

The Day of Distinction

Malachi 3:13–4:6

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Introduction

We live in a time in the evangelical world when we hear much about the concept of deconstruction. It was the 20th-century French philosopher and atheist, Jacques Derrida, who originally popularized the concept of *deconstructionism*. It was the idea that, since every worldview was ultimately man-made, every philosophical system needed to be deconstructed. It needed to be taken apart, all its component parts critically evaluated, its assumptions questioned, and its agendas laid bare for the deconstructionist to retain those components they judged to be worthy and to reject the components they judged to be faulty, wrongly motivated, or undesirable. It was in the late 1900s that another philosophy professor began applying Derrida's ideas to religion.

And today, given the popularity and triumph of the pop-philosophy of postmodernism—which rejects the existence of truth all together and embraces subjectivism, relativism, and even outright absurdities like saying $2 + 2 = 5$ and that men can be women—it's no surprise that deconstructionism has gone to church. It seems like it's every other week that we hear about another celebrity pastor or a musician from a once-popular Christian band announce that he no longer identifies as evangelical. No, the “power-imbalances” and “oppression” nurtured by the tenets of what we would call biblical Christianity have shown him that the faith he grew up in, founded on the authority of Scripture, is unfaithful to “the way of Jesus.” Jesus wouldn't condemn two people who love each other just because they are of the same sex! Jesus wouldn't force a young pregnant woman to carry her child to term if it meant that it would destroy her life! Jesus would have compassion on people who feel trapped in the body of the wrong gender, and He would affirm their desires to “become their authentic self.” Funny how “the way of Jesus” always seems to look less like what the *Bible* says about Jesus and more like progressive social politics. And so now, our former evangelical celebrity announces he's “going through a process of deconstructing his faith”—determining how he can retain the language of Christianity and some sort of connection to Jesus, while also making room for all the social and political opinions that make him popular with unbelievers.

And what always intrigues me—and, I confess, irks me—is how often the “exvangelical” crowd desires to keep calling what they believe “Christianity.” They qualify it, with terms like “liberal” or “progressive” or “affirming,” but they seem not to be able to resist putting Christ's name on what is an anti-biblical worldview—on what is ultimately an entirely different religion. And I

suppose they do that because they need to trick themselves, at least for a time, into believing that God would approve of their deconstruction.

But “Christianity” is defined by definite and specific beliefs—chief among them being the inerrancy and authority of the Bible, because you can’t claim to follow Jesus while rejecting what He’s said. And yet that’s what the deconstructionists do: they disown Jesus’ *Word* while seeking to retain Jesus’ *name*. They cast off the authority of the very Scripture that defines Christianity to be what it is, and they embrace an entirely antithetical worldview—that just so happens to get them praised by the world, whose attention and approval they so desperately crave—all the while continuing to masquerade themselves as the people of God.

Something similar—not quite the same—but something similar was happening in Malachi’s day. We’ve said several times now, that it had been about 80 years since God had made magnificent promises of revolution and restoration to the nation of Israel. Messiah was going to come! The temple was going to be glorious! The land was going to be secure and so filled with people who survived to old age as well as with children playing in the streets! And yet, Israel had not seen those promises be fulfilled. They were basically a colony of the Persian Empire. The glory of God had not come to the temple. The priests had let their hearts drop out of the temple service, so that worship became nothing more than lifeless externalism. And Yahweh’s discipline had even come in His striking their land so that it did not yield a fruitful harvest. And though Israel would pray for relief, Yahweh would not hear them because of their covenant disobedience.

The people had seen no such glorious revolution. They didn’t see any of God’s promises come to pass. And so they came to distrust the faithfulness of God. In their faithlessness, they had become disillusioned, apathetic, and even insolent. They believed God let them down. And so they were only hardened in their disobedience. They deconstructed their faith! And they began to reason with themselves: “It seems like the enemies of God prosper, while we, His people, His ‘covenant nation,’ languish.” And rather than being honest about their defection from the pure worship of Yahweh according to the covenant law, and separating themselves from God’s nation, they remained within the nation, and continued to call themselves God’s people—even to the point that they themselves became the majority in the nation. And they gave voice to their disillusionment, disappointment, and insolent complaining against the character of God for what they believed was His failure to keep His promises to them.

And God has sent the prophet Malachi to rebuke them in a prophetic oracle structured around **six disputations**. God comes to argue with His people—to engage them in debate, to demonstrate that their accusations against Him are unjustified, that His promises to them have not failed, that His covenant remains sure, and that their disobedience, therefore, must be repented of, or else they would be judged.

Now, we've had to be selective in our study of Malachi, aiming to work through these **six disputations** within four sermons. And unfortunately that's meant that we haven't been able to cover every verse. We covered the **first disputation** in our first message on chapter 1 verses 2 through 5, where God proclaims His covenant love for His disillusioned nation. Then, in our second message we covered half of the **second disputation**—a scathing diatribe against the empty ritualism of the priests, which runs from chapter 1 verse 6 through to chapter 2 verse 9. In last week's message, we devoted ourselves to the **third and fourth disputations**. In 2:10–16, we see Yahweh rebuke Israel for betraying their covenant with God and with one another by divorcing their wives and intermarrying with pagans. And in 2:17 to 3:5, we see God respond to Israel's blasphemous accusations against His justice by prophesying the coming of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will come in the fires of judgment on the Day of the Lord, to refine those who belong to Yahweh, and to consume those who are His enemies.

And then, had we time, we might have spent an entire sermon just on Malachi 3:6—truly a precious gem of a verse, nestled in between the fourth and fifth disputations: “For I, Yahweh, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.” The great declaration of the immutability of God—that He is constant and unchangeable; with Him there is no variation or shifting shadow. And therefore He is dependable, trustworthy, a rock for our faith and an anchor of the soul, on account of which those who trust in Him will never be consumed! We could do a whole series on that one verse and its implications, but we are constrained to press on.

We also must pass by the **fifth disputation** that comes in 3:7–12, in which Yahweh accuses Israel of robbing Him by withholding their tithes and offerings. In the wake of their faithless disobedience, verse 11 says that God had sent a “devourer” to destroy Israel's crops. And the people's response to their straitened economic times was to hold back for themselves their first fruits, which belonged to God, to ease their financial burdens. And they learn that that is faithlessness; all that they have belongs to Yahweh. He is the giver of all good things. And so to keep what is His for themselves is evidence that they don't trust Him to provide for their needs. If they would only trust Him—even with their meager resources—they would find that He would “open the windows of heaven” and pour out overflowing blessings upon them.

But that brings us to the **sixth disputation**, our passage for this evening. We come now to the final words of the final prophet in Malachi 3:13 through to 4:6. Follow along as I read our text. “‘Your words have been arrogant against Me,’ says Yahweh. Yet you say, ‘What have we spoken against You?’” ¹⁴“You have said, “It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His charge, and that we have walked in mourning before Yahweh of hosts? ¹⁵So now we call the arrogant blessed; not only are the doers of wickedness built up but they also test God and escape.”” ¹⁶Then those who feared Yahweh spoke to one another, and Yahweh gave attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear Yahweh and who esteem His name. ¹⁷“They will be Mine,” says Yahweh of hosts, ‘on the day that I prepare

My own possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.’ ¹⁸So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him. ^{4:1}‘For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze,’ says Yahweh of hosts, ‘so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. ²But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall. ³You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing,’ says Yahweh of hosts. ⁴‘Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel. ⁵Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of Yahweh. ⁶He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.’”

Israel once again arrogantly calls Yahweh’s justice into question. And once again Yahweh vindicates the glory of His own name by pointing to the Great Day of justice—to the Day of Yahweh—in which Christ will come at the end of the age and separate the righteous from the wicked, and render to each one what he is due. And we see this final disputation take shape in three broad movements, or scenes. First, we have **the complaint of the treacherous**, in verses 13 to 15. Then, we have **the response of the faithful**, in verse 16. And finally, we have **the day of distinction** in chapter 3 verse 17, through to chapter 4 verse 3. And then those final three verses form a fitting conclusion to the Book of Malachi, and in some sense to the Old Testament as a whole.

I. The Complaint of the Treacherous (3:13–15)

Scene number one: **the complaint of the treacherous**. And we see that in verses 13 to 15. “‘Your words have been arrogant against Me,’ says Yahweh. Yet you say, ‘What have we spoken against You?’” Verse 14: “‘You have said, “It is vain to serve God.” Here is their charge. “It is vain, it is futile, it is worthless to devote ourselves to the worship of Yahweh!” Now, where could they have gotten that idea from? Why would they say it’s useless to serve God? Well, for two reasons. They argue that (1) the righteous are not rewarded, and (2) the wicked are not punished.

The righteous are not rewarded. Look again at verse 14: “What profit is it that we have kept His charge, and that we have walked in mourning before Yahweh of hosts?” They’re saying, “We’re obeying God! We rebuilt the city walls! We rebuilt the temple! We keep bringing the sacrifices! The temple service is being performed! And yet, what have we got? We’re a rag-tag survivor nation on a strip of land 20 by 25 miles long! We’re under the thumb of the Persians who are basically our rulers! The old men are crying when they look at the temple because it doesn’t

compare to Solomon's! And on top of all of that, the Lord doesn't even bless us with a decent harvest—to the point that we're basically in a financial recession! What *profit* is it that we have kept His charge?"

"What *profit* is it ... that we have walked in mourning before Yahweh?" We saw it last week in chapter 2 verse 13: they "cover[ed] the altar of Yahweh with tears, with weeping and with groaning," because He doesn't accept their offerings. "To walk in mourning" referred to particular rites of penitence in which those entreating Yahweh's forgiveness of sin would basically deny themselves the blessings and comforts of life in order to demonstrate their grief over their sin. We read throughout the Old Testament of the penitent wearing uncomfortable clothing like sackcloth; pairing that with sitting on ashes, which would make them look filthy; they might go without food. Israel's saying, "We even do all of that! We deprive ourselves of the pleasures of life so that God will see our devotion, and even still He takes no notice of us!"

And I can hardly keep up with all the unbiblical theological assumptions they're operating on here. First, there's their mercenary attitude—that God is to be served for *profit*, that the only reason they're seeking to obey His commandments is because of what they can get out of it. Couple that with their prosperity theology—the belief that if they placate God with the duties of worship, He'll somehow be obligated to reward them with material blessing and political power. The false gospel of health, wealth, and prosperity isn't a 20th-century invention; it's ancient paganism in Christian dress. One commentator called this underlying assumption in Israel's theology "the *heathen* notion that there is a mechanical and magical connection between religion and prosperity" (Verhoef, 317). On top of that, there's something of a doctrine of self-atonement—that we can somehow feel bad enough or perform enough religious duties, and then God will forgive us.

And underlying all of that is the presumption that external ritualism can replace sincere obedience from the heart. They're complaining that the righteous aren't rewarded, but they aren't righteous! Remember: these are the **treacherous**—the ones who deal treacherously with one another and profane the covenant of their fathers! They offer the blind and the sick and the lame for sacrifice! They divorce their wives and marry pagans! They keep back the offerings due unto God for themselves! And they weep and wail and mourn in a blasphemous effort to bribe God into favoring them, as if He were a pagan idol!

And we can't linger long, but let a brief word suffice for application: ask yourselves whether any of these unbiblical assumptions characterize your own conception of God and practices of worship. Do you worship with a mercenary spirit, seeking your own fleshly profit rather than the glory of God above all things? Do you ever believe the lie that faithfulness to God necessarily results in easier circumstances and the absence of suffering? Are you tempted to practice a sort of evangelical penance, where you seek to atone for your sins by religious performance? And do

you reduce genuine heart-obedience to external formalism? These are questions of application that you can search your hearts on at some point this week.

But not only was Israel saying that it was vain to serve God because the righteous aren't rewarded. They were also saying that it's vain to serve God because the wicked aren't punished. Verse 15: "So now we call the arrogant blessed; not only are the doers of wickedness built up but they also test God and escape." And this is so similar to accusation of chapter 2:17: "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of Yahweh, and He delights in them." "Where is the God of justice?" "Here we are bending over backwards trying to keep your covenant (but not really) and we're languishing, while those who don't even pretend to worship You have it easy! The pagans enjoy the finer comforts of life, outright wickedness within Israel goes unpunished, and here we are weeping on the altar! What sense does it make to obey if You don't even punish disobedience?"

They sounded a lot like Asaph in Psalm 73. Turn there with me. We mentioned this psalm briefly last week, but it's worth looking at in more depth. Psalm 73: Asaph says, I came close to stumbling. Verse 3: "For I was *envious* of the arrogant as I saw the prosperity of the wicked. ⁴For there are no pains in their death, and their body is fat"—an evidence of their financial abundance. Back then, if you were fat it meant you had enough money to buy a lot of food and didn't have to work manual labor to burn the calories! Verse 5: "They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like mankind. ⁶Therefore pride is their necklace; the garment of violence covers them." Verse 8: "They mock and wickedly speak of oppression." Verse 9: "They have set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue parades through the earth." Verse 11: "They say, 'How does God know? And is there knowledge with the Most High?'" They boast about how God pays no attention to their wickedness! Verse 12: "Behold, these are the wicked; and always at ease, they have increased in wealth." And Asaph, in this fleshly, envious frame of heart, comes to the same conclusion as the Jews of Malachi's day. Verse 13: "Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and washed my hands in innocence; for I have been stricken all day long and chastened every morning."

And I think, sometimes, we can be tempted to have the same attitude. We can be envious of the unbelieving. Because sometimes, it does seem like things are just easier in this world for those who belong to this world. As followers of Jesus, we have not been promised ease. What have we been promised? John 15:20: "If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you." Matthew 10:25: "If they have called the head of the house Beelzubul, how much more will they malign the members of his household!" Philippians 1:29: "For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake." John 16:33: "In this world you will have trouble." This world, brothers and sisters, is not our home! "*Here*," says the writer of Hebrews, "we have no lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come." We are aliens and strangers in a world, the whole of which lies in the power of our Enemy (1 John 5:19). And

even though a life lived in submission to Jesus overflows with blessing, it only makes sense that a world that is not our home treats us as if we're pilgrims. And it only makes sense that those who belong to this world often seem to have an easier time than those who don't belong here.

And so sometimes we *are* confronted with this *same* temptation. "Man, I live my life by the Book, and it seems like those who don't give a rip about the Book are enjoying all the success!" And so we can be tempted to cut corners, to become lax in our pursuit of holiness, to compromise faithfulness to God's Word. We start thinking about what obedience causes us to miss out on. We're here every Sunday morning and every Sunday evening; and those who don't keep the Lord's Day have an extra family day, or vacation day, or even workday to earn a little more money. We're honest in our business dealings; but the other guys who aren't concerned about integrity are able to get ahead. We keep ourselves sexually pure, and the world just clobbers us with all these messages about how true fulfillment is found in giving full vent to your own lusts. And we can be tempted to question, "Does it really matter that I obey? Especially when those who disobey seem to suffer no consequences?"

That is the complaint of the treacherous.

II. The Response of the Faithful (3:16)

But what is **the response of the faithful**? That brings us to our **second scene: the response of the faithful**. And we see that in verse 16: "Then those who feared Yahweh spoke to one another, and Yahweh gave attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear Yahweh and who esteem His name."

We hear of a different group of people than those spoken about in verses 13 to 15. Apparently within Israel there *were* the treacherous, who forgot Yahweh's law, who disregarded His covenant, and who questioned the very goodness of His character. And they seemed to be the majority. But then there was also a minority—a remnant—of those who "feared Yahweh"—those who worshiped Him in spirit and truth, and who revered and esteemed His name, who regarded Him as worthy and weighty and glorious. And the text says they gathered and spoke to one another. It doesn't tell us the words they said, but the result of their conference was such that God announces in verse 17 that they will be His—that He owns them to be His own treasured possession. On this basis, it would be sound to conclude that this remnant of true believers in Yahweh came together to condemn the complaints of the treacherous, and to affirm their faith in God's promises and the trustworthiness of His character, and to resolve to walk in faithfulness no matter what the majority would say or do.

A number of commentators believe this to have been a covenant renewal ceremony, because the text says that "a book of remembrance was written before" Yahweh for these God-fearers. And

that could just be a vivid way of picturing the blessing of God's favor resting on those who worship Him in truth—that He remembers their faithfulness by setting the record of their deeds perpetually in His presence. But both in Ezra chapter 10 and in Nehemiah chapters 9 and 10—which describe events relatively contemporary with the events of Malachi—both of those portions of Scripture record covenant renewal documents, in which those in Israel repented of wickedness, swore faithfulness to Yahweh, and attached their names to a document as a testimony to that fact.

In Ezra chapter 10, one of the men of Israel comes forward in a crowd and openly confesses, Ezra 10:2: “We have been unfaithful to our God and have married foreign women from the peoples of the land; yet now there is hope for Israel in spite of this. So now let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives and their children, according to the counsel of my lord and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the law.” And then all the assembly gathers together, and all but two of the offenders agree to this covenant of repentance. And then verses 18 to 44 record all the names of those who had made this covenant confession. And then in Nehemiah chapter 9, Israel assembles wearing sackcloth and dirt, and they stand and confess their sins and Yahweh's righteousness—the exact opposite as the majority are doing in Malachi. Nehemiah 9:33: “However, You are just in all that has come upon us; for You have dealt faithfully, but we have acted wickedly.” And then verse 38: “Now because of all this we are making an agreement in writing, and on the sealed document are the names of our leaders, our Levites and our priests.” And the names appear in chapter 10 verses 1 to 26. And verse 29 says they “are taking on themselves a curse and an oath to walk in God's law, which was given through Moses, God's servant, and to keep and to observe all the commandments of all the commandments of Yahweh our Lord.” These are covenant renewal documents.

And so it seems likely that mention of a “book of remembrance,” at the same time as such ceremonies were taking place during the virtually-contemporary ministries of Ezra and Nehemiah, indicates that a righteous remnant came forward and renewed their commitment to keep God's covenant. One commentator said, “Almost surely this was a scroll that contained their names as signatories to some sort of statement of their commitment to Yahweh in faith that they were disassociating themselves from the prevailing sins, that his promises were reliable, and that his covenant was to be kept” (McComiskey, 1382).

This is how the **faithful** are to **respond** when those who profess to be God's people begin deconstructing the faith. When the treacherous complain of God's injustice or faithlessness to His covenant, simply because He withholds His blessing as a consequence of their own faithlessness, the **faithful respond** by examining their own lives, confessing and repenting of sin, and renewing their commitment to trust in God's character and walk obediently to His Word. The faithful don't seek to compromise with the treacherous! When the deconstructionists start

abandoning the inerrancy and authority of Scripture in favor of imbibing the world's sexual ethic of fornication, abortion, homosexuality, and transgenderism, the faithful don't negotiate! They don't go to try to find a middle ground in order to placate the treachery of apostates! They double down on faithfulness to God's Word! They write a document of fidelity to the truth, they put their names on it, and they nail it to the mast! "Let it be known! No matter who bows the knee to the culture, we will not bow!"

And do you know what God says? He remembers that faithfulness. The complaint of the treacherous is that Yahweh has forgotten them; they obey and He doesn't reward them; the wicked disobey and He doesn't punish them. "Yahweh doesn't see! He's not concerned! It doesn't matter whether or not we serve God!" But God says here that He does remember! He does see and He does take notice! Hebrews 6:10 puts it perfectly for a context like this: "God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name," so that when you can sing from the depths of your heart: "When all around my soul gives way, He then is all my hope and stay," God will not forget the way that you have magnified His name even in the midst of trials and difficulty! He will not forget that His people found Him to be so trustworthy, so satisfying, that even when wants pinched hard and others fell away, you ran *to* Him, and pressed *into* His Word, and *redoubled* your resolve to obey! He will not be unjust to forget that.

III. The Day of Distinction (3:17–4:3)

Because there is a day coming. And God's people are to live in light of that day. Whatever the circumstances are today, our eyes are to be fixed on that day! That brings us to the **third scene** of this final disputation. We've seen the complaint of the treacherous. We've seen the response of the faithful. And now we come, number three, to **the day of distinction**. And this runs from chapter 3 verse 17 all the way to chapter 4 verse 3. "'They will be Mine,' says Yahweh of hosts, 'on **the day** that I prepare My own possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.' ¹⁸So you will again **distinguish** between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him. ^{4:1}'For behold, **the day** is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze,' says Yahweh of hosts, 'so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. ²But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall. ³You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing,' says Yahweh of hosts."

Unbelieving Israel's complaint is that it makes no difference whether or not they serve God, because the righteous aren't rewarded and the wicked aren't punished. God makes no distinction between the righteous and the unrighteous—between those faithful to the covenant and those

who betray it—|| so what's the point of trying to be righteous? God says, "There is a **day** coming when you will again **distinguish** between the righteous and the wicked! Though the wheat and the tares grow together at the present time, and though the tares are not uprooted immediately, oh the day of winnowing is coming! And on that day, no one will have any questions about who the righteous and who the wicked are! The tares will be gathered together and burned up, while the wheat will be gathered into Yahweh's storehouses to be His possession.

The very first Psalm draws this very **distinction** between the righteous and the wicked that Israel had forgotten. The one who repudiates the counsel of the wicked, the path of sinners, and the seat of scoffers, but delights in the law of Yahweh, will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, yielding fruit in season, never withering, and always prospering. But, verse 4, "the wicked are not so, but they are like the chaff which the wind drives away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For Yahweh knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish." There *will* be a **distinction**! And on that day, the very ones who the faithless nation calls "blessed" and says will "escape," will be chaff in the furnace of omnipotent vengeance. They will be "set ablaze," with the result that neither root nor branch will be left. All will be totally consumed in the fires of divine judgment. Everlasting bitterness, shame, punishment, and torment.

But what of the righteous? This passage characterizes their blessing with **five designations**. First, they will be **spared**, verse 17: "And I will **spare** them as a man spares his own son who serves him." He will be compassionate and merciful to His people, forgiving their sins and sparing them from the terrible judgment they deserve. And this is such a glorious picture. It doesn't say, "And I will reward them in accordance with their merits." No, we still have to be spared! Even our obedience needs to be atoned for! The claim of God's people is not our own righteousness, but the righteousness counted to be ours through the perfect righteousness of Christ, so that, having been accepted for the sake of His perfect obedience, our imperfect obedience will be received for Jesus's sake! Calvin says, "for though our works be sprinkled with many spots, they will yet be acceptable to him, and though we labor under many defects, we shall yet be approved by him. How so? Because he will spare us: for a father is indulgent to his children, and though he may see a blemish in the body of his son, he will not yet cast him out of his house" (Calvin, 609).

Second, and related to that, the righteous will be **justified**. Chapter 4 verse 2: "But for you who fear My name, the *sun of righteousness* will rise with healing in its wings." Just as the rays of the sun bring light and warmth over all the earth for the health and growth of every living thing, so also will righteousness shine like the sun in the fullness of its strength, and, as one commentator said, "bring the healing of all hurts and wounds which the power of darkness has inflicted upon the righteous" (Keil, 662). And that healing stems from the imputation of a righteousness not our own, won for us by the Son of God Himself: by Christ our great Substitute and Champion. "In

His days,” Jeremiah 23:6, “Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely; and this is His name by which He will be called, ‘Yahweh our righteousness.’”

Third, the righteous will be **beatified**. And by that I mean, made truly and perfectly blessed—filled to overflowing with joy. Look at the second half of verse 2: “And you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall.” It’s a picture of unqualified exuberant joy! The same term is used in Jeremiah 50 verse 11 alongside terms like “glad” and “jubilant.” Here, in the world in which you are strangers and exiles—pilgrims in the land that lies in the power of the evil one—with no place to truly call your own, you mourn and you weep and you battle the temptation to envy the wicked. But in that day, you will be in the presence of the One in whose presence is fullness of joy, Psalm 16:11—in whose right hand are pleasures forevermore!

And the reason for your fullness of joy is because you’ll be, number four, **treasured**. Back to chapter 3 verse 17, and see if you can keep your heart from bursting as you read this: “They will be *Mine*, says Yahweh of hosts, on the day that I prepare *My own possession*.” God has said this of Israel from the beginning: Deuteronomy 7:6: “Yahweh your God has chosen you to be *a people for His own possession* out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.” Deuteronomy 26:18–19: “Yahweh has today declared you to be *His people*, a **treasured possession**.” And that is precisely what Paul says to Titus about Christ and the Church, Titus 2:14: He “gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, to purify *for Himself* a people *for His own possession*, zealous for good deeds.” We who ought to be disowned as the offscouring of the world, now the **treasured possession** of the God of all holiness and beauty! We who were no people—truly orphans of righteousness, children of none but our father the devil, now called sons of the living God! O, to be the treasured possession of the God of all loveliness! And what madness it would be to envy the wicked!

And then finally, the righteous will be **triumphant**. Chapter 4 verse 3: “You will tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing.” The very ones you now envy will be trampled under your feet on the day of judgment. Not that the righteous will destroy the wicked; Christ will destroy the wicked. But once Christ has struck them down, the righteous will triumph over them as spared, justified, beatified, and treasured!

And so if we turn back to Psalm 73, and look at the second half of the psalm, we see the remedy for Asaph’s envy of the wicked. Psalm 73 verse 16: “When I pondered to understand this, it was troublesome in my sight until I came into the sanctuary of God; *Then I perceived their end*. Surely You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to destruction. How they are destroyed in a moment! They are utterly swept away by sudden terrors! Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when aroused, You will despise their form.” You see, the remedy for the believer’s envy of the wicked is to look at the present with the eye of eternity. It is to perceive their end, and to perceive *our* end, and to recognize that, though it seems that God blesses the

arrogant and allows the evildoers to escape, while the servants of God languish in vain, the **day of distinction** is coming when all will be put to rights!

You see, friends, when the unrighteous within the visible “church” lose faith in the goodness and justice of God, when they envy the wicked so much that they betray God’s Word by “deconstructing” their faith in an effort to remain relevant or acceptable to the world, it belongs to us who would quit ourselves faithful to rebuke those on the path of apostasy and to reaffirm our trust in and loyalty to Christ and Scripture! You will be ostracized, and your way will be toilsome and wearying, but you remember that you are pilgrims—that this world is not your home, that here, like your Savior, you have no place to lay your head down in ease, but you are seeking a better country, a city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God!

Look ahead to the judgment—to that great **day of distinction**—and sing: “This is my Father’s world: / O let me ne’er forget / That though the wrong seems oft so strong, / God is the Ruler yet.” And as Ruler, God will bring down such condemnation upon the wicked that it should banish every trace of envy from your heart! And if that wasn’t enough, consider what that same day of judgment will be for the faithful. As Peter says, “fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” And comfort yourselves with that great word of consolation from the Puritan Thomas Brooks: “Your life is short, your duties many, your assistance great, and your reward sure; therefore faint not, hold on and hold up, in ways of well-doing, and *heaven shall make amends for all.*”

Conclusion (4:4–6)

And then, as a sort of *coda* to this great prophecy—and even to the Old Testament itself—Malachi tells God’s people: Remember the Law, and look for the Gospel. Verse 4: “Remember the law of Moses My servant, even the statutes and ordinances which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel. ⁵Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of Yahweh. ⁶He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.”

Remember the law. Be faithful to the covenant. Give heed to God’s Word. And then, look for the prophet, who will preach the Gospel. Before long, the prophet “Elijah” would come and prepare the way for Messiah. And we learn in the New Testament that John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God, as Luke 1:15–17 quotes this very text, to say what Jesus Himself said in Matthew 11:14: that “John [the Baptist] himself is Elijah who was to come.” And John preached that baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, and prepared the way for Jesus, who accomplished the very Good News that we preach: that though you are no less wicked than the treacherous Jews of Malachi’s day, you are as freely

welcomed to this glorious Messiah as they were! {Refer to audio for the rest of the final Gospel presentation.}