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## Questioning God's Care, 3

Malachi 3:13-18

Very early in the history of the Theocracy (845 BC), God gave this promise to His people if they turned from their sin.

Joel 2:19, "And the Lord will answer and say to His people, 'Behold, I am going to send you grain, new wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied *in full* with them; and I will never again make you a reproach among the nations.'"

100 years later, God gave this assurance to His people if they turned from their sin.

Hosea 2:21-23, “‘And it will come about in that day that I will respond,’ declares the LORD. ‘I will respond to the heavens, and they will respond to the earth, and the earth will respond to the grain, to the new wine, and to the oil, and they will respond to Jezreel. And I will sow her for Myself in the land. I will also have compassion on her who had not obtained compassion, and I will say to those who were not My people, ‘You are My people!’ And they will say, ‘Thou art my God!’”

125 years later, yet again God gave this promise to the nation upon its repentance.

Jeremiah 31:12: “And they shall come and shout for joy on the height of Zion, and they shall be radiant over the bounty of the LORD- over the grain, and the new wine, and the oil, and over the young of the flock and the herd; and their life shall be like a watered garden, and they shall never languish again.”

The point is that turning from our sin to God is a good thing — NOT ONLY does it glorify God (Joshua 7:19), BUT it grants tangible benefits to the one who repents! Malachi details some of these benefits.

The book of Malachi was written, redemptively speaking, in the valley, between two massively significant redemptive events: the Old Testament Theocracy and the First Advent of Christ. Between these two Redemptive events, life on the part of God’s people was incredibly unremarkable:

- God was silent.
- Little if no miracles occurred.
- Little if no prophetic activity took place.
- The restored temple remained uninhabited by God.
- And it seemed as though the nations could do what they wanted, unopposed by God.

It is akin to where you and I are living today as we wait for God’s final redemptive movement, the Second Coming of our Lord!

Accordingly, it was hard living at the time of Malachi. God’s people were left to live by faith with limited sight. In fact, if we were to identify a theme verse for the era in which they and we live, I think it would be something along the lines of John 20.

John 20:29, “Jesus said to him, ‘Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.’”

Christ knew that life in the era in which we live — a time between two Redemptive Movements — would be incredibly difficult. NOT simply because of persecution (which was promised), BUT because of the tendency of our hearts to grow cold toward

the Lord.

Luke 18:8b, “However, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”

Accordingly, Paul gave the following exhortation:

Romans 13:12, “The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.”

In essence, wake up and repent! That essentially is THE exhortation of Malachi. Because the hearts of God’s people had grown cold — because God’s people had fallen asleep — as a people they fell into six errors.

We have been looking at the sixth and final error where God’s people became critics of God! Yet unlike with the previous five exhortations, we read here of a group who responded to Malachi’s message with repentance and faith. The text closes with a description of the benefits that would rest upon God’s people on account of their repentance. The first is intimacy with God.

### Intimacy with God, v. 17a.

Malachi 3:17a, “‘And they will be Mine,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘on the day that I prepare My own possession...’”

There are two notable statements in this verse. The first is that “they will be Mine”<sup>1</sup> (the word “mine” is emphatic in the Hebrew)! I hope this expression sounds familiar to you. It is a major theme of the Covenant/Relationship into which God entered with His people in Abraham.

Genesis 12:1-2a, “Now the LORD said to Abram, ‘Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father’s house, to the land which I will show you; and I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you...’”

When Abraham was an idolator, worshipping false gods, the Lord claimed Him as His own — that through Him the saving grace of Christ might come to the world (cf. Galatians 3:29)! And thus, throughout Redemptive History, a major theme is this truth, that through the redeeming grace of God the sinner becomes God’s possession.

Leviticus 26:12, “I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people.”

Exodus 6:7a, “Then I will take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God...”

Jeremiah 30:22, "And you shall be My people, and I will be your God."

Ezekiel 36:28, "And you will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God."

It is this theme and promise which is repeated throughout Scripture as well as in our text as a glorious benefit of repentance: "And they will be Mine"!<sup>2</sup>

Yet this makes it sound as though the privilege of being "God's people" comes only to God's people when they turn from a specific sin. Yet, we know from Scripture that that is NOT the case. Well then why is this named as one of the Benefits of Repentance? Because the focus here is NOT on the *STATUS* of being God's people, BUT the *EXPERIENCING* of this Benefit- such as:

- Being close to God.
- Fellowshiping with Him.
- Knowing His comfort.
- Experiencing His presence.
- Knowing His joy!

It is this that is ultimately lost when you and I choose sin over God. The Psalmist speaking of God's people following the Exodus wrote this:

Psalm 106:13-15, "They soon forgot His works; they did not wait for His counsel, but lusted exceedingly in the wilderness, and tested God in the desert. And He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul."

We see this worked out in David's life.

Psalm 32:3-4, "When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer."

When David was in hot pursuit of his sin, he did NOT forfeit His salvation. What he lost was intimacy with God! And that is why when he finally turned back to God, notice that for which he prayed.

Psalm 51:8, 11a, 12a, 14, "Make me to hear joy and gladness, let the bones which Thou hast broken rejoice... 11 Do not cast me away from Thy presence... [recall David's words in Psalm 16:11a, 'In Thy presence is fullness of joy'] 12 Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation... 14 Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, Thou God of my salvation; then my tongue will joyfully sing of Thy righteousness."

That is the focus here! If God's people turned back to the Lord from their sin, God

promised them that they once again would enjoy the glorious benefit of a deep and abiding relationship with God, “You will be mine!” Yet there is more here.

Notice the next phrase in the text, “on the day that I prepare My own possession.” The word for “possession” speaks of a priceless treasure,<sup>3</sup> most notably a rare jewel.<sup>4</sup> In this context, the word for “prepare” speaks of the cutting and polishing process by which a Jeweler creates a costly ring or necklace. That is what God is doing in our lives in and through all things; He is “preparing [shaping, molding, refining] His own possession.” Why? Once again, that we might enjoy Him all the more. Recall that God said this speaking of His people:

Hosea 2:5-7, “For their mother has played the harlot; she who conceived them has acted shamefully. For she [God’s people] said, ‘I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.’ [So, what does God do? He ‘prepares his possession’...] Therefore, behold, I will hedge up her way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her so that she cannot find her paths. And she will pursue her lovers, but she will not overtake them; and she will seek them, but will not find them. Then she will say, ‘I will go back to my first husband, for it was better for me than now!’”

God expanded upon this in Hosea 3 speaking of His rebellious people whom He just brought back through His discipling grace,

Hosea 3:3-5a, “Then I [God] said to her, “You shall stay with me for many days. You shall not play the harlot, nor shall you have a man; so I will also be toward you.’ [I will be your all in all] For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, and without ephod or household idols. Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God...”

This is always the end of God’s discipling grace. It is NOT the promise of silver, gold, earthly prosperity, or ease of days. RATHER, it is intimacy with God — communion — that is renewed and enjoyed! That is what is behind the promise repeated throughout Scripture, “They will be mine”!

If there is anything that should motivate us when it comes to seeking the Lord at the cost of “the passing pleasure of sin” it is the promise of intimacy with God!

Matthew 5:8, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

Do you understand what this passage is saying? Sin is that which robs us of the joy of the Lord (cf. Psalm 51:12)! As such, the more we choose Christ over our sin the greater will be our ability to love, know, and so enjoy the Lord!

Proverbs 14:27, “The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life...”

The “fountain of life” speaks of the riches of spiritual nourishment and growth. How do you and I come to enjoy this in Christ? It is as we turn from our sin and go back to God in reverence and awe — just as many did in Malachi’s day! Isaiah described this as the Sabbath, whose essence you must know by now is that of refreshing ourselves in God (Exodus 31:17).

Isaiah 58:13-14: “If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot from doing your *own* pleasure on My holy day, and call the sabbath a delight, the holy *day* of the Lord honorable, and shall honor it, desisting from your *own* ways, from seeking your *own* pleasure, and speaking *your own* word [In other words, if God’s people stop seeking their sin, BUT instead seek the Lord, notice what will happen...], then you will take delight in the Lord, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; and I will feed you *with* the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

Once again, we have here the glorious benefit that is reaped when we turn from sin unto God. And what essentially is that benefit? Intimacy and communion! A. W. Tozer wrote, “The man who has God for his treasure has all things in one.” (Tozer, 1948, p. 19)

Fries, Rummage, and Gallaty wrote:

When we see God as our ultimate treasure we, like the psalmist, are able to taste and see that the Lord is good and His mercy endures forever. (Micah Fries, 2015, pp. Malachi 3:16-18)

Now would you notice, vv. 17-18 is progressive, meaning each benefit builds upon the previous one. When we turn from our sin to God, that is when we enjoy true life, which leads to the next benefit. Security in our relationship with Christ.

### [Security in our Relationship with Christ, v. 17b.](#)

Malachi 3:17b, “‘And they will be Mine,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘on the day that I prepare My own possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.’”

Again, the language here — “prepare” — speaks of the refiner’s fire, or discipline! And to whom does God give this discipline? His children, “...I will spare them as a man spares his own son...” From this we conclude that the existence of discipline in the life of the child of God is a testimony of God’s redeeming love! Because God has claimed them as His own (“they are mine”), He “prepares them” with the fire!

Now, in our earthbound thinking, it sounds odd to say that discipline in the life of a child is proof of the love of his father or mother. You’d think that if God loved His people,

they wouldn't have the struggles which they were experiencing in Malachi's day. Yet that is NOT the case. Recall the words of the Hebrews writer:

Hebrews 12:7b, 8, "...God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? [In fact] ...if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons."

Now, we are NOT talking here about abuse (which could never be inflicted in love). RATHER, loving discipline unto our growth in grace!

That being said, the emphasis here is on a discipline which inflicts the least amount of pain. The word for "spare" places us in a Court Room. The judge is confronted with a horrible moment where his own son stands before him. Now as a father, no doubt he wants to be gracious. BUT as a faithful judge, he must rule according to the standard of justice, the word of God. That means, if his son is guilty, he can't overlook the guilt and so let the boy go unpunished.<sup>5</sup>

In what way then could an earthly judge/father be gracious and kind? It would NOT be in the determination of the guilt of his son, BUT in his sentencing. As in our day, justice in the ancient world could be served in a plethora of ways. The language of "sparing"<sup>6</sup> here speaks of the sentencing phase in which the Father/Judge inflicts the least amount of pain upon his child — which is what God does when He disciplines us. Speaking of "temptation" which in Scripture is the general word for any and all trial we read this:

1 Corinthians 10:13, "No temptation [trial] has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be [tested, tried, tempered] beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it."

The idea here is that when it comes to God's tempering grace, the Lord ordains the least amount necessary to bring about His salvific end!

And all of this speaks of the security we have in Christ. Because we are sons/daughters, God will always discipline us! That means, contrary to what Malachi's generation believed, trial and difficulty are NOT the testimony that God has abandoned us. RATHER, it is the testimony of the sanctifying presence of God in our lives which accepts nothing less than our maturation!

And that brings us to the third and final benefit referenced here — building upon the previous two — contentment.

### Contentment, v. 18.

Malachi 3:18, "So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked,

between one who serves<sup>7</sup> God and one who does not serve Him.”

This is talking BOTH about “righteous and wicked” PEOPLE (who here are distinguished as “ones who serve God” verses “ones who do not serve God” and so saved and unsaved people) AS WELL AS their “righteous and wicked” WAY.

(The former will be address in the next section, chapter 4.)

The emphasis here is on God’s people being able to discern the “righteous way” vs. the “wicked way”. Recall, this was THE issue on account of which God’s people were criticizing the Lord at this time.

Malachi 3:15, “So now we call the arrogant blessed; not only are the doers of wickedness built up, but they also test God and escape.”

Again, each statement brings with it a comparison between how God deigned to treat the wicked and how He deigned to treat His own people.

- The wicked?... *Why they are “blessed,” “built up,” and their sin is “ignored”!*
- The child of God?... *They are cursed, broken, and their minor sins are paid back double!*

Struggling with the same sense of injustice, Asaph put it this way:

Psalm 73:3-5, 13-14, “For I was envious of the arrogant, as I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pains in their death; and their body is fat. They are not in trouble as other men; nor are they plagued like mankind... Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure, and washed my hands in innocence; for I have been stricken all day long, and chastened every morning.”

The comparison here is the same as the one in Malachi. In contrast to the many “blessings” God bestows upon the wicked, God’s people were “stricken all day long, and chastened every morning”! And so, Asaph, like those in Malachi’s day, found themselves envious of the wicked!

Now as we have seen, this comes as the result of walking by sight and NOT by faith! If we forget eternity and live as if all that matters is this side of the grave, then with Paul we rightly say, “Of all people, we are most to be pitied” (1 Corinthians 15:19)! But if, with Asaph, we go to the sanctuary of God and consider this world through the lens of eternity, we arrive at a completely different place...

Psalm 73:16-19, “When I pondered to understand this, it was troublesome in my sight until I came into the sanctuary of God; then I perceived their end. [And what is that end?] Surely Thou dost set them in slippery places; Thou dost cast them down



to destruction. How they are destroyed in a moment! They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors!”

From this we see that far from being the object of jealousy, the non-Christian ought to be the object of sorrow and pity when considered in light of eternity!

And so, it may appear on this side of the grave that the way of the wicked is life and peace whereas the way of the righteous is trial and difficulty. It may appear today that...

- If you thumb your nose at God you’ll be blessed, and...
- If you serve and love the Lord, you’ll be cursed!

In fact, this opinion may rest so heavily upon you that with Asaph you find yourself envying the way of the wicked!

Accordingly, this passage emphasizes the need for you and me — when we gaze upon this world and the lot of the wicked and the righteous — to “distinguish”<sup>8</sup> between their two ends, which is detailed for us in Matthew.

Matthew 25:31-34, 41, 46, “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. Then the King will say to those on His right [the sheep], ‘Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’... 41Then He will also say to those on His left [the goats], ‘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, but the righteous into eternal life.”

From this I hope you see that to envy the wicked on this side of the grave is like envying...

- A criminal on death row eating a final meal of the best steak money can buy.
- A child with terminal cancer who is given an all-expenses paid vacation to Rome through Make-a-Wish foundation.

You wouldn’t say, *“Boy, I wish I was on death row and could eat like that... I wish I had cancer and so could enjoy a free trip to Rome!”* NO! Perceiving their end, you would NOT envy them!

And so, it must be with us when we see the wicked prospering. We must never envy their lot. RATHER we must be content in the present, knowing the glorious future that

is before us in Christ.<sup>9</sup>

Psalm 16:5-6, “The LORD is the portion of my inheritance and my cup; Thou dost support my lot. [As that was true, notice the impact this had on David...] The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; indeed, my heritage is beautiful to me.”

What a glorious sense of contentment regardless of the difficult day in which he lived!  
In the words of Thomas Sherman:

What heir, traveling to take possession of a rich inheritance, allows either a green meadow or pleasant garden to detain him; or a black cloud or a dirty road to dishearten him? O my soul, you are traveling to take possession of a glorious eternal inheritance! Will you turn aside to pluck every flower? Will you linger to listen to every melodious sound? Will you leave your way to drink of every gliding stream of carnal pleasure? What is this, but to lose a mansion to view a meadow, to sacrifice an eternal crown for a dying flower, to lose immortal felicity for a flying vanity, to forsake the way of Zion to gather the grapes of Sodom?!

Though, my soul, your way is in tears, and your days in sorrow, all clouded; yet here is enough to comfort you: that a loving Father, an unending portion, a sweet rest, and an everlasting refreshment will make amends for all!

Therefore, this vain world does not allure me for I will make no deviation, because my way lies to purer comforts, and surer glory! (Sherman, 2021)

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## End Note(s)

<sup>1</sup> “These words, quoted from the covenant inauguration (Exod. 19:5) and later referred to in that connection (Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Psalm 135:4), draw attention to the original election of Israel. The purpose which God had in first choosing a people is shown in the last of the prophets to be about to be fulfilled.” (Baldwin, 1972, p. 273)

<sup>2</sup> This is the foundation and glory of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We did not choose God, He chose us to be His people- which is why Christ came, “And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for it is He who will save His people from their sins.” (Matthew 1:21; cf. also 1 Peter 2:9-10; Revelation 21:3a) Truly, the redeeming work of Christ is rooted and grounded in the covenant language of “My people”!

<sup>3</sup> “This word comes from the Akkadian *sikiltum*, which means a ‘private hoard or accumulation’. Originally it was an economic term, but over the course of time it began also to be used of precious personal possessions. In the Old Testament, it is applied to gold and silver twice but to Israel six times, notably in Exodus 19:5, where it describes their unique relationship to the Lord. In the light of this background, to be kept as a special treasure suggests that the faithful remnant of those who fear the Lord will constitute the new Israel on the Day of the Lord.” (Duguid, 2010, p. 236)

<sup>4</sup> “It is a word one would reserve for a collection of jewels. It is used in 1 Chronicles 29:3, when David had 3,000 talents of gold and 7,000 talents of silver, but stored an additional offering which was his ‘personal treasures.’ He had a safety-deposit box in addition to his savings account. God says, ‘You are My treasured possession.’” (Micah Fries, 2015, p. Malachi 3:16)

<sup>5</sup> This is why our redemption was secured at the dreadful price of the death of Christ, “[God]... did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all...” (Romans 8:32)

<sup>6</sup> “The verb *hāmal*, which occurs twice in this verse, is often said to mean ‘have compassion on, be sorry for.’ This is what Pharaoh’s daughter did for Moses when she found him in the basket (Exodus 2:6). The word does not carry as much emotional freight, however, as other terms for compassion (*hūs*, *nāham*, *rāham*), as seen in Saul’s “sparing” the best of the sheep for sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:15) or the prophet Nathan’s ‘rich man’ being unwilling (NIV ‘refrained’) to kill one of his own sheep for a traveler (2 Samuel 12:4).” (Richard A. Taylor, 2004, p. 447)

<sup>7</sup> “The comparison to a father sparing his son ‘who serves him’ is surprising. Nowhere else does the Old Testament explicitly refer to ‘sons’ working for or ‘serving’ their human father (but see Exodus 4:23; 1 Chronicles 25:3, 6), although sons being under their father’s authority and working for him is indisputable.” (Richard A. Taylor, 2004, p. 447)

<sup>8</sup> “The Hebrew is literally ‘then you will return and see between the righteous and the wicked, between one serving God and one not his servant.’” (Richard A. Taylor, 2004, p. 448)

<sup>9</sup> In the words of Spurgeon, “O thrice fools are we, who, like new-born princes weeping in the cradle, know not that there is a kingdom before them?” (Rutherford, 1997, pp. 7, Letter XX) See also Psalm 16:4-6!