

Text: Malachi 3:13-18

Title: Two Kinds of People

Truth: God will not forget the righteous.

Date/Location: Sunday June 20, 2019 at FBC

Introduction

The text falls into two segments that describe two very different kinds of people. The situation that it exposes is a supremely applicable to us because we live in a world much like Malachi's people did. At that time, many were not interested in following God. But there was a remnant that longed for God to "come down" and make His presence known openly on our planet. But they feared the judgment that they knew was coming on the ungodly. Would they become collateral damage in that judgment? Would they also be devastated by God's wrath against the wicked? Would God forget them and thus wipe out the entire nation? They know and are satisfied that God must exercise judgment against sin. They just don't want to be hurt by it.

So it is with us in our day. We see what is going on around us and we know that the wicked have raised up their hand against God. The evil in our age is little different than what went on then. In some ways it is worse because in so many of our fellow citizens there is not even a façade of religion. Others follow errant doctrine that can only lead its adherents to eternal separation from the true God and His Son Jesus Christ. Some of us ask for God to bless America and at the same time we are double-minded, knowing that He cannot bless a nation that is as wicked as ours. But we want to live out our days in peace, serving God. What is going to happen?

Our God will sort it out all perfectly. We should trust in Him implicitly about this. Let us examine the two types of people Malachi writes about.

I. People Who are Harsh Against God, v. 13-15

A. God, who always speaks the truth, explains that their *words* have been harsh against him. This means that their *hearts* have been harsh against Him as well, since Matthew 12:34 is a timelessly true principle. The word "harsh" can also be translated "strong." Their mindset was not one of humble submissiveness toward God, but arrogant self-sufficiency and superiority (James 4:6, 10, 1 Peter 5:6).

B. The people respond, once again dull as a rock, by asking, "What have we spoken against You?" It was obvious, but they did not understand.

1. Their lack of offerings showed where their heart was (3:8); they professed that they did not know how to return to God, as if they didn't need to (3:7); the priests did not speak the Law of God to the people (2:7); they drew a blank when told that they had defiled God with corrupt sacrifices and a terrible attitude (1:7, 12-13); they didn't realize how they were despising the name of God (1:6); and they claimed that God did not love them (1:2). They had disobeyed God from top to bottom, ignored His promises of covenant blessings, and then wondered why things weren't going so well.
 2. Why this disconnect? People who do not have the ministry of God's Spirit in their lives cannot understand spiritual truth. They are blind to the implications of God's word. Their hearts are morally darkened (Eph. 4:17-19; 1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 4:3-4).
- C. God graciously answers them through the prophet Malachi. Here is the catalog of what they said:
1. "It is useless to serve God." Evaluation: this is a false statement and comes from a terrible attitude. That clearly is "speaking against God."
 2. "What profit is it that we have kept His ordinance..." They thought that if they serve God, it will not result in blessing. That idea was out of step with the Mosaic covenant and promises of their unchanging God—some of which God had just reiterated in 3:10-12. Translations are split here as to whether they were asserting they *had* kept the covenant or were just offering a hypothetical "if we keep it" statement. Whatever the case, they had not in fact "kept His ordinance"! What they were doing was not the will of God.
 3. "...and that we have walked as mourners before the LORD of hosts?" They evidently had made some motions of emotions, some veneration of grief before God. But it was only fake religion—like the Pharisees.
 4. "We call the proud blessed, for those who do wickedness are raised up. They even tempt God and go free." Wrong again. The people got the idea in their head that God was so absent from their daily lives that they adopted a reverse morality. They looked at the wicked in their prosperity and concluded that God blessed them in their wickedness. They had fallen where Asaph had been saved from falling in Psalm 73:2-3. His tension was solved in 73:17. If you look at prosperity according to earthly metrics like Job's friends did, your instrumentation is wrongly calibrated. The people had already been "cursed with a curse" (3:9) because of their robbery of God and other indiscretions.

II. People Who Fear God, v. 16-18

The remainder of Malachi's prophecy cheers the heart of the righteous.

- A. The opposite kind of people are those who "fear the Lord." The end of verse 16 in NKJV indicates that they "meditated" on His name. That is true, but the idea of the verb conveys more not only thinking about God's name, but also the reason behind it, namely, that they honor and highly esteem God Himself. The verb means to respect and hold in high regard. The God-fearing person's attitude is entirely different than those people described in verses 13-15, who were more like the people in Isaiah 53:3. They did not esteem the stricken Servant of the LORD. They rejected Him—an awful truth that the people of Israel will someday realize when God gets their attention during the Tribulation.
- B. These good people spoke among themselves about all that was going on in their nation, and in their discussions gave evidence that they truly feared and respected God. Their hearts grieved about the abominable things done across the landscape (like those in Ezekiel 9:4). They, the people of God, knew that their people were not supposed to be doing these things. They were deeply troubled. And, they feared that they would be swallowed up in the punishment of their wicked neighbors.
- C. But God's people need not fear, because God is not unrighteous to forget the labor of love shown toward His name (Hebrews 6:10). Verse 16 says that God "took notice" and heard their concerns. Not only was He aware of what they were saying, but "hearing" implies that He cared and was going to do something about it.
- D. The "book" that is mentioned in verse 16 need not be reckoned as a codex on paper in heaven in order to be taken literally. It is a metaphor indicating the literal truth that God would not forget them. In other words, God was reminded of them and would never forget them, no matter what happened with the unrighteous. He would not allow them to become collateral damage, at least ultimately.
 1. If we de-emphasize the writing of a literal book, we save the trouble trying to identify the book with other "heavenly books" in Scripture, namely the Lamb's Book of Life. These God-fearing people were *already* written down in that book from the foundation of the world.
 2. If you are troubled by the idea that the book is not a literal hard-back in heaven, remember this: the *point* is that a "book of remembrance" means *God will remember*. This is just like other descriptions in the Bible. For example: a "belt of truth" refers to *truth* and a "breastplate

of righteousness” refers to *righteousness* (Ephesians 6:11-18) and a “crown of life” refers to *life* (James 1:12 and Rev. 2:10). The figure of a book is helpful because we understand written material has a long shelf-life. It is permanent and legally binding since it is “in writing.”

3. We do know that the godly often suffer because of the sins of the ungodly. Famine, disease and war ravage places without regard for one’s faith in God. But ultimately those who fear God will be OK.
- E. In fact, God says that these people will be “Mine.” What comfort this is! God loves those who fear Him (Psalm 103:13). The “day” refers to a future time of judgment in which all the sorting out will take place. At that time, God promises He will spare the God-fearing ones like a man spares his own son. In other words, these ones have a special father-son relationship with God. They are like special treasure to God (“jewels”), as Israel was designed to be centuries prior (Exodus 19:5 “treasured possession”; Deut. 7:6; Deut. 14:2; 26:18; Psalm 135:4). God’s people in the church are similarly situated (Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:5, 9).
- F. Forever after, in the millennial kingdom and beyond, the difference between righteous and wicked will be clear. The people will be able to properly discern who is good and who is evil. Unlike Malachi’s people—who called the evil blessed and thought that God was raising up the wicked—the people of Israel will once again get it right. How?
1. They will have better powers of discernment, because they will have the Spirit of God and won’t be able to be so confused.
 2. Justice will be meted out directly by Christ as He and His people reign over the world. There will not be long delays between bad behavior and punishment. Such delays induce people to think that the wicked prosper. And, wickedness grows under such conditions (Eccl. 8:11).

Conclusion

Look at verse 18. The contrast that we have made above between those who spoke harshly against God and those who served God is said in two other ways. “Between the righteous and the wicked,” and “Between the one who serves God and the one who does not serve Him.” This is powerful. There are two ways to live—one is to be righteous and actually serve God (not just *say* you serve Him), and the other is to not be wicked and not serve Him. In the present era of the church, it is no different. You either trust Christ and are thus launched onto a path of serving Him, or you don’t. You are either declared righteous and then go about living that way, or you don’t. That’s it.

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