

“MAJOR THEMES FROM THE MINOR PROPHETS: MALACHI.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

October 7, 2012, 6:00PM

Sermon Texts: Malachi 3:13-18

Introduction.

Some wise wag once remarked, “There are three kinds of people in the world, those who are good at math and those who aren’t.”

Or there are two kinds of people in the world, those who always divide people into two groups and those who don’t. Then there is the obvious one, there are two kinds of people in the world, male and female.

Our text this evening describes two kinds of people and speaks to two kinds of people.

First, there are people who don’t fear God, they don’t revere or respect or honor or esteem God. They don’t think or speak highly of God. They criticize and complain about God, they accuse God of being unjust and unfair. They feel like they have tried to do what’s right and follow the rules but things haven’t turned out very good for them. God hasn’t come through on His end of the bargain. These are the folks who are quick to point out how God could be doing a better job and how He could be a better God.

Second, there are people who fear God, they revere and respect Him, they honor and esteem Him. They think and speak highly of God. They are humble before God even when God delays in hearing their prayers or helping them. They serve God as a son serves his father.

The first spoke against God, the second spoke for God.

Which group characterizes your words or thoughts or actions? Which group do you belong to? If you are in the first group, the goal of this passage of Scripture is to move you into the second group.

Malachi 3:13-15, The murmurers and complainers and critics.

Remember last week our text began, “I, the Lord, do not change.” God was and is and will always be faithful.

This week the text could begin, “These people do not change.” They were faithless before and they are faithless still.

Here we are coming to the end of the last book of the OT and the people of God still haven’t changed. God has sent prophets, priest and kings, God has sent floods, famines and plagues. And when it got bad enough He sent armies to overthrow His people, and yet they remain hardhearted and unchanged.

We have already heard about these people in chapter 2:

Malachi 2:17 You have wearied the Lord with your words. But you say, “How have we wearied him?” By saying, “Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them.” Or by asking, “Where is the God of justice?”

Like the people of Israel in the wilderness murmuring against God and against their leaders.

Numbers 11:1 And the people complained in the hearing of the Lord about their misfortunes, and when the Lord heard it, his anger was kindled, and the fire of the Lord burned among them and consumed some outlying parts of the camp.

There are some in every crowd, in every church, in every family reunion, in every office. Those who grumble and complain, those who gripe about anything and everything.

They are those of whom it is said, “They would complain if you hung them with a new rope.” These are the glass is half empty people who manage to find a dark lining behind every cloud.

The great Puritan pastor, Thomas Watson, put it well, “Our murmuring is the devil’s music.”

Grumbling, discontent, ungrateful complaining are grievous offences against our gracious God. A murmuring spirit comes from a dissatisfied spirit and a dissatisfied spirit displeases God.

Malachi 3:13.

And what happens when you confront a grumbler and complainer? They immediately deny it. “What, me a complainer, never, I don’t know what you are talking about, and how dare you accuse me of such of thing.”

God confronts the murmurers and calls them to account and true to form they question God and say, *“How have we spoken against you? When did we ever complain or grumble?”*

Isn’t that the way it is, those who whine and gripe and complain the most are the least aware, the least tuned into their own words.

We should be used to this pattern by now in Malachi. This is how the ungodly have answered every accusation God has made of them.

This is the seventh or eighth time God has rebuked the people and the people have responded with counter questions, questions that sound like a direct denial of God’s words.

Malachi 3:14-15.

God answers them by giving them a verbatim of their own words. God quotes them and traps them with their own words.

Malachi 3:14-15 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.’”

How is it that God knows their exact words?

Matthew 12:36-37 I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, 37 for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

You know right that God hears every word we think and say. It’s like He is standing in our living room or barn or office or class room or shop. It’s like He’s in the car with us or in our kitchen or listening on the phone.

God heard their words, that there really wasn’t any point or benefit to following God and in fact, it appeared to be more profitable to be ungodly.

They think God is like a machine, you pull the lever and you get what you want. You give and you get back. You follow the rules and He’s supposed to bless you.

Their religion was just that, a formal religion without a relationship, without any heart. “With their lips they worship me but their hearts are far from me” (Matthew 15:8). Last week God said return to me and I will return to you. It’s a relationship and it starts in the heart.

This brings us to the second group of people in Judah and what a contrast.

Malachi 3:16-18, The God-fearers.

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.

Notice the word “*then*.” While all this grumbling and complaining and bickering and backbiting and murmuring and criticizing and finger pointing and tongue wagging and naysaying was going on, what else was happening?

While the days were evil and the godless were speaking loudly and the wicked seemed to be prospering, what else was going on? There was a remnant of God-fearers who were speaking the truth to each other and were defending the name and honor of God.

In other words, as things continue to get worse and worse in the world around us, those who fear the Lord must let their light shine brighter for each other and for the world.

This faithful remnant among His people are those who fear the Lord and esteem the name of the Lord, who serve Him like a son serves a father.

The mark of the remnant is the fear of the Lord.

The fear of the Lord is the sum of true religion and the first principle of faith. Without the fear of the Lord there is no true knowledge of God.

True fear of the Lord is completely compatible with true love for the Lord. They are not contradictory, but complimentary. True fear of the Lord mixes well with faith, hope and love.

Fear keeps us serious and watchful; faith keeps us joyful; hope keeps us confident in His mercy; love keeps us in His sweet embrace.

This fear of the Lord is a *filial fear*, the fear of a son to a father, not the fear of a slave to a master.

God makes four promise to those who fear Him.

God will hear those who fear Him.

God will remember those who fear Him.

God will make those who fear Him His treasured possession.

God will spare those who fear Him.

God hears the God-fearers. God listens to their voice and answers their prayers.

Matthew 7:11 If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

God remembers the God-fearers. God keeps track of who's who. He remembers their names in His book of remembrance. Not one true believer will be forgotten. He keeps track of their deeds, He records them. He knows their tears and troubles and trials. One day He will vindicate them.

God makes God-fearers His treasured possession.

Exodus 19:5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my *treasured possession* among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

God protects God-fearers.

In the days of Noah, there were only eight righteous who feared the Lord. In Sodom and Gomorrah there is only Lots family. In the days of Joshua he was bold to say, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." When the King was following Baal, God comforted Elijah saying there were still seven thousand who had not bent the knee. When the whole world was running after the heresies of Arius, Athanasius stood firm saying, "Athanasius against the world."

In the great day of judgment, God will spare and protect His own. His faithful remnant will be preserved.

God says there are two kinds of people and the day is coming when the distinction will be made clear between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who don't.

Psalm 58:11 Mankind will say, "Surely there is a reward for the righteous; surely there is a God who judges on earth."

Application and conclusion.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. 14 For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.

Fear God. Esteem His name. Serve Him with all your energy. Love Him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.

Those who fear the Lord will be blessed.

Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge;

Proverbs 2:5 then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.

Proverbs 14:26 In the fear of the Lord one has strong confidence, and his children will have a refuge.

Proverbs 10:27 The fear of the Lord prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be short.

Proverbs 19:23 The fear of the Lord leads to life, and whoever has it rests satisfied.

How can we increase in our fear of the Lord?

Think more about God. The reason many don't fear God is that they think little about Him or they think little of Him.

Pray and ask for this fear of the Lord. Some pray for health, some pray for wealth, let us pray for a stronger and richer fear of the Lord.