

What Does it Profit...

Malachi 3:13-4:6

27 November 2022 | Grace Bible Church Corinda | Ben Shannon

Big Idea: Those who follow God gain everything.

Big Question: What do we gain by serving God?

Introduction

What's the point in following Jesus?

What difference does it actually make to be a Christian?

Can't I just be a good, moral person without any need for God in my life?

Perhaps it even looks to you like it's a nett loss to serve God because the cost looks like it far outstrips any possible benefit there is.

Maybe you feel like they're questions that you're not allowed to ask.

I think that they're good questions – questions that we shouldn't be afraid of.

I remember thinking about those questions as a teen who grew up in a church-going family.

Those are the questions that I get asked from time-to-time by my friends who aren't yet Christians.

Maybe you're working through those kinds of questions this morning.

That's one of the reasons that we run the Life Course – to provide an opportunity to ask and begin to think through those kind of questions.

They're not forbidden questions – they're real things that we wonder about.

They're not new questions because people have been asking them for thousands of years.

The people Malachi was speaking to were wanting to know what the point of serving God was.

What do you gain from serving God?

What difference would it make to their lives?

Outline

We've been looking at a book in the Bible named Malachi.

It's not a book that Christians read very often, but it stands out because it's the very last book in the Old Testament.

The book's named after a bloke named Malachi and his name means, "My messenger."

His job was to speak to the people of Israel on God's behalf.

This happened after they'd returned back to Israel after being exiled in Babylon, or about 400-450 years before the time of Jesus.

Malachi's made up of a series of six different oracles.

Last week, we covered the fifth of these oracles.

We saw God's return policy: God is absolutely unwavering in his commitment to welcome back anyone who returns to him.

Return to God and he will return to you.

The finish line's in sight because we've looking at the final oracle today.

In this oracle, we're going to see that **those who follow God gain everything**.

- We Gain Life (3:13-15)
- We Gain Treasure Status (3:16-18)
- We Gain Eternity (4:1-3)
- We Gain Jesus (4:4-6)

We Gain Life (3:13-15)

The first thing to see is that we gain life.

God's a bit like a mirror as he speaks to the Israelites through Malachi.

He reflects them back to themselves, so that they can see exactly what they're like.

He's essentially saying, "This's what you've been doing."

The NIV translates the Hebrew word as arrogant (although it's different to the word his uses in 3:15 and 4:1), but other translations give a better sense of how hurtful their words are by using the word 'harsh'.

Verse thirteen:

Malachi 3:13 NIV11 ¹³ "You have spoken arrogantly against me," says the LORD.
"Yet you ask, 'What have we said against you?'"

Only they can't see because as soon as he tells them that they're being harsh, what do you think they say next?

"Thank you for showing us the error of our ways?" Nup.

We tend to think that we're the ones who know ourselves best, but sin's blinding.

We're often completely unaware of our own sins until someone else points them out.

And when they do, we automatically think that it mustn't be true... because we can't see it.

We jump to straight to justifying ourselves (that's an emotional response) rather than coolly considering the truth of what they're saying.

It's a familiar pattern in all of us and we've seen it in from what Malachi's said too.

God's not ignorant of what they've been saying.

He knows exactly what they've been saying out aloud and also in the privacy of their own minds.

They're convinced that it's futile to serve God.

Now we're getting somewhere.

That's why the priests aren't teaching God's words, why they're allowing dodgy sacrifices, why they're divorcing their wives instead of protecting them and why they're not tithing.

They think that it's futile to serve God.

The reason that they think it's a waste of time and energy to serve God is because they feel like they don't get anything out of it.

Their success criterion – they only have one – is the material blessing that they're going to get out of the relationship.

The questions behind their statements are things like, "What will I gain?" and "What do I get out of it?"

"What's the reward?"

And they're not alone because it's what most of us want to know too, isn't it?

I'm sympathetic to their questions because it looks like the only ones who are winning are the people who're doing the WRONG thing.

This sounds like what they were asking about at the end of chapter two, but it's not anywhere near as noble this second time around.

There, it was a question of justice.

Here's it's a question of gain.

The evildoers are prospering, verse fifteen.

They're even putting God to the test – testing his patience and they seem to be getting away with it!

Which isn't a good thing, it's an act of judgment because they're mounting up more and more penalties against them.

Like someone parking in a disabled spot day after day because they think they're getting away with it, until two weeks later when fourteen tickets turn up in the mail.

That's why they're going so far to even call someone who's arrogant towards God 'blessed.'

That's an upside-down view of blessing, if it's just limited to the material stuff of this world.

When success is measured by who's got the biggest and latest toys.

They're envying those who are arrogant, which's just as bad as actually being arrogant towards God themselves.

When God invited his people to test him (like we saw last week in verse ten), it was to see the blessing that comes from living his way.

In Deuteronomy, one of the books at the beginning of the Bible, Moses speaks on and on, chapter after chapter, about the laws of Israel.

He finishes up by telling them to choose life.¹

That's what the Law given to Israel was meant to do – it was meant to give them life if they followed it.

God doesn't set rules and make laws to make life dull and boring and monochrome.

He's not out to see how much of a kill-joy he can be by putting an end to any pleasure that you might have.

His limits are designed to give you the maximum amount of joy in the world that he's designed.

What you gain by serving God is life.

Life works best when we love God and we love others.

I'm not saying that someone who doesn't follow Jesus can't do things that are morally good and right and helpful – of course they can.

But I would argue that someone who's committed to loving God and loving others is going to do that in a whole different way to a whole different level.

Christians should be – and often are – categorically different in the way that they interact with the world and others, which we often take for granted.

God tells us what he requires of us and honestly, who wouldn't want to be around people who are behaving in a way that brings life and joy?

Micah 6:8 NIV11 ⁸He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

What do you gain by mourning over your sin all the time?

This seems to be another angle to their complaints.

Some people wonder why Christians have this morbid introspection over their sin.

Wouldn't we be happier if we eliminated the negative and accentuated the positive?

Not according to Jesus, who said:

Matthew 5:4 NIV11 ⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

He doesn't just mean that it's bad to mourn the loss of someone you love dearly.

His point is that if you mourn over your sin – confess and repent it, like we looked at last week – then the burden of your sin will be lifted.

You'll receive the comfort and certainty that comes from knowing that your sin has been forgiven by Jesus.

Perhaps most importantly, the gain in serving God is God himself.

There's nothing better than getting God.

Harry and Meghan have tried to surround themselves with important people to raise their status.

Who's the most important person you'd cut off your right leg to get the opportunity to be able to know as a personal friend?

They don't come any better than God himself.

He's amazing, wonderful, beautiful and perfect.

He's faithful, generous and kind.

Through our sins being forgiven in Jesus, we've got the opportunity to have a relationship with him again – just like the one Adam and Eve originally had in the Garden of Eden.

As A. W. Tozer put it, "The man who has God for his treasure has all things in one."²

The Israelites made the mistake of measuring blessing along just one axis – what's in it for me?

What will I gain?

If you're just after the material things of this world, then perhaps not much.

However, serving God brings life to you and to others as well.

We Gain Treasured Status (3:16-18)

Secondly, we gain treasured status.

One way of understanding what's going on here is that we've just heard about people who're rejecting what God's said and living their own way.

That's the essence of what sin is.

But there's another group of people who're talking to EACH OTHER.

Are they talking over God?

I kind of get nervous, thinking that they should be listening to God.

Which, it turns out, is actually exactly what they're doing.

God's not upset at them because they're talking over the top of him.

They're people who fear God – which doesn't mean that they're curled up in the corner quaking and trying to hide.

The idea of 'fear' here is that they've got a right and healthy respect for God.

And they talk about this with each other.

It's just so easy for us to lose sight of what God's really like.

You really don't have to be all that creative to make up a god of your own imagination.

We do it all the time with other people who are standing right there in front of us.

In our imagination they have two heads, breath fire and have grown horns... and there's absolutely nothing that they can do that's right.

How much more a God who we can't see, who, even though he's unchanging has his character assassinated by mutilation in our minds?

That's why we need to listen to what the Bible says about God.

That's the place where he reveals himself and what he's like.

But it's also important to have people who point us to him and remind us what the Bible says God is like.

To remind us that he's gracious, kind and compassionate, and not the ogre that we might have made up in our minds.

God listens to what they say and he takes note of the fact that they fear him.

He's writing a scroll which Malachi calls a 'scroll of remembrance'.

It was typical of kings in the ancient world to write down records of all the amazingly heroic events of their finest leaders.

But this scroll's going to be different.

It's a scroll to remember those who have honoured God's name.

God points them forward to the day that he'll act, verse seventeen.

As we looked at before, the reason God's not acting at the moment isn't because he's not able to.

It's because he's patient.

The day will come when he will act though.

God says that there will be a group of people who'll be his treasured possession.

I know that I've already used it as an analogy recently, but think of the child who finds a crushed-up, half-dead flower.

In that moment, it's the greatest thing in the world to that child and it brings them so much joy, even though as a grown man, I watch on in wonder at the wonder they see in that pulpy mess.

That's exactly what God's like when he calls messy, broken and sinful people to be his treasured possessions.

He calls people to return to him so that they might be his treasured possessions.

Disobedient and rebellious people who turn to him will find forgiveness and acceptance.

God will spare them, not because they've done anything so spectacular that it outweighs all their other wrongdoing.

Not because they're so wonderful and M&Ms wouldn't melt in their hands or their mouth, nor because they've never done anything wrong in their lives.

No, he'll have compassion on them, just like a father does for his son who serves him.

How's that possible?

Well, it's possible because God DIDN'T spare his son.

God sent his son, Jesus, to enter the world as a human being.

At Christmas, we remember that Jesus humbled himself by taking on flesh and he did this so that he could save us.

Michael Magrath will be pleased to know that God's Christmas song is "All I want for Christmas is you."

Jesus was willing to leave his elevated position in heave to become human in every way, except for one important distinction.

Jesus never, ever, ever, sinned.

Even the Roman leaders admitted that he hadn't done anything wrong.

Yet, Jesus allowed himself to go to the cross to die for us.

Which meant that he could die in the place of sinful people like you and me.

The consequence of sin is death but because Jesus didn't have any sin of his own that would cause him to die, it meant that he could die to take the punishment for OUR sin.

John 3:16 CSB17 ¹⁶ For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

God gave his own son so that we can become his sons and daughters.

The greatest thing we can get is God.

God giving himself to save us from our sins.

When you look around the world, you won't be able to tell the difference between who's got God's favour and who hasn't.

Some people are blessed materially by God in this life, but many aren't.

Just like there are people who seem to be doing very well despite their clear and obvious rebellion against God.

But there'll be a day when who's who will be revealed.

There will be a day when there won't be any confusion.

Malachi says the same thing twice in verse eighteen, something that often happens in Hebrew poetry.

There will be the righteous and unrighteous.

And the difference is between those who serve God and those who don't.

Malachi 3:18 NIV11 ¹⁸ And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.

What do you gain by serving Jesus?

The Israelites thought it was the amount of physical blessing that you get in this life.

Yet it's pointless having every material blessing in the world if your soul is lost.

Jesus once asked a man,

Mark 8:36 NIV11 ³⁶ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?

If you fear and serve God, you gain the status of being declared a treasure.

The greatest treasure is being treasured by God.

It's an astonishing thought that the creator of the universe cares about people like you and me.

That he would give himself to make us his treasured people.

We Gain Eternity (4:1-3)

We also gain eternity.

Malachi warns that a day is coming.

It'll be a day of fire that won't just refine people, but also consume them.

It's a graphic and striking picture that weren't not meant to take lightly or flippantly.

It will be a sad day because nothing will be left of the arrogant person or evildoer on that day.

Verse fourteen:

Malachi 4:1b NIV11 "All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble a, and the day that is coming will set them on fire," says the LORD Almighty.

I know by the calendar we're still meant to be in spring, but on these hot summer days we've been having, it's not hard to forget the power of the sun.

I stand out in the sun and I can feel myself cooking as the rays come down onto my skin.

The furnace of the sun might be what's in his mind here.

On that day, the heat will cause an all-consuming bushfire.

Ge then flips the analogy around because the sun that burns is also the sun that rises and brings hope.

When you've been restless through the night and sleep's been elusive, the light of dawn brings hope.

Our perspective on a night of gastro changes as the sun makes an appearance in the morning and you know that all will, in fact, be well.

Working graveyard shifts, the sight of the sun rising in the morning was always a welcome sight because it meant the end of the long night.

Hope is coming for those who fear God.

For those who revere God's name, the sun of righteousness will bring healing, restoration.

Those words might sound familiar because we're used to signing them in the Christmas carol, *Hark! the Herald Angels Sing*.

*Hail the heav'n-born Prince of Peace!
Hail the Sun of righteousness!
Light and life to all He brings,
Ris'n with healing in His wings:*

Joni Erickson Tada is a woman who was paralysed in an accident.

She now depends on other people for even the simplest of everyday tasks.

Throughout her life, she had to fight anger towards God for allowing to be that situation.

Yet she's got a hope for healing that only the gospel can provide.

Every time I sing the part about healing in His wings, I choke up. Many years ago, I thought it meant Jesus would heal me physically. I remember thinking, "Surely this Christmas He's going to raise me up out of this wheelchair!" Little did I know that, in due time, God would heal me—but in a way I never, ever dreamed possible. Because two years later, on another Christmas, I found contentment and joy, simply because I found that I could embrace His will for my life. And what is His will? That we put ourselves in the best position, the best place, in which God can be most glorified.³

The word for rays here is also the same word for wings and the hem of a piece of clothing.

This adds colour and depth to the incident with the woman who bled for twelve years in Matthew 9.

She was incurable, despite trying just about everything, until she touched the hem of Jesus' robe.

Instantly, the Son healed her and she left greatly excited about what Jesus had done.

I think that incident shows us that Jesus is the one who brings the healing that Malachi was looking forward to.

Malachi describes God's people on that day as being like a calf that comes out of their stall.

I don't know whether you've seen the same thing, but calves, foals and lambs are all legs.

They've got tiny bodies on long legs and they just love to jump around.

For a while, we had Lowline cattle.

They're like baby Angus – jet black in colour and about 30% smaller than the highline variety.

You think that your puppy is cute, but it's got nothing on the sheer delight of watching lowline calves frolicking in the lush, green grass.

That's what we'll be like in eternity, joyous at what God's done.

I don't know about you, but I find myself quite uncomfortable with verse three, the complete flipside of the coin to verse two.

One of the reasons for sharing that is that I want to say that it's okay to be uncomfortable with God's word sometimes.

The problem is if I say that because I'm uncomfortable about something, that means it's wrong.

God's word isn't ever wrong, I am.

Malachi 4:3 NIV11 ³ Then you will trample on the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act," says the LORD Almighty.

You mightn't be, but I'm happy that one day there will be justice because God will judge and make things right.

However, I want to be compassionate and it seems to strike me as not my place to actively trample on the wicked.

Let's be clear that there's no room for revenge here (see what Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount) and I don't think the emphasis is on delight either.

I think it's more that Malachi boldly states the reality of what eternity will be like.

The last chapters of the Bible describe the gain for all those who trust in Jesus.

There'll be no more tears, no more crying.

There won't be a sun, because God will give all the light that's needed.

There won't be any more of the chaos that we're so used to at the moment.

What a great day that'll be for those who trust in Jesus!

A day that'll stretch with delight into eternity.

We gain eternity.

We gain Jesus (4:4-6)

Finally, we gain Jesus.

Verses four through six really give us the closing words of the whole book.

Not just the end of Malachi, but the end of the Book of the Twelve or the Minor Prophets.

Many scholars think that these books aren't randomly placed but were designed to be read together almost like chapters of one book.

And these verses also give us the last instalment in the Old Testament before the arrival of Jesus.

In particular, there are two figures who sort of represent God's words mentioned here – Moses and Elijah.

Moses received the Law from God.

As a prophet, Elijah represents God speaking about the future.

They show us the importance of looking back and looking forward because of what Gods' said.

Look back at the Law that was given to Moses.

Moses went up onto Mt Horeb to receive the laws and decrees that came from God.

These words are the foundation for who Israel are and not to be forgotten.

Those laws were never meant to be restrictive, but to give them life.

Malachi also tells them to look forward.

God is going to send the prophet Elijah.

As we saw a few weeks ago, he was John the Baptist.

That was looking ahead at the time that Malachi spoke.

It was a reminder to them that God is coming.

He's coming to restore and to rebuke.

To provide eternal prosperity and security or eternal destruction on that great and dreadful day of Yahweh.

It will be a great day for those who are going to be brought home to him forever.

Being in God's presence is the great gift.

And it will be a dreadful day for anyone not trusting in Christ.

Throughout Malachi, we've seen the problem of fractured hearts.

In verse six, we're that God's the one who'll turn the hearts of his people back to himself.

He talks about the parent-child relationship here.

Parents and children can have fractured relationships at times.

Especially as teenagers try to renegotiate the relationship and the dynamic as they go from being a child to an adult.

Parents are concerned to protect their kids because they're generally wiser and more experienced at life.

Teens can feel like that's so restrictive, that it's stifling, not realising that their parents are doing it out of love.

While that's true, I don't think this is about parents and their children so much as God and his people though.

Time and time again, throughout Malachi, God has described himself as a father and the people of Israel as his children.

I think that's what he's talking about here.

He'll turn his children back to their father.

Malachi 4:6 NIV11 ⁶ He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction."

As Christians, we look back and forwards too, but in a different way.

What wasn't clear to God's people in Malachi's day is that Jesus would, in fact, come twice.

His first coming would be to bring salvation and only at his second coming to bring judgment.

We look back to Moses, but also to the greater Moses.

The Bible repeatedly describes Jesus as the new Moses who comes to bring a new covenant and a new law.

He came once to speak finally of what God has done, is doing and will do.

As the writer to the Hebrew says:

Hebrews 1:1–2 NIV11 ¹ In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.

And we look for the day that he'll come again.

Tradition says that you read verse five again after verse six to leave things on a positive note because verse six says that day will be a great day of rejoicing and destruction.

Your response shouldn't be to try and sugar-coat things, but to turn to him today.

Trust in Jesus today. Return to him.

That's the only way you'll find hope and meaning and purpose that lasts.

Gain Jesus and you gain everything.

Conclusion

What do you gain by following Jesus?

If that's your question, I'm glad you're asking it because it's an important question.

It's worth asking whether there's really a future in serving God.

What do you gain?

But it's not the only question worth asking.

It's also worth asking what you lose if you DON'T follow God.

You lose life. You miss out on living life as God intended it to be.

You lose the opportunity to experience eternity with God.

Most importantly, you lose the opportunity to know God himself.

Jim Elliott was a brilliant young man with his whole life ahead of him.

If he was in our church today, it would be a no-brainer that most people would think that he should finish school, go to uni and become a dentist, doctor or lawyer.

He decided to become a missionary so that he could take the good news of Jesus to people who'd never heard it.

And it ended up costing him his life.

But his now-famous words sum up why he was willing to do it.

It was because of what he knew he gained:

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

May we have the great gain of knowing, believing and living that perspective too.

Prayer

To him who loves us and freed us from our sins by his blood, and made us to be a kingdom, priests serving his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

¹ Deuteronomy 30:6, 16

² Pursuit of God, 19.

³ 'Healing in His Wings | Joni and Friends', 23 December 2019, <https://www.joniandfriends.org/healing-in-his-wings/>.

What Does it Profit...

Malachi 3:13-4:6

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Big Idea: Those who follow God gain everything.

Big Question: What do we gain by serving God?

Discussion Questions

1. What question were God's people asking? What are some versions of the same question that we might ask today?
2. What was the situation that caused them to ask this question? How is it different to what Malachi addressed in chapter two?
3. What is the 'scroll of remembrance'?
4. What will happen on the day that's coming?
5. Does 4:3 make you feel uncomfortable? Should it?
6. Why is it important that they look back and forwards because of what God's said?
7. Why will God turn the hearts of parents and children towards each other (verse 6)?
8. What are some of the things that we gain by serving Jesus?