

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:
Pastor Stephen Felker
Swift Creek Baptist Church, 18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834
November 9, 2003

Malachi 3:13 - 4:6 "A Glorious Destiny"

Intro. In every age, regardless how dark, God always has a people that are true to Him and serve Him. In the book of Malachi we have been following a group of people who have been responding to the Word of the Lord with arrogance and denial. Now we come to 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 was 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 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 & white, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, male and female, bond and free. 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 & the ungodly. First notice:

A. The Ungodly – In verses 13-15 the people in Malachi's day were complaining that it seemed the ungodly seemed to be prospering, successful, and doing fine, while those who identified themselves with the God of Israel were suffering. They said, "It is useless to serve God." 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. They were making a false comparison.

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. 15a, & 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 vv. 15 & 4:1 they are also described as those who do wickedness. It refers to those who do wrong, who do wicked things, and are thus condemned as guilty. Do you habitually practice things that are wrong, such as lying, drunkenness, stealing, cussing, immorality, and so forth?

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 how God's people are described 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 questioned 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.”¹ Do you fear the Lord? You don't if you habitually practice the same sin over and over again.

2. They Fellowship with Other Believers - V.16a 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 should we commune with fellow believers. True Christians get together for worship and fellowship. They enjoy talking about the Lord. Does that describe you? 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. 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?

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. Their neighbors may have laughed at them, but God was pleased with them. 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 the angels.

3. They Meditate on the Lord (v.16b) – The word translated “meditate” (*chashab*) can mean to give much thought to (Neh. 6:2, 6; Esther 8:3; Job 6:26; 35:2; Psa. 35:4; 36:4; 40:17²; 73:16; 77:5; 119:59; 140:2; 144:3); to consider someone or something and make a judgment about them or it (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). It can also mean “to declare the worth of, to esteem” for it can mean “calculate, count, value” (Gen. 15:6; Lev. 25:50; 27:18; 1 Kings 10:21; 2 Kings 22:7; Job 41:29). 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!

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.

4. They Serve God – The last part 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. Do you serve God? How can you serve God? One way is through the ministry of the church. 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

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

² “...I am poor and needy; Yet the Lord thinks upon me....”

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. But have you considered where they are leading you? As we see in v.15, sometimes it seems that the ungodly prosper, and are raised up. 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. 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.” Notice what God warns will happen. First, He compares the proud and wicked unbelievers to stubble or chaff. This refers to lightweight,³ dry plant matter. Just as stubble burns quickly, even so the wicked will be judged, and removed from this earth quickly, and hardly a trace of them will be left.⁴ That is made more clear in the last part 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 will be the Lord's destruction of the wicked: total and complete. This verse teaches that the unsaved are to be judged and removed from the earth's scene. Without Christ you will be utterly forgotten, alone for all eternity! This is in stark contrast to what v. 16 says, “So a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD....”

This hasn't anything to do with the doctrine that death ends all for the unsaved, that death for the unsaved is annihilation. The Bible doesn't teach that. Remember, God's revelation in the Bible is progressive. The OT does not clearly teaching 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 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 (II 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

³ 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!”

⁴ 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 rotteness, 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;...”

limited to the end time. Many times in history, He has overthrown the wicked. Saddam Hussein and his sons were 3 very evil men, and they have been overthrown.

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, Nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you; 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 Jehovah will bask in the light of His righteousness. V. 2 gives another imagery concerning the destiny of the godly. It probably should be translated, “And you shall go out and spring about like calves out of the stall.” 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?

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 nearly an hour 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. 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). The star is the sign of the coming of Christ to take His church out of the world before the final judgment falls, and the sun is the sign of His second coming to the earth to establish His kingdom. 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 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 - 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 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 ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” Stay true to Jesus. Evil will come to an end some day! Some day 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—drink, 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 2 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 remembrance, and will be recompensed one day. If our names and acts are written there, we may be content to accept scanty measures of earthly good, and not be “envious of the foolish” in their prosperity.

God has several books. There is His book of revelation, the Bible. There is the Lamb's Book of Life. You are not saved unless your name is written in that book. And here we read of a Book of Remembrance. 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.

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. 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” (“treasured possession,” NIV), 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....”⁵

3. God Will Bring Final & Complete Healing - V. 2 indicates that when Jesus comes again, there will be “healing in His wings.” 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.” The OT ends with a warning of a curse, 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 & curse of sin (Rom. 8:18-23).

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.” The day is coming when the difference between the righteous and unrighteous will be obvious. 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,

⁵ 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.”

then you should understand last of all there are:

III. THE TWO DECISIONS THAT ARE POSSIBLE

A. You Can Reject The Lord. You can scoff in unbelief at the biblical doctrine of judgment for the wicked in a burning hell. You can fail to give heed to the warnings of Scripture, and keep going down the same path you've been on. And based on vv. 5-6a God may even send you other preachers to warn you of coming judgment. But notice what will happen if you don't repent. In v. 6b He says, "Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse." The last word of the Old Testament is curse. Malachi closes with a thud, and the curtain comes down. A final warning is given of inevitable judgment upon the wicked. The curse came when Adam and Eve were in the Garden of Eden and disobeyed God. The curse will not be lifted as long as you refuse to repent and turn to God. The curse of sickness, sorrow, and death awaits you. God has done all that He can do to keep you from being consumed by the fire of His righteous judgment, but He will not violate your will.

But 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 through the saving work of Jesus Christ. So let's examine the other decision you can make:

B. You Can Turn to the Lord -

1. 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.⁶ When your sin catches up to you, and in 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....].

2. Repent of Sin - Vv. 5-6a says, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers...." Moses and Elijah are the two giant figures that dominate the history of Israel. Law and prophecy are the two forms in which God spoke to the fathers. The former is of perpetual obligation, the latter will flash up again in power on the threshold of the coming Day of the Lord. The purpose of his coming 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. This verse was quoted in Luke 1:17 in reference to the ministry of John the Baptist.⁷ 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.⁸ 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

⁶ 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!

⁷ 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."

⁸ 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.

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.

3. Believe in the Messiah, Jesus – He is the Sun of Righteousness. He is the promised Savior. He is the only One who can redeem you from the curse of sin.

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 silence was broken by the messenger who would introduce the Messiah. The silence of four hundred years was broken. Though the OT 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: Homer Hailey, *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972); 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); 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 Publications, Inc., 1996); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

ABOUT THESE SERMON NOTES

This document has not been transcribed from an audio recording, but is the result of the sermon preparation process. Most outlines are original to the author, but much of the content of the notes are taken from commentaries, other sermons, and Bible study aids (see sources above). Sermons are preached without notes, and thus the content of the "live" sermon is in the author's own words. To get an audio recording of this message, you may send \$1 for each audio cassette tape ordered, plus \$3 shipping & handling for each order mailed in. Up to 2 messages come on each cassette. Make checks payable to Swift Creek Baptist Church, P.O. Box 235, Colonial Heights, VA 23834.