

THE BOOK OF MALACHI - When Spiritual Intimacy Feels Elusive
Part 12 - Sunday, February 26th, 2023, 5:30 p.m.
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GOD'S BOOK OF REMEMBRANCE

Malachi 3:13 - 4:3 - "Your words have been hard against me, says the Lord. But you say, 'How have we spoken against you?' [14] 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? [15] And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape.' "[16] 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. [17] "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. [18] 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....[4:1]...."For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. [2] But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. [3] And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts."

Malachi speaks at a time when even the people of God had become ***cynical about the value of living for the Lord***. Whether the words were said out loud or not, the people were wrestling with the reality of beliefs they had held all their lives. Maybe they tried to fight those nagging thoughts and doubts back down to the bottom of their hearts for a long time. But they kept coming to the surface.

What was the point of living for God? Was it really worth while? Did it actually make a difference?

Look at the words of **verses 14-15** - **“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? [15] And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape.' ”**

Those thoughts come when there's been a season of trial or persecution, when there's been a drought of answered prayer, when people who have wronged you don't seem to get justice, when circumstances seem to eat up your physical strength and prosperity.

"What difference does it make to serve God? Look at the people who ignore and trample on God's principles and God's ways - they're getting along every bit as well as those who try to honor God - sometimes better!"

And make no mistake about it, that's the environment for the wavering of faith and the inflaming of compromise. Since arrogant and evil people seem to prosper - without any response from God - then why not join in with them?

Ecclesiastes 9:2 - "It is the same for all, since the same event happens to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As is the good, so is the sinner, and he who swears is as he who shuns an oath."

So what do I get for serving the Lord? How do I measure the benefits of it. Why is honoring God an important thing - something to be valued even when others scorn it? Let's face it, we seem to lose a lot of the battles in this world. Abortion, homosexuality, the sliding standards in the entertainment industry are all areas of concern to Christian people. The moral standards - even in the church itself - have changed drastically in recent years. When you look at the lives of the godless it seems they can have their cake and eat it too. They don't seem to be squirming under the weight of their sin.

What does God have to say to people asking these questions? Malachi says God has two responses:

Malachi 3:16-4:3 - "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. [17] "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. [18] 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....[4:1]....For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. [2] But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. [3] And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts."

1) GOD KEEPS TRACK OF THOSE WHO HONOR HIS NAME

Malachi 3:16-17 - "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. [17] "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."

A scroll or book is maintained with meticulous care and accuracy. Now, God doesn't write things down because He's afraid He's going to forget - the way you might make a list of "things to do" or a "grocery list." God has no memory lapses.

No. These words form a picture that's given for ***our*** benefit. God is confronting my tendency to think of God in terms that make Him too much like I. I'm constantly having these little fogs during the day where my whole head seems to be stuck in neutral - ***"Now, I know there was something I was supposed to do. What was it? It was very important. O well, it will come to me later on."***

Particularly when the morals and values of Godly living are in such a state of decay - where ***moral fools*** think they can replace the will of the Creator at their ignorant discretion - I find myself wondering, and sometimes praying, ***"Excuse me God, I'm not sure You're aware of what's going on!"*** And you begin to wonder whether God cares about His own glory or not.

But I'm starting to realize that God has two primary ways to preserve His glory in this fallen world:

- a) **First**, as the course of events turns more and more against the standards of God's Word the citizens of this world will have less and less patience with the true church. God will be glorified in the lives of a **stubbornly committed remnant** who will not budge from their love for Jesus.

You and I will have the honor of glorifying God through enduring the trying of our faith. You can glorify God every day by patiently demonstrating that you **value** God more than the acceptance and good pleasure of this present godless age. God will find ways to **test** you in this.

- b) **Second**, God will be finally vindicated and glorified when He judges the world in truth and righteousness. At that day, all the polls and votes will be totally meaningless. For now, if enough people feel a certain way about any issue, their opinion becomes "right." But all that will change one day. Only God's will is going to stand. God will **enforce** the keeping of His will in a way that we rarely see presently.

So God reminds these people - and me - that we are not out of His sight or heart. Place this idea at the front of your mind every day. It will stand you strong in the face of temptation and ridicule and persecution. God **keeps track** of those who honor Him when most don't. It makes an enormous difference.

God presses an understanding on the people through the prophet that while He doesn't **judge** everything now, He does **record** everything right now. Or to be a little more precise to the text, while He doesn't **reward** everything right now, He **records** every righteous heart and act. Every time you continue to stand for Christ it is noted. It matters. Angels rejoice.

Let that sink in for a moment. Think of it. Every person who quietly, patiently endures - every one who doesn't strike back - everyone one who doesn't give up - everyone who goes the second mile - everyone who fights long, private battles in some dingy prayer closet - everyone who stays home some lonely Friday night because he refuses the company and waste of time with ungodly friends - ***Not one second of that time goes unrecorded by God!***

The Bible reminds us that everything matters more than it appears right at this moment: **Psalm 56:8** - **"You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?"**

Do you see what that verse says? What's breaking your heart right now? What makes you feel overwhelmed and inadequate? When you can't sleep at night because something troubles you and keeps you awake, **God writes that down**. David lies awake at night **"tossing,"** contemplating the successes of his enemies. There are no Tylenol capsules to ease the pain or silence his racing brain. It's three a.m. and all this lonely king can do is stare at the ceiling of his bed chamber and cry.

And God says to some celestial recorder, "Make sure you right all this down. David's up against it right now, and I'm going to see to it that all of this is made up to him!"

Look at **Revelation 5:6-8** - "**And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. [7] And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. [8] And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints."**

Notice, your prayers don't just get "**said.**" They are a **banked investment** with God. Next time you're scurrying from the foyer into the prayer room for ten minutes before the service remember that every approach to God adds to the prayers kept in heaven - like an account that's being built up. How important all of those words are! How significant is our effort before God Almighty! The whole point is prayer is never **wasted.**

So Malachi reminds this Godly remnant of God's book of remembrance. You can't endure long without the support of this **future hope**. We are prone to forget about this. We get discouraged when all wrongs aren't righted now - when all the sick aren't healed now - when life throws both sweet and sour on the same plate - when wrong prevails instead of right - when immorality flourishes instead of righteousness.

When you're wearying in the battle and tempted to throw in the towel remind yourself of God's book of remembrance. The book of remembrance is for those who **fear** the Lord and those who **esteem** His Name - **Malachi 3:16** - **"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."**

That verb, **"fear"** the Lord means **"to reckon"**, or **"to count"**, or more commonly, **"to consider."** It's not a matter of **knowing** about God's book of remembrance. It's **remembering it in the sense of banking on it**. It's mentally **drawing strength, acting on this trust that God is in control**. It's resisting compromise because you know God is trustworthy even when you don't see His hand. It's abiding in the truth that He can be trusted to act in His time for my good.

Remember, God is His own interpreter. He gives account to Himself alone. He doesn't have to reward **now**. He doesn't have to judge **now**. He **records** now, and will **act** later. That's what faith is for. I can rest in that each day of my life.

I said there were two aspects of God's work that Malachi reminded these people about. The **first** was God's recording in His book of remembrance. Now, on to the **second**:

2) **SECOND, GOD REMINDS HIS HEARERS THAT EVEN THOUGH THE SCORES OF LIFE BETWEEN THE GODLY AND UNGODLY AREN'T DECISIVELY SETTLED RIGHT NOW, A DAY OF JUDGING WILL MAKE THE DISTINCTION CLEAR AND FINAL**

Malachi 3:18-4:3 - "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....[4:1]...."For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. [2] But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. [3] And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts."

These verses show **why** a book of remembrance is being kept. God will one day prove that no act of obedience is overlooked. No secret sin ignored.

"I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day" - Henry Longfellow

**"I heard the bells on Christmas day,
Their old familiar carols play,
And wild and sweet the words repeat
Of peace on earth, good will to men."**

**"And in despair I bowed my head,
There is no peace on earth, I said,
For hate is strong and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men."**

**"Yet pealed the bells more loud and deep,
God is not dead, nor doth He sleep,
The wrong shall fail the right prevail
With peace on earth, good will to men."**

**"Then ringing, singing, on its way
The world revolved from night to day,
A voice, a chime and chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good will to men."**

I've never led the church in singing that Christmas carol. I suppose it's pretty enough. But I've often thought that Longfellow was a better *poet* than *theologian*. The wrong will fail and the right prevail but it won't be with **"a voice, a chime, and chant sublime"**

It will be when Jesus Christ comes with the sound of the trumpet, the resurrection of the dead, and a purging fire of judgement that will cleanse and renovate a new heaven and a new earth.

In the mean time we live in a world where the Godly and the pagan are mixed together. But I love that closing picture of unbounded, unrestrained, and uncontainable hilarity on that glorious day - like a calf that had been cooped up - hemmed in - finally turned totally loose and free - **Malachi 4:2** - **“But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.”**

What a picture of the sheer delight that will dawn on us on that day!