

Malachi 3:13-End "Is God Enough?"

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Preacher: Will Spink

- [0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- Thank you, guys. It's going to be fun enjoying that with 1,500 or so of our closest friends next Sunday night. I'm excited, too.
- This is our last Sunday together in the Minor Prophets. In this particular study, I told you when we started that I was a bit cautious about it.
- And I was right to be so. It's been hard. A convicting study for me as I've seen more of my idols feel like every week.
- And at the same time, it's been so needful and so helpful to my heart because God has kept calling me back to himself. This morning, Malachi gives us a good chance to review.
- [1 : 04] So let's remember briefly where we've been and see how God keeps calling us back through his prophets. Remember, God has this special relationship with his people, Israel.
- They're to be his treasured possession. So when they wander from him, he repeatedly calls them back to himself. He sends one prophet after another to yell, Repent!
- Come home to me! First, we looked at Micah. Micah came and called out the idolatry of God's people as they stepped on the lowly to get ahead themselves.
- As they were merely playing church. As their leaders led them away from God. And he calls them back to a God who's more great and glorious than anything they can imagine.
- And then Zephaniah comes just a couple generations later and he warns the people of coming exile because of their repeated idolatry.
- [2 : 12] And he tells them, You must come back in repentance to experience God's rich love or else. And then they do go into exile, right?
- And after that exile from the promised land and God bringing them back, God sends Haggai to them because even through the exile they've forgotten. Even though they've come back, Haggai has to say to them, Remember to put God's house first and rebuild the temple.
- That's first priority. Living in relationship with him for his glory is of first importance. Finally, Malachi has come.
- And even though time and time again they've gotten these reminders, Here are God's people again and they're caught worshipping half-heartedly. Doing whatever suits them in marriage and divorce.
- Focusing on others' sins rather than their own. And robbing God by not trusting him enough to give. And so again he says, Repent!
- [3 : 22] There's a special relationship with God that is more important than anything else. Come back and remember that. And we've seen that that relationship is at the heart of what we're talking about when we talk about repentance.
- Right? Repentance has to be for us a normal, daily turning back to God. Not just from the big sins. That's not what repentance merely means.

But even from the slow drifting away from him that our hearts know. That moment by moment decisions to value something else more than we value God.

Repentance is where our hearts grieve even the smallest break in our relationship with God. And turn back to him. Knowing that we can rejoice as we do.

That there's restored relationship with him. And so repentance which begins in sorrow leads to joy. So now as we close, I want us to consider how we respond to that call back to relationship.

[4 : 35] That repeated plea of our loving father. Southwood. We've read about God's people in the Old Testament. How will we respond to God's call?

We are very capable. Even conditioned, I would say, to hear that call to repentance. We've heard it many times perhaps, some of us.

And to just ignore it and move on with life. Not perhaps to complain about it, but just to carry on with life as usual. Or, we have the chance to respond and run home in repentance.

And be renewed and revived in our relationship with God. God's been speaking that to my heart. I know he's been speaking to many of your hearts. And Malachi presents here at the end of his prophecy.

Two ways that those among God's people respond to God's call to repentance. Listen for that. Those two ways.

[5 : 43] As I read Malachi beginning at chapter 3 verse 13. Your words have been hard against me, says the Lord.

But you say, how have we spoken against you? You have said, it is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge?

Or of walking as in mourning before the Lord of hosts? And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper, but they put God to the test and they escape. Then those who feared the Lord spoke with one another.

The Lord paid attention and heard them. And a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed his name. They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts.

In the day when I make up my treasured possession. And I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked.

[6 : 46] Between one who serves God and one who does not serve him. For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble.

The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name, the son of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.

You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall and you shall tread down the wicked. For there will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts. Remember the law of my servant Moses.

The statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers.

Lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction. The grass withers. The flowers fade. But the word of our God stands forever.

[7 : 54] Let's pray. Father, we do give you thanks for your word. For your call to our hearts. Again this morning.

So we ask Holy Spirit that you would give us soft hearts and open ears. We would be willing to hear and respond. As you would have us.

To our loving Father. We pray it in Jesus name. Amen. As many of you have noticed.

I spend a lot of time at the gym working out. Well at least I do run sometimes anyway. If you ever catch me at the gym.

It's because I really want to be able to enjoy Thanksgiving dinner next week. And I really don't want to buy new pants the following week. That's the purpose for which I am there.

[8 : 51] I am among the group at the gym to get something for me. For my body. But there is another group of people at the gym, isn't there?

There are those at the gym who really love working out. They love being there. They love being there. You know who they are. You see them. And they love being there.

Whether they need to get something out of it or not. They just love being there. Two different groups. With two different reasons for being at the gym.

The same is true with the people of God in Malachi's day. And in our day. There are those who really love God.

And then there are those who use God to get something they want. Note in this passage that those two groups we're talking about are not the religious and the irreligious.

[9 : 53] Nope. Malachi is addressing people who all go to the temple. They all hear the words of the prophet. They all know God's laws.

They all have even suffered for following his laws. But their responses to God could not be more different. Again, it's not the super spiritual and the pagans.

None of them is perfect. God is calling all of them to repentance. They all get that same call to repent. But there are two distinct responses to that call.

And that makes all the difference. Please hear me on this. Two responses that people who sit in church today can have to God's call on them.

And both the focus of your life and the location of your eternity hang in the balance of how you respond to that call.

[10 : 59] The first response I'll call tracking God. Keeping track of how he's doing for me.

Right? We'll hear value terms multiple times in this passage as we ask the question, Is God enough? Is God worth it?

We hear it in verse 14 when this group responds to God's call to repentance. What is the profit? What do I get from knowing and following Yahweh?

Not enough, apparently. Because the arrogant, the evildoers are living the life I want. They're getting away with murder. I've been tracking you, God.

And to see if you're paying off if the benefit of, to my life is worth the cost of relationship with you. And God, so far it's not. That whole tithe thing cut into my profit margin.

[12 : 04] That arrogant, prideful thief got the girl I wanted. My competitors are out there getting ahead while I spend my Sabbath resting with you.

Do you hear the echoes of their gossip about God from earlier in Malachi? Where is the God of justice? Why is it not paying off?

What if I said it to you this way? Because maybe that sounds really bad. What if I said to you, they're just running a cost-benefit analysis? Some of you do those. What if I told you that we live in this tension every single day?

All of us, in different ways, are asking ourselves the question, Is God worth it? Maybe in marriage, you held out for the godly guy, and he lets you down big time.

And you're asking, Will I give God another chance this time around? Maybe in your career, you made a tough decision to do what God was calling you to do, but it just doesn't seem to be paying off, and you're not able to provide for your kids the way you want to, and it hurts you, and you start asking yourself, What do I really want most for my kids?

[13 : 31] Maybe you're a single adult who keeps coming to church week after week, year after year, and not only does God not seem to bring you a spouse, but also the family of God is not the community you hoped and longed for.

And you're asking, Is it time to give up? Maybe your adult kids are shipwrecking their lives right now, after you raised them to follow Jesus, and you prayed for them.

And you're asking, Can I follow this God anymore? If this is how he treats those who love him, these decisions, and hundreds more like them, they're not one-time decisions, are they?

You know that. These are day after day, moment-by-moment decisions that we have to make. Will I come back to find God worth it here, in this moment, in this situation, or will I reject him and look out for myself?

You may not use those words, but every day we're making those kinds of decisions. Y'all, the rich young ruler spent lots of time in church.

[14 : 51] He kept lots of God's laws. He talked lots of Christian things. But in the final analysis, he walked away sad, because his riches were worth more to him than relationship with God.

There's a clear warning here, a painful warning, of valuing anything above God. If you're just tracking God, chapter 4, verse 1, Behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble.

The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave neither branch nor root. That day of accounting is coming, God says.

And God would have you understand, in no uncertain terms, that eternity must factor into your cost-benefit analysis. A relationship with him is the only thing that counts in the end.

But I hang out with Christians. No. But I go to church pretty regularly. No. But do you know and love and trust Jesus alone?

[16 : 15] He's warning you to run back to him and know him personally today. Please listen to this warning. Friends, listen to me. If life is really hard, or if you don't know God very well, it's really hard to take this seriously.

It's actually quite easy to think, you know, a lot of money is better than a little bit of God. And in fact, a lot of comfort is better than a lot of God.

Or, you know what? If I'm honest, even a little pleasure is better than a lot of God. Elizabeth Elliot's husband, Jim, used to say, he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

Elizabeth believed that so deeply that even after her husband was speared and killed by a tribe that he was seeking to reach with the good news of Jesus, instead of safely returning home, which seemed to make a lot of sense, she actually pressed in further and stayed with this tribe.

Oh, yeah, sorry. She and her toddler daughter that she kept with her for multiple years, living among, sharing the good news of Jesus with people, some of whom had killed her husband, because God is worth it.

[18 : 02] She wrote this, God is God. Because he is God, he is worthy of my trust and obedience. I will find rest nowhere but in his holy will that is unspeakably beyond my largest notions of what he is up to.

I have one desire now, to live a life of reckless abandon for the Lord, putting all my energy and strength into it. The only cost-benefit analysis I hear going on here is valuing God's great glory above even my own life.

That's the second response to God's call to repentance. Not tracking God for what he's doing for me but rather treasuring God for who he is in himself.

That's what happens in verse 16. Verse 16. Then those who feared the Lord spoke with one another. The Lord paid attention and heard them and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed his name.

This remnant of God's people, this small group of them, fears him, esteems, values his name.

[19 : 26] In other words, when asked, is God worth it, they respond, absolutely. They don't have to run a cost-benefit analysis of life's circumstances because they have gotten to know and experience God himself and in so doing, realize there is nothing of greater value.

And so there's this unique picture here. I love it. These people gathering to speak with one another, right? Apparently, about that very reality, how much they treasured God.

Likely, they needed to remind each other of that. Likely, they needed to encourage each other to remain faithful. Likely, they needed to share stories of his faithful care for them.

I think one of them said, you know what? A little of God is better than a lot of anything else. Let's get to know him and trust him more together.

Can you say that? Could you honestly say that to yourself or to someone else? You know what? A little bit of God is better than a lot of money or comfort or pleasure or fame or peace or a lot of God is better than a lot of anything else because I know him.

[21 : 00] Just him. Remember, the difference with this group is not their perfection. These aren't all the people who kept a straight line their whole lives.

It's actually their repentance. They too have struggled. They too have wandered. But they hear God's call and they run home to him. And that gospel community that they share urges them towards it.

Our newest members stood up here and made a public statement of the value of God this morning. Praise the Lord. But usually, the picture is of smaller groups sharing.

Of connect community discussion. Where the commitment to God and to each other is more tangible and personal. How are we reminding each other daily of God's value in a world where other things have higher price tags, right?

How are we doing that together? Since the earliest days of the church, martyrs would remind each other of this truth. In many different ways. Some, there are stories even of sharing it together in prison the night before they died together.

[22 : 13] That still happens in other places today. I love the story from the 1600s in Scotland of two Margarets.

Margaret Wilson was 18. Margaret McLaughlin was 70. The younger 18-year-old Margaret was arrested while visiting her much older widowed friend.

As faithful covenanters, neither of them would acknowledge the king as head of the church but only Jesus Christ. And so the two friends were held in prison with others.

They were convicted at trial and the two of them sentenced to drown. All the while they encouraged each other to cling to Christ.

There's a poetic telling of the morning they were led out to be drowned in the raging sea off the coast. It reads this way of the two women. Long had they loved as Christians love those two so soon to die and each the other greeted first with weeping silently.

[23 : 27] The matron wept that that young life so timelessly must cease. The maiden that that honored head must not go down in peace.

But soon oh soon it passed away the coward thought and base and each looked humbly thankfully into the other's face. Mother he rules the awful sea with all its waters wild.

The many waters are his voice of love to thee my child. They spoke to each other for the last time on earth though certainly not the first time these sisters had shared it together of God's love for them.

A God whose love even when hard and costly was strong and good and would bring them home. Do we talk to each other like that?

Not in poetry. I mean do we talk to each other about how much God is worth it? Who reminds you when life is hard?

[24 : 35] To whom are you whispering through tears God is worth it? When we talk to each other like that we're told God pays attention he hears and he remembers those who esteem his name who value him more than anything else even life itself.

In fact he promises a different outcome doesn't he than the outcome for those who do not repent for those who do repent he remembers them in his book never forgets their names he sends Elijah John the Baptist to restore relationships especially in their families the picture there in verse 6 of chapter 4 of multiple generations faithfully committed to the covenant God old and young father and son grandmother and granddaughter being restored because they're united in their love for God following Yahweh no matter what 18 and 70 we're in this together and then ultimately for these who are repenting of course there's Jesus himself the fullest manifestation of the son of righteousness rising with healing verse 2 providing freedom and justice for those who serve

God and delight in him and in his law and run after him like young calves running out of the stall with joy and freedom to run after our God and follow in his ways is God enough sometimes I want 500 other people to love me too sometimes I want the money so I can rest in myself too is God enough friends to be in relationship with him is always worth it to experience his grace time and time again is glorious to know his faithful love protects his beloved people even in their deaths and some of you have watched that reality with those that you love see that's the one God worth treasuring we've learned a lot about him in the prophets for sure his great majesty his creative power his unchanging faithfulness his steadfast love his overwhelming generosity last week his constant pursuit of his people isn't it amazing how he continues to call us and as we begin truly to know him we see how worth it he is how committed that he actually is to us listen

Southwood if we together decide to repent to talk with each other about the value of God beyond anything else to hold each other to lives that demonstrate the great worth of Jesus in everything that we do then listen to what he says to us verse 17 they shall be mine says the Lord of hosts in the day when I make up my treasured possession I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him you're mine right my treasured possession God says these people treasured him and he treasures them he calls again because he is utterly committed to our relationship with him he absolutely insists on our knowing and experiencing the blessings of repentance that come the revival that he brings in our hearts and in our community when we actually come back to him there's personal joy right there's there's corporate restoration there's eternal celebration that happens with our father and this is what he's calling us to when our loving heavenly father calls us to repent he's he's not just calling us to to quit some big sins and to try to live a little bit better he's calling us back to himself he wants to know you like that he wants you to know him and he wants us together as we do to be able to live with him and for his glory he wants to do that here in new ways one illustration of this incredible love of our

God and then we'll close you may have heard Ruth Graham tell her story at the funeral of her father Billy Graham last year I've shared it with you once before newly divorced and devastated she found herself in another relationship that her parents and her children told her was not good for her but in her words now being stubborn willful and sinful I married this man on New Year's Eve and within 24 hours I knew I'd made a terrible mistake after five weeks I fled I was afraid of him what was I going to do I wanted to talk to my mother and my father it was a two day drive questions swirled in my mind what was I going to say to daddy what was I going to say to mother what was I going to say to my children I'd been such a failure what were they going to say to me we're tired of fooling with you we told you not to do it you've embarrassed us you don't want to embarrass your father but you really don't want to embarrass

[30 : 59] Billy Graham and as I rounded the last bend in my father's driveway my father was standing there waiting for me as I got out of the car he wrapped his arms around me he said welcome home there was no shame there was no blame there was no condemnation there was just unconditional love and you know my father was not God but he showed me what God was like that day when we come to God with our sin our brokenness our failure our pain and our hurt God says welcome home as often as our heavenly father issues the call to repent he throws open the doors and welcomes us home return to me and I will return to you he says he treasures you

Southwood you are his his treasured possession won't you join me in continuing to run back home to him together let's pray father thank you that the one who exposes our hearts who can cause so much pain as our idols are uprooted and torn away is so tender loving and merciful and so longs for us to come home to his arms father I pray we trip over each other on the way back to you that we would drag each other towards you that you bring new life in our hearts that even in this next season as you move and break into our world because of your love we would see you clearly and know what a treasure you are and how much you treasure us work in us

Jesus for your glory we ask in your name amen for more information visit us online at southwood.org