

FROM **LABOR** TO **LEGACY**

KEY TEXT

Isaiah 16:14 (NKJV) – But now the LORD has spoken, saying, “Within three years, as the years of a hired man [KJV – hireling], the glory of Moab will be despised with all that great multitude, and the remnant will be very small and feeble.

Matthew 4:1-11 (NKJV)

4 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the

devil. 2 And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterward He was hungry. 3 Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread."

4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.' "

5 Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written:

'He shall give His angels charge over you,' and, 'In their hands they shall bear you up, Lest you dash your foot against a stone.' "

7 Jesus said to him, "It is written again, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.' "

8 Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9 And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me."

10 Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.' "

11 Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him.

Philippians 2: 5-11

⁵ Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, being in the form of

God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,⁷ but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, *and* coming in the likeness of men.⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient *to the point of* death, even the death of the cross.⁹ Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,¹¹ and *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ *is* Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Every season in life has an **appointed time**.

There are moments when God calls us to **work, to serve, to labor** quietly — even when no one notices. There are also moments when He allows **testing** — not to crush us, but to **complete** us.

In **Isaiah 16:14**, God declared that Moab's glory would end "**within three years, as the years of a hireling.**" That phrase — "**the years of a hireling**" — means a ***fixed, counted, and measured time of labor.*** A hireling works for a set term, knowing his duty and his end.

Later, in Christ's ministry, we see the pattern again. Jesus served for roughly **three years**, faithfully fulfilling every assignment of the Father. Then came the wilderness — the testing — and finally the

cross, where His obedience was proven **perfect.**

These two seasons — *the three years of a hireling and the four years of testing* — reveal two sides of the same truth:

God appoints our seasons not to **destroy** us, but to **develop** the likeness of Christ in us.

This morning, I want to share about the numbers 3 and 4 relating to our **season of labor** for the Lord and the **season of testing** from the Lord. The title of my sermon this morning is: “FROM LABOR TO LEGACY”.

The outline of my sermon will be as follows:

- The Limited Season
- The Testing Season
- The Fulfillment in Christ

**(I) THE LIMITED SEASON: GOD
APPOINTS THE TIME OF THE
HIRELING**

**Isaiah 16:14 (NKJV) -“Within three years,
as the years of a hired man....**

**KJV- “Within three years, as the years of an
hireling.....”**

**NIV - “Within three years, as a hired
servant would count them...”**

**Isaiah 21:16- “For thus hath the LORD said
unto me, Within a year, according to the**

years of a hireling, and all the glory of Kedar shall fail.

Literal Meaning of “As the Years of a Hireling”

This phrase refers to a **set, measured and unalterable time** – just like a hired worker counts the exact days until his contract ends. He will not stay one day longer than what he is paid for.

So, “**years of a hireling**” means:

A FIXED, COUNTED PERIOD – NOT A DAY MORE OR LESS – THAT WILL BE FULFILLED PRECISELY AS APPOINTED BY GOD.

Spiritual Meaning of “the three years of a hireling”

A hireling’s time is not **indefinite**. *His* master defines his term. *Spiritually*, this

means that every trial, task, or assignment we face has a **DIVINE TIME LIMIT**. God measures our seasons with **PURPOSE AND MERCY**.

Spiritually, the “**three years of a hireling**” symbolizes several key truths:

- **God’s Precise Timing and Justice**

Just as a hireling term is exact, **GOD’S JUDGMENTS AND PROMISES ARE EXACT IN TIMING**.

The “**three years as the years of a hireling**” comes from **Isaiah 16:14** where the prophet Isaiah uses a contract-worker’s time measure – **precise, non-negotiable, strictly counted** – to declare a fixed period before judgment falls on Moab.

How does this connect to **judgment for injustice and oppression?**

While the passage speaks specifically to Moab's national downfall, we can draw a **legitimate prophetic application** like this:

- It shows God appoints a **LIMITED TIME** for **UNCHECKED INJUSTICE** before He intervenes.
- The hireling metaphor implies **JUDGMENT IS MEASURED, CERTAIN, ACCURATE, NOT ACCIDENTAL.**
- Moab's pride, exploitation of others, and oppression (a repeated biblical theme in Isaiah) make it reasonable to apply the principle to **SYSTEMS THAT EXALT THEMSELVES AND CRUSH THE VULNERABLE.**

Application: God may allow injustice to operate for a season, but **He sets a boundary** – like a hireling's contract – after which **judgment for oppression** is executed with **precision**.

Now before you point your finger and accuse me of being unforgiving and vindictive against the oppressors of my past, let me clarify by adding the following points:

- I am not saying God waits exactly three years to judge every oppressor.
- I am saying **JUDGMENT HAS A DEADLINE AND IS CAREFULLY ACCOUNTED**, especially when injustice and oppression reach their limit.

- The broader book of Isaiah repeatedly reveals God as the One who **defends the oppressed and judges the proud.**

Story: The Hireling's Contract and the Invisible Witness

Micah was a warehouse loader in a booming logistic company owned by Mr. Calder. The company promised good wages but Micah worked under a hireling contract – 3 years, hourly paid, strictly timed, with no overtime allowed outside what was written. Every minute was logged by the system.

Micah was strong and loyal, yet every month his paycheck was mysteriously short. When he asked HR, they pointed at the digital logs and said, “The numbers

don't lie." But what they didn't tell him was this: Mr. Calder altered the internal clock, shaving off 5-7 minute per hour across all loaders. Individually small. Collectively massive.

The loaders were paid like hirelings – contracts counted down to the second, but their suffering was dismissed like white noise.

Over time, the loaders grew quietly desperate. Some skipped meals. A few pulled their children out of school. Micah watched friends break down under the weight of invisible theft. Yet Mr. Calder rose higher – expanding branches and boasting at forums.

One night. Micah stayed back to pray on the empty loading bay. He whispered, "Lord, if the clock sees my minutes, You must also see my tears."

*Unknown to him, a newly installed security AI system – launch by a tech audit team from a third-party compliance firm – had begun recording unaltered time, power consumption, and payroll discrepancies. It wasn't watching people. It was watching **PATTERNS OF INJUSTICE.***

Midway through Micah's final year, the audit triggered a critical alert. Investigators arrived unannounced. They didn't argue with emotions – they confronted precise, measured evidence. The logs showed millions owed to workers.

The manipulation was systematic. The injustice deliberate.

Mr. Calder was stunned. "It's impossible!" he yelled. "No one works 3 years without quitting. They should have walked away!"

The lead investigator replied, "They worked because they believed the contract protected them. And you used its precision to betray them."

The court ruling was swift. All affected workers were compensated **WITH INTEREST**. Mr. Calder lost ownership of the company and was placed under legal sanctions. The empire he built by oppressing hirelings collapsed not by protest, but by measured accounting catching up to moral debt.

*When Micah received his adjusted pay, he wasn't shouting – he was quietly weeping in relief. He said only one thing: **"God judges injustice with the same accuracy that oppression tries to hide behind. And his clock cannot be altered."***

Lesson: When God says, **"Within three years,"** it means:

- His plans are neither delayed nor premature – His word is punctual.
- God's dealing in your life have a **set season**. You may not see movement yet, but the clock of heaven is precise – **"not a day longer than needed."**



- **Human Labor vs Divine Calling**
A hireling works for pay, not for love.



He serves for wages, not relationship.

Jesus contrasted this in **John 10:12-13** – the hireling flees when the wolf comes because he does not care for the sheep.

Thus, spiritually, **“three years of a hireling”** can represent:

A period of testing or service where one's **MOTIVES** are exposed- whether you serve God for **reward** or out of **love**.

The first 3 years after our dismissal was the hardest trial I had ever undergone. God really did a deep surgery into my heart's motive in serving Him. The questions kept resurfacing from God to me: ***“Even without salary from Singapore, will you still carry on the call of God? Even when your name***

is dragged to the mud by your persecutors, will you still stay on in Iloilo City as a missionary? Even all your Chinese tithers left at the instigation of your persecutors, will you still go on? Even if your church is decimated to only a remnant because of the intrigues sown by the enemy to divide the church, will you still go on? Even if Singapore church regard you as an impostor, will you still go on? Now you are no more the famous and the favorite of your sending church, will you go on still?"

For most part of the three years, my answers to God were NO but God never gave up, exposing my idolatrous and disordered heart, ridden with the idolatry of power, approval of man and control and then reordering my heart's desires to be God-centered.

Today, my attitude is this:

“We are treated as imposters, and yet are true; as unknown and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as punished and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.” (2 Cor 6:8-10).

God may allow you to pass through a **“hireling season”** – a time where you work faithfully even when you don’t feel rewarded – to purify your motives from **DUTY TO DEVOTION.**

- **A Season of Transition and Testing**

The number three in Scripture often represents **DIVINE COMPLETENESS OR TRANSITION.** Jesus rose on the third day.

So “three years of hireling” can symbolize:
A full, completed season where something
TEMPORARY gives way to something
ETERNAL.

E.g. # 1 – Jesus’ three years of ministry
ended in **glory and resurrection**.

E.g. # 2 – A hireling’s three years end in the
end of his contract – signifying **closure and
new beginnings**.

Lesson:

After the full “three years” of divine timing
– your **temporary toil** will end, and God
will bring you into a **new phase of purpose
or rest**.

Application:

Some of you may be in your “**three years of hireling**” – a phase where:

- You serve but see no visible fruit yet.
- You labor faithfully under **exacting discipline**.
- You feel “**contracted**” – limited, unseen or routine.

But take heart – when that appointed time is complete, the Lord will release you into

**FRUITFULNESS, FREEDOM
AND FULFILLMENT.**

God sets an end to every season of **struggle** — faithfulness matters more than fame.

“At the end of the hireling’s time, he receives his due” – and at the end of your season, God will bring your harvest in full measure.

Illustration: “The Contract Worker and the Construction”



A young man once got a three-year contract to help build a bridge across a wide river.

Every day he worked under the scorching sun, laying stones and steel beams, never seeing the full picture. He often thought, “Why keep building when I can’t even see the end?”

But on the final day of his contract, the engineer took him to the top of the completed bridge.

From there, he saw the whole span — strong, beautiful, and connecting two distant cities.

Tears filled his eyes as he realized: his labor had meaning all along.

In the same way, God often gives us “three-year seasons” — times of work, obedience, and quiet faithfulness — where we don’t yet see the full result. But when the work is complete, God shows us the bridge He was building through our obedience.

Christocentric Application:

Like that worker, Jesus labored faithfully in His appointed time — and when His work was finished, the “bridge” between God and man was complete through the cross.

(II) THE TESTING SEASON: GOD PROVES WHAT HE HAS PLANTED

Matthew 4:1 - “Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.”



If the 3 years of the hireling speak of **LABOR**, then the 4 years of testing speak of **PROVING**.

The number *four* often represents the whole earth — four winds, four corners, four directions — symbolizing that the testing touches **EVERY AREA OF LIFE**.

After His baptism, Jesus was led **by the Spirit** into the wilderness — not by Satan, not by failure, but by the Spirit of God. The **wilderness is NOT punishment**; it is the **proving ground of identity**.

For forty days, He was tested physically (hunger), spiritually (temptation), and emotionally (identity). In every way, Jesus faced the **full circle of human testing** — the **“four corners”** of life — and remained **faithful**.

Why? Because He wasn't trying to **prove Himself to be the Son of God**; He was demonstrating the **faithfulness of the Father in Him**.

Application: When God allows testing, He's not questioning **who you are** — He's

confirming what He already knows. He is proving **what He has planted**.

What does **“proving what He has planted”** mean?

- God’s test are not **identity exams**, they are **growth demonstrations**

When God allows testing, He isn’t asking:
“Are you really My child? Do you really belong to Me? Are you genuine?”

He already settled that when you trusted Him. Your identity in Him is **NOT UNDER INTERROGATION**.

Instead, the test reveals:

“Look at the faith, endurance, love, humility, courage I already deposited in you – now watch it come forth.”

So the test is not God **QUESTIONING YOUR NEW NATURE**, but God **CONFIRMING HIS WORK IN YOU**.

- The purpose is **not discovery**, but **display**.

God doesn't test you to discover what is in you – He tests you so that **YOU, OTHERS, AND EVEN SPIRITUAL OPPOSITION WILL SEE WHAT HE HAS PLANTED**.

Like a seed buried in soil:

Before pressure → unseen

After storms break the ground → visible proof of life

Testing makes the hidden deposit
MANIFESTED EVIDENCE.

- The battle is over **fruit**, not ownership
The enemy wants the fire to destroy the seed.

God wants the fire to **VALIDATE THE SEED.**

So testing is the moment when:

- what God planted is **brought to the surface.**
- what was merely believed is **now evidenced.**

- what was internal is now **demonstrated externally.**

When God tests you, He isn't doubting your identity – He is revealing **the reality** of what He has already built into you. The test proves His seed is **real, rooted and living.**



Illustration: A teacher gives exams to know what the student learned. But **God gives tests like a farmer gives the sun and rain –**

not to ask if the crop is his, but so the crop will **grow and prove the seed was alive all along.**

In short

- God's tests → prove what He implanted
- Human exams → question what you know

God already declared who you are.

Now testing shows **WHAT HE HAS MADE YOU INTO.**

Every test has two voices: the **enemy's temptation to destroy,** and **God's invitation to strengthen.** Jesus overcame so that you can overcome in Him.

“The testing of your faith produces perseverance... that you may be mature and complete.” — James 1:3–4

The **wilderness** of testing prepares you for the **witness** of glory.

(III) THE FULFILLMENT IN CHRIST: FROM SERVANT TO SON, FROM LABOR TO GLORY

Philippians 2:8-9 - “He humbled Himself... therefore God highly exalted Him.”

The 3 years of labor led to the **CROSS**— the faithful Servant finished His work: ***“It is finished.”***

The 4 years of testing were fulfilled in His passion, death, and resurrection — the

proven Son **emerged victorious over sin and death.**

In Jesus, both seasons find their ultimate meaning:

- The Servant's labor (hireling) — **finished.**
- The Son's testing — **passed perfectly.**

Now, the One who served has been **exalted.** The One who suffered now **reigns.** The One who toiled in obedience now sits **enthroned in glory.**

And here's the **gospel truth:**

In Christ, our **service** is not in vain; what feels like a hireling's toil is actually **partnership with the Master,** whose **finished work guarantees our reward.**

In Christ, our **testing** becomes **transforming** — not to destroy us, but to reveal Christ's strength within us, the tested and true Son of God now living in us.

Because we are in Christ, our **labor** is not wasted and our **testing** is not meaningless. The same Spirit who empowered Jesus in His work and testing now lives in us to bring us into **glory**.

Application:

What begins as ***servanthood*** ends in ***sonship***. What begins in ***struggle*** ends in ***splendor***.

Your **“three years”** and **“four years”** — your seasons of effort and endurance —

are not wasted time. They are **training time** for eternal glory.

E.g. Last Sunday one of our ex staff visited our church. She came to thank me for all the training she received from Etab. She went through a lot here while working in the office – not with me but more with the staff. But she said to me – All that she had gone through here in the office was a PREPARATION from God for her to be a senior pastor of her mother church in General Santos. And I rejoice with her for her promotion by God.

“If we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him.” — 2 Timothy 2:12

When you endure like the **Servant**, you will reign with the **Son**.

Analogy: “The Blacksmith and the Blade”

A blacksmith takes a raw piece of metal and heats it in the fire, hammering it again and again.

*At first, the metal only feels **pain** — heat, pressure, and shaping. But the blacksmith knows that the fire and blows are not punishment — they are **preparation**.*

When the process is done, that same metal becomes a sharpened sword — strong, refined, and useful in the master’s hand.

Lesson:

- The 3 years of a hireling are like the **hammering** — steady, rhythmic, daily work.

- The 4 years of testing are like the **fire** — intense, refining, and complete.
- Together, both produce a **vessel fit for the Master's use** — just as Jesus was proven through His labor and suffering, and now reigns in glory.

Every believer will walk through these two seasons — the ***labor of a hireling*** and the ***testing of a son***.

The first teaches us **faithfulness** in service; the second shapes us for **fruitfulness** in maturity.

But both lead to one destination — the **likeness and glory of Christ**.

Whatever your season — if you're laboring unseen, or being tested beyond measure — remember: Jesus has walked both paths before you. He is both your **Model** and your **Mighty Helper**.

Divine Purpose

- 3 Years of a Hireling – God **measures and limits affliction or service**; it teaches *faithfulness and endurance until the appointed time is fulfilled*.
- 4 Years of Testing – God completes the **process of maturity**; it leads to **promotion or commissioning** after proven obedience.

Spiritual Outcome

- After the 3 Years – The hireling's term ends; God brings closure, reward, or

release — symbolizing that **no trial lasts forever.**

- After the 4 Years – The testing produces stability, maturity, and readiness for greater responsibility — **a vessel fit for the Master's use.**

From Labor to Legacy- The Christ who works and wins in us.

End