oven. All the arrogant and evildoers will be like stubble. That day, they will be set on fire to such a degree there will neither be nothing about them left untouched.

At home, we have a self-cleaning oven. It works by getting very hot. It literally incinerates the stains in the oven. This is the picture of the Day of the Lord for the wicked. It is a day when things will be hot, really hot. Hot as a self-cleaning oven that will set everything about them on fire.

**It will be complete destruction.**

Incidentally, the fires of God's judgment do not mean people will be annihilated and cease to exist. In other passages, the Bible clearly says everyone will exist eternally in indestructible bodies, either in the lake of fire or in the new heavens and new earth with Jesus. When it says this day will leave neither root nor branch, it means everything about a person will be subject to the fire of God's judgment; on that day nothing will escape. The thing to remember is

it is a day when everyone apart from Christ is set on fire in a self-cleaning oven, but they are in indestructible bodies so everything about them will burn eternally.

Please hear me. Everyone will give an account of his or her life to Christ. Everyone will bow his or her knees to Christ, some to eternal salvation and others for eternal damnation. This Day of the Lord is the best day for a believer in Jesus, but it is the worst day of life for the unbeliever. If you are here this morning, and you are not a Christian, you need to know this. You are going to the lake of fire where you will burn in a self-cleaning oven eternally. You may not think that is a very loving thing to say but it is very true thing to say. The lake of eternal fire is simply a just response to sin. There is nothing about it that is one fraction more than what we deserve for our sin.

The most important thing to know is none of us needs to spend eternity in the lake of fire. No one here this morning needs to experienced the just fire of God's wrath. If you have asked Jesus to forgive your sins by his death on the cross, that means Jesus has taken the punishment you deserve. Jesus Christ, God's own son, came and died in our places for our sin so we do not need to experience for all of eternity what we deserve. If you have asked Jesus to be your most precious possession, you can rest assured that on the Day of the Lord, when Jesus returns, God has made you his most precious possession and Jesus has paid for your sin.

Some of you think God is so unfair by sending people to the lake of fire. Remember, God is completely fair. The purpose of the lake of fire is so that God would be just and fair and we would receive what we deserved for our sin. If you

want to see what is unfair, look at Jesus. He is God. He was without sin. He had done nothing wrong, yet he died the most heinous death known to man and even took all of our sins upon him. He died in our places to give us eternity in heaven so we don't get what we deserve. The lake of fire is what we deserve. Eternity with God as brothers and sisters of Jesus is exactly what we don't deserve. Since this is what Jesus has done for us; how can he be anything less than our most precious possession?

We live in a day when people don't want to consider their eternal fate. We live in a time when everyone thinks they are a good person and all religions are the same and everybody dies and goes to heaven. That is not true. It takes more than your death for you to be in a better place. It takes the death of Jesus for you to be in a better place.

The book of Revelation talks about the Day of the Lord and how things will go down on that final day for those apart from Christ.

Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. Revelation 20:14–15 (ESV)

### **What will the Lord's return be like for those who trust in him?**

But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts. Malachi 4:2–3 (ESV)

For those who know Christ as their most precious possession, this life will be as close as they come to the lake of fire. I love the language Malachi used to describe the Day of the Lord for his people. It makes it exciting. Malachi gave us three analogies.

### **Heaven will be like warm sunshine.**

Imagine a long cold dark winter. Maybe we don't need to imagine it. We are experiencing it. You know what that first day feels like when the sun comes out in all of its warmth and brilliance? On that first warm spring day, I want to go outside and stand there to soak up the sun because it feels so good. That is what the Day of the Lord will feel like for Christians. It says the sun of righteousness will rise. Jesus is the one who is the "son of righteousness." This is what Jesus' arrival will feel like for his people. It will feel like that spring moment when we love soaking up the warm rays of the sun; we will love soaking up the warm rays of the son. Jesus's presence will be like the breaking of the long, hard winter of sin, death, suffering and pain in this world.

This spring, when the sun bursts through the clouds and you feel the warmth of its rays penetrating your skin, let that whet your appetite for the Day of the Lord when Christ returns. It will feel just like that but better!

### **It will be healing.**

Not only will the radiance of Jesus' glory feel warm but the son of righteousness will rise with healing in his wings. In that day, the wings of the sun was metaphorical language for the rays of the sun. Whenever we look at the sun we see the rays of the sun like wings radiating from around it.

Here we learn the rays of Jesus' glory will not just feel warm but they will heal us. The glow of Christ's glory will bring healing to his people. Imagine that moment when the light of Christ first strikes your body and there is no more sickness, no more doctors, no more wheelchairs, no more cancer, no more

hospitals, no more surgeons, and no more health insurance premiums to pay. The radiance of Jesus' glory has such healing power that it raises our dead bodies from the grave! That is serious healing power.

You see, we may not see a difference between the righteous and the wicked today but there will come a day when the difference between God's people and the rest of the world will be clearly seen. While those people apart from Christ are simply experiencing fair justice eternally in the lake of fire, God's people will be completely warm and completely healed. In that moment, we will experience in full what it means for God to shower his affection on those who are his most precious possession.

**It will be a day of sheer joy.**

What will we be like on that day? We will be like calves leaping from the stall. When I first read that, I was stuck. I grew up in the city. I have never seen a calf leap from the stall. I trust the farmers understand this more than me. I picture a calf stuck in a pen all winter but finally being let out of its stall so it leaps for joy

The best way I can relate to this is our dog. Actually, it is not my dog. My oldest son, David, is living at home to save money. He has a dog, a little dachshund. A wiener dog. Her name is Willa. She is a great dog, but she is not fully house-trained. When we are gone, we cannot let her roam the house. We have a dog crate in our furnace room. We keep her in there when we leave the house.



She does not like that crate. She hates the crate. That is not an overstatement. She cries and whines as soon as we put her in the crate. When we leave the house, she is crying and whining like somebody stepped on her toe.

When we come home, she can hear us open the door. Immediately, she starts whimpering. When we walk down the stairs to the furnace room she can hear us getting closer. Her yelping and whining gets louder and louder. You can literally hear her bouncing in the crate. As soon as I open the crate door she begins running circles of joy around me in the furnace room. Sometimes she sprints around me a dozen times. Her tail is wagging so hard you would think it might break. When I open the door to the furnace room, letting her into the rest of the house, this little dog shoots like a bullet from one side of the house to the other in sheer joy. You can just read her face. "My master came. My master set me free from my crate. Life is good!"

That will be you and me on the day Christ returns. We are finally free. Our master has returned. Our master set us free from the crate of sin, sickness, brokenness and death. The moment we see Jesus and feel the warmth of his radiance will be the beginning of sheer joy that will last for eternity.

## **Conclusion**

Right now, there are times when life is hard and we don't always experience many of God's gifts that come from walking with Him. There are many times when it looks like the wicked prosper. Sometimes there is no discernible difference between God's people and the rest of the world. Sometimes, like Job, we will not understand God's wisdom and God's ways. We will not understand why we do the right thing before God but end up suffering.

We will face times when we need to make a choice to attack God in our anger or trust hHim even when we don't understand him.

When we trust him, rest assured that God is not absent. God is watching. God is recording our trust in him in his books and one day he will reward his people for their faith and trust in him.

We can be confident that on that great and final day, the Day of the Lord when Christ returns, there will be a difference between the righteous and the wicked. The wicked will have the greatness of their lives reduced to ashes as they begin an eternal and just suffering for their sin. The righteous, whose sins were paid for by the gracious death of Jesus on the cross, will find that day to be a day of warmth, a day of complete healing and sheer joy that will last for all eternity.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, time with his family and wrestling with his sons. His favorite topics are preaching and ancient rhetoric. Feel free to contact him at [www.Christ2RCulture.com](http://www.Christ2RCulture.com) ([www.c2rc.com](http://www.c2rc.com))

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