

**Malachi 3:17**  
**The Voice of Grace Part II**  
 Jimmy Snowden

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**Introduction**

Malachi 3:16—the end of the book is the aftermath of Malachi’s prophetic utterance. Last time I preached I postulated that Malachi 3:16-17 is all about responses. In Malachi 3:16a we see the response of those who fear the Lord to the word of the Lord, while we see the response of God to those who respond to His word with fear in Malachi 3:16b-17. Three weeks ago we discussed the response of the faithful to the word of God (3:16a), and two weeks ago we discussed the response of God to those who fear him (3:16b). We are going to be continuing the same discussion this morning. God’s response to the godly is quite different than His word to the unrepentant. In fact, it has become quite apparent that the overall tone of God’s voice completely changes in 3:16. From 1:1-3:15 God shows up on the scene with eye brows furrowed and neck veins protruding. He attacks the Israelites, accusing them of their hard-hearted rebellion against Him. However, God’s audience changes in 3:16. While in 1:1-3:15 God speaks to self-centered brats who refuse to consider their own guilt, in 3:16 He speaks to those who are perfectly characterized by Isaiah 66:2;

*“This is the LORD’s declaration. I will look favorably on this kind of person: one who is humble, submissive in spirit, and who trembles at My word.”*

In verse 16 we find two different ways in which God’s responds to those who fear Him and esteem His name: 1. He listens emphatically and 2. He takes attendance (the book of remembrance). This morning we are going to be considering Malachi 3:17. What will become evident is that God responds to those who fear him in two more ways.

**#3: He Treasures**

God says two remarkable things in the first half of 3:17 in response to those who fearfully submit to Him, but they both refer to the same thing. He first says, “They will be mine.” In other words, He takes ownership of those who fear Him and esteem His name. Then He clarifies what he means by taking ownership of the faithful in the next part of the verse; “a special possession on the day that I am preparing.” Thus, by saying “They will be mine” He is referring to the fact that He will treasure them as a man treasures his own inheritance.

All of the different translations have slight, yet helpful, variations on the phrase “My special possession” (HCSB). Notice the variety; “My treasured possession” (ESV and NIV), “My jewels” (NKJV), “My own special treasure” (NLT), “My own possession” (NASB). The Hebrew word for ‘possession’ is *segullah* and it refers to either “valued personal property, what is owned by someone, which the owner has special affection or holds special value” (Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2; 26:18; Psalm

135:4) or “a personal accumulation of values, as contrasted with a governmental treasury”<sup>1</sup> (1 Chronicles 29:3; Ecclesiastes 2:8).

What an incredible thought this is. God treasures those who fear him. This part of the glory of who God is is most expressly evidenced in the Gospel. You see, God has not just saved us from His judgment, which would have been more than anyone could have bargained for. The Gospel would be worth giving our lives for if God decided to merely (how dare I even use the word ‘merely’ like this) save us from our sins. But God has went much further than just (once again, how dare I use a word like ‘just’ in this context) save us from His wrath. In other words, God did not just do the unthinkable by taking us from -1,000,000 to 0, saving us from His negative judgment. That would have been enough for me—I could give my life to a God who would do such a thing. But our God’s grace goes deeper than mere (once again, how dare I use the word ‘mere’ in this context) salvation from judgment. Rather, God has taken us from -1,000,000 to +1,000,000,000. He has not just (once again...) saved us from His wrath, which would have been enough to make each of us owing of an eternal debt, but He has actually taken us from objects of His wrath, cancelled our debt, and then conferred upon us blessing upon blessing upon blessing. He has taken us as children of wrath and has made us His special treasures. What an incredible God of grace we serve!

You see, those who were in this holy huddle deserved judgment because they were guilty. But you say, ‘Weren’t they broken? Weren’t they repentant? Weren’t they changed?’ My answer is, ‘Yes, but a repentant response does not take away past sins.’ Turning a new leaf does nothing to take away guilt—it simply means that they have made a commitment to no longer rack up more guilt. You see, God was not obligated to do anything for them. It would have been more than enough for him to pardon them, but He does not merely pardon those who fear Him—that is far too little of an act of grace for our great God—He goes beyond mere pardon and actually makes them the supreme object of his possession.

Ultimately, God is declaring those in this holy huddle to be His inheritance. Notice what he says, “a special possession *on the day that I am preparing.*” This communicates the fact that God has set a day where he will come and gather these God-fearers up unto Himself. The idea of inheritance is a predominant theme in the Scriptures. We find two main promises that God gives His people regarding this idea of inheritance: (1) God promises to give His people an inheritance and (2) God declares his people to be His own special inheritance. Let me state it another way: when Jesus comes back he will do two things: (1) He will come to gather His people into their heavenly inheritance, and (2) He will come to gather His people until Himself as His inheritance. You see it is not just us who benefit from God’s redemptive act through Christ. He is a beneficiary as well. Not only does He get the glory, but He also gets redeemed treasures.

The big question: *Do you see yourself as a treasure? Has the fact that God delights in you hit home yet?*

Generally, inheritance in the ancient world had to do with land. When a man’s father died he inherited the father’s land—he took over the estate and assumed complete ownership over the land of his father. God promises us an inheritance—the Apostle John referred to it as ‘the new heavens and the new earth’ (Revelation 21:1-2). This really is

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<sup>1</sup>Swanson, James: *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)*. electronic ed. Oak Harbor : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997, S. DBLH 6035, #2

the object of our hope. The source of our hope is the cross of Jesus Christ, but the object of our hope is what the death of Jesus Christ won for us. The inheritance that we have been promised in Christ is nothing less than eternal life in the new heavens and the new earth: a place where there is no more sickness, no more war, no more rust, no more thieves, no more death, no more sin, not more fear, no more fat, no more sunburns, no more broken relationships, no more speeding tickets, no more temptation. Do you look forward to this day—is this not what you live for; is this not what you eagerly await? God looks forward to you and waits for you with as much urgency as you await your heavenly inheritance.

The thought of being God’s inheritance is just as exciting as the thought of being co-inheritors with Christ, because God’s setting His seal upon us as his own inheritance is our surety that we will be forever treasured by Him. In other words God’s inheritance of us means that we are (and always will be) to Him what the land is to us. He anticipates gathering us unto Himself just as much as we anticipate being gathered unto Him. He anticipates ushering us into His kingdom just as much as we anticipate being ushered in. He delights and longs for us just as much as we delight and long for Him and the future dwelling we will enjoy in His presence.

You see, we are not some sort of a science experiment to God. He does not take risks with us. We are His treasures, His inheritance. I want you to notice the Holman Christian Standard Bible’s translation of Ephesians 1:11. I will compare it to the ESV’s translation of the same passage so that you can see the great difference.

HCSB: “In Him we were also made His inheritance, predestined according to the purpose of the One who works out everything in agreement with the decision of His will.”

ESV: “In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.”

Both of these translations are viable. The clear difference between the two translations is (1) who is doing the inheriting (in the HCSB it is God who is doing the inheriting and in the ESV it is we who are doing the inheriting), and (2) who or what is being inherited (in the HCSB we are the one’s being inherited and in the ESV it is eternal glory that is being inherited). Although this text is disputed, it certainly can refer to the fact that we are God’s inheritance. Even if Ephesians 1:11 is not sufficient to prove that we believers are God’s inheritance, 1 Peter 2:8b-9 is. In this passage Peter is contrasting the people of this world with those who have embraced Christ as their Lord and Savior.

*They stumble by disobeying the message; they were destined for this. But you are a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for **His possession**, so that you may proclaim the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.*

In fact, the word for “possession,” **περιποίησις** (*peripoiesis*), in 1 Peter 2:9 is the same exact word used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old

Testament) for “my special possession” in Malachi 3:17. What does this mean? This means that the way you become a treasured possession in God’s new economy is by believing in Christ, the cornerstone that has been rejected by the world.

This is something that we all long for: to be valued and treasured. Husbands long to be valued by their wives, wives long to be treasured by their husbands. We all put our best on display as we mix among our fellow human beings within our communities. We wear the right clothes, drive the right cars, live in the right houses, get the right jobs. And why? So that we might be noticed by others; so that others might see us as important; so that others might see us as we want to be seen. And how do we want to be seen? As valuable and important, significant to others. Because we live in a fallen world our relationships in the world have been marred. Many have never been valued or treasured. We live in a dark world where things like abandonment and rape are every-day realities in the lives of many. Parents often times beat and/or abandon their kids, husbands often times cheat on or neglect their wives, wives often times completely disregard their husbands, we, even in the body of Christ, often times undervalue each other. What is the result of this chaotic web of relational confusion? People do everything they can to find significance; they do everything they can to be seen and cherished and valued. Maybe you are in that place right now.

Well, let me tell you that you need not search for value, significance, or value any longer. Because God looks down at those who fear Him and esteem His name and says, “They will be mine... a special possession on the day that I am preparing.” And what did the Israelites have to do for God to look their way? Did they have to attain perfection; did they have to cross all their t’s and dot all their i’s? No, they simply had to take Him seriously, plead His grace, and cling to Him as their personal Lord and Savior—they had to be submissive in Spirit, humble, and tremble at His word.

The thing that is so difficult about discussing this issue of being cherished and treasured by God is that we live in a culture that over-sentimentalizes everything having to do God. Christianity has become the default religion for the emotionally unstable. The majority of those who profess Christ communicate their faith in shallow, sentimental terms. And although this sentimentality may be attractive to a few on the fringes, to the majority this sort of mindless, well-wishing sentimentalism is nothing less than a foundationless aid to the weak. They consider Christianity to be great for the unstable but far too shallow for the ‘average Joe.’ I want you to know that the reality of God cherishing and treasuring His people is no mere sentimentality. There is nothing sentimental about the Creator God bending over as far as He can, condescending to our level, to make us His own by sending His one and only Son to die a bloody, offensive death on our behalf. The thought of the infinite and eternal King of Glory, the one who is described in Revelation 1:14-16, condescending down to the radically corrupt is far from a mere sentimentality. Consider the one we are being treasured by. He is no mere soft-hearted hippie; He is the all-glorious Creator/Sustainer/Redeemer/Warrior, the Great Unexplainable. Look at how the Apostle John describes the vision he saw of Jesus. Imagine the glory of what John must have seen. What John saw went so far beyond his experience that he had to explain who Jesus was in almost contradictory ways.

*His head and hair were white like wool—white as snow, His eyes like a fiery flame, His feet like fine bronze fired in a furnace, and His voice like the sound of*

*cascading waters. In His right hand He had seven stars; from His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and his face was shining like the sun at midday.*

The thought of the great Warrior God treasuring sinners like us is a picture of powerful grace, not sentimentality. If this doesn't float your boat, you are unspeakably sick. If you can see infinite grace coming from the omnipotent, eternal, and infinite Creator/Warrior God to those (namely, us) deserving of nothing less than His infinite judgment and yet be unmoved, you are in desperate need of life from above. Only the sickest among us could look upon such powerful grace and conclude, "This is it? This is the Good News? God treasures those who fear Him, what's next?" As opposed to being sentimental, this love is radical—a love worth dying for, living for, being hated for, losing everything for, giving everything for.

Malachi 3:17 is the affirmation that God longs for us just as much as we long for Him.

#### **#4: He Spares**

Thus far we have considered three ways in which God responds to those who fear Him and esteem His name. Not only does God listen emphatically, take attendance, and treasure those who fear Him and esteem His name, but, as can be seen in the second half of 3:17, He 'has compassion on' or 'spares' or 'has pity on' those who fear Him.

The Hebrew word translated as 'compassion' in the HCSB, *chamal*, literally means to "spare, take pity on, i.e., show kindness to one in an unfavorable, difficult, or dangerous situation, and so help or deliver in some manner, implying in some cases that the one in the distress may deserve the condition."<sup>2</sup>

Interestingly, as suggested in the definition above, inherent in this word is the idea that the benefactor of the compassion or pity is actually deserving of the distress he may be under at the time. Those in this holy huddle, as discussed above, are certainly deserving of the judgment of God. In this case, the "dangerous situation" that those in this holy huddle are facing is the judgment of God due them because of their sins—judgment that they deserve. I really think that the HCSB does a disservice to this verse by translating *chamal* as "compassion." I really do prefer the ESV, NASB, NRSV, KJV, NKJV's rendering of this word. The word "spare" definitely gets at the heart of what is going on. God is going to spare these God-fearers. Maybe it would be best to say it as follows: God's compassion is going to drive Him to spare these broken God-fearers as a father spares his own son. He is not going to give them what they deserve (namely, His judgment).

As I sat down to meditate upon this text a few weeks ago the first question that popped into my mind was; How can this verse be of any comfort? After all, God Himself did not spare His own Son when He bore the sins of the world. But then it hit me like a ton of bricks. That's the point! *The only reason He can spare us (or the ancient Israelites) as a father spares his own son is because He did not spare His own Son when He stood in our place.* Turn with me to Romans 8:32.

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<sup>2</sup>Swanson, James: *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains : Hebrew (Old Testament)*. electronic ed. Oak Harbor : Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997, S. DBLH 2798

*He did not even spare His own Son, but offered Him up for us all; how will He not also with Him grant us everything?*

I do not want to mislead you; the word ‘spare’ here in Romans 8:32 is not the same as that used in Malachi 3:17, but the idea expressed is exactly the same. God can spare us as a father spares his own son simply because He did not spare His own Son when He stood in our place. When Jesus was on the cross bearing our sins, God the Father let loose the full strength of His wrath. On the cross Jesus bore the full strength of the wrath of God, fully satisfying God’s righteous requirement. If God did spare His own Son we would still be in our sins—under the penalty due to us because of our sin (which is nothing less than the judgment of God). If God spared His own Son there would be no way that He could spare us without at the same time failing to be righteous or just. Sin and injustice has to be dealt with. God cannot simply acquit the guilty. The Lord, through Solomon, even says in Proverbs 17:15;

*Acquitting the guilty and condemning the just—both are detestable to the Lord.*

God must be both just in His justification of the guilty and fair in his judgment of the pure. How did He get around this problem? He Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, took our sin, bore our judgment, died our death. In so doing God became both just and the justifier of sinners. God dealt with our sins in a just way; by taking both our sins and the penalty due us because of our sins upon Himself.

The fact of the Gospel, and that to which all of the sacrifices of the Old Testament pointed, is bound up in the reality that God sent His own Son to take ownership of our sins and thus take the penalty due us because of our sins so that we might become sons of God. And now that we have been adopted by God we are treated as His full-fledged sons. In other words, God treats us as He treats Christ.

These Old Testament believers can be spared the judgment of God only because Christ was not spared the judgment of God. The same goes for us; the only way we can be spared the penalty of our sins (which is eternal death) is if we are looking to Christ and what He has done for us on the cross of Calvary as the only sufficient payment of our sins. We can be spared as sons because He was not spared as a Son when He stood in our place.