

# Hope in Times of Hopelessness:

## A Gospel View

**Scripture:** *Malachi 3:13-18 & 4:1-6.*

**Summary of Sermon:** We can either allow our *hardships* to drag us down into *hopelessness* or, in the face of our hardships, we can allow the gospel to lift us up into our NT *hope* in Christ.

### Introduction

I'm sure that you will agree with me that we live in times of much uncertainty and hardship today. We have just come through two years of living with the global Covid-19 pandemic of lock-downs, depressed economies, and much sickness and death. At the beginning of this year, just when we thought we could begin to live again with some measure of normalcy because of vaccines and herd immunity, there came along this senseless war in Ukraine which has now foisted on the whole world the scourge of higher food and fuel prices, as well as the unspoken threat of nuclear war.

These days, what we read and hear about in the news about the war in Ukraine, and about droughts and floods throughout the world can easily develop a sense of hopelessness in us, and perhaps deep in our hearts, we wonder if God really hears our prayer or cares for us as we experience all these hardships today.

This is exactly how the people of God in the book of Malachi were feeling. The Lord had graciously allowed them to return to their land in Palestine after decades in exile in Babylon. God did not, however, appear to give them the success and prosperity they were expecting. For this reason, many of these people became nominal in their obedience to the Law of Moses since they believed they were being let down by the Lord, and they began to feel quite hopeless about their situation.

As a result of their backsliding and nominal religiosity, God sent the Prophet Malachi to bring His word to these people. The name *Malachi* means God's messenger. The message that Malachi brought to these disheartened and backsliding people takes the form of six arguments between them and God that is spread throughout the book.

Our passage of reflection this morning, **Malachi 3:13-18** and **4:1-6**, is part of the words of the sixth and final argument between God and the people in the book.

The people Malachi addressed in his book lived under the Old Covenant, in which God expected them to express their faith and obedience to Him by adhering to the Law of Moses that God had given to them when He delivered them from bondage in Egypt.

You and I, as the people of God today, live under the New Covenant, which was enacted by the costly grace of God in Christ on the cross to make the gospel real and experiential in our lives. So, in our own seasons of hopelessness today, we come to this Malachi text wearing the lens of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As we do so, from our Malachi passage, we discover that, we can either allow our **hardships** to drag us down into **hopelessness**, or, in our hardships, we can allow the gospel to lift us up into the NT **hope** that we have in Christ. **3H's**: Hardships, Hopelessness, and Hope.

### **I. Hardship (Verses 13 - 15)**

- 1) The people Malachi addresses in his book had returned to their land from exile with a great deal of optimism and they had begun to rebuild their ruined homeland. In particular, the Temple, the symbol of God's presence among His people, had been rebuilt.
- 2) However, their nation, Judah, remained a relatively insignificant province of the Persian Empire, which was the world power of the day, and God did not appear to give them the kind of success and prosperity they expected.
- 3) Their daily lives were overshadowed by much hardship. They endured high taxation by both the civil and religious authorities. They experienced unfavourable climatic conditions that gave them poor harvests. In addition to all this, they were saddled with a corrupt judicial system in which the poor suffered injustice at the hands of the rich and powerful.
- 4) This is why here in **verses 13 to 15** of our passage, we see them complaining by saying, "It's foolish to serve the All-Powerful God. What do we get for obeying Him? See how happy those arrogant people are. Everyone who does wrong is successful, and when they do wrong, they always get away with it."
- 5) Today, here in Kenya and in the Horn of Africa region, twenty million people are facing famine as a result of a severe drought. Across Africa today, our currencies are rapidly depreciating against the Dollar, resulting in the increasingly higher prices we are paying for everything, especially for fuel and food.
- 6) Like these former exiles who had returned to their land with a great deal of optimism, we began this year with a great deal of optimism, seeing ourselves returning from the exile of the Covid-19 pandemic, to our old more promising lives, and yet here we are today, facing all these seemingly un-ending hardships caused by all these forces beyond our control.

Plus, in our own individual lives, we face the additional hardships of unexpected health issues, financial challenges, work and business challenges, relationship difficulties, and so much more.

- 7) So, we can summarize **our first H** by saying that, like these people in this passage, our **hardships** can easily bring us to feel the same way these people felt about God in this passage.

### **II. Hopelessness (Verses 13 - 15)**

- 1) From what the people felt and said about God in **verses 13 to 15**, we see that many of them had come to feel quite cynical and hopeless about their situation. This sense of hopelessness was demonstrated in their spiritually backsliding behavior that is described in the earlier chapters of this book of Malachi.

- 2) In **Mal. 1**, we read that the priests had become corrupt. In **Mal. 2**, we read that contrary to the Law of Moses, many of the men were divorcing their Jewish wives and marrying Gentile pagan wives, and many of them were not keeping the Sabbath, nor paying their tithes. In **Mal. 3**, we read that, across the land, there was sorcery, adultery, perjury, fraud, oppression, and injustice.
- 3) To encourage these discouraged and spiritually backsliding people, in **Mal. 1** and **2**, Malachi reminded them that God is still their father and master, and that God was still a God of justice who loves them, even though they did not show that they loved God.
- 4) He reminds them that it was their persistent violations of the covenant that God had entered into with them at Sinai that had led to God's judgment of sending them into the exile from which they had now returned. In **Mal. 3**, Malachi reminded them that God's character of righteous honesty does not change.
- 5) You see, here they were, having returned to their land. The Temple had been rebuilt; the city of Jerusalem had returned to a substantial degree of normalcy, and they had been experiencing the comforts of the lenient Persian colonial system.

We get the impression that, because the days of exile under their previous external enemies were behind them, they had allowed the not-so-obvious internal enemies of spiritual compromise to overtake them. As so often happens when things begin to get comfortable for us, we get the impression that these people were falling back into spiritual laxity and compromise.

So, we get the impression that the sense of hopelessness that these people were beginning to feel was because they had begun to depend on their own sense of self-sufficiency, and to spiritually turn away from faithfulness to God, and from faith in God, while still expecting God to bless them.

- 6) At the beginning of this year, here we were, expecting to come out of the exile of the pandemic and beginning to think of charging ahead and picking up all our delayed and postponed plans and programs.

So, let us ask ourselves this question: Could it be that some of the hardships we face today might very well be God's way of helping us to avoid the backsliding mistakes of these returned exiles in this passage, and to help us to keep our faith in Him, rather than resorting to faith in ourselves?

- 7) So, we can summarize **our second H** from this passage by saying that, like the people in this passage, our sense of **hopelessness** can often be the result of not seeing the faithfulness to God and the faith in God that God seeks to enhance in our Christian lives through the hardships that He allows us to endure.

## II. Hope (3:16 - 4:6)

- 1) In this passage, we see Malachi seeking to encourage these discouraged and backsliding people by presenting them with a vision of hope for their future. This is why these last verses of the Old Testament are so filled with hope.
- 2) In **verse 16**, Malachi announces that God will remember those among them who remained faithful to Him, who loved Him, and who honored Him.

Here in **verse 16**, we also read that a scroll was written in God's presence in heaven concerning these faithful people who feared the Lord. In **verse 17**, the Lord refers to these people as His treasured possession.

This description of God's faithful people as having their names written in heaven appears throughout both the OT and the NT. In the OT, we find it in places such as Ex 32:32; Psalm 69:28; Isaiah 4:3 and Daniel 12:1. In the NT we find it in places such as Luke 10, Phil. 4, and Heb. 12. We also see this in several places in the book of Revelation such as Rev. 3:5, 13:8, and 17:8.

In the first three verses of **Mal. 4**, the Lord declares that a day is coming when He will intervene in the affairs of men and women, bringing victory to those who obey Him, and judgment to those who disobey Him.

- 3) In **Mal. 4:4-6**, Malachi concludes his message by referring to Moses, who represents the Law, and Elijah, who represents the Prophets. Malachi reminds the people that they must take seriously their covenant relationship with God that is embodied in the Law of Moses. He also announces to them that a great day is coming when a new Elijah will appear to herald the coming of the Messiah.

In **Matt. 17** and **Mark 9**, on the Mount of Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appear with Christ, and the voice of God from heaven instructs us to listen to Christ, thus reminding us that the OT, comprising of the Law and the Prophets, had all along, been pointing to Christ, who had now come.

In **Luke 24:27** and **44**, Christ confirmed this by declaring that Moses and the Prophets, that is, the entire OT, pointed to His life, His death, and His resurrection. Here in this Malachi passage, we see a clear example of this, as Christ is described in **Mal. 4:2** as the Sun of Righteousness who will come with healing in His wings.

In His life, His death, and His resurrection, we see that, indeed, we receive the spiritual healing of God's salvation when we place our faith in what Christ did for us on the cross to make the gospel experiential in our lives.

- 4) In **Matt. 11** and **Luke 7**, Christ identified John the Baptist as the new Elijah whom Malachi refers to in this passage, who came to prepare the way for Christ's first coming into the world.

We know that, as **Mal. 4:5-6** tell us, the ministry of John the Baptist prepared the hearts of many people in Israel to receive Christ. And for those people, Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, brought into their lives the spiritual healing of God's salvation that the Lord had promised in this passage.

This means that God's OT promise in this passage to bring His salvation to His people was fulfilled through the First Coming of Christ. That reminds us that God's promise in this passage concerning the Second Coming of Christ will equally be fulfilled. That promise is in **Mal. 4:2** that tells us that a day is coming when the people of God will go out and frolic like well-fed calves.

This will happen because, at the Second Coming of Christ, as we read in **Rev. 21:1**, there will be a new heaven and a new earth in which there will be no more sin, no more suffering, and no more death.

At that time, we shall finally experience our longed-for dream of a life of perfect love, justice, and peace in a renewed world in which all our hardships and hopelessness are ended forever.

- 5) In the meantime, therefore, as we wait for that glorious final day, as we face all these hardships as Christians today, we do well to allow the gospel to remind us about Christ on the cross who, on our behalf, faced the greatest hardship anyone has ever experienced.

The gospel reminds us that, because Christ, on the cross, for our sake, was forsaken by the Father, our hardships are not because the Father has forsaken us. The gospel also reminds us that our hardships are not because the Father is punishing us for sin in our lives, because, on the cross, Christ took upon Himself the punishment due to us for our sins.

During our hardships, when we allow the gospel to thus point us to Christ, we are also reminded of what He said in **John 16:33** on the night before He went to the cross. There, this is what He said: *In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*

What Christ meant by these words is that, because we live in a fallen world, hardships will come to us in one way or the other, but as we face these hardships, we should remember that, as Christians, we have in us His life and His victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil, that will bring us through our hardships, as we look to Him in faith and obedience.

- 6) So, when you and I, as a result of the hardships we face in these days, feel like the discouraged returned exiles in this passage, we need to let the gospel remind us that Christ Himself was the ultimate exile who came from heaven to give us both the assurance of God's present help in our hardships, as well as the hope of our one day going to heaven where our names have already been written in the Lord's book of life.

As you have heard me say before, in the NT, the word *hope* is never a vague optimism about the future. Rather, it is a solid certainty about something that is sure to happen in the future with the Second Coming of Christ, as **Titus 2:13** reminds us.

- 7) So, we can summarize **our third H** by saying that, for you and I, who have placed our faith in Christ to become God's treasured possession, regardless of how life looks now, the gospel reminds us of both the NT **hope** we have in Christ for God's help in our present hardships, as well as our eternal joy in the world to come.

### Conclusion

So, this is how, in this Malachi passage, these **3H's** teach us that we can either choose to let our *hardships* drag us down into *hopelessness*, or, in our hardships, we can allow the gospel to lift us up into the NT *hope* that we have in Christ.

Malachi, the last book of the OT, as you can see, closes with God's message reminding His people to His coming judgment. This explains why, when the NT opens 400 years after Malachi, just as Malachi prophesied, John the Baptist comes as the new Elijah, calling people to turn from their sins to faith in the coming Messiah.

Christ Jesus the Messiah did come, and for those who turn from their sins to faith in Christ, as **Rom. 8:1-2** assures us, there is, therefore now no condemnation before God for us as we await expectantly for the final glorious day of the Lord.

The flip side of this, obviously, is that, at the Second Coming of Christ, those who have not repented of their sin and placed their faith in Christ will face God's impending judgment like stubble set on fire, as Malachi declares in **Mal. 4:1** of this passage. So, as you listen to this, I hope that you have repented of your sin, that you placed your faith in Christ, and you have therefore received God's salvation to ensure that your name is written in the Lord's Book of Life in heaven.

So, we can conclude with the gospel good news that, for you and I as Christians today who have placed our faith in Christ, *hopelessness* about our *hardships* cannot be the last word in our lives because our sure NT *hope* is that our faithful God controls our lives in the present with His love and power, and He also controls the future, and in the fullness of His time, He will make everything right.

I'll end with the real-life story of Derek Redmond. *Narrate story and show video.*

My dear brothers and sisters, in all the discouraging hardships that we face today, we can be like Derek Redmond if we remember that, through the gospel, the Lord Jesus Christ has come alongside us, like Derek's father, with all the NT hope we need, to hold us on, and bring us across the finish line.

This is how **Heb. 12:1-2** puts it: *Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.*

In other words, Christ began our race, and He will enable us to complete the race, no matter what hardships we go through.

Let us pray.

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Tigoni,  
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