



**BETHEL**  
PRESBYTERIAN

## **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

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### **The Glorious Privilege of Being a Servant of God**

Malachi 4:1-6

Matthew 16:1-3: "And the Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and testing [Christ] asked Him to show them a sign from heaven. But He answered and said to them, 'When it is evening, you say, "It will be fair weather, for the sky is red." And in the morning, "There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening." Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times?'"

What an interesting rebuke! The religious leaders of Christ's day knew of the sailor's warning and evidently lived by it, "*Red sky at night, sailor's delight. Red sky in the morning, sailor take warning!*"

Shockingly, these religious leaders, trained in the Bible, were better at discerning the weather than they were at discerning "the signs of the time" ... Shame on them!

Now lest you and I look down upon them, we struggle with the same problem! It appears this is a struggle that is inherent in living in this fallen world as image bearers. Like Elisha's servant (2 Kings 6:15-19), we can misread what really is going on and so misjudge God, His service, and the blessing that is ours in Christ. That is why we read such passages as these:

Colossians 3:2, "Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth."

It is so easy to be earthbound and so horizontal in our thinking where all that we value and seek is the present! We see it in Martha with the surprised dinner guests of Christ and His disciples, Martha felt overwhelmed; especially when Mary "*abandoned*" to listen to Christ's teaching!

Luke 10:40-42, "...Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to [Christ], and said, 'Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me.' But the Lord answered and said to her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and bothered about so many things; but *only* a few things are necessary, really *only* one, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her.'"

In other words, Martha, you are concerned about the wrong meal! It is so easy to lose sight of eternity and so live in this world as though what we see is all that matters!

It was this very pitfall into which God's people fell in Malachi's day! Again, they were living in the valley — more than a valley, in a Peruvian mine<sup>1</sup> — between two climatic Redemptive Movements: the Theocracy and the Second Coming of Christ.

Accordingly, they just like we, did NOT live in a day of miracles, powers, theophanies, or revelation! In comparison to their father's generation, their lives were incredibly ordinary/common. And because of the hostility that this world has toward Christ and His followers, they even began to feel picked on most certainly by their neighbors, BUT even by God! The result is that they began to reject the way of faith as they envied the wicked!

Accordingly, God raised up one more prophet, Malachi (the last prophet of the Old

Testament), who warned them against six errors which typically arise when our hearts grow cold toward the Lord. These errors:

- Compromise when it comes to God's worship, Malachi 1:6-14.
- Compromise when it comes to the teaching of God's word, Malachi 2:1-9.
- The taking for granted and so the trampling underfoot the covenant community, Malachi 2:10-16.
- Questioning God's Justice, Malachi 2:17-3:6.
- Worldly, earthbound living, Malachi 3:6-12.
- Questioning God's Goodness/Character, Malachi 3:13-18.

It was in the context of his sixth and final discourse that Malachi made the following statement after sharing of the glorious plan of God for His people:

Malachi 3:18, "So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him."

What does that mean? We need NOT guess, for the final chapter of this prophecy was given as an addendum to explain what Malachi meant here. Accordingly, this is NOT a seventh prophetic discourse addressing another struggle when our heart grows cold toward God. RATHER, this was given in explanation of the call for us to:

- Be "discerning" when it comes to the way of the righteous and wicked.
- "Set our minds on the things above."
- "Distinguish between the righteous and the wicked."

When we do that, we will begin truly to see and so behold the glorious privilege that is ours in being a servant of God in this state of sin and misery. Notice, it begins with a contrast when it comes to the destinies of the wicked and the child of God.

Malachi 4:1, "'For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace<sup>2</sup>; and all the arrogant<sup>3</sup> and every evildoer<sup>3</sup> will be chaff [the combustible dry straw that remains after the grain has been harvested]; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze,' says the Lord of hosts, 'so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.'"

This is referencing the Last and Final day of life on this earth. On that day, all who have ever lived will stand before Christ's Judgment Seat to be judged. On that day, the fate of the "arrogant" and "evildoer" will NOT be good. We read about it in Matthew 25.

Matthew 25:31-33, "But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. And all the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the

left.”

This is the Last Judgment! At this time, ALL mankind will stand before God and be judged. During this judgment, a great separating/sorting will take place in which Christ will put the saved on his right and the unsaved on his left. Speaking of those on His left, “the goats” and so the unsaved.

Matthew 25:41, 46, “Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels... And these will go away into eternal punishment...”

Now we know that prior to this time, the earth is going to be burned up, which is the focus of our text.

Malachi 4:1, “For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze...”

The focus of the metaphor here is NOT that of a “fiery furnace” BUT a heat-stricken land suffering under extreme drought. In such a condition, vegetation can suddenly catch fire in which dry fields become like an oven in which even the roots of the plants are reduced to ash. It is this that is what awaits this world. Peter speaking of this day wrote this:

2 Peter 3:12b-13, “...the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat! But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.”

Very recently, God in His grace and love gave the world a picture of this coming day with the Superior/Lafayette fires. I’m sure most if not all of you here saw the brutal pictures of whole neighborhoods on fire. As you know my son said that when he drove through the burning neighborhoods, he could feel the heat of the flames from the houses through the car door of his police cruiser!

Now you must see that this fire and the many other signs of the time evident today are given to sober us unto repentance and so flee to God.

Isaiah 26:9b, “...when the earth experiences Thy judgments the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.”

In God’s program, natural disaster serves a didactic purpose that the world might learn righteousness! And what is meant by “righteousness”? Christ answered that question.

Luke 13:1-3, “Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to

[Christ] about the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And He answered and said to them, 'Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered this fate? I tell you, no, but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.'"

That is the "right path" (the idea behind "righteousness") God would have us follow in response to the sin and miseries of this life. It is NOT griping, grumbling, envying, or indulging. It is NOT questioning God's goodness or grace. RATHER, it is turning from self unto God!

That is why the last day will go so bad for the "arrogant" and "evildoer." Throughout their lives they witnessed countless warnings from God that destruction is coming. And rather than repent, many used the warnings to criticize God! Yet for the believer whose "minds are set on the things above", God's warnings both sober and encourage us — which is where Malachi turns in his teaching here.

Malachi 4:2, "But for you who fear My name the sun of righteousness<sup>4</sup> will rise with healing in its wings<sup>5</sup>; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall."

It is easy to miss the pun that is being utilized here. Whereas the wicked will be consumed by the heat of the sun, God's people will be blessed by it, "But for you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness<sup>6</sup> will rise with healing in its wings..."

It is so true: *the same sun that hardens clay softens butter!* When we think of the hot, scorching heat of the sun, we naturally think of things being burnt up — which as we just saw is the fate of the non-Christian on the Last Day! Yet for the believer — the child of God — the Sun will have a completely different effect, it will refine us, heal us, and so restore us to our original condition, the condition Adam had when He was first made.<sup>7</sup>

This is the idea behind "healing in its wings"<sup>8</sup>. In antiquity, the sun was often depicted as a disc, with its rays represented as wings. So here, the rays of the sun — which scorched/devoured the wicked — will convey health and strength, as well as warmth to the people of God. It is at this moment we will become real humans, fully man, man as God intended; man as Christ Himself was and is! That is why our hope as Christians revolves around the Second Coming of Christ. In fact, Paul exhorts to look for Christ's coming.

Titus 2:12b-13, "...looking... for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus."

How is it that Christ's Second coming is our hope? Because at that time something amazing is going to happen.

1 John 3:2, "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet

what we shall be. We know that, when He appears [at His second coming], we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is.”

When Christ returns, He will do so in order to transform us once and for all into His image! That is why Peter exhorted this way:

1 Peter 1:13b, “...fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

What is that grace? The grace by which we finally and fully will be conformed to the image of Christ!

It is this “hope” that Malachi’s waves before his brethren as they struggled to live in a difficult setting.<sup>9</sup> Yes, today we struggle to live in this sinful world with its miseries, trials, tragedies, and pains. In fact, we even at times are tempted to envy the wicked! But we must know that a New Day is dawning — the night is almost gone, the day is at hand (Romans 13:12a). And when the first beams of the rising Sun of Righteousness hit your face, every one of your righteous longings, passions, and goals will be fulfilled!<sup>10</sup>

The language of “skipping about like calves” speaks of that time in the morning when the sun rises, and the cattle are let out of their stall. What do calves do? They “skip about in the warmth of the sunshine”! Again, that will be our response when the rays/wings of the Sun of Righteousness first hit our face!

Now this raises a very important question: “Christian, do you believe this? Do you believe that God’s best will be enjoyed NOT in this life, BUT in the life to come?”

If you do, then let us once and for all do three things.

- “Make a distinction” and so understand God’s purpose and plan for the wicked and His purpose and plan for you and me.
- Stop envying the “easy life” of the wicked in this age.
- Stop being critical of God’s providences in your life.

That is the message of Malachi here! And yet there is more. Malachi did NOT want God’s people simply to live with a “survivor” mentality. RATHER, he wanted them to live with a “Conquering” mentality!

[As Seen in Our Conquest, v. 3.](#)

Malachi 4:3, “‘And you will tread down the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing,’ says the Lord of hosts.”

While the scope of this conquest is reserved for the Last Day (which is important that we see that), nevertheless the truth of this text should create in us the Mentality of a Victor/Conqueror!

As God's purpose for our current world serves His redemptive program, OUR CALL as His people in the face of the brutality of this life is NOT vengeance, BUT submission to God to bring about His purpose/program in the lives of the non-Christians. That is why in this age the call in the face of attack is to "turn the other cheek."

Proverbs 20:22, "Do not say, 'I will repay evil'; wait for the LORD, and He will save you."

=Deuteronomy 32:35, "Vengeance is Mine, and retribution, in due time their foot will slip; for the day of their calamity is near, and the impending things are hastening upon them."

Matthew 5:39, "But I say to you, do not resist him who is evil; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also."

None of this means that

1. Capital punishment is NOT Biblical (cf. Romans 13:1-2),
2. That just wars ought NOT to be fought,
3. That we ought NOT to defend ourselves when physically attacked.

The focus of this text is God's ultimate judgment, Joyce Baldwin describes it this way:

The amazing reversal in which the wicked are no more is best appreciated by those who, because they are righteous, have suffered at their hand. Forbidden to avenge themselves (Deuteronomy 32:35; Proverbs 20:22), they endure with no hope of relief. In every age persecuted believers long for the dramatic denouement [conclusion] when God's eternal order will be vindicated. The prophet longs that this should be prefaced by worldwide repentance, but if not, the alternative, destruction of the unrepentant, is inescapable. (Baldwin, 1972, p. 274)

That is Malachi's point here. Today, the ethic of "*turning the other cheek*" is still applicable. Yet it won't always be the case! Forget this at the Second Coming of Christ, we are NOT going to be by-standers BUT active participants! Iain Duguid wrote:

In contrast, the charred 'ashes' of the wicked (who were earlier burned like chaff in the oven) will be even further crushed under the hooves of the righteous on that great day of the Lord's decisive intervention. (Duguid, 2010, pp. 237-238)

Now, this is NOT to infer that on the Last Day when Christ comes to destroy Satan and

His followers that we are going to fight alongside Christ as He damns Satan and his followers to the Lake of Fire! RATHER, our participation will be in giving the “Amen” to the judgment and justice of Christ! (cf. 1 Corinthians 6:2-3<sup>11</sup>)

That is how we will participate! That is what is behind the metaphor used here by Malachi of “the remains of the wicked being crushed under our feet.” Do you understand practically what this means? Today we may at times feel like the conquered, crushed, or destroyed. Yet in Christ we have become Victors! It was based on this truth that Paul gave two glorious exhortations. This is what we look like in Christ today,

2 Corinthians 4:8-11, 16a, “We *are* afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus’ sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh... [yet] we do not lose heart...”

Why is it that we “do not lose heart”? Notice the ultimate reason...

Romans 8:35-37, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, ‘For Thy sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.”

In all these things we are NOT crushed, “We Are More than Conquerors”!

If you could travel back in time during WWII when all of France had been conquered by Germany, what would you say to encourage the French Resistant Fighters<sup>12</sup> whose labors seemed so impotent against the powerful army of Hitler? Yet knowing that in the end the resistant fighters would win, what would be your message?

It is this message you must give to yourself the next time you are tempted to give up or give in when it comes to your battle for holiness and fidelity to the Lord! That is what is behind the conquering mentality here exhorted by Malachi and later by Paul!

We know the future! We know someday this world will be ours! So let us stop living in this world as victims, pacifists, or evaders! Let us rather gird up our loins and “fight the good fight of faith”! (1 Timothy 6:12)

## References

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## End Note(s)

<sup>1</sup> I'm thinking of the 2012 Peruvian mine debacle where 9 miners were trapped for 6 days in the Cabeza de Negro mine.

<sup>2</sup> "The image of a furnace, used earlier (in 3:2), reappears in this portrayal. Earlier the image was used to describe a future work of purging or purifying, as a result of which God would cleanse his people and establish a generation of those who would live righteously and worship him in truth. It is the kind of discipline Jesus spoke of through his use of the image of the vine and its branches. He spoke of trimming the branches (John 15:2). It is a blessed thing for God's people, though painful. However, the second use of the image of a furnace (in 4:1) is quite different. Here the object of the burning is not purification but rather the destruction of the wicked: "'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 a branch will be left to them'" (v. 1). This is a judgment to be feared." (Boice, 2006, p. 611)

<sup>3</sup> "That word arrogant is synonymous with 'prideful.' Pride may run rampant now, but there will come a day when all will be humbled on level ground. In their own minds the people are self-sufficient and independent of God, caring little for Him. A modern-day example would be people who profess, 'I can wait to serve the Lord later. I do not need God in my life.' The Lord strikes fear in their hearts with the promise of a future day of reckoning. He will come with recompense for their evil deeds." (Micah Fries, 2015, pp. Malachi 4:1-3)

<sup>4</sup> "This is the only occurrence of this phrase in the entire Bible. It conveys images of the brilliant morning sun projecting rays and providing warmth and comfort to those privileged to find solace under it." (Micah Fries, 2015, p. Malachi 4:2)

<sup>5</sup> "The Hebrew word *kanaph* is here translated 'wings.' It occurs elsewhere in the OT to refer to a number of different things. In Genesis 1:21 it speaks of those created, winged animals who soar around the earth. Isaiah 6:2 uses the word to define the wings of the seraphim. ¶ It is also used to refer to the corner or the hem of a garment. In the book of 1 Samuel, after Saul is disobedient to the Lord, the Lord sends Samuel to confront Saul and strip him of the kingdom. Saul responds by approaching Samuel and grabbing the corner or the hem (*kanaph*) of his garment, the force of which rips it off." (Micah Fries, 2015, p. Malachi 4:2)

<sup>6</sup> Note that "the sun of righteousness" here is not an inanimate object, but a person, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! "The church fathers from Justin onward have almost universally understood the 'sun of righteousness' to be Christ. Martin Luther in particular said, 'Under the Law there is weakness and condemnation; under the wings of Christ, under the Gospel, there is strength and salvation.' This is proper theology, of course, and the earlier prophecy of God's sending a messenger to prepare the way before him (Malachi 3:1) does encourage us to think forward to the coming of Jesus." (Boice, 2006, p. 611)

<sup>7</sup> "By God's own mouth, He intends to cleanse and purify, not coddle. This will happen when the arrogant and the evildoers burn like straw." (Micah Fries, 2015, pp. Malachi 4:1-3)

<sup>8</sup> "It was assumed in ancient Israel that the hem of the garment of righteous men contained healing properties. Yet the healing that Malachi refers to in this passage is not merely physical healing, but a spiritual restoration from sin and from separation from the Lord." (Micah Fries, 2015, p. Malach 4:2)

<sup>9</sup> "The Day of the Lord was often portrayed in the prophets as a fearful day of gloomy cloud and darkness (see Isa. 13:10), yet those who feared the Lord's name would experience it as a day of warm sunshine, the welcome daybreak that drives the shadows of the night away once and for all. The rising sun would be 'the sun of righteousness' for the God-fearers, in the sense that the

coming of the light would vindicate them, finally making clear the distinction between them and the wicked.” (Duguid, 2010, p. 237)

<sup>10</sup> James Montgomery Boice wrote, “As the rays of the sun spread light and warmth over the earth for the growth and maturity of the plants and living creatures, so will the sun of righteousness bring the healing of all hurts and wounds which the power of darkness has inflicted upon the righteous. Then will they go forth from the holes and caves into which they had withdrawn during the night of suffering and where they had kept themselves concealed, and skip like stalled calves (cf. 1 Sam. 28:24) which are driven from the stall to the pasture.” (Boice, 2006, p. 612)

<sup>11</sup> At the last day, we will have the incredible responsibility/privilege of participating somehow in the Final Judgment. In what way will we participate? While there is debate as to the degree in which we shall participate, Rev. 19:1-2 gives us at least a partial answer, ‘After these things [Christ’s Judgments] I heard, as it were, a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God; because His judgments are true and righteous; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and He has avenged the blood of His bond-servants on her.”’ Whatever else might be said about our participation in the Final Judgment, notice that God’s children will at least give the ‘Hallelujah!’ and so the ‘Amen’ to all that Christ pronounces in that day. This is how we will participate! Richard Baxter put it this way, ‘They shall not only judge the world, in Christ their Head, by way of communion with Him, by their works compared with those of the ungodly, or by way of testimony against them, but they shall be assessors of Jesus Christ the Judge, giving their voice against them, consenting to His judgment as just, and saying *Amen* to the doom pronounced against all the ungodly...’ quoted in (Boston, 1964, pp. 418-419)

<sup>12</sup> France was overrun by German forces in 1940. Nazi Germany would occupy France for four more years (1940-1944)!