

**Malachi 4:2-3**  
**A Day of Victory**  
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***Introduction***

As I stated the last two times I preached, 3:18-4:3 should be taken as a unit; Malachi 3:17 standing as the introduction to 4:1-3. Malachi 3:18 states that the difference between the righteous and the wicked will become evident on the day that the Lord has prepared. In 4:1-3 the Lord discloses exactly how He will distinguish between the righteous and the wicked. As was stated last week, the distinction between them has everything to do with how God will deal with them at the second coming. Thus, the way to read 4:1-3 is to focus on the distinction between the righteous and the wicked in regard to how God is going to deal with them at the second coming. In other words, we are to read 4:1, which is where God discusses how He will deal with the wicked on the Day of Judgment, and then contrast it with 4:2-3, which is where God discusses how He will deal with the righteous on the Day of Judgment. When you read it this way, the great difference between the righteous and the wicked becomes evident.

Last week's sermon focused solely on 4:1, which emphasizes how God will deal with the wicked on the Day of Judgment. What became supremely clear is that the wicked have much to be afraid of. They are going to suffer under the judgment of God. We emphasized the fact that Malachi used 'fire imagery' to communicate how God will deal with the wicked on the Day of Judgment. I stated that fire is the imagery that the biblical authors most commonly use when speaking of the judgment of God. The reason for this is because fire is the most destructive phenomenon in God's natural order. When fire consumes something it reduces [that thing] to nothing but ash and dust. Fire consumes. The more it consumes the bigger it gets, the bigger it gets the more it consumes. This is what the wicked have to look forward to on the day that the Lord has appointed. But, as was stated last week, God has prolonged His coming in order to give the wicked as much opportunity to repent and thus be saved from His wrath, for he does not delight in the destruction of the wicked, but rather wishes that all men come to salvation.

Well, this week we will complete this subsection in the book of Malachi. Malachi 3:18 introduces the topic of this section: that a day is coming when the difference between the righteous and the wicked will become evident. Then we see in 4:1-3 exactly what will distinguish the righteous from the wicked. The difference has everything to do with how God will deal with them on the day that He has prepared. In 4:1 we saw how the Lord is going to deal with the wicked: He is going to completely destroy them as a Consuming Fire. Now, the point of this morning, as we look at 4:2-3, is to contrast what we learn about how God will deal with the righteous on the day that He has prepared with what we learned about how God will deal with the wicked on the day that He has prepared in 4:1.

So... how will God deal with the righteous on the day that He has prepared? I believe that this passage reveals three different ways in which God will deal with righteous on the day that He has prepared.

### ***Finding Your Place In God's Story***

Well, in order to really grasp what Malachi has to say in 4:2-3, in order to understand how God is going to deal with the righteous on the day that He has prepared, we must get an understanding of the big picture. I want to paint a picture for you of what the main message of Malachi 4:2-3 is. One of the most common elements in almost every good movie is the element of 'tension.' At the climax of a good movie the plot will begin to thicken, and things will start looking down for the 'good guys.' The stronger the tension, generally speaking, the better the movie. The goal of the director is to build in your heart a fear that if something amazing doesn't happen—and happen quickly—evil will win out and the happy ending will be ruined. And then in the heat of battle, just when the tension begins to overtake you, just as you are about to shut the movie off in defeat, the hero of the movie comes in glorious fashion, pushing the enemy back, valiantly saving the day.

Well... this may sound fantastical to you, but we are caught up in a similar drama in the history of redemption. God's story of redemption, as can be found in God's word, is full of this element of tension. The (non-fiction) story starts out with an all-loving God who created all that is, and declared it to be good. But then, just two chapters into the story, God's 'good' creation rebels against Him. The rest of this narrative is about God winning back what was lost through the fall—redeeming and restoring rebels and the effects of their rebellion and once and for all, defeating and annihilating everything that is opposed to Him, His character, and His agenda of love and justice.

This is the story in which we find ourselves. Where do we find ourselves in God's great drama? This is a vital question to ask. We find ourselves towards the end of the drama. God has created us, we have rebelled, God has done as much as could be done to point toward the great remedy (the supernatural birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus), the remedy (the price that had to be paid for our redemption) has been accomplished with perfection (John 17:4 and John 19:30), and now we are in the 'time between the times,' awaiting the full consummation of all that Christ has already purchased and won. The ransom price has been paid, the grave has been defeated, the victory is sure. But while our redemption is sure, it is not completely realized; while Christ's reign has been inaugurated, it has not yet been fully consummated. He has begun to reign, but His reign of peace and his project of restoration is not yet complete—it has already been bought and won, but we are in the 'time between the times.' We are in that part of the narrative where things are looking a bit hairy—things appear on the surface to not be going all that well. Surely, the Gospel is advancing in power, and yet wickedness and Gospel hatred are also picking up speed. We live in the 'time between the times.' The period of time which falls between 1. the decisive purchasing of our redemption and 2. the actual full consummation of our redemption.

Christ has already bought our redemption, secured our salvation, inaugurated his righteous reign, and yet the battle is not over—the decisive blow has been made, the decisive payment has been made, and yes... the victory is 'in the bag,' and yet we await the consummation of all of these things. Our redemption has been bought, and so we are already partially redeemed and we anticipate with full confidence the full actualization of the fullness of redemption; our salvation has been secured, and thus we are saved, and yet our salvation has not yet been fully actualized, but we do await for it with unswerving confidence; Christ has inaugurated his righteous reign, and thus He does rule with justice

and righteousness now, but His kingdom has not yet been fully consummated and will not be until he comes, as Malachi says over and over again, “on the day that He has prepared.” So this is where we find ourselves in God’s redemptive story--the most true and relevant story in all of existence.

And our view of God’s redemptive story within the pages of history can be quite frightening. We can, like the King of Rohan in the “Two Towers”, become quite despairing if we have an earth bound perspective. This why God has given us His word—He wants us to fight the good fight of faith with courage knowing that our redemption is sure, our salvation is sure, our rescue from this evil age is sure, and that His Kingdom, of which we are loyal subjects, surely will know no end.

When you take a panoramic view of the world what do you see? Is it good or bad? It is bad. The first thing I think of when I think of the world on the whole are things like: war, terrorism, hunger, poverty, drug trafficking, human trafficking, money laundering, and corruption. When we think of the world scene our thoughts revolve around problems that need to be solved, crime that needs to be stopped, and opposition surrounding our every step forward. This is what we see when we look at the world through the eyes of realism. Let me ask another question; When you take a panoramic view of Christianity in the world, what do you see? Is it good or bad? Really, it is both. On the one hand, we live in the most privileged time for the Christian faith. The Gospel has never advanced more quickly nor touched more lives than today. On the other hand, persecution has never plagued the church more than it does today. Consider the following quote that I found at the “Voice of the Martyr’s website.

*“According to the World Evangelical Alliance, over 200 million Christians in at least 60 countries are denied fundamental human rights solely because of their faith. David B. Barrett, Todd M. Johnson, and Peter F. Crossing in their 2009 report in the International Bulletin of Missionary Research (Vol. 33, No. 1: 32) estimate that approximately 176,000 Christians will have been martyred from mid-2008 to mid-2009. This, according to the authors, compares to 160,000 martyrs in mid-2000 and 34,400 at the beginning of the 20th century. If current trends continue, Barrett, Johnson and Crossing estimate that by 2025, an average of 210,000 Christians will be martyred annually.”<sup>1</sup>*

If these statistics are accurate—and there is no way of nailing the number down with precision, but this is the best educated guess that they could come to—that means that one Christian is put to death because of their faith every three seconds. And those who conduct such surveys postulate that this number is on the rise, not on the decline.

And yet we Christians know that although things look bleak on the surface for God’s ‘good gone bad’ creation; although it would appear in many ways that Christianity is losing the battle; although one might be tempted to question whether or not Christ truly is reigning as King over all, we know from God’s word that our Redeemer, Jesus, is on His way. The plot is thickening, and the Scriptures promise that it will continue to thicken until He comes back. As 2 Timothy 3:13 suggests; in the last days things will go

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.persecution.net/faq-stats.htm>

from bad to worse. The tension will rise and rise and rise before Christ comes back. The Gospel will advance, but the more it advances the more the battle will intensify.

This is the time in which we find ourselves. And this was a reality in Malachi's day as well. Don't you remember Malachi 3:14-15?

*“You have said: ‘It is useless to serve God. What have we gained by keeping His requirements and walking mournfully before the LORD of Hosts? So now we consider the arrogant to be fortunate. Not only do those who commit wickedness prosper, they even test God and escape.’”*

What do we see in this passage? Tension! “God, I thought you promised good things to those who obey and follow you! Come to find out your promises of blessing are hallow. God, I thought you were just! Come to find out you are loosey goosey on sin.” Do you see the tension? The godly (the righteous—those who fear the Lord) wait for the day when God will vindicate them and when God will vindicate Himself over the wicked. The righteous wait for the day when God will show Himself to be all that they know Him to be. The righteous wait for the day when God when God will come in His righteousness, establishing justice and peace and love as the law of the land—completely eradicating sin.

Have you not questioned such things yourself? Have you ever questioned how an all good and all powerful God could let 1.3 million abortions happen every year and not step in to stop such gross injustice. I have been listening to Greg Wheatley's “Prime Time America on the radio discussing the rising reality of human trafficking in the world. It was quite the disturbing radio broadcast. It leaves one sitting there, asking God, “God, if you are all loving, and if you are a God of justice and righteousness, how can you look on? Why don't you stop this horrific mess?” We know that He wants to (He is all good and all loving), and we know that He can (He is all sovereign), so why doesn't He? The answer to that question is, “He is going to stop it *on the day that He has prepared.*”

In God's grand redemptive narrative, we find ourselves in the thick of the tension, intensely anticipating the return of our King. Our King will break in upon all this craziness. He will come in all of His glory, establishing righteousness, vindicating His people, and vindicating His own name. This is the hope of the righteous. And this is most principally what Malachi 4:2-3 is all about.

### ***Malachi 4:2-3***

You have to get a taste of the tension of the ‘time between the times’ in order to understand this passage. The righteous are victors in God's grand narrative, and yet they seem to be losing the battle in the present. How will God deal with the righteous on the day that He has prepared? He will rise in His all of His glory, establishing His righteous reign, vindicating His people, granting them complete and total victory over their enemies (both spiritual and physical). The point here is that God will break in on the craziness and rampant injustice that is spread across the globe; He break in upon them as the sun breaks out upon the earth. You are to have in your head a picture of the earth, but instead of a yellow ball rising in the east, you are to see a Warrior shining in all of His glory, rising as the sun, coming to deliver His people, rescuing them from the hands of their enemies.

He comes to establish righteousness *on their behalf*. Take a look at the text.

*But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.*

So how will God deal with the righteous on the day of judgment? I think this passage shows us four ways. **First of all**, He will vindicate His people. He will, like the sun, rise to establish righteousness on behalf of His people. He will vindicate them; rescuing them from the clutches of their enemies. **Second**, we see that He will “heal” them. Primarily in the context I believe that this is a reference to Him healing His people from the afflictions of their enemies, but I do believe that Christ coming in His righteousness will result in complete healing, both spiritual and physical healing. He will give them new bodies that cannot be touched by sin, sickness, death, or pain. **Third**, as can be seen from the second half of 4:2, He will *set his people free*. Notice what the passage says;

*And you will go out and playfully jump like calves from the stall.*

The picture is that of a calf that has been locked away in a stall for an extended period of time experiences the freedom of the wide open range. The calf excitedly ‘milks’ (no pun intended) the large space for all that it is worth—jumping about in freedom. In a similar way, when God comes at the end of the age to establish righteousness, the people of God will be set free from sin, death, fear, bondage to Satan, and from the afflictions of the enemies of God. And **fourth**, Malachi 4:3 clearly teaches that God will *grant His people victory*.

*‘You will trample the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day I am preparing,’ says the Lord of Hosts.*

God will grant His people victory. This is really what is so exciting about the second coming of Christ; it is the King coming in all of His glory, announcing victory to His people—declaring to them that the time has come for all of their enemies to be brought to justice.

### **Victory**

The point here is that God will break in on the rampant injustice that is spread across the globe; He will break in upon them as the sun breaks out upon the earth. You are to have in your head a picture of the earth, but instead of a yellow ball rising in the east, you are to see a Warrior shining in all of His glory, coming to deliver His people, rescuing them from the hands of their enemies. He comes to establish righteousness *on their behalf*.

Turn with me to Isaiah 62:11-63:7.

*11 “Look, the Lord has proclaimed to the end of the earth, ‘Say to Daughter Zion: Look, your salvation is coming, His reward is with Him, and His recompense is before Him.’ 12 And they will be called the Holy People, the Lord’s Redeemed; and you will be called Cared For, A City Not Deserted.”*

This is simply the Lord's declaration to His people that He is going to redeem them, making them His own special possession. Look with me at what follows.

*63:1 Who is this coming from Edom in crimson-stained garments from Bozrah—this one who is splendid in His apparel, rising up proudly in His great might?*

This here is a picture of watchmen standing post on the towers in the city of Jerusalem. They would scan the horizon looking for visitors. The towers were lifted high in the sky so that they could see people far off and thus they could spot an enemy army approaching from the distance, giving them time to alarm the army to array for battle. Without the watchman the city would be completely open for a surprise attack. Well, these watchman look out at the horizon and see a blood-splattered warrior approaching the walls of the city with much pride. The watchman wonder who it could be.

The one who is approaching then answers.

*"It is I, proclaiming vindication, powerful to save."*

Come to find out that the blood-splattered warrior is Yahweh Himself. He has come from Edom, which was an enemy nation of the Israelites, and He has come to announce victory and vindication to His people. His blood stained attire points to the fact that He has shed the blood of the Edomites to vindicate His people.

The watchmen then respond;

*"Why is Your clothing red, and Your garments like one who treads the winepress"*  
(63:2)

As any good watchman would do, these watchmen question this warrior as to why His garments are so covered with blood. The imagery of the winepress was quite significant. In the ancient world one of the ways in which a vintner would make wine was by putting a large amount grapes in a large vat and would stomp on the grapes. It was much like the "I Love Lucy" episode where they stomp on grapes to make grape juice. But here it is not the juice of grapes that is splattered on His garments; it is the blood of the Edomites, the enemies of His people.

Yahweh answers;

*3 I trampled the winepress alone, and no one from the nations was with me. I trampled them in My anger and ground them underfoot in my fury; their blood spattered My garments, and all my clothes were stained. 4 For I planned the day of vengeance and the year of My redemption came. 5 I looked, but there was no one to help, and I was amazed that no one assisted; so My arm accomplished victory for Me, and My wrath assisted me. 6 I crushed the nations in My anger; I made them drunk with My wrath and poured out their blood on the ground.*

So what is going on here? God has come to Jerusalem with His garments soiled by the blood of His enemies. Ultimately, He has come to announce victory. He has come to declare to His people that He has accomplished salvation for them—that He has

defeated their enemies. The proof of His victory is on His clothes. He is literally drenched in the blood of the Edomites in the same way that a vintner is drenched with grape juice after treading the winepress. This is an announcement of victory.

Now notice the response of the watchman to Yahweh's bloody arrival.

*7 I will make known the Lord's faithful love [and] the Lord's praiseworthy acts, because of all the Lord has done for us—even the many good things [He has done] for the house of Israel and has done from them based on His compassions and the abundance of His faithful love.*

When you see this picture of our God drenched in blood, how does it make you feel? To most people it is quite unattractive. I wrote a paper on this passage and one person told me that they could never worship a God who was so bloody. But before you write God off as some sort of a blood-thirsty tyrant, let me read for you a snippet from John Oswalt's commentary on Isaiah. I found Oswalt's comments to be so utterly helpful.

*For most of us, the picture of a blood-splattered warrior striding exultantly off a field of battle strewn with corpses is a distasteful one. This is especially true for us in North America, who have known so little bloodshed in comparison to the rest of the world. However, we need to put this in another perspective. Think about the prisoners in a Nazi concentration camp. Striding up to the barbed-wire gates comes a blood-splattered, smoke-begrimed GI, who with one burst of his submachine gun blasts the locks off the gates. Does he look distasteful to those prisoners? Not in the least! He is the most beautiful thing they have seen in years. He means freedom; he means deliverance; he means life from the dead. Can you imagine any of them saying, 'Now Yank, those Nazis are really nice people, and if you had just talked to them gently and rationally, I am sure all of this unpleasant violence would have been unnecessary'? Hardly! On that field, there was only one approach, a fight to the death and winner take all.*

*The same is true in the spiritual world. There can be no negotiation with sin, for it is the sworn enemy of all that God is. It is sin that killed the Son of God, and it is sin that will kill all God's creatures if it can. The idea that we have negotiated peace where God holds one part of the creation while sin holds another is ludicrous. In the end, either the righteous God will rule the world or sin will. The same thing is true for the human heart. The thought that we can have forgiveness of sin by the blood of Jesus while continuing to practice that which killed him is ludicrous. Christ the warrior comes to destroy sin and set us free.<sup>2</sup>*

Many do not realize that Isaiah 63 is in the New Testament, just read Revelation 19:11-16. In Revelation 19 we find that Jesus is the one who treads the winepress of God's wrath, once and for all dealing with the enemies of His people, eradicating both sin and unrepentant sinners from His new creation. Most think of Isaiah 63 as another indication that the God of the Old Testament was harsh and unloving while Jesus is the God of all grace. Oh how mistaken this is. Go home and read the book of Revelation in one sitting. Revelation is by far the bloodiest book of the Bible, making the book of

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<sup>2</sup> John Oswalt, *Isaiah*, The NIV Application Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 661-62.

Joshua (and the conquest of Canaan) look like child's play. And as you read it I want you to see how fierce of a warrior God is, and I want you to remind yourself that all of the seals of judgment, and all of the bowls of wrath, and all of the trumpet blasts of judgment, and all of the shed blood of the enemies of God was for you—it is a battle for your heart. One of the main messages of the book of Revelation: “Don't Mess With God's Kids.”

Turn with me to Revelation 6:9-10. Notice the nature of the prayer of the martyred saints—they are praying for God to avenge them, bringing justice to the persecutors of God's people.

Revelation 6:9-10: *“When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those slaughtered because of God's word and the testimony they had. They cried out with a loud voice: ‘O Lord, holy and true, how long until You judge and avenge our blood from those who live on the earth.’”*

John Day suggests that the rest of the book of Revelation is God's answer to this prayer.<sup>3</sup> He points his readers to many passages in the book of Revelation,<sup>4</sup> but I just want to draw your attention to Revelation 18:21-19:5. It is quite clear from this passage that God's destruction on His enemies is in many ways tied to the prayer of the martyrs in Revelation 6. Notice how the destruction of the enemies of God results in worship. Why would so much shed blood result in worship? Because it means that the enemies of the people of God have been destroyed forever, and thus there is no longer reason to fear anything. God's perfect plan of redemption will be finalized upon His return. Take a look with me at the text.

Revelation 18:21-19:5 *Then a mighty angel picked up a stone like a large millstone and threw it into the sea, saying: ‘In this way, Babylon the great city will be thrown down violently and never be found again. The sound of harpists, musicians, flutists, and trumpeters will never be heard in you again; no craftsman of any trade will ever be found in you again; the sound of a mill will never be heard in you again; the light of a lamp will never shine in you again; and the voice of a groom and bride will never be heard in you again. All this will because your merchants were the nobility of the earth, because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery, **and the blood of the prophets and saints, and all those slaughtered on earth, was found in you.**’*

*After this I heard something like the loud voice of a vast multitude in heaven, saying: ‘Hallelujah! Salvation, glory, and power belong to our God, because His judgments are true and righteous, because He has judged the notorious prostitute who corrupted the earth with her sexual immorality; **and He has avenged the blood of His servants that was on her hands.**’*

*A second time they said: ‘Hallelujah!’<sup>5</sup> Her smoke ascends forever and ever!’ Then the 24 elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God, who is seated on the throne, saying: ‘Amen! Hallelujah’*

<sup>3</sup> John N. Day “The Imprecatory and Christian Ethics” *Biblia Sacra* 159 (April-June 2002): 185.

<sup>4</sup> He points to Revelation 15:3, 16:6 and 18:20-19:3.

<sup>5</sup> “Hallelujah” simply means “Praise Yahweh!”

*A voice came from the throne, saying: 'Praise our God, all you His servants, you who fear Him, both small and great!*

Why all this blood? Why all this death? It is for you! It is for your freedom. This is why the second coming is so exciting. Don't get so mixed up in the nuts and bolts of eschatology that you miss the main point. The main point is that the second coming is exciting because it is the world-wide announcement of victory—that Jesus has officially done away with sin, unrepentant sinners, Satan, death, and the grave.

### ***Conclusion***

So the difference between the righteous and the wicked will become evident says Malachi 3:18. What will be the distinguishing mark between the righteous and the wicked? Well, according to 4:1, the wicked will suffer under the fierce fury of God's wrath, which burns like a fire, leaving them neither root nor branch. God is going to reduce the wicked to ash. And, according to 4:2-3, God is going to rise with angel armies at His command on behalf of the righteous. He is going to come to the righteous with an announcement of victory. They will be completely healed and set free. They will be forever under the shadow of His wings, safe by Creator-Warrior Daddy's side.

Do you know Him this morning? Have you become a child of this King? The decisive question; "On the day that He has prepared will you under his judgment or will you be healed and set free?" It all depends upon what you do with the Son of God, Jesus. John 3:18 says,

*Anyone who believes in him is not condemned, but anyone who does not believe is already condemned, because he has not believed in the name of the One and Only Son of God.*

Are you reading for His coming? Is God going to be fighting for you or against you—which end of His sword will you be on? You can know that you know that you know that you will be the recipient of the Good News of victory. All you have to do is repent of your sins, receiving Jesus as your Lord, and believing that he personally died for you, throwing yourself upon Him as your only hope of salvation.