

**Hurst Green**  
**8<sup>th</sup> Sep 19**  
**Malachi – Serving to the end**  
**Malachi 3:13-18 (Read 6-18)**

Wow there is so much in these few verse that I could preach on – it could occupy us for weeks but we have the whole bible to look at and so we need to move on.

This is another of those passages I want you to consider over the coming week. Try and read it every day and see what God speaks to you individually about. Next week I will give you a chance to say a few words about any verse or message that has leapt out at you.

I have spoken several times about God's big dare in verse 10

**Malachi 3:10 (ANIV)**

<sup>10</sup> *Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.*

.It is a huge challenge for us all and, this week, I will only say that we have seen this come about in our own family. Once we were finally taught about giving (rather than the legalistic tithing) and decided to follow through on it our family has been blessed by God in so many ways.

When God dares us it is for a purpose and who does not want the flood gates of heaven opened?

But rather than that familiar passage which it would be so easy to pick up again I want to turn to the last few verses of our reading, v13-18, and show you another message from Malachi for today's church.

Did you notice when you had those verses read to you that there are two rather different groups of people in there?

One group looked around and complained and so ended by speaking against God.

The second group looked up to God and understood.

But God listened to both groups and understood.

**Matthew 12:36-37 (ANIV)**

<sup>36</sup> *But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.* <sup>37</sup> *For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned."*

Those two groups are present in the world today. Much of the world is in the first group – too much of the world is in the first group!

But beware too much of the first group is in the Church as well!

**So for the First Group**

Let's see what they said:

**Malachi 3:13-15 (ANIV)**

<sup>13</sup> “You have said harsh things against me,” says the LORD. “Yet you ask, ‘What have we said against you?’”<sup>14</sup> “You have said, ‘It is futile to serve God. What did we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the LORD Almighty?’”<sup>15</sup> “But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly the evildoers prosper, and even those who challenge God escape.”

In there they lodged three complaints against God and these echo round the world to this day:

**1. We’ve said nothing wrong**

Look at verse 13 “*What have we said against you?*”

But note that God is not saying that they have said harsh things to him but that they have said harsh things against him. This is a people in denial – they are denying they have a problem and this is prevalent in our rich and comfortable society.

The people will claim they have never said anything against God but they have never said anything for him either!

This is the seventh time in Malachi that they have used this excuse!

But God eavesdrops on all of our conversations as that earlier reading from Matthew says. They may not have said anything to God but as they lead their hedonistic lifestyle they have said plenty about God.

They have claimed that they have done it; they are self made – they have not attributed to God what God has blessed them with. Remember all those pagan kings in our series on Ezra – they had plenty but at least in their hearts they acknowledged the Lord our God. These people do not even do that.

They complain about the state of the world. Where God has told them to do something about it and given them the resources they choose just to talk to each other about how terrible it is.

In summary they ignore God in the world he has created.

Have you noticed how easy it is for this sort of thing to spread? You sit a group of people down and if one starts to complain or bemoan it spreads round the group like wildfire and soon they are all at it.

Of course no-one likes a person who just moans about everything but it is way more subtle than that.

Simple comments like

How awful the situation in Calais is.

How incompetent are our politicians.

And before you know it you have a group of moaning minnies.

Of course we need to discuss the world around us but we need to be constructive about it for in Calais are Christian groups trying to alieve the situation and in Parliament there are several cross party groups of Christians trying to bring God to bear on all that is going on.

## 2. Serving is useless

In verse 14 *“It is futile to serve the Lord”*. Many have not even examined his requirements let alone tried to carry them out. They simply reject him.

They say that worshipping, giving and doing is all futile. Why? Because they gain nothing from it.

Who says that we should benefit from all that we do for God? If that was the case we could go and try any of the other religions in the world because they are all about earning your place in heaven.

Our faith turns that on its head and we serve because we have been saved not to try and earn salvation.

Isn't that one of the fun things about Christianity – the way most things are back to front compared to the world.

Christianity is never about the world's view of “What's in it for me?” and even the secular people who believe they are doing good in the world are doing it because they feel good about doing it they are not doing it out of a heartfelt gratitude for being saved to eternal life.

This is an attitude you find throughout the bible:

### ***Isaiah 58:3 (ANIV)***

<sup>3</sup> *'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?' "Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers.*

That is from those who think they have tried to serve God and got nothing from it because again they thought you served in order to get benefits rather than serving from gratitude for the benefits you have been given.

Or

### ***Job 21:14-15 (ANIV)***

<sup>14</sup> *Yet they say to God, 'Leave us alone! We have no desire to know your ways. <sup>15</sup> Who is the Almighty, that we should serve him? What would we gain by praying to him?'*

For all those people who say they want nothing from God without acknowledging that all they have comes from God. They just want to be left alone to enjoy what they have and look after their own. They want no part in the call to change the world that all may share in the riches it produces.

For you remember

### ***1 Corinthians 15:58 (ANIV)***

<sup>58</sup> *Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.*

And always remember that serving doesn't have to be about hurting because when you serve you use the gifts that God has given you in the first place.

When we first came here we were doing the course by Rick Warren 40 days of purpose. Those of you who have done it may remember that he gave us a useful acrostic SHAPE which echoes:

***Ephesians 2:10 (ANIV)***

<sup>10</sup> *For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

SHAPE helps you remember the five things that God has given you that makes you who you are and fits you for the service he has for you:

**S**piritual Gifts – those God given gifts and abilities that God has given you for the work he has prepared for you to do.

**H**ear – he has given you a heart for things. The things you want to do. They may not appear to have an impact on the spiritual but they do. I always fancied flying and so, in the Army, I volunteered for a tour with the Army Air Corps. Not very spiritual but in training we supported the Garrison Church which was going through an inter regnum and in Germany a Garrison Church that was going through lean times and a few years later was holding a successful out reach.

**A**bilities. Where spiritual gifts are for certain situations your abilities are yours. They are things you have developed in your life that allow you to do certain things.

**P**ersonality. The who you are. That is the real you not the mask you might like to wear. This all comes from that God who knew you in your mother's womb.

**E**xperience. God wastes nothing and all that you have been through has been in preparation for today and all that you do today prepares you for tomorrow.

**3. God is not fair**

This is their third grievance – God does not seem to treat people how they deserve. The bad people seem to be doing rather well; perhaps even better than the good.

They ignore the biblical statement that the rain falls on the good and the bad and also the statement we have looked at where we are told to pray for the land we are sent to because if it prospers then you will prosper.

***Psalms 73:3-5 (ANIV)***

<sup>3</sup> *For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.* <sup>4</sup> *They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong.* <sup>5</sup> *They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills.*

Isn't that a trap we can all fall into! We see the godless doing rather well, those big houses up on the hill, money is no object, they can do as they like while we struggle to make ends meet. Shouldn't it be the other way round?

There is no reason it should. We are here to serve not live in comfort. Of course there are some rich Christians but always remember what Jesus said:

***Luke 12:48 (ANIV)***

<sup>48</sup> *But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few*

~~blows~~. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

At times we will all slip into Group 1 and we have God's forgiveness for that but I want you to ensure that you are firmly in the **second group**. Read on in Malachi

**Malachi 3:16-17 (ANIV)**

<sup>16</sup> Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honoured his name. <sup>17</sup> "They will be mine," says the LORD Almighty, "in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him.

This is the group to be in. Look at this.

**They feared the Lord.** That is they held him in great Awe as we should. This is the other side of the Character of God the Father who is also the awesome creator of the Universe.

We have an awesome God and we need to remember it as this group did.

And always remember when the bible talks of fearing God it is not about us cringing in fear that the mighty judge is going to strike us with some plague.

Our fear is much more that we will hurt God by what we do or say, or that we should run from him. If you are tempted to do that always remember Jonah – you can run but you can't hide!!

**Philippians 2:12 (ANIV)**

<sup>12</sup> ~~Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,~~

At the moment churches in our country tend to emphasis the warm cuddly Father God and perhaps we need to do a bit more trembling.

God is the God above all gods, the Most High and the Holy One. He can rain fire from the heavens, command the rains and do anything in the universe he created. A bit of trembling might be good for us.

And that little bit in verse 16

*Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other*

They shared with one another – all the good that the Lord had done, they encouraged and taught one another in their talking together about the things that matter. Never forget the importance of sharing what God has done and is doing in your life.

**Proverbs 13:20 (ANIV)**

<sup>20</sup> He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.

And always

**Hebrews 10:24 (ANIV)**

<sup>24</sup> And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds.

Because then you share five characteristics of God with each other.

**1. v16 God listens.** He listens not only to your prayers but every word that you say.

**2. v16 God remembers.** Better than us he remembers. There are different phrases used through the bible for this such as your names are engraved on the palm of his hands. He wipes away your sin but remembers everything else about you.

**3. v17 God claims us.** God claims you as his own and no-one has the power to rub that out. No matter what the world throws at us, what mole hills are appearing as mountains, nothing can come between us and our God.

**4. v17 You are God's treasured possession.** It doesn't matter what you think of yourself God thinks of you as one of his greatest treasures simply because you believe him. A little or a lot does not matter – that faith as small as a mustard seed makes you God's treasured possession.

**5. v17 God spares us.** God in his mercy ensures that we do not receive what we deserve but instead we are invited to the wedding banquet.

So this morning which group are you in? It is important because as the last verse in this chapter says.

***Malachi 3:18 (ANIV)***

*<sup>18</sup> And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.*

We are born to be different, to stand out as it says here on this wall.

We are distinct – if the world cannot see that we are different then we need to change our lives so that all can see we are the Body of Christ at work in this place.

Ensure that you are in that second group and always remember:

- God listens to you
- God hears you
- God remembers you
- God claims you
- God treasures you
- God spares you.

You are written in that scroll of remembrance from v16 and your name cannot be erased. You need to put yourself on the line and ensure that you are distinct and you are distinct because the Lord your God loves you.