

“What’s in it for Me?”—Malachi 3:13-15

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “What’s in it for Me?”, is Malachi 3:13-15 → *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. What is the profit of our keeping His charge or of walking as in mourning before the LORD of hosts? And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape.”* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

As you listen to people talk, how often do you hear them judge the motives of other people’s actions? Observing the behavior of others, it seems rather easy to point out mistakes, character flaws and even hypocritical actions. “She such a hypocrite!” “All he ever thinks about it how it benefits him!” “They’re always making it about themselves!” However, in the midst of such judgments do you stop to think about the fact that they may be doing the same to you?

The sin of self-righteousness runs so deep in us that it is a challenge to do something from purely unselfish motives. It is natural for people to look at activities, opportunities and relationships in life from a “What’s in it for me?”

perspective. This perspective is so ingrained in the fabric of our lives that “sacrificial service” is not very sacrificial at all and can be motivated by a “What’s in it for me?” attitude as well. “You receive so much satisfaction when you help others!” “Serving others will help you take your mind off of your own problems.” “Serving others can look good on college or job resumè.” One may even believe that he will experience an extra blessing because of his service through the special recognition of others or even God Himself.

Such motives for service become detrimental when carried over into your relationship with Jesus Christ. What happens when you discover that there is “nothing in it”—that is, no personal benefit—for you? You can lose faith. Our text records the LORD reprimanding His people through the prophet Malachi because they had an attitude problem which affected their faith in Him as well as their service to Him. The primary focus of their sanctified life in relationship with Yahweh was “What’s in it for me?”

No doubt, there is much that is “in it” for you when it comes to God’s grace! In fact, Yahweh made His grace all about you by taking on human flesh in Jesus in order to accomplish what you could not accomplish, no matter how much personal sacrifice you invested into it. He accomplished the forgiveness of your sins, has given you a new life and eternal salvation! Jesus stated this purpose in Mark 10:45 → He *came not to be served but to serve, and to give*

His life as a ransom for many. **God's grace is all about you!** It is this grace moves you to praise, thanksgiving **and the desire to serve Him!**

However, what happens when our desire to serve God is also governed by a “What’s in it for me?” attitude? We will come to the same conclusion as His people in our text. They had determined that it was futile to serve God since, **from their perspective**, it didn’t appear they were benefitting by doing so. Verse 14 of our text records them complaining: *It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping His charge or of walking as in mourning before the LORD of hosts?* In other words, how do we benefit by obeying His commands? What benefit did we receive by humbling ourselves before Him?

The “benefit” for which they were looking appears to be physical blessings **in comparison to the evildoers around them**. Observing *the arrogant* being *blessed* and the *evildoers not only prospering but putting God to the test and escaping* (cf. Verse 15), just doesn’t seem fair! Shouldn’t we who trust in God and serve Him receive more blessings than those who rebel against Him? They figured that the reason for carrying out God’s requirements and repenting of their sins (i.e. *walking as in mourning before Yahweh*) was so that He would bless them **in the manner they thought they should be blessed**.

Our sinful nature demands God to bless us on our own terms! At the same time, we do not recognize we are acting in hypocrisy since our actions of

obedience and service to God do not agree with our selfish motives. In the process of experiencing unfulfilled “spiritual” expectations we can actually take on the *arrogant* attitudes and ways of the very evildoers we criticize. In our text this arrogance was displayed as they challenged God by their stubborn unbelief and began to think that their stubborn sinful ways were “no big deal” if God’s judgment was not imminent. Yahweh should be acting more justly right now! The problem was, if He did act justly at that moment, they too would have been swept away to the judgment of hell because of their selfish “What’s in it for me?” hearts. **God was actually being gracious by granting them this time to repent of their sins before His final judgment came!**

The proper attitude for serving the LORD is an attitude of fear and love experienced by God’s grace in Christ Jesus. Such humble faith approaches God with all new desires. Psalm 37:4 says: *Delight yourself in the LORD, and He will give you the desires of your heart.* Taken by itself this promise could reinforce a “What’s in it for me?” attitude. Sounds like God is going to give me whatever I want if I love and obey Him. Taken in light of other teaching of God’s Word will give a different picture. In Ezekiel 36:26-27 Yahweh promises to *give you a new heart, and a new spirit . . . within you* by removing your *heart of stone* (i.e. hard-hearted in stubborn rebellion) *and give you a heart of flesh* (i.e. sensitive toward the LORD’s will). How will He do this? He says, *I will*

put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes and be careful to obey My rules. Thus the promise is to give you **new heart's desires** by the power of His Holy Spirit!

The person who fears the LORD is one who desires what God wants most of all because he respects Him as Lord of his life! Serving the LORD with this attitude revolves around answering the question: “What’s in it for God?” You already have the benefits of God’s grace in the Person and Work of Jesus! Forgiveness of sins and eternal life is yours through faith in Him! In fact, you get to receive these benefits over and over again through His means of Grace—the Gospel, the sacraments and confession/absolution! This grace moves you to live in sanctification with a different attitude because you’ve been *renewed in the spirit of your minds, and daily put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness*—Christ’s righteousness and holiness! (cf. Ephesians 4:23-24) It’s an attitude **totally** motivated by God’s love for you in Christ Jesus, according to Galatians 2:20 → *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ Who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me.*

On the Last Day all people will learn that it is always “profitable” to serve the LORD of heaven and earth. No, not because you will receive a nice

recognition for your faith and obedience. If your sacrificial service is pointed out to you in heaven by Jesus, you will be surprised! (cf. Matthew 25:34-40) You will discover the “profitable” nature of sacrificial service in results which belong to God—people experiencing the eternal life which God desires for them through faith in Jesus! You will join the rejoicing with the angels of God over the sinners who repented (cf. Luke 15:7.10) because of a “What’s in it for God?” service!

Instead of serving God with “ulterior motives” with a “What’s in it for me?” attitude we serve God with a desire to do His will so that others can “gain” Christ and more souls are “gained” for eternal life! Instead of our own selfish “gain” the Holy Spirit moves us to sacrificial service so that God is glorified as others come to faith in Christ, a gain that causes much joy in heaven! Amen.

*May the God of peace Who brought again from the dead
our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep,
by the blood of the eternal covenant,
equip you with everything good that you may do His will,
working in us that which is pleasing in His sight,
through Jesus Christ, to Whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

(Hebrews 13:20-21)

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