

Sermon outline and notes © Dr. Stephen Felker  
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18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834  
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Malachi 3:13 - 4:6 (read until 4:3) “A Glorious Sunrise Some Day”

Intro. In every age, regardless how dark, God always has a people that are true to Him and serve Him. The prophet Malachi ministered among a group of people who had been responding to the Word of the Lord with arrogance and denial though they were outwardly religious. Then he talks about a different group of people beginning in v.16. These are the faithful few, the Master’s minority. In Elijah’s day idolatry and sin were widespread in Israel. But even then, there were 7000 faithful men and women in Israel. In our day it seems that the ungodly far outnumber the godly. But don’t get too discouraged about that. God will watch out for His own, and we will see in our text today that we will ultimately prevail with our God.

Now this morning I want you to examine your heart. I will present to you two kinds of people, and I want you honestly to see which group you belong to. Then I will show you the vital importance of this, for your ultimate destiny will be vastly different, depending on which group you belong to. I will challenge you to make sure you belong to God’s people. And if you do, I believe you will be greatly encouraged by the glorious destiny that is awaiting the people of God, according to the promise of God.

So let’s see the first teaching of this text that I want to call your attention to. For here we see there are:

## I. TWO KINDS OF PEOPLE

There are only two basic kinds of people in this world. I am not talking about outward differences, such as black and white, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, or male and female. These are merely external differences, not eternal differences. But what I am talking about are two kinds of people *spiritually*. Both types are presented in my text today. We have here the godly and the ungodly. Don’t just assume you are among the godly. Put yourself to the test of this text of Scripture. So notice first:

A. The Ungodly – In verses 13-15 the people in Malachi’s day were complaining that it seemed the ungodly were prospering, successful, and doing fine, while those who identified themselves with the God of Israel were suffering. So they said in v.14, “It is useless to serve God.” Have you ever felt that way? What they failed to realize was that an outward connection to God does not make you godly. Many of the Jews in Malachi’s day were ungodly in their heart. They were little better than the pagans that surrounded them. So they weren’t even making a fair comparison. They were under the delusion that their merely outward worship of God must be acknowledged and rewarded.

Now we can glean from these verses a pretty good description of the ungodly. See if any of these characteristics are true of you. For example, the ungodly are proud. That is how they are described in vv. 15 & 4:1. That word (*zed*) literally means to boil. They’re puffed up. They exalt themselves over others. They want to be the focus of attention. In those verses they are also described as those who do wickedness (vv.15, 4:1). It refers to those who do wrong, who do wicked things, who violate God’s moral law, and are thus condemned as guilty.

Are you proud? Do you habitually practice things that are wrong, such as lying, cussing, stealing, drunkenness, immorality, and so forth? If so, you are among the ungodly.

On the other hand, Malachi also speaks of:

B. The Godly – Beginning in v.16, God describes those who are *truly* godly. Many of the Jews, though professing faith, were not godly. But there were some in Israel who were truly godly. Notice the four descriptions of God’s people that are found here in our text. See if this describes you:

1. They Fear the Lord – This attribute is used twice in v.16, and once in 4:2. In contrast to the murmurers and complainers who dared to question the moral government of the Lord, there were some who feared Him. This means they held Him in awe and worshiped Him as the Lord Almighty. The godly are those who have a healthy respect for God, and fear to displease Him. This is foundational to a walk with God. Proverbs 1:7 says, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge....” Proverbs 16:6 says, “... by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil.”<sup>1</sup> You don’t go anywhere spiritually until you take this first step in your relationship with God.

Do you fear the Lord? You don’t if you habitually practice the same sin over and over again. You don’t if you take His name in vain. But the godly are grieved when they do wrong, and are concerned about displeasing God.

2. They Fellowship with Other Believers - V.16 says, “Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another....” They met together, not to complain but to encourage and edify each other. The more the truths by which we believe are contradicted, the more we should commune with fellow believers. True Christians get together for worship and fellowship. They enjoy talking about the Lord. They want to hear God’s Word. They obey the command of Hebrews 10:25 to assemble with other believers.

Does that describe you? Except for the homebound, how can a person say they are a Christian if they do not gather with God’s people on a regular basis? These people who hardly ever come to church look more like unbelievers than believers. If it walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, I would say it is a duck. Even so, if you avoid the worship and fellowship of God’s people like an unbeliever, I would say you are most likely an unbeliever! Does your church attendance demonstrate that you are among the godly of this world? The Greek word translated “church” by definition refers to an *assembly* of believers. True believers desire to assemble together on a regular basis.

Notice an interesting thing that happened when they met together. V.16 goes on to say, “...And the LORD listened and heard them....” “Listened” means “pay attention, incline ears of.” It is music to the ear of God for Him to listen in on His people speaking well of Him and praising His name. I wonder if this relates to an obscure verse in 1 Cor. 11:10. Paul is talking about worship and he says, “For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels.” Not only is God listening in on our worship, but so are some of the angels! There’s an older worship song that says, “I can hear the brush of angels’ wings, I see glory on each face.”<sup>2</sup>

3. They Meditate on the Lord (v.16b) – The word translated “meditate” (*chashab*) can mean to give much thought to;<sup>3</sup> to consider someone or something and make a judgment about

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<sup>1</sup> Likewise, Proverbs 8:13 says, “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil....”

<sup>2</sup> Lanny Wolfe, *Surely The Presence Of The Lord*.

<sup>3</sup> Neh. 6:2, 6; Esther 8:3; Job 6:26; 35:2; Psa. 35:4; 36:4; 40:17; 73:16; 77:5; 119:59; 140:2; 144:3.

them or it.<sup>4</sup> It can also mean “to declare the worth of, to esteem” for it can mean “calculate, count, value.”<sup>5</sup> The fact that “the name” of God is the object of the verb makes this meaning likely. This is what worship is all about, to declare the worth of our God. He is so wonderful! He is worthy of our praise.

Do you take time each day to think and reflect upon the Lord, His goodness, His love, His mercy? In so doing do you realize how precious the Lord is to you? One of the best ways to do that is to read a portion of God’s Word each day and reflect upon it. The thought life of the godly includes a significant amount of reflection of the Lord. But the wicked think very little about the Lord, except when something goes wrong and they take His name in vain, or blame God.

4. They Serve God – The last of v.18 gives a description of the righteous and the wicked. It is clear from Hebrew poetic parallelism that the righteous are those who serve God. V.17 also speaks of God’s people who serve Him.

Do you serve God? How can you serve God? One way is through the ministry of the church. If the Nominating Committee calls upon you to serve, will you say “Yes”? Another way is the service of worship. Yet another way is the minister to the spiritual, emotional, or physical needs of a believer. Jesus said in Matthew 25:40, “...inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.”

Now based on this description of the righteous here in Malachi, can you truthfully say that you are numbered with the godly? An honest evaluation of your spiritual condition is the first step. I hope you see that there are two kinds of people, the godly and the ungodly; the righteous and the unrighteous; the people of God, and those who are not. Now I want to show you why it really matters which group you belong to. Just as there are two different kinds of people in this world, there are also:

## II. TWO DIFFERENT DESTINIES

When you travel on a road, the most important question is this: where will this road take me? What is the ultimate destination? Well, you can walk with the ungodly of this world, and follow them. That seems to be a well-traveled road by so many people. But have you considered where they are leading you? Jesus warned in Mt. 7:13, “... broad *is* the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.” Too many people don’t seem to realize where the spiritual road they are traveling on is leading them! They only see the present, and don’t consider the ultimate outcome of that road. As we see in v.15, sometimes it seems that the ungodly prosper. But don’t judge a destiny by the journey. God gives an answer in v.1 of chapter 4 to these critics who complained that it seemed useless to serve the Lord because so many of the wicked seem to be doing quite well, while God’s people suffer. Here from God’s Word we see:

A. The Destiny of the Ungodly – V.1 says, “For behold, the day is coming....” The ungodly may prosper and even enjoy the journey they are on for the present. But “the day is coming....” God’s judgment is usually not immediate, but it is sure. Moses warned in Numbers 32:23, “...be sure your sin will find you out.” There is payday, someday, though it may come in the distant future.

Notice what God warns will happen. First, He compares the proud and wicked unbelievers

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<sup>4</sup> Gen. 31:15; 38:15; Deut. 2:11; 1 Samuel 1:13; 2 Samuel 14:13; Nehemiah 13:13; Job 13:24; 18:3; 19:11; 33:10; Psa. 44:22; 88:4; Proverbs 17:28.

<sup>5</sup> Gen. 15:6; Lev. 25:50; 27:18; 1 Kings 10:21; 2 Kings 22:7; Job 41:29.

to stubble or chaff. This refers to lightweight,<sup>6</sup> dry plant matter. Just as stubble burns easily and quickly, even so the wicked will be judged, and removed from this earth quickly, and hardly a trace of them will be left.<sup>7</sup> That is made more clear in the last of v.1, “That will leave them neither root nor branch.” As a tree or shrub is dug up by the roots and burned, so the Lord’s destruction of the wicked will be total and complete. This verse teaches that the unsaved are to be judged and removed from the earth’s scene. Not a trace of them will be left. Without Christ you will be utterly forgotten, alone for all eternity!

This hasn’t anything to do with the doctrine of annihilation, that death ends all for the unsaved. The Bible doesn’t teach that. Remember, God’s revelation in the Bible is progressive. The Old Testament does not clearly teach a burning hell, but it gives hints to the teaching that is fully revealed in the New Testament. Here we read of the burning of the wicked. In the New Testament we see that the ungodly will experience a burning that never ends! Jesus Himself spoke more about hell than heaven, and He died to save you from it. Why would He suffer such agony at Calvary if there were not a hell?

Now when will the ungodly receive this ultimate judgment? Well in v.5 God warns of “the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.” A final day of complete destruction of the wicked from the face of the Lord will be at Christ’s coming (2 Thess. 1:7-9). When He comes to this earth to establish His kingdom, the wicked will be put down. However, God’s judgment is not limited to the end time. Many times in history, He has overthrown the wicked. Hitler was defeated and committed suicide. Saddam Hussein and his sons were 3 very evil men, and they were overthrown. Gaddafi of Libya was overthrown and killed.

Now you don’t want this to be your destiny, do you? But if you travel on the road with the wicked, then you will share in the destiny of the wicked, unless you get off that road and walk with the righteous! So let’s next of all:

B. The Destiny of the Godly – Oh, what a contrast! V.2 says, “But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings....” The Old Testament closes with a great hope that, although this world is very dark, there is coming a new day. Someday the Sun of Righteousness will arise and spiritual light will break upon this little planet. Who is this “Sun of Righteousness”? It is the Lord Jesus Christ. Right now it is man’s day. But the Day of the Lord is coming, and the Lord Himself will bring a new day to this old world, and His glory shall fill the earth. In Isaiah 60:19 we read: “The sun shall no longer be your light by day... But the LORD will be to you an everlasting light, And your God your glory.” Likewise, Rev. 21:23 says, “The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light.” The main point is that God will bring the dawn of a new and glorious day for the child of God. Those who fear the Lord will bask in the light of His righteousness.

V.2 gives another imagery concerning the destiny of the godly. I believe the NKJV translation is wrong. It probably should be translated, “you will go out and playfully jump like calves from the stall” (HCSB; cf. 1 Sam. 28:24). God says we are going to leap for joy like calves let out to pasture at the start of a new day. Isn’t that going to be a glorious day?

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<sup>6</sup> Job 41:28, “The arrow cannot make him flee; Slingstones become like stubble to him.” Psalm 83:13, “O my God, make them like the whirling dust, Like the chaff before the wind!”

<sup>7</sup> This is similar to Exodus 15:7, “And in the greatness of Your excellence You have overthrown those who rose against You; You sent forth Your wrath; It consumed them like stubble.” Isaiah 5:24, “Therefore, as the fire devours the stubble, And the flame consumes the chaff, So their root will be as rottenness, And their blossom will ascend like dust; Because they have rejected the law of the LORD of hosts, And despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.” Isaiah 47:14, “Behold, they shall be as stubble, The fire shall burn them;...”

Now before the Lord establishes the full light of His glory in the earth, we have a different imagery in the last book of the Bible. In Rev. 22:16 Jesus says, "I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star." The bright and morning star appears a little before the sun comes up. In the darkest part of the night, the bright and morning star appears to give hope of the soon dawning of a new day. Christ is the bright and morning star for the church today.<sup>8</sup> The morning star is the sign of the coming of Christ and the dawning of the Kingdom of God. The Old Testament closes here in Malachi with God directing man to look toward the heavens, and it is well that man looks up.

A little boy was walking down the street with his father during World War II. He noticed that there were blue stars in many windows, but every now and then there would be a gold star in a window, which meant that someone had given a son to die for this country. It was in the early evening, and as they came to a vacant lot, the bright evening star was just appearing above the horizon. The little fellow said to his dad, "Look Dad! God gave *His* Son!" Yes, God gave His Son, and the star speaks of that. That little fellow was right, by the way.

Now notice with me what God promises to do to for His people on that glorious day:

1. God Will Bring Victory - In this evil age, too often the evil oppress the righteous. But the day is coming when the righteous will be victorious over the wicked. V.3 says, "You shall trample the wicked, For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet On the day that I do this...." Remember that in v.1 the wicked are likened to stubble that is burned, leaving only some ashes on the ground. Listen, stay true to God, reject the way of the wicked, and you will have the ultimate victory. At times the righteous are afflicted and the wicked prosper, but don't be bothered by that. Jesus said in John 16:33, "In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." Stay true to Jesus. Evil will come to an end some day! Someday the devil himself will be utterly defeated. Rom. 16:20 says, "The God of peace will bruise Satan under your feet shortly."

Are you defeated and discouraged? Look to Jesus! If you are defeated by life, if you are overcome by some habit, such as alcoholism, dishonesty, a bad temper, immorality, or materialism. He is the answer for you, and you can trust Him as your Savior.

2. God Will Reward Us – I see two indications of this. V.16 says, "Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, And the LORD listened and heard them; So a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD...." God was paying attention and keeping a record of their words. Faithful words may seem lost, but they and every faithful act are written in His book of remembrance,<sup>9</sup> and will be recompensed one day. Also keep in mind that in v.18 we see that the righteous serve God. Every time you serve in the nursery, God writes it down in this book, etc. Every time you minister to someone in need in the name of Christ, God writes it down in this book. And you can be sure that someday He will reward you for the good words you have spoken, and for the good works you have done. 1 Corinthians 15:58 says, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

Notice another indication of His reward to us. In v.17 God also says of the righteous, "They shall be Mine... on the day that I make them My jewels." "Make" refers to God's creative work. A master jeweler can take a rough, ugly stone, and turn it into a beautiful jewel. This old world doesn't think much of us Christians, but God says we are His jewels, His "treasured possession"

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<sup>8</sup> Peter speaks of Him in that way: "And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts" (2 Pet. 1:19).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Esther 6:1-2; Psa. 56:9; Dan. 7:10.

(NIV). This emphasizes our value to God. Many of God's faithful servants become discouraged because the times are difficult, the crowds are small, and their work seems to be unappreciated. But the day will come when God will reveal "His jewels", and then the faithful will receive their reward. Likewise, Ex. 19:5 says, "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people...."<sup>10</sup>

3. God Will Bring Final and Complete Healing - V.2 indicates that when Jesus comes again, there will be "healing in His wings." Since He is called the Sun of Righteousness, His wings must refer to the rays of light that spread out from the sun. No longer will there be sickness among God's people. The curse of sin will be removed. Rev. 22:3 says, "And there shall be no more curse." Isn't that great? The Old Testament ends with a warning of a curse (v.6) and the New Testament ends with the promise of the *end* of the curse! All of creation is eagerly awaiting the return of the Savior, expecting Him to deliver creation from the bondage and curse of sin (Rom. 8:18-23). No more shall God's people watch a loved one suffer and die. The day is coming when Rev. 21:4 will be fulfilled, "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

What a difference in destinies! That is why v.18 says, "Then you shall again discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him." The word translated "discern" means "to see, observe, perceive." The day is coming when the difference between the righteous and unrighteous will be obvious.<sup>11</sup> Malachi's answer to the doubters fixes on the prophecy of a future that will show that it is not all the same whether a man is good or bad. It *does* make a difference in how you believe and live. The anchor of faith in that storm is the unconquerable assurance that a day comes when righteousness will be vindicated, and the eternal difference between good and evil manifested in the fates of men. The gulf between the righteous and the wicked shall be solemnly visible, wide, and profound. So whatever the lot of the proud or of the meek at given times, the ultimate victory of the righteous and the defeat of the wicked is abundantly assured by the Lord.

Now if there are two kinds of people spiritually, and if they have vastly different destinies, then you should understand last of all:

### III. THERE IS ONLY ONE DECISION TO MAKE

If you realize that you are not among the godly, and that the direction of your life is not good, I have good news for you. You can become righteous and godly by turning to Jesus Christ. Here is what you must do:

A. Recall the Word of God – In v.4 God says, "Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments." The first step in getting right with God is to listen to His Word, and retain it in our hearts to remember it.<sup>12</sup> When

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<sup>10</sup> Likewise, Deut 7:6 says, "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth."

<sup>11</sup> Likewise, 1 John 3:1-2 says, "Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

<sup>12</sup> By the way, after 1000 years the prophet attributes the authorship of the books of the Law to Moses. Liberal theologians have divided the origin of the law among many sources and authors, but Malachi stamps the lie on all such intellectual nonsense-it is God's Word through Moses!

your sin catches up to you, and you are sitting in jail, or laid up in a hospital, or suffer some great loss, remember the Word of God that you learned along the way [John 3:16....].

B. Repent of Sin - V.5 says, “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.” V.6 gives the purpose of his coming. It was to “turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers.” What does this mean? The word “turn” is the most important word here. That word points to conversion and repentance. If you realize you are on the wrong road, going the wrong direction, you need to turn from sin and self and to the Lord! This verse was quoted in Luke 1:17 in reference to the ministry of John the Baptist.<sup>13</sup> He certainly preached repentance. It could mean that Elijah will bring back the devout dispositions of the patriarchs to the children of Israel, and so to bring the “hearts of the children to their fathers”, as united with them in devout obedience.<sup>14</sup> In this condition of the heart, they would be ready to receive the Messiah. Elijah had preached repentance and a return to Jehovah, and he will return to carry on the same ministry for the Jewish people.

I believe this will literally be fulfilled in the last days. Revelation speaks of two witnesses who are to appear in the last days (see Rev. 11:3-12). I do not know for sure who the second witness will be, whether Moses or Enoch, but I am sure that one of them will be Elijah. Jesus Himself said, “Elijah truly shall first come, and restore all things” (Matt 17:11). The signs that these two men will perform remind us of the miracles of Elijah. After the ministry of the witnesses, the Lord will pour out His wrath upon the earth (v.18; 16:1ff) and the Day of the Lord will burst upon the world in its fury.

C. Believe in the Messiah, Jesus – He is the Sun of Righteousness (v.2) He is the promised Savior. He is the only One who can redeem you from the curse of sin, and bring lasting healing to your soul and body.

Conclusion: Following this prophecy by Malachi, Israel is going to move into a period in which heaven goes off the air. God will not be broadcasting. No word was heard from Him until the 400-year silence was broken by the messenger who would introduce the Messiah. Though the Old Testament ends with a curse, the New Testament ushers in salvation, blessing and hope through Jesus Christ, the Messiah. Won't you believe in Him today? Jesus came under the curse of the Law when He died on the cross for you. Now, you can be saved, become a part of the people of God, and share in this marvelous destiny.

Sources: Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2021; Homer Hailey, *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972); C. F. Keil, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes, Minor Prophets, Vol. 10* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978 reprint); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena: Thru The Bible Radio, 1982); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Jerry Vines (notes from his sermon on this text dated 11/6/89); Warren W. Wiersbe, *“Be” Series: Old Testament, Malachi: Be Amazed* (Wheaton: Victor Books/SP

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<sup>13</sup> In vv. 16-17 the angel said to Zacharias, “And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, `to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

<sup>14</sup> This could refer to the spiritual obligations of parents and children. Parents need to realize the impact they have on their children's spiritual well-being, whether for good or bad. But notice that God also expects that there should be a turning of “the hearts of the children to their fathers.” When parents are seeking the spiritual good of their children, the children need to respond in the right way.

Publications, Inc., 1996). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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