

Those who feared the Lord.....

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[0 : 00] Now let us turn back to this portion of scripture we've read from Malachi and chapter 3. And again focusing on verse 16 onwards.

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.

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.

Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked. Between the one who serves God and the one who does not serve him.

I pray that the Lord will lead and guide us as we meditate for a few moments on these words. The word Malachi means my messenger.

[1 : 18] And the Lord's servant who wrote this particular book, he was bearing the Lord's message to these people.

They were a people who had been in the captivity of Babylon. And around a hundred years before this book was written and this message was given to them.

They had returned from Babylon as a people and resettled in Jerusalem. And they had rebuilt the temple and a hundred years had now passed until these words of our text were written.

They had come back from the captivity of Babylon with great excitement. The prophet Jeremiah anticipated their return in Jeremiah 31 and verses 8 onwards.

When he says these marvelous words by way of encouragement to these people. Behold, I will bring them from the north country and gather them from the furthest parts of the earth.

[2 : 46] Among them the blind and the lame, the pregnant woman and she who is in labor together. A great company shall return here. And they had returned and established themselves again in Jerusalem.

But with the passing of the years, they had become a disloyal people. Disloyal to their God. They had become careless in relation to the worship of their God. They had become a careless and worldly people.

Although they were named as the people of God. And I'd like just to focus for a few minutes on the kind of disloyalty and carelessness and worldliness that had crept in over the past hundred years. That's the first thing. But secondly, despite all that, at the beginning of verse 16, we have reference that even at that time, with all that worldliness that had crept in, there were those who feared the Lord and spoke with one another.

[4 : 11] Focus on that particular group of people. In the midst of the great mass of worldliness and ungodliness, there were these people who feared the Lord.

A God-fearing people. Thirdly, one or two words from the second part of verse 16, when it talks about God's interest in these godly people who feared the Lord.

It says from the second half of verse 16, 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.

The Lord's interest in this small group of faithful people. And fourthly and finally, what it says by way of God's promise to such.

Verse 17, the Lord says, They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession.

[5 : 21] And so on. Just a few words under these four headings, the disloyal people, the God-fearing people, God's interest in his God-fearing people, and God's promise to them.

Firstly, the disloyalty of these people. It's amazing the change that will come upon a society in a hundred years.

And that happened with this society in Jerusalem. See, for example, what they say at chapter 1 and verse 2.

The Lord says to them, I have loved you. And surely he had. And he had expressed and shown them his love and care down through the centuries as his covenant people.

And here he reiterates that. I have loved you, says the Lord. But you say, How have you loved us? It's as if they're not aware of the Lord's care and the Lord's provision.

[6 : 34] They're not aware of the way the Lord has done great things for them in the past. And it's as if they shrug their shoulders and say, We don't see any signs of your love or care for us now.

The second thing is also in chapter 1, verses 6 to 8. A son honors his father and a servant his master.

The Lord says, If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? Says the Lord of hosts. O priests, you despise my name.

But you say, How have we despised your name? And the Lord answers, By offering polluted food upon my altar. But you say, How have we polluted you?

And the Lord says, That the Lord's table may be despised. You offer blind animals in sacrifice. Is that not evil? It's as if they were giving the Lord the second best.

[7 : 47] The second rate is good enough for him. And the next thing, from chapter 2, verse 11, Another mark of their disloyalty to the Lord. Verse 11 says, Judah has been faithless, And abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem.

For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord, Which he loves, And has married the daughter of a foreign god. May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob Any descendant of the man who does this, Who brings an offering to the Lord of hosts.

They had mixed with the pagan nations around them. And they had imbibed the views, The world views, And the kind of worship that the pagan nations were involved in.

And that contaminates these people. And then, finally, under this first heading, We see chapter 3 at verse 8.

Another example of what the Lord here highlights, As their careless worldliness. Will man rob God? The Lord is asking.

[9 : 08] Yet, he says, You are robbing me. But you say, How? How we robbed you? In your tithes and contributions. You are cursed with a curse.

Bring the full tithe to the storehouse, That there may be food in my house. And so on. It's as if they were holding back. They weren't committed to the Lord.

They were casting their net wide, And embracing foreign gods, And giving the Lord, as it were, Second or third, Or no place at all in their lives.

Although there was an outward Commitment to the Lord, In their coming and going from the temple, And having some kind of worship performed, Nevertheless, Their heart was not in it.

And as I was reading this, And thinking about it, There's a sense in which It highlights many things That are wrong in our own society today.

[10 : 11] The Lord cares for our society In so many different ways. But the Lord is not given The honor and the place That the Lord requires. We enjoy peace.

We enjoy marvelous privileges In God's wonderful providence. Even today, How many people Attend the house of God To worship throughout our nation.

It's less than 10% Of the population of our nation Who will acknowledge That this is the Lord's day. And consecrate their lives Today and else And other days To him.

And he says, Bring the full tithes Into the storehouse. Give the Lord What the Lord asks.

Give him of your time. Give him of your energy. Give him of your life. That you might honor him.

And we know that If we give him What he asks of us, He will pour blessings upon us.

[11 : 12] Just as he promises These people. He says, Put me to the test. Says the Lord If I will not open The windows of heaven For you And pour down for you A blessing Until there is no more need.

So there were A decadent people A people who had lost Their spiritual place really Something like your own society A decadent society Living for the moment living with many people doing what's right in their own eyes.

Just as it was at the days of the judges in Israel. Everyone did what was right in their own eyes. Well, that's not the way to success.

That's not the way to secure God's blessing. It's the way to disaster. The second point. Verse 16 at the beginning.

Then those who feared the Lord spoke with one another. And that word then at the beginning of verse 16 is absolutely pregnant with force and with significance.

[12:35] It's as if the then takes note of everything that has been said about these people in the previous verses and the previous chapters.

Describing how they had gone off the rails spiritually. And he says despite all of that at this point there were other people in the nation who lived a different kind of life.

Who had a different allegiance. Whose lives were dedicated to the Lord. And he uses three words to describe what these people were like.

Then he says there were people first of all who feared the Lord. And who spoke with one another. And who thought upon his name.

These three things. There are different kind of people. There are people who give the Lord the place he requires.

[13:38] And that's the way he describes them. They feared the Lord. This is something that the Lord requires of us all. He required it of Israel.

Israel in Deuteronomy chapter 10. And now Israel. What does the Lord your God require of you but. To fear the Lord your God.

To walk in all his ways. To love him. To serve the Lord your God with all your heart. And with all your soul. And to keep the commandments and the statutes of the Lord.

That was at the very beginning of this nation's existence. In the days of Moses. Deuteronomy chapter 10. And the writer of Ecclesiastes.

Sums up all he has said. In the book of Ecclesiastes. Where he says. That this is what the Lord requires of you. But to fear God. And keep his commandments.

[14:37] For this is the whole. Of man. You find that the whole duty. The word duty is put into many of the translations. But really in the original it says.

This is the whole of man. Man cannot be whole. Apart from fearing God. And keeping his commandments. There is always something missing.

If we don't fear God. And keep his commandments. We are not whole as individuals. We are not whole as a society. If God is left out. Of the equation.

But these people. They were those who feared. The Lord. Now this doesn't mean that they were. Shaking in their boots. At the thought of God.

It wasn't a slavish fear at all. It was a fear. That was full of respect for him. A fear that was full of love for him.

[15:36] And fear of sinning against him. And offending him. A fear that marked itself out by obedience to him. And a delight in him. And a faith in him.

And a wholehearted worship of him. And service. Focusing on him. Even. Even.

In that awful society. Where people couldn't care less about God. There were those. Who feared him. Who loved him. Who walked.

In obedience to his word. And who worshipped him. And served him. And sought to honour him. In their lives. It's that.

Mark you. Does it mark me. Does it describe us. Fear God. The next thing is.

[16:36] That they thought upon his name. Those who feared the Lord. That they thought upon his name. It's at the end of verse 16.

Thinking about the name of God. That word thought upon his name. Is a very interesting word. The thought is.

That they were thinking. Minutely about him. And carefully about him. They were thinking about him. With a real focus.

Not as if. They thought about God's. Existence now and again. But they thought about him. As a being. As a person.

And it says here. They thought about his name. What name? Well first of all. One of the names he's got in the Bible.

[17:38] Is the Holy One. Of Israel. They thought about the fact that he is holy. And they are sinful.

He demands holiness. Of us. Be ye holy. For I am holy. He says. He demands that. He's also called.

Emmanuel. God with us. You find that in. Isaiah chapter 7. A virgin. Shall be with child. And bear a son. And call his name. Emmanuel. God with us. It's as if. The Holy God. Who is so different from us.

In every respect. Nevertheless. Came to be with us. In the person of his son. And these people. In the days of Malachi.

[18 : 38] As they feared the Lord. They thought upon. This God as holy. Nevertheless. Who was among them. In the midst of them.

And when Isaiah describes him. In chapter 9. Of the prophecy. He uses these marvelous words. Particularly about Christ. He says of him.

That he's a wonderful. Counselor. That he is the mighty. God. He is the everlasting. Father. And he is the prince.

Of peace. They think about his name. And what all these names mean. That he's a wonderful. Person in himself.

That he is a counselor. To those who need counsel. He is a director. Of those who are lost. Directing them. In the right direction.

[19 : 40] And in the right way. He is a mighty God. He is the almighty one. Who created the universe. And who upholds everything. By the word of his power.

So that if he withdrew. His word of power. The whole creation. Would revert. To nothingness. In him.

We live and move. And have our being. The bible says. He's the everlasting father. He so cares. For his people. That he is. Likened. To a father. Not only that he is. From everlasting. But he cares. Everlastingly.

And forever. For those. Who trust in him. With fatherly care. What an amazing. Focus. These people had.

[20 : 35] As they thought. Upon the name of God. He is my father. And he keeps me. And protects me. And sustains me. And provides for me. Not only in this world.

But in the moment. Of my death. And at the resurrection. And throughout the endless. Ages of eternity. humanity. And these people. They were delighting. In thinking about.

Such a God. As this. But the next thing. It says about them. They weren't a people. In isolation. Although they were. In a way. Separate from the mass. Of the population. Who had given themselves. Over to. Reckless. Worldliness. Yes. These people.

They had a group together. And they spoke. Often. To one another. You see. They were able. To identify. People.

[21 : 35] Of the same mind. And people. Of the same outlook. With whom. They met. From day to day. We're not part of. The foolish.

Worldly. Group. That live. So carelessly. We delight. In the name. Of the Lord. And we fear. The Lord. And it's as if.

These people. Were magnetized. By the spirit. Of God. To group together. In Ecclesiastes. It says this. In chapter four. Two. Are better than one. Because they have. They have a good. Reward.

For their toil. For if. They fall. One. Will lift up. His fellow. And though a man. Might prevail. Against one. Who is alone.

[22 : 31] Two. Will withstand him. And a threefold. Cord. Is not quickly broken. These people. When they gathered. Together. They were.

Stronger. Together. Than they were. Individually. Or separately. Hebrews. 10. 25. Says. Do not forsake. The assembling.

Of yourselves. Together. As the. Matter. Of some. Is. But exhorting. One another. And encouraging. One another. And so much. The more. As you see. The day.

Approaching. Encourage. One another. And build. One another up. Just as you are doing. That's exactly.

What these people. Were doing. In the days. Of Malachi. I suppose. They felt. Threatened. By. The way. The tide. Was running.

[23 : 25] In Israel. At the time. Just like. Maybe. You feel yourself. Today. In our own nation. The tide. Seems to be running. So strongly. Against the Christian.

World view. When people. Cast the Bible. Aside. And cast it. Under their feet. On various issues. It's as if the Bible's. Ruling. Is totally rejected.

But we see. That when we gather together. We are stronger. And we encourage. One another. To know that God reigns. And he is still on the throne.

God reigneth. Let the earth be glad. And isles rejoice. Each one. Isn't that something. That keeps you going. In the face of discouragement.

And uncertainty. That God is not discouraged. And he is not uncertain. As to what he is doing. He does all things well. Despite the dark day.

[24 : 25] And the difficulties that come. They would meet. And talk together. They would tell each other.

Their experiences. The blessings. They had received. The good things. That the Lord has done. For their souls. And they would be encouraged. To know that the Lord was. Strengthening.

And encouraging them. As individuals. Remember. When David had. A very hard time. At the hands. Of King Saul. And he was.

Going around. As if he were a fugitive. And that's exactly. What he was. And there was. This particular day. And Jonathan. Went down. Into the woods. Where he knew.

David was. And he went down. And strengthened. His hand. In God. What an amazing. Thing that was.

[25 : 19] And you remember. What David said. When Jonathan. Had been slain. On Mount Gilboa. As he sang. His. Lament for him. He said. Wonderful.

Was your love. For me. Jonathan. Because he had. Helped him. Because he had. Had fellowship. With him. Because two. Were better than one.

And they thought. The same way. And praised. The same Lord. And lived. To the glory. Of the same God. I often think.

Also. Of. When Elizabeth. In Luke. Chapter 1. Was pregnant. Bearing. John the Baptist.

And then. The angel. Gabriel. Came. And. Made the announcement. To Mary. That she should. Bear a son. And so on.

[26 : 16] And you find. Then. That Mary. Goes down. All the way. To see. Elizabeth. And what amazing. Discussions. They would have had.

We don't know. From the scripture. What they were saying. But one. Can safely. Assume. That their focus. Would have been. On the great. Experience. Through which.

They were both. Going. That was so. Momentous. For the life. Of the world. And they encouraged. Each other. And strengthened.

Each other. And rejoiced. Together. In the Lord. And his goodness. They spoke. With one another. Are you doing that?

As much. As you need to. Speak. With one another. Encourage. One another. Be one another's burdens. And so. Fulfill.

[27 : 11] The law. Of Christ. That was a mark. On these. Special people. In the days. Of Malachi. But thirdly. The second half.

Of verse 16. We have a little. Insight. Into. What the Lord. Thought of them. The Lord. It says. It's paid attention.

And heard them. What an amazing thing. This small. Evidently. Group of people.

Seemingly. Steamrolled. By. A worldly attitude. And cast aside. By those. Who felt. That the world.

Was theirs. And they were the people. These people. Here. What they were. What they were. And what they were. Doing and saying. Was being registered.

[28 : 09] In heaven. The Lord. Paid attention. And heard them. What the original. Here says.

Is something like this. The Lord. The Lord. The Lord. Picked up his ears. And he paid attention. It's as if. There was. So much.

Other noise. Round about. And this. Was a frequency. That was different. And it reached. The ears. Of Jehovah. He heard them.

You know. The Lord. Delights. In the fellowship. Of his people. He delights. In the heavenly. Heavenly conversation. Of his people. Of their spiritual.

Repertoire. As they talk together. He delights. In it. He delights. When they discuss. Their experiences. And their.

[29 : 12] Experiences. Of his own grace. And love. He delights. To hear. Their complaints. About their. Woundings. Because of sin.

And when they weep. For the iniquity. Of the world. Around them. The Lord. Takes notice. And he puts their tears. Into his bottle. Of remembrance. Remember.

The two. On the road. To Emmaus. They had thought. That Jesus. Was going to be. The redeemer. Of Israel. But Jesus.

Had been crucified. And buried. And they said. No. This is the third day. And it's as if. Their whole world. Had collapsed. They turned their back. Upon Jerusalem. And going to Emmaus.

Six or seven miles. Distant. And a gloom. Hung over them. As they spoke together. And were sad. But there was somebody.

[30 : 12] Who knew them. And who paid attention. To them. And who heard them. And that was the. The saviour himself. The risen saviour.

And he drew near them. And what are these words. You're speaking. As you journey. And are sad. Haven't you heard. What's happened. In Jerusalem. In these days.

No. What is it. About Jesus of Nazareth. Who was a prophet. Mighty in word. And deed. And so on. And Jesus. Explained to them. From the scriptures. The things.

Concerning himself. And as they journeyed on. Their heart. Burned within them. As he spoke to them. By the way. And opened. To them. The scriptures.

And as they went. Into the house. And the Lord. Broke bread. They knew them. In the breaking. Of the bread. In other words. They had. An extra. An extra. Understanding. Of them.

[31 : 07] The Lord. Gave. Them. To see. More of his glory. As. They knew him. In the breaking. Of the bread. How gratifying.

To know. That the Lord. Knows. Your tears. That the Lord. Knows. Your questions. That the Lord. Knows. Your longings. And not only.

Does he know. But it says here. A book of remembrance. Was written. Before him. Just as the books.

Of. Remembrance. Were written. In the king's palaces. Of old. Remember when. In the book of Esther. The king.

Ahasuerus. Found. In the journal. About. How. Mordecai. The Jew. Had saved his life. There was a recorder.

[32 : 03] Recording. What was happening. Just as if. In the house of commons. Hansard. Is being written. Everything. That is being said. In the house of commons.

Is recorded. So everything. That happens. In your experience. As a Christian. Is being recorded. In heaven. The details.

Of your life. Of faith. First time. You saw. The glory. Of Jesus Christ. Recorded. In heaven. The first time.

When you can't. Began. Your thinking. About him. And to seek him. As your own savior. When your heart. Was warmed. By the gospel. As you sat.

In a seat. In church. Or as you read. The word of God. Alone. When you went home. And closed your room. Behind you. And did business. With your Lord.

[32 : 56] In heaven. And thanked God. For Jesus Christ. Whom you now. Had trusted. As your Lord. And savior. He records.

The. The desires. Of your heart. The secret. Acts. Of loving service. Done in his name. He records. Your soul.

Sorrow. For your lack. Of. Fruit. And lack. Of service. In his name. A book.

Of remembrance. Was written. Before him. This little. Seeming. Insignificant. Group of people. In a sea.

Of carelessness. Nevertheless. The Lord. Knew them. And he knows. Every individual. Who fit. This description. Of his people.

[33 : 54] Those who fear. The Lord. Who think. Upon his name. With delight. And who speak. Often. To one another. Thirdly.

And finally. Fourthly. And finally. The God's. Promise. To these people. He says. They shall be mine. Says the Lord. Of hosts. In the day. When I make up. My treasured.

Possession. I will spare them. As a man. Spares his son. Who serves him. And so on. The time is coming. When the Lord.

Is going to deal with. Those who have lived. Recklessly. And carelessly. Chapter 4. Verse 1.

Behold. The day is coming. Burning like an oven. When all the arrogant.

And all evil doers. 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.

[34 : 50] Nor branch. The awful end. Of the wicked. But those who. Fear the Lord. This is what it says.

They shall be mine. In the day. When I make up. My treasured possession. He keeps them safe. He himself.

Surrounds them. He himself. Protects them. In the most difficult. Of times. In the most trying. Of circumstances.

In the most disappointing. Of events. He. Keeps them. My father. Jesus said. Give them to me. And none.

Shall pluck them. From my father's hand. What an amazing assurance. God gives. To the minority. To the small group.

[35 : 45] In the midst of the great. Wide world. Who don't care to know him. There are those. Upon whom. The Lord's eye is set. And whose.

Whose love. Fills. Their heart. And surrounds. Their lives. He calls them.

His treasured. Possession. Maybe that's. Not the way you feel. About yourself. That you're no treasure. At all. That you're just.

A waste of space. The psalmist. In Psalm 73. When he. Thought of. On his life. He said. In view of all. That he had been.

Thinking. And saying. I was a beast. Before you. He felt. That he was. Not worthy.

[36 : 46] But the Lord. Says of his people. They are blood bought. And they are safe. Not only. In time. But also. They will be safe.

Whatever circumstances. Come. And they will be safe. At death. The souls of believers. At their death. Are made perfect. In holiness.

And to immediately. Pass into glory. And their bodies. Being still united. To Christ. Rest in their graves. Until the resurrection. What about the dust.

To which our bodies. Will go. Catechism. The catechism. Says. That the resurrection. Believer. Shall be raised. In glory. Openly.

Acknowledged. And acquitted. At the day of judgment. Shall be made. Perfectly blessed. In the full. Enjoying of God. To all eternity. Are you among them.

[37 : 44] Although you may feel. Sidelined. Though you may feel. Nothing in yourself. If you fear the Lord. Think upon his name.

And speak. In fellowship. With his people. And with him. All will be well. At last. Let us pray.