

Roy's sermon for 30<sup>th</sup> August, 2020

## Malachi 3:16-18 'Be Not only Hearing'

Last week we looked to understand what God meant, what He actually intended when He said "test me in this and see if I do not pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it." (Malachi 3:10b-15) Firstly, we cast aside the idea that this was the secret to health and wealth. No, this is not the case. Remember Matthew 19:21-24: "how hard it is for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of heaven." And also Matthew 6:19-21: "but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." So no, Jesus was not an investment banker. Matthew 6:24: "you cannot serve both God and mammon."

The people blamed God, saying that He had changed. Verse 13 "You have said harsh things against me", says the Lord Almighty." So He was no longer the protector and provider that He had been in the past! Yet God had said in verse 6 "for I the Lord do not change. So you O descendants of Jacob are not destroyed." Yes, although they were right in thinking that God had withheld the rains, and had caused their crops to be dying in the ground, the blame lay squarely at their own feet. God says repent, "return to me bring the whole tithe." And the evidence of that repentance will be clearly seen in those wholehearted tithes and offerings! 'Yes do this' He is saying; 'test me in this' and see. See what I will again do for you.'

So the all- important context then is drought and hardship due to the people's rebellion and sin. And evidenced in their hypocrisy and tight-fistedness toward God and His temple! So God then says "'return' and you will see the rains and blessing come again.' Yes the rains will come, the seed will be sown, the crops will grow, the pests will stay away and the harvest will be overflowing with His provision. So Simply put, God would provide for all of their needs. This was not riches, but God's daily blessing every step of the way!

Their next accusation against Him is in verse 14: "it is futile to serve the Lord." And I said that though they be only fleeting moments sometimes, we can find ourselves listening to Satan's whispers and feeling that same way. Our circumstances can beat us down and we can feel that it's all a waste of time. And that is what Satan wants! Remember Job's wife in chapter 2: "are you still hanging on to your integrity? Curse God and die." Yes, this is the devil's goal: For the servants of God to be brought to believe that it's all for nothing. Yes it's all a waste of time and effort. But we know he lies! Sin came about through his lies concerning God. Romans 3 verse 4 "let every man be a liar and let God be true." So we must reject his lies because Job 19:25 "I know that my Redeemer lives." And also the apostles said "where else have we to go, for you alone have words of eternal life." The Israelites said "what did we gain going about like mourners before the Lord almighty? But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly, evil doers prosper, and those who challenge God escape." But again no , it is not a waste of time and effort, because we know that Jesus lives!

Well so to the text for this morning: Malachi 3:16-18 'Be Not Only Hearing!'

James chapter 1:22 "do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." You know it does sound strange to say, but in a real sense, those people who go to church every

week, and even put their 10% into the bag, can be in a more dangerous position than those who have nothing to do with God at all. But why do I say this? Well, to sit near the door of the Kingdom so to speak, hearing all about the riches of the King and the price He paid for His subjects, so that they would indeed have all of the benefits and blessings of His realm, while never actually entering through that door, will bring with it even greater condemnation from the King's Father, than if they had never heard of Him and His Kingdom at all!

This to a great extent, is where the people were at as a whole during Malachi's day! They had all of the benefits and privileges that came with the ancestry and heritage that they loved to lay claim to as their own, even as their first class ticket into heaven as it were. Yes they could look all the way back to Abraham the father of their nation and the true father of faith. They could claim all of the prophets down through the centuries. The patriarchs, the 12 tribes from Jacob, and yet they were further away from God, (if that were possible), than if they had never heard of Him at all!

But how does this happen? Yes how do we find ourselves in a place such as this? Well it's simple. There is an evil familiarity which can breed a contempt toward God, the longer we know of Him and even sadly, the longer we walk with Him. And through what we in hearts can perceive as almost our right to Him . Almost as though we had ownership of God! Well that is where Israel was in those days. But do you see, even amidst wickedness like that, God's mercy is such, that there were still His people who would hear His word, repent and respond. And so it must be for us also! We cannot be those people who hear the sermons every week, and perhaps even thank the preacher for his message, and yet it have only a passing interest for us with no impact upon our lives at all! Yes with such a position there is tremendous contempt for God. And which also has eternal consequences!

And amazingly, those truths from Malachi have brought about for some a "returning" to God, which He had indeed called for! Verse 16 "then those who feared the Lord talked with each other." Friends, can you see, this is the effect which the Word of God should have upon our lives? It shouldn't just be a fleeting thought or a passing glance because we are talking about our eternal destiny. Where and with whom we shall spend eternity. Yes the Word of God should play a far greater role in our lives than the 6:00 o'clock news or the Today show.

Notice the words "then those who feared the Lord." As we have seen for some weeks now Ecclesiastes 12:13 "now all has been heard here is the conclusion of the matter. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." So those people who had heard and had reflected upon what had been preached through Malachi, (as God had spoken to their hearts and as they had examined themselves and recognised their own sin and shortcomings toward Him), then came together with those others of like mind! You see they did indeed "fear God", meaning they had recognised Him as God, and had confessed Him and His rightful authority over them to be God. Yes He, was their ruler. He, was their King and creator. So they came together and they "talk with each other." Perhaps in a manner like after hearing the sermon on Sunday they then got along to Bible study, to reflect upon what was said and how it had impacted upon them.

And that is the key here, Beloved, it had affected them. No it wasn't like water off a duck's back. Those things had penetrated their hearts and brought about a response. Then they put this into practise: Proverbs 27:17 "as iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another". So as the knife slides along the sharpening steel, (and it must happen again and again and again, not only once), yes as it slides along the steel there is this honing, this redefining of the edge which occurs. And that is what happens in Bible study. As people come together and bounce their thoughts and ideas off each other concerning the Word of God, as it is impacting upon their lives. And that is exactly what is happening here in Malachi! God had cut them to the heart. And they responded by meeting together. To stir

one another up in righteousness. And also to encourage one another on in that response of “returning” to God. And notice that they “talked with each other and the Lord listened and heard.” Here is yet another example and evidence of the nearness of God to His people brothers and sisters. Even in the midst of such wickedness, when His people met together, the Lord's heart was inclined toward His people.

Dear friends, how clear it is that God is not way out in the universe, unaware, uncaring, and unknowing. He is a loving father with His ear to the doors of the bedrooms of His rebellious children. Ready to say all will be well, just come to me with a changed heart! And again clearly, that is what is happening before us in Malachi. Perhaps it went something like this: ‘We've really screwed up. We have treated the Almighty with such contempt. How did we get here? We've all heard what Malachi has been saying, and we all know that God's words to us through him are true. What are we going to do? How can we make restitution? What proof can we give to God that we are sincere in our change of heart? I know, (someone says), let's all write our names down together. Yes, let's put it down in black and white so that we will all be accountable to one another over the coming weeks, months, and years ahead, there will be no turning back. We will bring the whole tithe, then we will stand up from this day forth!’

Friends, what a great thing to do. To make a collective, public declaration of their faith. A statement to the world of who they are and where they stand. And they would stand for the One in whom they believe! Would we be prepared to make just such a stand? Just such a declaration to the world around us where we live? That is the question brothers and sisters! So, “a scroll of remembrance was written in His presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honoured His name.”

So to “fear God” in this way is to give glory to Him, and to “Honour His name.” They have all in effect, bowed low in reverence and honour, and yet also stood tall in worship and praise, to the Lord almighty. And notice it was “in His presence.” Again brothers and sisters, God is fully aware of where and when His people meet together in honour of His name. Yes, He is “present” in every sense just not physically as we understand it.

Now look at His wonderful response of mercy. Like the father running to the prodigal son, God spiritually wraps His eternal arms around them declaring “they will be mine says the Lord almighty.” Matthew 25:34 “come you who are blessed by my father take your inheritance the Kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.” Yes, “They will be mine”, says the Lord almighty. “In the day when I make up my treasured possession.” What words they are dear friends, that we are the “treasured possession” of God. Surely to the Sinner there are no sweeter words. Except perhaps “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.” And where He says “makeup” He means complete that which He had promised to do. Yes, “they will be mine” They will be part of that precious treasure, even My own personally chosen and handpicked people. “I will spare them. Just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him.”

So there is cause for God's anger to be poured out. There is discipline to be used here. But as a father deals with his own rebellious son, (not closing the door on him but constantly seeking to draw him back), God's mercy would turn away His wrath. They would be spared His just punishment, and find comfort in His arms along with the rest of His children!

Brothers and sisters, this is how God deals with us, not as our sins deserve. Because if He did so, how long would we survive? Think about it. If God's wrath were poured out upon us each moment of our failings each day, who would be left? Well as we saw in verse two of this chapter “but who can endure the day of His coming? Who can stand when He appears?” And of course the answer is no

one! Friends, hearts that are hard and unyielding, with no sense of their own guilt before the Lord, and even with the disposition of self- assurance will have a terrifying reality thrust upon them when these things find their ultimate fulfilment!

Our final verse this morning reads (v18) “and you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked. Between those who serve God and those who do not.” So I suppose then it stands to reason that there are times, sadly, when there seems to be no “distinction”. When the church and people of God are indistinguishable from everyone else. Now when that is the case, think about the implications for the lost and perishing world around us. Jesus said in Matthew chapter 5 “you are the light of the world. You are the salt of the earth.” So if these two things are taken out of the world, (the means by which they see, and the sense through which they discern what is good from what is evil), then what hope do they have discerning the hand of the living God in this life? Can you see, that if the church, (or people of God), are not discernibly different from those who are not the people of God, then who are we really? God commands us to be holy, (meaning set apart, different) and Jesus elaborates on this by saying “be in the world but not of the world”. But if we have become so Chamaeleon like that the nonbelievers have claimed us as their own, then you know who we are? We are those about whom God is speaking here. We are the secret Christians. And brothers and sisters, there is no such thing! Because it's one thing to be in hiding because we are in fear of our lives because of our faith, but to be blending into the scenery because we are ashamed of the gospel, or we couldn't care less, is to have the same problem as did the Israelites, a contempt for God. Which means we are not His church at all!

So friends we must be distinguishable as Christians from those around us, it's crucial to our testimony to the One we claim as our saviour . But we need to understand that God is speaking here of that end of all things. When there will no longer be any doubt as to a person's allegiance or spiritual origin. It is about that “making up” about God completing those promises to His people to redeem them, yes to buy them back and give them that inheritance which would be purchased by His Son's own blood!

So I guess the question which remains this morning is: will we be distinguishable? Will there be a distinction between ourselves and the rest of the world? During those seasons of feasting at Easter and Christmas, of family and celebrations who will we be? Will we be those who blend in? Will the whole world embrace us as their own, because we have found a cosy warm home among them, or will we stand up? Will we in our hearts, write down our names on that scroll of Remembrance declaring that I am not of this world? Yes I am in the world, I've obeyed Jesus called to be in it to testify to Him and to be for Him, but I am just passing through. Yes I'm on the road to another place for a meeting with my King!!

Let's pray!