

11/23/25

God's Purpose Never Changes

*Malachi 3:16-4:6*

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Today is the final Sunday in our **Six Things About God that Don't Change** series from Malachi. The **theme verse** that inspired the series is *Malachi 3:6*, "**For I the Lord do not change.**" Each characteristic that doesn't change calls for a response from us. To review, **God's love** doesn't change, and our task is to **love God and others** in return. **God's glory** invites us to **honor God**. **God's faithfulness** inspires us to **be faithful** to God and in all our relationships. **God's justice** motivates us to advocate for and **do justice** ourselves. The richness of **God's mercy** sets an example of mercy and generosity for us to imitate. Finally, **God's purpose** doesn't change, and our response is to **take God seriously**.

Earlier in worship we heard the words of *Psalms 84*: "*How lovely is Your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts... For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere... For the Lord God is a sun and shield.*" And we've been reminded of the wisdom of *Psalms 112*: "*Happy are those who fear the Lord... The righteous will never be moved; they will be remembered forever.*"

Both Psalms share a truth that's woven throughout the Bible: **God sees, God remembers, and God distinguishes between the righteous and the wicked**. This isn't just an Old Testament theme. It's part of the great tapestry of God's unchanging purpose for God's people, from Genesis to Revelation. Listen to *Malachi 3:16-4:6*.

"Then those who **revered the Lord** spoke with one another. **The Lord took note and listened, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who revered the Lord and thought on his name. They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, my special possession on the day when I act**, and I will spare them as parents spare their children who serve them. **Then once more you shall see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him**. See, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. **But for you who revere my name the sun 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 they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day **when I act**, says the Lord of hosts. **Remember the teaching of my servant Moses**, the statutes and ordinances that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. Lo, I will send you **the prophet Elijah** before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse.”

Today, we stand at the end of the Hebrew Bible — the final verses of the book of Malachi. These are the final prophetic words given to Israel before four hundred years of silence, until the voice of one crying in the wilderness — John the Baptizer — breaks the stillness and prepares the way for the Lord.

Malachi’s message is a wake-up call. It is a call for God’s people to take God seriously. Not casually. Not occasionally. Not halfway. But truly — deeply — seriously. Because **God’s purpose never changes**, and because God never changes, our response must be one of holy reverence, trust, and obedience. That’s our focus today. **Because God’s purpose never changes, the Lord calls us to take God seriously.**

Malachi shows us what a life that takes God seriously looks like in three ways:

1. **God sees and remembers those who take the Lord seriously.**
2. **God will act decisively to judge evil and to heal God’s people.**
3. **God calls His people to prepare their hearts for Christ and God’s unchanging purpose.**

Let’s walk through the text and hear what the Spirit is still saying to the church.

### **God Sees and Remembers Those Who Take Him Seriously**

*Malachi 3:16* paints a beautiful and intimate scene: **“Then those who revered the Lord spoke with one another. The Lord took note and listened, and a book of remembrance was written before him.”** Notice how quiet, how simple, how ordinary this moment is. There’s no thunder. No earthquake. No vision. Just ordinary people — faithful people — speaking together about God... and Heaven leans in to listen. We often imagine God taking note of the big moments: the heroic act, the extraordinary sacrifice, the mountain-top decision. But here we see that God also records the small moments of

faithfulness: the whispered prayer, the unseen act of kindness, the word of encouragement, the quiet choice to obey when no one else is watching.

Malachi says, *“The Lord took note and listened.”* God wrote their names down. God remembered. This image of the “book of remembrance” anticipates the “book of life” in *Revelation 20* and *21*. At the final judgment, **books will be opened**, books that record the deeds and choices of every person. And then *another* book will be opened: **the Lamb’s Book of Life**, containing the names of those who belong to Christ by faith.

Malachi wants to make the question clear: **What book is your name going to be in?** Is your life one that God can point to and say, *“This one revered Me. This one thought on My Name. This one took Me seriously”?*

*Psalm 112* echoes Malachi’s theme: *“The righteous will never be moved; they will be remembered forever.”* How do we ensure that we are among those remembered? Malachi gives two simple characteristics:

1. **They revered the Lord.** The Hebrew word here means “to stand in awe,” “to honor,” “to hold weight.” This is not fear that drives us away from God — it’s reverence that draws us near.
2. **They thought on God’s name.** Their minds were filled with God. Their conversations drifted naturally toward Him. Their decisions were shaped by His character and commands.

This is taking God seriously — not in fits and starts, not only when life is hard, not only when it’s convenient, but in the whole pattern of life.

And God’s response is, *“They shall be mine,” says the Lord of hosts, “my special possession.”* The Hebrew phrase means “treasured possession” — the same term God used at Sinai when God made covenant with Israel. Malachi is reminding us that **God’s covenant love and purpose haven’t changed.**

The Lord has always intended to gather a people who take God seriously, who live by the Word, who walk in God’s ways, and who trust God completely. In the New Testament, we hear this reflected in *1 Peter 2:9-10 (NIV)*, *“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, **God’s special possession**, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you*

*were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."*

### **God Will Act Decisively to Judge Evil and to Heal His People**

*Malachi 4:1-3* then turns toward the future. A day is coming — **“the great and terrible day of the Lord.”** For the arrogant and the evildoers, this day will be like an oven. It will expose. It will purify. It will burn away everything rooted in rebellion against God. But for the righteous... for those who revere the Lord... for those who take God seriously... **“The sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings.”** This is a beautiful and hope-filled image. Malachi uses the sun as a metaphor for God’s saving presence. To those who love God, the same fire that consumes the wicked will **heal, restore, comfort, and renew.**

And the result will be, **“You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.”** This is the joy of freedom — joy that is uncontainable, unforced, unstoppable. The picture is of young calves released from their confinement, springing into an open field with energy and delight. It’s Advent joy. It’s resurrection joy. It’s the joy of knowing that God’s purpose includes not only judgment, but healing and restoration for His people.

### **The “Sun of Righteousness” and Jesus Christ**

Early Christians saw, in *Malachi 4:2*, a reference to Christ. That’s why Charles Wesley included the phrase in his Christmas hymn, **“Hark! The Herald Angels Sing”**:

*Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace!*

*Hail the Sun of Righteousness!*

*Light and life to all He brings,*

*Risen with healing in His wings.*

Jesus is the true and eternal Light of the world. He shines in the darkness. He exposes sin, not to condemn us, but to heal us. Jesus brings warmth to cold hearts, direction to wandering souls, and life to those who sit in the shadow of death.

But the sun’s warmth is only good news for those who step into its light. For those who reject Christ, the day of the Lord will be a day of reckoning. Malachi wants us to feel

the weight of this truth: **Because God’s justice and mercy don’t change, part of God’s purpose is judgment for the wicked and healing for the righteous.**

In *Revelation 21*, John tells us that in the New Jerusalem, “*the city has no need of sun or moon... for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb.*” Christ is our light — now and forever.

### **God Calls Us to Prepare Our Hearts for Christ** (*Malachi 4:4–6*)

In the final verses of the Old Testament, God shares a command and a promise:

**“Remember the teaching of my servant Moses.”**

God is calling people back to the foundation of the Lord’s unchanging purpose: God’s Word. God’s law. God’s covenant. God’s commands. This isn’t nostalgia; this is obedience. God is saying: “You want to be ready for My coming? Return to my Word. Live in my ways. Build your life on my commandments.” This is what taking God seriously looks like.

**“I will send you the prophet Elijah.”**

This is a promise of a forerunner — one who will prepare the way for the Lord, who will call people to repentance, who will turn hearts back to God. In the New Testament, ***Luke 1:17*** explicitly applies this prophecy to **John the Baptist**: “*He will go before the Lord in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of parents to their children.*”

John is the bridge between Malachi and Jesus. He stands at the crossroads of the Testaments, proclaiming the same message that Malachi proclaimed: “Prepare the way of the Lord.” “Repent.” “Bear fruit worthy of repentance.” “Take God seriously.” John was preparing people for **the coming of Christ — the Sun of Righteousness**. We see a fulfilment of this in what’s called the Transfiguration of Jesus, an experience that Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record in their gospels. ***Matthew 17:1-3*** says, “After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. **His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.**”

Malachi ends with both warning and hope. He warns that if hearts are not turned, the land will face a curse. But he hopes for a people who respond to God’s unchanging purpose with repentance, obedience, and faith. The New Testament tells us the story:

Jesus came — he healed, preached, taught, forgave, died, and rose again. And now Christ reigns, calling all people everywhere to repentance and faith.

Malachi's message isn't ancient history. It's a word for us, now. God's purpose hasn't changed. God's call hasn't changed. God's standards have not changed. God's holiness hasn't changed. God's mercy hasn't changed. God's desire for our hearts hasn't changed. We're still called to take God seriously.

### **How Do We Take God Seriously Today?**

Malachi gives us six steps:

- 1. Revere the Lord — live in awe of God.** Not with casual faith, but reverent, wholehearted devotion. A faith that shapes every part of life.
- 2. Think on God's name.** Fill your mind with God's Word. Lift your prayers to Him. Speak often of God's goodness and truth.
- 3. Live distinctly from the world.** Malachi says, *"You shall see the difference between the righteous and the wicked."* There should be a clear distinction in how we live, speak, love, forgive, and serve.
- 4. Prepare your heart.** John the Baptist prepared the way for Christ's first coming. We prepare for Christ's return by repentance, worship, obedience, and faith.
- 5. Trust the Sun of Righteousness.** When you're weary, Christ brings warmth. When you're wounded, Christ brings healing. When you're captive, Christ brings freedom. When you're in darkness, Christ brings light.
- 6. Long for your name to be written in the Book of Life.** Not by works, not by achievements, not by church attendance, but by surrendering to Christ and living as His disciple.

Malachi ends the Old Testament with a challenge — and with a promise.

The challenge: **Return to God.** The promise: **The Sun of Righteousness will rise.** God's purpose never changes. God will judge evil, heal God's people, remember the righteous. The Light of the Lord will shine forever. And so, the question echoing across Scripture is the same question for us today: **Will we take God seriously?**

Will our lives testify that we revere God's name, honor God's Word, and walk in the ways of the Lord? Will our names be found in the Book of Remembrance? Will our

names be written in the Lamb's Book of Life? The good news is that because of Jesus Christ — because the Sun of Righteousness has risen— we can answer “yes.”

Yes, Lord, we will revere Your name.

Yes, Lord, we will return to Your Word.

Yes, Lord, we will prepare our hearts.

Yes, Lord, we will follow You.

Yes, Lord, we will take You seriously.

May God give us grace to live in such a way that one day the Lord will say to each of us, “*You shall be Mine... My treasured possession... on the day when I act.*” Amen.

### **Questions for Discussion and Reflection**

1. See *Malachi 3:16*, “The Lord took note and listened...” Where in your life do you most need to remember that God sees and remembers your faithfulness?
  2. What would it look like for you, in your current season, to “take God seriously”?
  3. Malachi says God distinguishes between the righteous and the wicked. In your daily life, what helps you live distinctly as God’s possession instead of a possession of the world?
  4. The “Sun of Righteousness” rises with healing (*Malachi 4:2*). Where do you need Christ’s healing right now—emotionally, spiritually, relationally, or physically?
  5. Malachi calls God’s people to “remember” God’s Word (*Malachi 4:4*). What specific truth or command of Scripture is God calling you to return to right now?
  6. As we begin the Advent season, preparing our hearts for Christ involves repentance. What area of your life is the Holy Spirit inviting you to turn back to God in a fresh way?
  7. *Malachi 3:16-17* speaks of God’s “special possession” and the Book of Life. How does knowing you are God’s treasured possession shape your identity and daily choices?
- Bonus Question: Of the six characteristics of God that don’t change – God’s love, glory, faithfulness, justice, mercy, and purpose – which one means the most to you at this moment in your life? Why?