

Recession Proofing Your Faith

**Cling to Jesus
Malachi 3:13-4:6**

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Introduction to Text: This morning we come to the close of this incredibly challenging book. The focus of our study has been on questions that people of Malachi's time have asked of God. God's responses to the people's questions have given us 6 previous principles of how each of us might "Recession Proof our Faith." We have learned that if we want to recession proof our faith we must:

1. Celebrate God's love—Settle once and for all God's love for us.
2. Celebrate God's Name—Worship with great integrity
3. Confess our Sin—Continually and Authentically
4. Be Careful about our Attitude toward God
5. Completely Repent of Sin
6. Commit our Finances to God

Today, we add to these a 7th principle. Perhaps it is the culminating principle as this prophetic book concludes.

Text: ¹³ "Your words have been harsh against Me,"
Says the LORD,

"Yet you say,

'What have we spoken against You?'

¹⁴ You have said,

'It is useless to serve God;

What profit *is it* that we have kept His ordinance,

And that we have walked as mourners

Before the LORD of hosts?

¹⁵ So now we call the proud blessed,

For those who do wickedness are raised up;

They even tempt God and go free.'"

¹⁶ Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another,

And the LORD listened and heard *them*;

So a book of remembrance was written before Him

For those who fear the LORD

And who meditate on His name.

¹⁷ "They shall be Mine," says the LORD of hosts,

"On the day that I make them My jewels.

And I will spare them

As a man spares his own son who serves him."

¹⁸ Then you shall again discern
Between the righteous and the wicked,
Between one who serves God
And one who does not serve Him.

¹ “For behold, the day is coming,
Burning like an oven,
And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble.
And the day which is coming shall burn them up,”
Says the LORD of hosts,

“ That will leave them neither root nor branch.

² But to you who fear My name
The Sun of Righteousness shall arise
With healing in His wings;
And you shall go out
And grow fat like stall-fed calves.

³ You shall trample the wicked,
For they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet
On the day that I do *this*,”
Says the LORD of hosts.

⁴ “ Remember the Law of Moses, My servant,
Which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel,
With the statutes and judgments.

⁵ Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet
Before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

⁶ And he will turn
The hearts of the fathers to the children,
And the hearts of the children to their fathers,
Lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.”

Introduction: The final question on the hearts of the people of Malachi’s time is given in Malachi 3:13. We sense the same rebellion and argumentative spirit in this question that we have seen in the previous six. The people cannot comprehend that there is anything wrong with their question. Once again, there is no comprehension that they are guilty of anything wrong. To them they have been just in speaking against the LORD.

Again, we ought to be reminded that the questions are the result of the difficult circumstances in which the people are living. The return to the land of Israel has not been easy. They are out of money and there is little hope for the future. Their wicked oppressors seem to be prospering.

Added to this background ought to be the foreshadowing of what is to come. I remind you that following Malachi is the 400 years of approaching silence from God. This final message seems to imply the foreshadowing of the wait to come. This background presents for us, the contemporary reader, an interesting question.

How do you survive the silence when you are hanging on by a thread?

Isn't that what the difficult times of life seem like? Where is God? Where is God's justice? This passage gives us a survival guide for the times of silence when it seems as though we are hanging on by a thread.

1. **Trust God!**

Believe me, I don't mean to seem so simple. But, when we are hanging on by a thread, is there a better plan? In verses 13-18, it seems that two kinds of people are addressed. The first persons addressed are those who do not fear God. They think it useless to serve God. The second group is those who do fear God. The message to them is to persevere—keep their faith in God even when all seems hopeless. From these two groups we are reminded of two truths about God and His justice.

God remembers.

God rewards. This coming day of reckoning will make the distinction between the evil and the righteous clear.

The call of God in the silence is to trust. During one of the most volatile periods of the current economic crisis—a week in which global stock markets declined by \$7 trillion—Philip Yancey received a call from an editor at *Time* magazine. The editor's question was simple: "How should a person pray during a crisis like this?" Here is a summary of what Yancey shared in response:

The first stage is simple, an instinctive cry: "Help!" For someone who faces a job cut or health crisis or watches retirement savings wither away, prayer offers a way to voice fear and anxiety. I have learned to resist the tendency to edit my prayers so that they sound sophisticated and mature. I believe God wants us to come exactly as we are, no matter how childlike we may feel. A God aware of every sparrow that falls surely knows the impact of scary financial times on frail human beings. ...

If I pray with the intent to listen as well as talk, I can enter into a second stage, that of meditation and reflection. Okay, my life savings has virtually disappeared. What can I learn from this seeming catastrophe? ...

A time of crisis presents a good opportunity to identify the foundation on which I construct my life. If I place my ultimate trust in financial security or in the government's ability to solve my problems, I will surely watch the basement flood and the walls crumble.

2. **Trust that God is at work!**

God's silence does not mean that He is idle.

Was God doing nothing during these four hundred years of silence? No, in fact, these years were packed with activity—God's activity. Maybe God seems silent, but trust Him, and by faith believe that He is always at work in your life—even if you do not see that activity.

Dave Dravecky's story is one of hope, courage and perseverance in the midst of dark and overwhelming uncertainty. In 1988 Dave was at the top of his game and life. Not only did he have a wonderful family but he was reaching his all-star peak playing the game of his childhood dreams. His 5-1 opening day victory over the Dodgers was overshadowed later that fall by the discovery of cancer and the removal of half of the deltoid muscle in his pitching arm. For baseball

fans worldwide Dave Dravecky etched his name into history on August 10, 1989. Defying all odds, after battling cancer in his pitching arm, Dave came back to pitch once again in the Major Leagues. People were on their feet cheering and anticipating the game while he stretched and warmed up. He became an inspiration not only to cancer fighters, but to all who needed hope that day.

As Dave took the mound, no one could deny the miracle that was taking place. After being told by his doctors, "Short of a miracle, you'll never pitch again," Dave pitched a 4-3 win for the San Francisco Giants. Sadly, Dave's comeback was short-lived. Five days later, in Montreal, Dave threw "...the pitch that could be heard round the world." Dave's arm had split in two. As he tumbled to the ground, his mind filled with doubt and fear. Little did he know that the dream he had since he was a little boy, was simply a platform for his purpose to share hope with the suffering around the world.

*Dave's triumphant defeat of the cancer and his return to the game of baseball is chronicled in his award winning book, *Comeback*, which has sold more than 650,000 copies. After Dave's comeback and fall from the mound, with the weakened bone, the cancer returned yet again. The arm was not going to get better at this point so Dave decided to retire from his dream, the game of baseball, in November of 1989.*

*Slowly the treatment and the cancer ate away Dave's arm and simultaneously his career. Radiation treatment after radiation treatment resulted in a staph infection that placed a hole in the middle of his arm exposing bone. Finally, the arm along with Dave's shoulder blade and left side of his collar bone had to be amputated for fear the cancer would spread and take Dave's life. The second part of Dravecky's story is told in a second book, *When You Can't Comeback*. (From His Website)*

Listen to Dave's advice about the silence of God.

"I have learned that God's silence to my questions is not a door slammed in my face. I may not have answers. **But I do have him.**" (Dave Dravecky)

3. **Trusting that God is at work, Keep His Commands!**

Too many times, I have seen people give up on God by ceasing their obedience to His Word. Anticipating this response, the prophet Malachi says, "Remember the Law of Moses." In the midst of the silence we just keep doing what God has told us to do.

Samuel Johnson, devout Christian, and compiler of an English Dictionary in the 1700's said, "He that hopes to find peace by trusting God must **obey Him.**"

Samuel Johnson in Sermons (XIV). Christianity Today, Vol. 37, no. 2.

4. **Trusting that God is at work and keeping His Commands, Keep Looking Up!**

Ultimately, this text tells those Old Testament recipients to keep looking for the Messiah. In similar fashion, the message for us is to keep looking up. Keep looking to Jesus.

On Saturday, Feb. 1, 2003, the Space Shuttle Columbia exploded only 16 minutes before its anticipated landing. The crew of 7 consisted of at least two very outspoken and unashamed followers of Jesus—Michael Anderson and Rick Husband. Many amazing stories come from the lives of these two faithful astronauts. Among the stories told about them is one story of what Michael Anderson told his minister days before lift-off. Reportedly, he told his pastor, "If this thing (referring to the Columbia flight) doesn't come out right, don't you worry about me. I'm just going on higher." (source: CBS TV News Feb 4, 2003)

What if your present crisis doesn't turn out right? Keep looking up! Looking unto Jesus is not only all that you can do, it is precisely what you ought to do.