

Malachi 3:13-4:1-6

"The Best Of Times; The Worst Of Times"

The best of times, the worst of times. It's how the book of Malachi comes to a close & it all depends on which side of the line you make your stand. In the end, we're either *for* J.C. or *against* Him. We're either *hot* or we're *cold*. There is no neutrality, no "lukewarm" mentality that's going to fly. We're either *on* or we're *off*, we either *believe* or we *don't*. & That's what's going to make all the difference (one way or the other) for you.

As we fall back into the flow, God has rebuked Israel for their lack of generosity. The fact that they've neglected to obey His word & fully support the ministry. Yet He's promised to extend blessing to them if they will cease *robbing* Him & *return* to Him. That is, obey His *word* to them & bring all the tithes into the storehouse. But even though He promises blessing to *them*, they still speak harsh against *Him*. Notice.

Vs 13-15

Family. When we began this book, I told you that it essentially revolved around 7 questions (this being the last), "What have we spoken against You?" But whether they're saying, "In what way have we robbed You?" Or "In what way have You loved us?" Or, "In what way have we defiled You?" Or, "In what way shall we return to You?" Or whatever the case may be.

I just want to point out an unspoken truth imbedded within these verses & that is that God hears every word we say & every thought otherwise hidden in our hearts. Darkness is as light before Him & a whisper may as well be shouted from the rooftops because God hears it all! In the NT vernacular, Jesus said it like this, "*But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.*"¹

Here in Vs 13, God puts it plainly before them, "Your words have been harsh against Me." Allow me to say this as well, growth in our lives doesn't come by always rearing up in a defensive posture &/or challenging those who love us enough to point out the truth of where we're really at, or what they see going on.

They were speaking sinfully harsh against God & we're so cauterized, so desensitized they didn't even realize (or at least that's the card they play) in what way they were doing so. & It's almost an underscoring of the problem God pointed out in the previous Ch, "You've wearied the Lord w/your words." "In what way?"

¹ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Mt 12:36-37). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

“In that *you say*, ‘Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord.’ Or, ‘Where is the God of *justice*?’ This is kind of the counter-side of that. In Vs 17 of Ch 2 the thought is, “God seems to bless those who do evil.” You know, the ungodly seem to have it good! Here, the thought is in the negative, “It *doesn’t* pay to serve God.” “It’s useless to serve God; there’s simply no profit in keeping His word or mourning before Him.”

Guys, I want to say this again. When it comes to our service, our sacrifice, our study... whatever we give to God, the way we’re responding to the *word of God*. It never ends with *what* we’re doing, God is always searching deeper into the *why* we’re doing it. Or to understand it another way, what is truly the heart of the matter? (The matter of the heart.) & God happens to know something about the human heart. & He tells us what that is in Jeremiah Ch 17 Vs 9-10 where we read, “*The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it? I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings.*”²

I’m just going to say it plainly. Ritual, without a right heart has no value before God. God doesn’t honor it. Legalistic, outward showing of obedience, rituals of mournful repentance designed to attract God’s attention & win His favor. “God, look at us, doing what You said to do! Now You can bless us!” Those kinds of religious showings don’t impress Him nor win favor *from* Him. It’s what He addressed w/them a few hundred years prior to this during Isaiah’s day. Jesus would reiterate it again when He said, “*These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.*”³

Maybe I should say it this way, if you’re serving God, or giving to God, or even mourning *before* God because it *pays* (there’s some kind of profit in it), then it won’t pay. They’re all, “It’s useless to serve God.” Guess what? For them it was, because their hearts weren’t in it, so there was no point in simply going through the motions.

Now; I’d never want to discourage someone from being in church. But at the same time I would say, “Why are you here?” If your heart isn’t in it, then there’s really no value in being here. If you have no heart to praise God, to worship God, to truly learn of Him or be obedient to Him, then it really *doesn’t* benefit you to be here. Of course, if you *don’t* know the Lord, yet you’re open to *hearing & learning*, maybe even *receiving*, that’s fantastic! I commend you for being here!

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Je 17:9–10). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Mt 15:8–9). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But if it's nothing more than your religious weekly duty, there's really no need to bother.

To throw this out from another angle I would say... God has given you (& me) everlasting life by grace through faith in J.C. Let's pretend for the sake of argument that He never did another thing, didn't bless you (or me) in any other way... Is that unjust of Him? Does He *owe us something*? Not at all!

We, however, owe Him *everything*! Family, serving God is anything *but* tantamount to life on easy street... But again, *why* do we serve God? Because it makes life easier? Or because it's the right thing to do?

Having said that, let me say this... We established the fact last week that God will never be indebted to me or to you. We *cannot* out give Him. However, many of the rewards with which He will bless you, He has reserved for you in heaven. That's not to say that He won't take care of your needs here & now.

But in writing to the Romans Paul said this, "*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.*"⁴ & Again to the Corinthians, "*For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*"⁵ Yes, God could give us a reward here & now (& there are times [many times] that He does) & then when we die, they'd just vanish forever like every other temporary thing of this world. Or we could rejoice in the wisdom of God in reserving those rewards for the day that we see Him face to face that we might *enjoy* them & through them *glorify* Him forever... God help us to live w/that view toward the eternal.

Think about it this way. What if all that's in it for you, this side of eternity is the fact that you bring God glory? It doesn't benefit you practically, materially, or in any real discernable way. But it honors God's & brings glory to Him... is that enough?

Job adopted the mentality, though He slay me, yet will I trust Him. But too often we'll adopt a mercenary mentality of, "What's in it for me? What's the immediate pay out?" Yet scripture is clear, "*Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit,*"⁶ Let's reject the, "What's in it for *me*?" mentality & look more toward, "How can I bring *God glory*?"

⁴ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ro 8:18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁵ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (2 Co 4:17-18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁶ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Php 2:3). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Vs 16-18

What a precious portion of scripture... & We see here the same thing we find in so many other dark or seemingly disparaging passages of scripture & that is this; God always has His repentant remnant, a faithful few who genuinely desire to honor Him & are given to serving Him from the heart (even when it seems everyone else has turned away or is messed up in their motives).

& Here we discover that those who truly feared & *revered* the Lord came together to encourage one another *in* the Lord. To remind themselves that this mentality of it not being worth it to serve God simply was untrue & inappropriate. That it's an honor & privilege to serve God or be used of God in any capacity.

Earlier, we pointed out the fact that God keeps track of every *idle* word that man may speak. Here, we're learning that He's also tuned in to every *edifying* word, every *uplifting*, *encouraging* or *inspiring* word we speak to one another in order to strengthen one another to carry on... When you talk to someone else about the Lord, it's like the Lord's ears *turn toward* & *tune in* to what you're saying. He loves to see true fellowship, love & encouragement among His people.

Sometimes we feel like when we're serving the Lord, no one really pays attention or even cares. That's not true, God keeps track of each individual who walks w/Him, fears Him & honors Him.

& Not only does God *tune in* to your words, He makes a *record* of your words (almost like He's scrap booking, He loves to "look back" (if you will) & "remember" what you've said. (& It's not as if He's in danger of maybe forgetting, but He wants you to take confidence in the fact that He's taking note). The author of Hebrews put it this way, "**For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister.**"⁷

When you spend time thinking *about* the Lord, serving on behalf of the Lord or so that you might be found pleasing & bringing glory *to* the Lord. God sees that & He won't forget that... Isn't it fascinating to think that somehow & in some way a permanent remembrance of your faithful and reverent response to God & His word is kept in heaven? He will never forget your service & your submission to Him.

God says, "Right now, you feel like a lump of coal, but on that day I'll make you My diamonds... my jewels."

⁷ The New King James Version. (1982). (Heb 6:10-11). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

In other words, don't be *discouraged* based upon your *feelings* be *encouraged* by the *facts* of God's word. "You may *feel* this way currently, but the *fact* is that I'll make you *My jewels* (My precious possession) *eternally*."

This is how God sees you, as a precious gem. As a pearl that He'd be willing to give everything for... One day, Jesus was teaching His disciples & He said, "*Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it.*"⁸ & Many people will tell you that Jesus is the pearl, that we're those who are seeking & when we find Jesus we give up everything in order to apprehend Him... & It sure sounds good & makes me feel like the sacrificial good guy of the story, "Look at all I gave up to find Jesus..." But the way I understand it is just the opposite. *Jesus* is the merchant, *He's* the One who came to seek & to save that which was lost. *He's* the One who gave everything, who paid the greatest price to obtain me... & to obtain *you*... You are His jewel, His gem, His pearl that He sacrificed everything (even His own blood) to purchase.

But think about this; this was a spiritually low time for Israel. The priests & the people were steeped in corruption & compromise. But God had His remnant... & This is something I try to anchor in my kids. It doesn't matter what everyone else may be doing, what matters is what are *you* gonna do? We have a choice, we can honor God & it really doesn't matter if anyone else chooses to or not... As the song says, "Though none go with me, still I will follow." Choose this day whom you will serve, but as for me & *my house*... we will serve the Lord...

Today is a lot like Malachi's day. It can be hard to tell who's genuine in their walk with God & who doesn't really have a heart for Him. Compromise is so prevalent in our day & age that the line can begin to blur. But the day is coming (Vs 18) when God will make it clear. Those who truly have a heart for God Vs those who simply use godliness as a means of gain, not really serving God, will be made evident... God will vindicate His own.

Ch 4

Vs 1

God once again turns the attention of their hearts toward the eternal. "You think they're getting away with it, that they're even being blessed in it. But the day is coming, burning like an oven & all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble... & neither root nor branch shall be left to them."

⁸ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Mt 13:45-46). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Which is to say that it will be a judgment so final that their destruction will be absolute. No recovery, no recuperation, all that will be left will be eternal condemnation from the presence of the Lord.

The day in view here is the 2nd coming of Christ. When He comes to establish His rule & His reign upon the earth. In 2nd Thess, Paul spoke of the finality of the Lord's judgment upon the wicked when he wrote, *"...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,"*⁹ When the Lord comes again (we're not talking about the rapture, but the 2nd coming) there will be an irrevocability, an absolute finality to His judgment.

You're saying it's pointless to serve God, profitless to serve God. I'm saying that's a shortsighted, self-centered perspective. We talked about this last week... "But what will you do in the end?"

Family Jesus made it clear that He was going away. & There would be those who would adopt the mentality, "My master delays His coming." They would grow weary, short sighted, self-centered in their doings, in their actions. But He said, "Watch & be ready, for the Son of Man will come upon a day & at an hour that you do not expect." The good & faithful servant will enter into rest, into the joy of their Lord. The unprofitable servant will be cast into outer darkness where there will be weeping & gnashing of teeth.

So maybe the question to consider isn't so much, "How does serving God profit me?" But rather, "How does my service profit God?" We forget sometimes the chain of command. We didn't enlist God for *our* profit, but He's made an investment into *us*, & He's the One who looks for a return on *His* investment. So how exactly *does* my life glorify God or increase His kingdom?

The 1st time Jesus came it was as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world. The next time we'll see the Lion of the tribe of Judah, who will establish righteousness & reign upon the earth. So again I say, don't wait till it's too late. Now is the acceptable time, today is the day of salvation, if you'll hear His voice don't harden your heart. Open your heart & believe on the Lord J.C.

God's judgment is real. Hell, is real. The lake of fire is real; & it's eternal. But no one has to go there. God has made a way of escape by His grace through faith in J.C.

⁹ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (2 Th 1:7-9). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Vs 2-3

The day that makes for unparalleled terror for the wicked, will be a day of unspeakable joy for the people of God... A new day will dawn, the Sun of Righteousness shall arise w/healing in His wings. (The idea is like the rays of the sun enveloping the earth, we'll be covered by the warmth, the hope & healing & wholeness of J.C.)

We'll be like stall-fed calves let out of their dingy stalls to kick up their heels in joy & exuberance. & The righteous (who are so often trampled by the wicked) will triumph over them. "They'll be like ashes under the soles of your feet."

Vs 4

These would be the last words of God to the nation of Israel for some 400 yrs. So He tells them, "Remember the Law of Moses". He turns their attention to His word. Sometimes we feel like God is silent, but what He's telling us here is that He's given us all we need already in His written word.

& Let's remind ourselves that remembering should invoke a response. Not only are we to *remember* God's word, or *return* to His word, we're to *respond* to God's word. That is, we're to be *doers* of the word because we *love the Lord*. Jesus said, "If you love Me, keep My commandments."¹⁰

Vs 5-6

This is an interesting word to sign off on isn't it? "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great & dreadful day of the LORD." & Because of this, people wonder, "Will Elijah literally come? Or will someone (like J.B. at Jesus' 1st coming) come in the spirit & power of Elijah, fulfilling the same role?"

I'm not certain we can say w/absolute certainty, but I'm of the persuasion that it will be Elijah personally. For a few reasons. #1 We read it right here. #2 In Matt 17:11 Jesus said he would come. & #3 When we read of the 2 witnesses in Rev 11, they carry the same miraculous giftings as did Elijah & Moses. Not to mention when Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James & John, who was it they saw talking to Jesus? (Moses & Elijah).

Who's mentioned in these closing Vs? (Moses & Elijah) So I don't think it's a stretch to believe that God will in fact send Elijah himself before the 2nd coming of J.C.

& He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children & the hearts of the children to their fathers. Does this speak of a restoration of the family that society is trying to dismantle even as we speak? Certainly that's part of it.

¹⁰ *The New King James Version*, (1982). [Jn 14:15] Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

But more so it seems to me that he will return the faith of Israel (the hearts of the children) to that of the patriarchs.

Interesting the last words of God to Israel under the old covenant were the looming words of a curse. And certainly the law confines us under a curse. Not because the law is bad, but because we can't keep it. The law is righteous, we (however) are not.

However, under the new covenant, God's final written word to us is, "*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.*"¹¹

What a wonderful day it will be, when Jesus comes again in glory. I'd encourage you to not delay, but to make sure your life, your heart is in His hands today...

Prayer Points:

God we thank You for the wonderful richness of Your word. & Lord rather than being concerned w/what we can get *from* You, may our hearts be concerned w/how we can live lives pleasing *to* You. Help us to maintain that eternal perspective. We thank You that You love us, that You came to seek & to save us, & that You value us. May we be doers of Your word & may our lives bring glory to Your name.

If you've not turned *to* Jesus or placed your faith *in* Jesus, I want you to know that God wants to make *you* His jewel, His gem, His prized possession. I'm not going to tell you that following Jesus is going to make everything grand & great. Or that it's the easy thing to do. Jesus never promised to be the easy way, He promised that He was the only way... turn from your sin, trust in Him today.

¹¹ *The New King James Version*, (1982). [Re 22:20-21]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.