

November 23, 2025

Malachi 3:13-18; Luke 23:27-43

# “When You Have Jesus!”

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The expression “what’s the use?” [I don’t see the point of this situation] is used to question the reason or purpose behind an action, often implying that the action will not achieve any significant or good outcome. In our Old Testament lesson the Lord has been good to his people in all that he has promised in the coming of the Savior. He gives blessings that only he can give. Yet, even though there are many evidences of God’s love for them, the people are rebellious and say very harsh and offensive words against him. They deny their own rebellious ways and misunderstandings of God’s mysterious ways and protest: “It is vain [useless] 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.”

In other words, they are saying: “we did all the right things and what did we get for it?! We see the arrogant and they get blessed. We watch the evildoers and they prosper. These have the audacity to even test God by their deliberate transgressions and they live happy lives and somehow escape. But we do our very best to meet his requirements and what do we get for it? Where are the blessings and a happy life for us?!” What the people were doing and saying demonstrated that God’s repeated pleadings with the people in law and gospel had fallen on deaf ears and unbelieving/unrepentant hearts. This was made plain by the fact that the people were saying: “It is vain to serve God.” Or, “what’s the use?” [I don’t see the point of this situation].

It may be that we feel this way from time to time or we go headlong into this kind of thinking and end up turning our backs on Jesus. It can be that our expectation as Christians is that God would make us happy and bless us for our striving to do what is right. In fact, we often think that a prosperous life is a given when you became a Christian and strive to live the Christian way. But the absence of our understanding of God’s undeserved love and our need to undergo difficult times to keep us on the straight and narrow way can become for us a moment when we get angry with God because he just won’t do what we think he should be doing. What is the end of this kind of thinking?

Our gospel lesson speaks of a great multitude of people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for Jesus as he is headed to the cross. He turns to them and says some very strong words. He tells them not to weep for him but to weep for themselves and for their children. He warns them of the days that are about to come saying, “For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?” The idea of the words of Jesus are this: if Israel has put a flame to a green tree (who is Jesus the Savior) then what will the burning be like when faithless and rebellious people became a fire to dry wood, or to that which has been sitting for a time and gotten older? How will the great multitude of people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for Jesus fair under such conditions? How will we fair? Will we, like those of the Old Testament, cry out “what’s the use?”

Here we are today living in the days of a faithless and rebellious people who are a flame to dry wood that has now been sitting for a considerable time. Where are we in our walk with the Lord as we find ourselves closer and closer to the very end. In these last days are we growing old and ready to give up?

What is the opposite of the expression “what’s the use?” [I don’t see the point of this situation]. Here the question might be turned to almost a statement. Here one might say “I see the use [I see the point] and now that I see it, how may I use it so that I don’t conclude that it is vain to serve God?” In our Old Testament lesson, after many said, “It is vain [useless] to serve God,” we read the following about those who feared 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. “They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.”

Notice the extraordinary contrast. On the one hand there are those who say “What’s the use?” On the other hand there are those who fear the Lord. It is important to understand what it means to fear the Lord. It means that they believed in the coming of the Savior and kept their sight on him. They believed in the forgiveness of sins and trusted that it was not futile to be free from sin and to live in that freedom. And though they themselves suffered in life and didn’t have all that they wanted, they refused to lean on their own understanding of things and trusted that God was leading them to heaven. They saw the point and refused to conclude that it was in vain to believe and live in freedom despite the chastisements that they had to endure in life. In the end, they did not want to do anything that would cause them to lose their Lord.

Our gospel lesson says that, when Jesus was crucified, they put a sign over his head that stated the following: “This is the King of the Jews.” And Jesus was and is the King of all who believe in him. That means that he is the ruler of the forgiveness of sins and our salvation. That means that everything that he does in his rule has in mind our eternal salvation. Moreover, our gospel lesson states the following about two others who were crucified with him:

One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Did you catch what the criminal said? “Do you not fear God ... ?” To me, that is an echo of our Old Testament lesson when it says that those who feared the Lord spoke to one another. This criminal fears the Lord. That means that he is believing in Jesus, regardless of his predicament on the cross, and is now speaking to the other criminal to exhort him to also fear or believe in Jesus and the freedom he brings. What’s the use? Is it vain to serve God? So the criminal who fears God says to Jesus: “remember me when you come into your kingdom.” In other words, “bring me to your rule of salvation that I may be with you.” And Jesus said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Is it vain to serve God? Do we see the use? Do we get the point? Nothing else matters than knowing Jesus and believing in the forgiveness of sins that he brings through his perfect life for us and by suffering and dying our punishment. Whoever believes in Jesus will not perish but have everlasting life. In our last moment, may we embrace that the words that Jesus spoke to the criminal on the cross are words for us: "Today you will be with me in paradise." **When You Have Jesus** you have everything!

As we find ourselves in the middle of flames and dry wood may it be that the blood of Jesus Christ will keep us from being burned up. May we keep a reign on words that are harsh and offensive against our Lord who truly loves us and who does what he does and allows what he allows for our salvation. Even when we see the arrogant blessed and the wicked prospering may our thoughts and hearts cling to Jesus so that we are able to say in every circumstance: "I cannot imagine what life would be without Jesus my Savior. I cannot imagine what life would be without the forgiveness of sins and the hope of paradise." May we see the point of it all even as criminals dying on a cross. May we understand that **When You Have Jesus** you have paradise! It is never useless to know and believe and serve God!

Amen.

Pastor Brock