# If You Love Me, Trust My Timing

Malachi 2:17-3:6

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*Return to God’s Love (Malachi)*

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**livinghopechurch.net**

**Introduction**: Open your Bible to Malachi 2 and 3. We are continuing in a series in Malachi called “Returning to God’s Love.” Tonight’s study is entitled: “If You Love Me, Trust My Timing.”

It’s hard to wait on God, but every moment of waiting is designed to increase our joy and trust in God. Consider the words of George Mueller as he speaks of the joy of waiting on God.



 “It is impossible to describe the abundance of peace and heavenly joy that often flows into my soul because of the answers I obtain from God after waiting on Him for help and blessing. The longer I have had to wait on Him or the greater my need it, the greater the enjoyment when at last the answer came.” **~ George Mueller**

**Context of Malachi**

Disillusionment had followed the rebuilding of the temple because, though decade followed decade, no supernatural event marked the return of the Lord to Zion. So far as could be judged the Jews had done their part, but God failed to fulfil his promises like **Zechariah 8:3-5**, “Thus says the Lord: I have returned to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem shall be called the faithful city, and the mountain of the Lord of hosts, the holy mountain. **4**Thus says the Lord of hosts: Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of great age. **5**And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets.”

**Malachi 2:17-3:6**, “You have wearied the Lord with your words. But you say, “How have we wearied him?” By saying, “Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them.” Or by asking, “Where is the God of justice?”

3:1 “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. 2 But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. 3 He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord. 4 Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.

5 “Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner [*immigrant*], and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts.

6 “For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.”

1. Trust God’s **Silence**, (Mal 2:17).

**Malachi 2:17**, “You have wearied the Lord with your words. But you say, “How have we wearied him?” By saying, “Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them.” Or by asking, “Where is the God of justice?”

The Lord’s delays were being taken as an excuse for a kind of practical atheism. The question “Where is the God of justice?” was tantamount to doubting his existence. They no longer felt his presence or saw his blessing.

**Why Does God Delay in Answering Our Prayers?**

Let me say something several times tonight: Just because God is not on your timetable, doesn’t mean he’s not listening. God often delays in answering our prayers.[[1]](#footnote-1)

1. **Our focus is off.** At times the Lord sees that our attention is misdirected. Our relationship with Him should have priority over any earthly matter. Minds and prayers can become so fixed upon a need that our gaze shifts away from Him. The Father may delay His answer until we refocus on Him.
* **Mark 12:30**, “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.”
* **Matthew 6:33**, “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”
1. **God’s plans are bigger than our plans.** In other situations, God waits because the timing is not right for granting our request. Perhaps certain events must happen first, or people’s thinking needs to be changed.
2. **God is growing us.** There are also seasons when the Lord wants to stretch and grow our faith. One of the ways He accomplishes that is by having us watch for His response. The Holy Spirit will work in these times of waiting to mature us and bring forth righteous fruit (Gal. 5:22-23).
3. **Habitual sin in our lives.** Other reasons are a wrong motive for our request (James 4:3) and the practice of habitual sin. We all fall short when it comes to God’s standard of holiness, but some of us persist in a *lifestyle* of disobedience. The Lord may delay His answer so He can prompt us to confess our sin and turn back to Him.

Waiting on the Lord isn’t easy—faith and trust are needed (Heb. 11:1). If His answer is delayed, check that 1) your focus is on Him, 2) your motive for asking is God-honoring, and 3) you aren’t practicing habitual sin. Then believe that His response will be for your good and His glory. I love **Psalm 39:7**, “And now, O Lord, for what do I wait? My hope is in you.”

**Their Complaint: Why Do the Evil Prosper?**

The age-old problem raised by the apparent prosperity of the evil man was a live issue in Malachi’s day. It appeared that God favored the wicked, and both Jeremiah (Jer. 12:1) and Habakkuk (Hab. 1:2–4) had questioned God’s just ordering of providence, while at the same time maintaining their faith in God’s ultimate righteousness.[[2]](#footnote-2)

It seems to them that God favors evil men, seeing how the evil people were prospering rather than destroyed.[[3]](#footnote-3) The people of Israel in Malachi’s day had hardened their hearts to the Lord. They viewed their present circumstances as God being silent. To them, it was like God was ignoring them.

**Cynicism Stains Everything**

When our hope is not in the Lord, our hearts become hard and cynical like those in Jerusalem during Malachi’s day. I read recently about a man who had a large, bushy moustache. While he was sleeping, some young pranksters smeared limburger cheese on his moustache. When he awoke his first comment was, ‘This room stinks!’ He immediately went into another room and pronounced: ‘This house stinks.’ He then stepped outside, and sniffed, and muttered, ‘The whole world stinks!’

I’ve known some people who thought the whole world stank when the real trouble was right beneath their own noses! There is not much anyone can do with a person who insists on seeing the dark cloud behind every silver lining.[[4]](#footnote-4)

**Reasons for Cynicism**

Why do people get cynical towards God? It is because they construct some notion of what he must do and when he must do it. If it does not happen according to their preconceived notion, they conclude that he has failed. Malachi’s people were upset with God because, in their opinion, he had not corrected things that were crying for attention.

This complaint was their way of expressing unhappiness with God for not sending the Messiah. To their minds the Messiah was overdue. It was so clear to them, but it had not happened. Although God had demonstrated throughout their nation’s history that he would be faithful to his promises, their faith in him was shaken. They took God’s delay in fulfilling his promise to mean he was not going to keep his promise. So they thought he had let them down.[[5]](#footnote-5)

**The Result of Cynicism**

Malachi leaves no doubt about the seriousness of their cynicism. He says it had ‘wearied the Lord.’

Most of us are not accustomed to the idea of God getting tired. We think of the words of the prophet Isaiah: “Have you not known? Have you not heard? The everlasting God, the Lord, the creator of the ends of the earth neither faints nor is weary” (**Isa. 40:28**).[[6]](#footnote-6)

So we understand that God never gets truly “weary.” He is omnipotent. The expression is an anthorpopathism – attributing human attributes to God in order to help us understand God.

**God Wearied with Sinful Hearts and Words**

Malachi says that the people of Israel had “wearied the Lord” with their words. God is never said to be wearied with human prayers and questions but only with human sin.[[7]](#footnote-7) **Isaiah 43:24** says it well, “You have not bought me sweet cane with money, or satisfied me with the fat of your sacrifices. But you have burdened me with your sins; you have wearied me with your iniquities.”

**What Were the Words that Wearied God?**

What then was it that wearied God? It was a sinful understanding of God where God is somehow absent, uninterested, and lacked justice. **Malachi 2:17**, The priests were “saying, “Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them.” And they were asking: “Where is the God of justice?”

**The Root of God’s Weariness was Their Unbelief**

The center of God’s weariness was their unbelieving heart and their cynical prayers. Remember it was the priests who first said that their worship was a burden and said, “What a weariness!”

It’s like **Isaiah 43:24** says, “You have burdened me with your sins; you have wearied me with your iniquities.”

**Asaph’s Confusion**

Asaph in Psalm 73 begins to have a cynical heart, but he brings it to the Lord.

**Psalm 73:1-3, 12, 16-19**, “Truly God is good to Israel,

 to those who are pure in heart.

2 But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled,

 my steps had nearly slipped.

3 For I was envious of the arrogant

 when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

12 Behold, these are the wicked;

 always at ease, they increase in riches.

13 All in vain have I kept my heart clean

 and washed my hands in innocence.

16 But when I thought how to understand this,

 it seemed to me a wearisome task,

17 until I went into the sanctuary of God;

 then I discerned their end.

18 Truly you set them in slippery places;

 you make them fall to ruin.

19 How they are destroyed in a moment,

 swept away utterly by terrors!”

Asaph had to consider the ultimate and final judgment of God before he could understand how He might trust in God for God’s final justice.

1. Trust God’s **Son**, (Mal 3:1-4).

The ultimate answer to evil is answered in the cross of Christ. Here we see the

**Malachi 3:1-4**, “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will **suddenly come to his temple**; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. 2 But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. 3 He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord. 4 Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.”

The Lord here assures his people that he has not forgotten his promise to send the Messiah. The one whom they were seeking would be preceded by a special messenger from God (John the Baptist). [[8]](#footnote-8)

John Benton writes: ‘John the Baptist was like a herald going before the royal procession to indicate the route that the king would take and to make preparations for his coming.’[[9]](#footnote-9)

**The Lord Will Suddenly Come to His Temple**

Furthermore, the Messiah would ‘suddenly come to his temple.’ The Lord probably chose to emphasize this because of the attitude that the people had towards the temple that had been rebuilt after the captivity. Because it could not compare with their first temple, built by Solomon, many were disappointed. Here the Lord tells them that their temple would have a glory all its own, a glory which could not be matched even by Solomon’s. Their temple would be visited by the Messiah himself![[10]](#footnote-10)

**The Lord is Coming but He’s Coming to Judge**

The hearts of the people may very well have leaped within them as they heard Malachi assure them that the Messiah would come to their temple. They could not have been elated for long. The reason? Malachi proceeded to deliver a stinging message. Yes, the Messiah was coming, but he would not do what they were expecting. He would come to deal with the sins of Israel!

**Refiners Fire and Fullers Soap**

**Malachi 3:2-3**, “But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. 3 He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord.”

Malachi makes this point by saying that the Messiah would come ‘like a refiner’s fire’ and ‘like fullers’ soap’ (v. 2). As the refiner removes impurities from silver and the fuller (launderer) removes filth from clothes, so the Messiah would come to cleanse. And this cleansing work would apply to all. Even the religious leaders (‘the sons of Levi’—v. 3) would not be exempt from it. The Messiah would purify them so they would give ‘an offering in righteousness’ (v. 3).[[11]](#footnote-11)

**God Wants His People Holy**

**Malachi 3:3-4**, “He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord. 4 Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.”

The refiner who sits and concentrates all his attention on the metal in the crucible depicts something of the concern of the Lord for the holiness of his people. He begins at his sanctuary (cf. Ezek. 9:6) with *the sons of Levi* to purify them *till they present right offerings*, or, more literally, *offerings in righteousness*. Both senses are needed. Once character has been transformed and purified the offerings (Heb. *minḥâ*) will both be worthy and be offered in the right spirit.

Only then will the rest of the population, who no doubt also undergo the purifying process, be able to offer what is *pleasing to the Lord as in days of old*.[[12]](#footnote-12)

1. Trust God’s **Judgment**, (Mal 3:5-6).

**Malachi 3:5-6**, “Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner [*immigrant*], and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts. 6 “For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.”

Graham Scroggie said, “**They that wait upon the Lord will also wait for Him**.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

God is angry with the wicked. Anger is not a bad thing.

The cross is a declaration of forgiveness for those who fear God enough to believe, it is a declaration of guilt for those who do not fear God and do not believe.

God has a long wick…but because God is JUST, He does get angry. The wicked will be punished. God describes Himself to Moses in **Exodus 3:6-7**, “The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, 7 keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.”

The contrast is in **Malachi 3:5**, “Then I will draw near to you for judgment.” The “THEN” of verse 5 has not yet come—the day of Judgment—but it will come when Jesus returns. For His people, Jesus is a witness for the defense. For those who are not His people, Jesus is a witness for the prosecution. And by the time Jesus arrives in His second coming, the trial is over and the judgment is swift. This can easily lead us to stand afar from the world with pride, instead of dwelling in it with love. We will be tempted to act as judge since it seems like God is taking so long. ***Remember you and I are not the Judge. That job is already taken.***

**Anger is Not Always Sinful**

It is not wrong for God to be angry. Anger is a reality in the human heart, and it is something we must control, or it will control us.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon said if we don’t kill anger, anger will kill us: “Do not say, ‘I cannot help having a bad temper.’ Friend, you must help it. Pray to God to help you overcome it at once, for either you must kill it, or it will kill you. You cannot carry a bad temper into heaven.”

Anger is often one of the top problems in marriage. It is often seen either in the withdrawal of a spouse in the marriage or else in explosive indignation. Both are symptoms of a larger underlying root: sinful anger.

**Anger Defined**

Anger defined simply, is taking an emotional stand for one’s convictions of right and wrong. It is saying, “I’m against something.” Something you believe is wrong. That kind of anger can be very good or it can be very bad, depending on what master you value.

**Sovereign Anger**

***God is angry***. As Christians, we need to realize that an-ger is not in and of itself sinful. Anger is a holy and perfect attribute of God—it is part of His justice. **Psalm 7:11**, “God judges the righteous, and God is angry with the wicked every day.”

***God is angry against one thing: sin***. Any time man ventures outside of God’s control and sovereign Lordship, we call that sin. **1 John 3:4**, “sin is the transgression of the law.” When we venture outside of God’s rule over us, we have betrayed God’s Lordship and usurped His throne. When sin occurs in the universe, God meticulously demands justices. The fury of His holiness and goodness boils against sin.

**Human Anger and God’s Anger**

Anger is an emotion God has given to all humanity as a tool to maintain a passion for holiness and righteousness. We all have anger in our lives. It is something that exists because things are not right in the universe.

The Bible says that on this day Jesus Christ will come “in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess 1:8). The mouths that right now are blaspheming God will be eternally stopped. Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. After Christ comes, we will all face Him, and He will be sitting on an awesome radiant throne of judgment, and it says He is the One “from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away” (Rev 20:11).

The reality of God’s anger with the world should not lead us to pride, but humility, because in the judgment of the world, we see the judgment we deserve.

* Knowing that God is angry and that there is a coming judgment of the world helps me to know that God’s silence is not indifference—it should lead me to faith.
* Knowing that God is angry and there is a coming judgment of the world helps me to know that what feels like judgment now is refinement—it should lead me to grow and worship, even in pain.
* Knowing that God is angry and that there is a coming judgment of the world helps me to restrain my own indifference—it should lead me to mission.

**We are Not Consumed**

**Malachi 3:6**, “For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.”

**God Broke the Silence with Jesus**

God answers Israel’s accusations by telling them, He was coming to prove they were wrong…in person. And he did come.

This is the last word that He has spoken, but it is not the last word He will speak. Jesus is coming again. His crucifixion proves that the evil of this world disgusts Him, and that He is willing to give pay the ultimate price to make it right. Don’t mistake his silence for approval, or his slowness for indifference. He sees. He knows. He cares. For the Christian, know that one day He will make all things right. And for the Non-Christian, know that the day will come suddenly—today is your day to turn from your sin and turn toward Jesus. Believe and experience God as loving Father for if you don’t, you will experience Him as a wrathful Judge He will witnesses for his children, and He will witnesses against his enemies.

**God is Not Willing that Any Should Perish**

You may not think God is angry right now, but He is. Actually, God is patiently waiting for one final day when He will bring justice to every injustice, and he will thrust in His harvesting sickle into the earth, and gather all men to Him.

**2 Peter 3:3-13**, “…Knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. 4 They will say, “Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation.” 5 For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, 6 and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. 7 But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.

8 But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9 The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

11 Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, 12 waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! 13 But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.”

May the Lord help us to trust in His mercy, and pray for our patience and the salvation of many of our loved ones, friends, and even our enemies! Let us by God’s grace trust his timing.

1. The following section is adapted from Charles Stanley. Taken from *Waiting for Answers to Prayer*, by InTouch Ministries. June 29, 2011. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ibid., 263. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Cheung, Vincent (2014-11-26). Commentary On Malachi (Kindle Locations 1285-1286). Lulu.com. Kindle Edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ellsworth, R. (2007). *Opening up Malachi* (p. 62). Leominster: Day One Publications. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid., 163. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid., 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Baldwin, J. G. (1972). *Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary* (Vol. 28, pp. 263–264). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid., 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Benton, *Losing Touch*, p. 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ellsworth, 65-66. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid., 66-67. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Baldwin, *Malachi*, 265-66. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Graham Scroggie. *Soul-Depths and Soul-Heights*, 1874. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)