# If You Love Me, Wait for My Son

Malachi 4

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*Return to God’s Love (Malachi)*

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**livinghopechurch.net**

**Introduction**: Open your Bible to Malachi 4. We are continuing in a series in Malachi called “I Still Love You.” Tonight’s study is entitled: “If You Love Me, Wait for My Son.”

Waiting is not easy. We long for things to be made right. We yearn for our tears to be wiped away. Something is wrong in the universe. Who will fix it? A day is coming when the Lord will restore all things as new. The Father in heaven is sending Messiah soon – so Malachi tells the people of his day. Messiah is coming. Be faithful to wait for him, because without the sacrifice of Jesus God would meticulously meet out judgment. “I will come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.” That’s the last sentence in the Old Testament. It doesn’t sound hopeful, but it is. We could paraphrase the last sentence in the old covenant from a New Testament perspective like this: “Unless Jesus comes, there will be utter doom for you.” Utter. Doom. Here’s the point: we need Jesus.

The Waiting Will Soon End (4:1-3)

 “‘For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch” (Mal 4:1).

What day is the prophet recalling? “There can be no doubt that Malachi was referring to the day which he mentioned in the last verse of chapter 3, that is, the Day of Judgement.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

**God’s Fire for Believer and Unbeliever**

God is like a refiner’s fire to the **believer**, bringing the heart and crucible of trials to the believer’s life in order to purify his children. But to the **unbeliever**, God is like the destructive fire of an oven that burns so hot, there will be “neither root nor branch.” The prophet compares it to the burning of a furnace and likens the wicked to **stubble** and **shrubs** that will be unable to stand the fire of that terrible day.[[2]](#footnote-2) In other words, God’s punishment cannot be withstood or escaped from. There are not exits in hell.

We don’t like to think about it, but the Day of Judgment is coming. All unbelievers will suddenly be like chaff in a burning furnace. “When the stubble hits the oven, it is burned, and when the wicked hit judgement, they are consumed.”[[3]](#footnote-3) As the writer of Hebrews warned: “For our God is a devouring fire” (Heb 12:29, NLT).

**Jonathan Edwards Description of Hell**

Jonathan Edwards described this scene on Judgment Day in frightening, yet accurate terms. He said God is not “unmindful” of the wickedness of sinners. He is not like them at all, but is **pained by wickedness** and must punish it. God is not forgetful as the lost imagine him to be.

“The wrath of God burns against them, their damnation don’t slumber, the pit is prepared, the fire is made ready, the furnace is now hot, ready to receive them, the flames do now rage and glow. The glittering sword is whet [sharpened], and held over them, and the pit hath opened her mouth under them.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

**No More Wait for the Wicked’s Judgment** (4:1)

 “For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven…” (Mal 4:1a). God has not forgotten the wicked. There is a day coming in which God will judge the wicked.

“Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev 20:11-15).

God will “set them ablaze.” Jesus will come “in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who know not God and obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 1:8).

**Jesus’ Warning of Hell**

Jesus speaks to the multitude gathered about the ultimate calamity. It was not physical death. It was rather being “cast into hell.”

 “I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him!” (Lk 12:4-5).

The word translated “hell” is the Greek word “Gehenna.” The word was the city refuse dump where the fires unceasingly burned. It is a frightening representation of that which awaits those without God.[[5]](#footnote-5)

There is much about hell that we do not know. But the story of the rich man and the beggar named Lazarus in Luke 16 reveals much.

“There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house— for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’  But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead’” (Lk 16:19-31).

From this passage we know:

• Hell is a real place

• It is a place of separation from God and all that is good (Lk 16:23)

• It is a place of just punishment (Lk 16:24)

• It is a place where there is memory (Lk 16:25)

• It is a place of hopelessness (Lk 16:26)

Something else we know is that we do not have to go there. Those who confess the truth about Jesus will be saved. The coming day of judgment will be quite different for these (Rom 8:1).[[6]](#footnote-6)

**No More Wait for the Righteous’ Reward** (Mal 4:2-3).

“‘But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings” (Mal 4:2).

The church fathers from Justin onward have almost universally understood the “sun of righteousness” to be Christ.[[7]](#footnote-7) Martin Luther in particular said, “Under the Law there is weakness and condemnation; under the wings of Christ, under the Gospel, there is strength and salvation.”[[8]](#footnote-8) Whereas when we were lost, the guilt and shame of our transgressions against God’s law flew over us like a pack of vultures indicating death, so God’s grace and love pursue his children like a winged sun, representing the desire of God’s heart to do good to unworthy people.

**The Winged Sun of Righteousness**

The Old Testament closes with the promise of the rising of the winged “sun” of righteousness. The New Testament closes with the promise of the rising of the “morning star” (Rev 22:16).[[9]](#footnote-9) What is this winged sun?

**Hezekiah’s Signet Ring**

The symbol of the winged sun was so powerful in the hearts of ancient believers that it was adopted by some of the Hebrew kings, most noteworthy of which is Hezekiah. In 2015, the royal seal of King Hezekiah’s signet right was discovered on the grounds of the royal palace in Jerusalem.[[10]](#footnote-10) It reads, “Hezekiah, Son of Ahaz, King of Judah.” There is an “Ankh” which is a cross with a circle at the top. It is the most ancient symbol in human writing which symbolizes “eternal life.” But there is also the symbol of the winged sun – a symbol that God’s grace and protection will follow you wherever you go. This was a very common symbol that the prophet Malachi refers to in Malachi 4. We see it in the sketch of Hezekiah’s signet ring below.

**An Ancient Symbol**

The symbol of the winged sun goes back to 2000 BC in Egypt where it represented the sun god and the Pharaoh.



*The Egyptian winged sun disk (Parayre 1990: plate 1, no. 1)*

**Why a Winged Sun?**

Why would Hezekiah use an ancient pagan symbol from Egypt for his reign? And why would Malachi use this symbol to point to the coming Messiah?

In view of the Old Testament Scriptures’ description of Yahweh in several passages as an infinite God with cosmic features, wings, and one whose name derives from a verb meaning ‘to be,’ we can begin to comprehend the reasons the Judean royalty might have appropriated such a symbol.

The winged sun effectively served the purpose of promoting the worship of Yahweh alone, principally in his role as the God most high, over against the Assyrian local deities to the North and other Canaanite deities that had infected Israel and Judah, such as Asherah and Baal.[[11]](#footnote-11)

**The Grace of God Follows You with Wings**

The prophet Malachi applies this ancient symbol to the grace of God that follows the child of God. “But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings” (Mal 4:2). In other words, “the sun of God’s grace will follow you wherever you go!”

The winged sun originating from Egypt was adopted, especially by Hezekiah, as a picture of the eternal, infinite God who gives eternal life. Malachi, reading 2 Chronicles written a hundred years before Malachi by Ezra, would have known about Hezekiah’s symbol and uses it as a way to encourage those who truly fear the Lord.

What a hopeful message Malachi gave: there is coming a day when God will spare the righteous. His winged sun of righteousness will follow you wherever you go.

This blessing reminds us of the Levitical blessing – “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace” (Num 6:24-26).

**Leaping like Freed Calves**

“You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall” (Mal 4:2b). For the Christian who understands he or she is loved by God, there is such “joy unspeakable and full of glory” that inside we feel like **a calf that has been freed** – jumping and leaping for pure joy. We were in the stall of sin, and one day we will be “released into the sunshine from their dingy stalls, kick up their heels in sheer exuberance.”[[12]](#footnote-12)

**What Shall We do While We Wait?**

We know the day is coming, but what shall we do while we wait? Malachi tells us to “remember the law” of Moses. Remember Sinai. We are so guilty, it is worth waiting for God’s “Sun of Righteousness.”

The Law Tells us to Wait in Faith (4:4)

“Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel” (Mal 4:4).

Horeb is another name for Sinai in the book of Deuteronomy. How frightful God’s law was at Sinai. The lightening lit up the sky when God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. The thunder rolled and fire burned furiously on her peak. No one was permitted to come near the base of the mountain upon penalty of death.

The Ten Commandments lay out our obligations to God and man. We can’t be saved by keeping the commandments. “For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20).

What is the purpose of God telling us to “remember the law” of Moses? Why would God draw such attention to his terrifying law at Mount Sinai in a prophecy about his love? The law cannot save us, but is like a mirror that shows us our need of Christ.

The law, Paul says, is the “schoolmaster” that brings us to Christ (Gal 3:24). This is an especially important tension in the Bible. God is holy. Man is wretched and sinful. We look to God and his law and see ourselves as condemned, overcome with guilt and shame. I deserve hell. My conscience and God’s law condemn me. It is this humiliation in the soul that brings us to see our deep need for Christ. Remember the law of Moses! You cannot fulfill it (Rom 3:20). But there is one who has.

**Remembering the Law Points Us to Imputation**

The law of Moses condemns us. Someone has to die. Either I have to die for my sins in hell or a perfect sacrifice has to take my place.

When we “remember the law” of Moses, it points us to what New Testament scholars call “imputation.” What is imputation? Theologian Dr. Tim Keller says it this way: “Jesus lived the life we should have lived, and died the death we should have died.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

Puritan John Owen explained, “The Lord Christ fulfilled the whole law for us; He did not only undergo the penalty of it due unto our sins, but also yielded that perfect obedience which it did require.”[[14]](#footnote-14)

We realize that no human being can keep the law of God righteously. There is only one who is righteous, Jesus. Theologians talk about his obedience for us being active and passive. Jesus perfectly obeyed the law in thought, word and deed in his life, and he perfectly satisfied God’s wrath in his death.

Remember the law! Christ fulfilled it. “For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them” (Rom 10:5). Has anyone done that? Only Jesus Christ!

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb 4:15).

J. Greshem Machen said, “Every event of Jesus’ life was a part of that glorious keeping of the law of God by which he earned for his people the reward of eternal life.”[[15]](#footnote-15)

So we have good reason to “remember the law.” Christ fulfilled it on our behalf.

**A New Law**

Of course Christians have a new law in their hearts when they are born again. At the close of the Old Testament we await a new law that came at Pentecost. The Spirit of God is poured out at Pentecost and now indwells all born again people. These people constitute the “Body of Christ” and the new “Temple.”

“For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (Eph 2:18-22).

This is consistent with the teaching of Paul in Romans 8:1-4, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For t**he law of the Spirit of life has set you free** in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (cf. Eze 36:25-27).

Not only should we wait in faith by remembering the law. We should wait in faith looking for what Elijah and all the prophets was pointing to.

Elijah Tells us to Wait in Faith (4:5-6a)

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers…” (Mal 4:5-6a).

We know that this prophecy of “Elijah” is pointing to the ministry of John the Baptist (Matt. 11:11–14; 17:10–13), and we know that John the Baptist came to pave the way for Jesus (John 1:19–34).[[16]](#footnote-16)

It was John who (referring to Malachi 4) cried out: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me’” (Jn 1:29-30).

**John is the NT Elijah**

Jesus interpreted these verses so clearly in Matthew 11:11-15, “Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

**All the Prophets Point to Jesus**

Jesus told the Pharisees, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me” (Jn 5:39).

After Jesus’ resurrection, Jesus walked the **road to Emmaus** and one of them named Cleopas explained the unusual events of that day. He said, ‘Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see.’ And he said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Lk 24:24-27).

All the prophets point to Jesus. So look to where the prophets are pointing.

**The Power of the Gospel on the Family**

By the way, the ministry of John the Baptist would prove to have a profound effect on the family life of the people of Israel. It would turn the hearts of fathers towards their children and the hearts of the children towards their fathers. How we need such a turning! And that turning can come only as parents and children find a common bond in the Christ of whom John spoke. [[17]](#footnote-17)

What if We Don’t Wait in Faith? (4:6b)

We must look to Jesus through the Law and the Prophets, God says, “lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction” (Mal 4:6b).

John the Baptist will come with a ministry of repentance that will introduce the one who will hold back the curse. If this doesn’t happen, then God would have to “come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.”

Without Jesus’ coming, we have only judgment to look forward to. But in Christ there is “no condemnation” (Rom 8:1).

In a tender and genuine sense, God closes out the book of Malachi and the Old Testament and says, “I’m sending Jesus soon. Wait for me! You can be sure he is coming, because *I still love you*.”

1. Ellsworth, Malachi, 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. VanGemeren, W. A. (1995). [Malachi](https://ref.ly/logosres/ecb;ref=Bible.Mal4.1-3;off=1096;ctx=_experience_(4:1$E2$80$933).~_The_prophet_compare). In *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible* (Vol. 3, p. 711). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid., 84-85. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Edwards, Jonathan and Smolinski, Reiner, Editor, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. A Sermon Preached at Enfield, July 8th, 1741.” (1741). Electronic Texts in American Studies. Paper 54, p.7. http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/etas/54 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ellsworth, *Malachi*, 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid, 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Boice, J. M. (2002). *The Minor Prophets: an expositional commentary* (p. 611). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Luther, *Luther’s Works,* vol. 18, *Lectures on the Minor Prophets: I,* 418. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Brooks, K. (2009). [*Summarized Bible: Complete Summary of the Old Testament*](https://ref.ly/logosres/summbblot;ref=Bible.Mal4;off=551;ctx=riking_Facts:_v._2._~The_Old_Testament_cl) (p. 215). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Meir Lubetski, “King Hezekiah’s Seal Revisited,” BAR, July/August 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Daniel Sarlo, "Winged Scarab Imagery in Juday: Yahweh as Khepri," University of Toronto, 2014. Accessed 15 March 2017, academia.edu/5562359/Winged\_Scarab\_

Imagery\_in\_Judah\_Yahweh\_as\_Khepri [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ellsworth, *Malachi*, 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Tim Keller. “Gospel-Centered Ministry,” The Gospel Coalition conference, May 23, 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. John Owen. *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith* (London: R. Boulter, 1677), 365. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. J. Gresham Machen, "The Active Obedience of Christ," in God Transcendent (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Ellsworth, *Malachi*, 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Ellsworth, Malachi, 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)