

# God Hears

01/03/2021

Scripture: [Malachi 3:16](#)

Series: [Encouragement For  
Faithful Believers](#)

By: [Colin  
Smith](#)

Happy New Year! May this year be filled for all of us with God's blessing, according to His grace, and with God's help according to our need.

I want to begin the New Year message with a heartfelt word of thanks. The Scripture calls us to endure hardship like a good soldier of Jesus Christ (2 Tim 2:3 NIV). In large measure, you are doing this in an exemplary way.

Over the last year many of you have endured hardship and loss with faith and with fortitude. You have shown the genuineness of your faith by persevering in your commitment to Christ and to His church.

You have accommodated the unusual circumstances of these days, you have put the needs and feelings of others above your own preferences, and you have shown patience with what is less than ideal.

In all of this you have honored the Lord and reflected the beauty of Jesus. So, thank you.

As we come to the beginning of another year, I want to encourage you so I have chosen as the title for this short series, "Encouragement For Faithful Believers."

We are looking at the last book in the Old Testament, so please open your Bible at Malachi 3:16, where we read these words: *Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them* (Mal 3:16).

This may be a less familiar part of the Bible for some of us, and I want to give you a rough timeline so you know where we are in the Bible story. And I think this will help you to see how Malachi speaks to us today.

## **Rough Timeline:**

### **586 B.C. The exile began in Babylon.**

Some had gone into exile before this time, but this was when Jerusalem was destroyed, and God's people were deported to Babylon.

### **538 B.C. The first exiles returned from Babylon**

About fifty years later the first exiles returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of a man called Zerubbabel.

You can imagine the excitement. Here were people of faith venturing out to rebuild the city of God. God's people doing God's work in God's world. First, they built homes. Then they got stuck. Enthusiasm waned, and God sent the prophet Haggai who called on God's people to rebuild the temple.

Then God sent the prophet Zechariah who spoke of a glorious Messianic age. *The Lord will be king over all the earth* (Zech 14:9). *Rejoice...Jerusalem...Your king is coming to you...mounted on a donkey* (Zech 9:9).

That got the people going and the work of rebuilding the temple was completed about 20 years later.

#### **516 b.c. Rebuilding of the temple completed**

After rebuilding the temple, God's people seem to have got stuck again. The city walls were still in ruins, but as often happens after a major project, the will to begin something new was gone. And that's how it was for decades.

#### **458 b.c. Ezra returned to Jerusalem**

About 60 years later, a second wave of settlers returned to Jerusalem under the leadership of Ezra, when Ezra arrived, he found the faith of God's people at a low ebb. He began to teach God's Word and call the people to repentance.

#### **445 b.c. Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem**

Then about 10 years after that, a third wave of settlers returned under the leadership of Nehemiah. He saw that the walls were in ruins, and he led the people in rebuilding the walls.

#### **435 b.c. Malachi spoke the Word of God.**

The book of Malachi comes from the time of Nehemiah. He spoke 80 years after the rebuilding of the temple. The rebuilding of the temple was as far back to them as the second world war is to us.

By the time of Malachi, most of those who had built the temple under the leadership of Zerubbabel would be gone. Their children would be seniors. Their grandchildren would be in midlife.

This was the third, fourth and fifth generation of life in the new community. The promised King had not appeared. The messianic age had not dawned. A mood of discouragement had settled over the people of God, and a growing skepticism was pulling many toward unbelief.

But some remained faithful, and at the end of Malachi, God speaks to them.

I want us to see two things today: What faithful believers face, and what faithful believers do. I use the present tense because what faithful believers faced then and what faithful believers face today are exactly the same.

### 1. What Faithful Believers Face

#### **a. Disappointment With Leaders**

The first responsibility of any leader is to be an example to the people he or she leads. This is true of every parent, every small group leader, every elder and board member, every pastor and ministry leader (1 Peter 5:3).

In Old Testament times, the priests had a special calling to lead. God says, *The lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD*

*of hosts. But you have turned aside from the way. You have caused many to stumble by your instruction. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the LORD of hosts (Mal. 2:7-8).*

Here are leaders, trusted with the Word of God, but some have *turned aside from the way*, and what they did caused *many to stumble*.

I wish the application to our day was not so obvious. But it is. Failures among leaders who have turned aside from the way have eroded the faith of many.

a. Disappointment With leaders

**b. Disruption Of Worship**

We see this in the book of Nehemiah, who served at the same time as Malachi. Nehemiah says, *In those days I saw in Judah people treading winepresses on the Sabbath, and bringing in heaps of grain and loading them on donkeys, and also wine, grapes, figs, and all kinds of loads, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day. And I warned them...* (Neh 13:15).

The normal routine for God's people was that work would stop on Friday evening, and the next 24 hours through Saturday evening would be a Sabbath to the Lord.

The sabbath was a window in time to strengthen a believer's grip on eternity. And at the center of that day was the gathering of God's people for worship.

But Nehemiah tells us that the sabbath had become another day of trading. Worship continued, but it was 'fitted in' beside the unrelenting demands of life. And Nehemiah says, 'I warned them.'

Now again, I wish the application was not so obvious. But it is. Our normal patterns of worship have been disrupted

Disappointment with leaders and Disruption of worship are the background to the main theme of Malachi which is:

**c. Growing Coldness Of Heart**

Speaking of the last days, our Lord said, *The love of many will grow cold* (Matt 24:12). Malachi describes what that looks like.

The book has six sections followed by a response. that is the focus of this series. In each of the six sections God speaks, and His people answer back. It is like an unresolved argument and the longer it goes on the clearer it becomes that people who once professed faith had become cold and resistant towards God.

Malachi shows us what coldness toward God looked like then and what it still looks like today. You can use this profile to examine your own heart and to ask yourself, "Are there signs that I am growing cold?"

A Cold Heart Is

**i. Distant From God**

*"I have loved you," says the LORD. But you say, "How have you loved us?"* (Mal 1:2). Here are people who professed faith, but they no longer believed that God loved them. The love of God is like a blazing fire on

a winter's day. Scripture calls us to keep ourselves in the love of God, (Jude v21). And a cold heart is a heart that is far from the warming fire of God's love.

### ii. Formal In Worship

*You say, 'what a weariness this is'* (Mal 1:13). These people still came to worship, but worship had become a duty. They had been doing this for years and they were tired of it. Worship had become a matter of routine and their hearts were not in it.

### iii. Careless In Marriage

*Guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth* (Mal 2:15). If your heart becomes cold toward God, other people will feel the chill. Those who will feel it most are the people God has placed next to you.

### iv. Persistent In Complaint

*You have wearied the Lord with your words* (Malachi 2:17). One sure sign of a cold heart is the habit of complaint in which all a person can see is what's wrong with the world. A cold heart is a complaining heart and God says 'I am tired of hearing it.' *You have wearied the Lord with your words.*

### v. Reluctant In Prayer And Giving

*Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. But you say, "How shall we return?"* (Malachi 3:7). What an amazing invitation that is! God says, "return to me!" But the cold heart has no interest in drawing near to God.

### vi. Disinterested In Service

*"Your words have been hard against me," says the LORD. But you say, 'How have we spoken against you?' You have said, 'It is vain to serve God'"* (Mal 3:13-14). A cold heart feels that the cost of following Jesus simply isn't worth it. If God's people get sick and are bereaved the same as everyone else, and if God's people lose their jobs the same as anyone else. And If God prospers the wicked as well as the righteous (v15).

What's the point? Put these together, and I think you have a precise description of the challenge facing faithful believers today: We have endured the disappointment of leaders whose lives turned out inconsistent with the faith they professed. Our normal rhythm of worship has been disrupted. We live in a cold climate of growing skepticism and creeping unbelief.

In Malachi's day, this led to massive falling away from faith. And I believe that many will face the same challenge in this New Year: That the combined pressure of disappointment with leaders and disruption to worship will lead to the hearts of many growing cold.

Perhaps the greatest spiritual danger you will face this year is that your heart will grow cold. So, what are we to do? When we face what faithful believers in Malachi's day faced, we must do what faithful believers in Malachi's day did.

1. What Faithful Believers Face
2. What Faithful Believers Do

*Then those who **feared the LORD** spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them* (Mal 3:16). When the love of many was growing cold, there were some who feared the Lord.

To fear the Lord is the opposite of a cold heart. To fear the Lord is so to love Him that His frown would be your greatest dread and His smile your greatest delight.

In John 17:26, Jesus prays to the Father that *The love with which you have loved me may be in them* (Jn 17:26). How great is the love of the Father for His Son! The prayer of Jesus is that the love the Father has for the Son may be in you!

How is that possible? *God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us* (Rom 5:5). When God pours out His love into your heart, you will love *what* He loves, and you will begin to love *as* He loves.

That's why Peter says to faithful believers, *though you have not seen him you love Him* (1 Pet 1:8). *To you who believe He is precious* (1 Pet 2:7 NIV). Why? Because the Father's love for the Son has been poured into your heart by the Holy Spirit. Here are people who live in a cold spiritual climate. But they love the Lord. And notice what they do:

### **Faithful Believers**

#### a. Speak With One Another

*Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them* (Mal 3:16). I want to encourage you to move toward other believers in this new year. That's what faithful believers do. This was against the trend in Malachi's day and it will be against the trend today. When leaders fail, it would be easy to say, 'Well, I still have my faith, but I am done with church.' And in these days when worship is disrupted, it would be easy to say, 'I can manage on my own.'

But if you try to go it alone, your heart will soon grow cold. The more skepticism and unbelief rises, the more we need each other.

Faithful believers speak with each other. They draw strength from others who have the same love for Christ.

Luke records the story of two believers who were walking on the road to Emmaus. As they walked, they were speaking about Jesus. And Luke tells us, *While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them* (Lk 24:15).

### **You will find the presence of Jesus in the company of other believers.**

*Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them* (Matt 18:20).

#### a. Faithful Believers Speak With One Another

#### b. Speak Well Of The Lord

*Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the LORD and esteemed his name* (Mal 3:16).

Those who feared the Lord spoke with one another. What did they say? Malachi tells us that *those who feared the Lord esteemed His name*. When those who feared the Lord spoke together, they spoke in a way that honored His name.

This was very different from what the people around them were doing. Their normal way of speaking about God was to complain about all that God did and to question all that He said.

Now we all know what it is to wrestle with questions, doubts and even complaints toward God, especially when we suffer. Job knew what it was to struggle with unanswered questions. Rarely has a man suffered more than this godly man who lost all of his children.

But Job spoke well of the Lord, and at the end of the book, God commends Job: *The LORD said to Eliphaz the Temanite: "My anger burns against you and against your two friends, for you have not spoken **of me** what is right, as my servant Job has (Job 42:7).*

How we speak about God matters. God hears what we say about Him! He takes note when we speak well of Him in times of trouble.

When God heard faithful believers speaking well of Him, *The Lord paid attention*. This was something different from what He was used to hearing.

So here is a resolution for the New Year: *Let your speech always be gracious (Col 4:6).*

*Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up (Eph 4:29).*

*Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips (Ps 141:3).*

*O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise (Ps 51:15).*

Others may doubt God's love. We will declare His faithfulness.

Others may count worship a tedious duty. We will call it a delight.

Others may be careless in marriage, but we will seek to love others well.

Others may pour out their complaints to God. We will give thanks for His mercies.

Others may refuse to draw near to God, but we will seek His face.

Others may think that it is vain to serve the Lord, but we will be *steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord because we know that our labor is not in vain, (1 Cor 15:58).*

Faithful believers speak often with one another. Faithful believers speak well of the Lord. And Malachi tells us that *when those who **feared the LORD** spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and **heard them** (Mal 3:16).*

There is a wonderful statement in the book of Hebrews, *In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and **he was heard because of his reverence** (Heb 5:7).*

Hebrews says he was heard because of His reverence. The King James Bible puts it this way: He *'was heard in that he feared.'*

Jesus loved the Father so much that the Father's frown would be His greatest dread, and His smile was His greatest delight.

So, He said, “Father, not my will but yours be done.” The will of the Father was that Jesus should bear our sins. And Jesus cried out – notice – not to the One who was able to save Him from dying but to the one *who was able to save Him from death*,

And when our Lord Jesus cried out, He was **heard**. And the proof that He was heard was His resurrection from the dead.

And when we who fear the Lord come to the Father in Jesus’ name, we too will be heard. And one day, we too will rise to the everlasting life that is ours in Him.

© Colin S. Smith

Permissions: You have permission and are encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format you choose, as long as you do not alter or change the wording in any way and do not charge a fee (beyond the cost of reproducing these materials). For posting on the web, a link to this document on our website ([www.UnlockingtheBible.org](http://www.UnlockingtheBible.org)) is preferred. Any exceptions to the above must be approved by Unlocking the Bible, 1-866-865-6253.

**Please include this statement on every copy distributed:**

By Colin S. Smith. © Colin S. Smith. Website: [UnlockingtheBible.org](http://UnlockingtheBible.org)