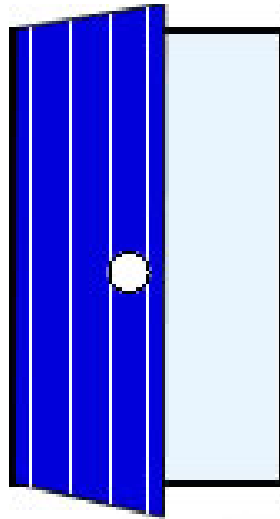


BIBLE STUDIES



Mill Lane Chapel

Malachi

(8) "They shall be mine"

Read Chapter 3: 13-18

As we have seen, Malachi 2: 17 - 3: 18 can be divided as follows: **(1)** The coming of the Refiner, 2: 17 - 3: 6. "But who may abide the day of his coming.....for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap", V2. **(2)** The call to return, 3: 7-12. "Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?", V7. **(3)** The conduct of the remnant, V13-18. "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another", V16.

1) THE COMING OF THE REFINER, 2: 17 - 3: 6

This section comprises a question and an answer. **(A) The question:** "Where is the God of judgement?", 2: 17. **(B) The answer:** "Behold, I **will** send my messenger before my face.....and the Lord whom ye seek, **shall** suddenly come to his temple", 3: 1

2) THE CALL TO RETURN, 3: 7-12

This section can be summarised by two phrases in V7: "Ye are gone away.....return unto me." Their **departure** is described in V8-9, and they are encouraged to **return** in V10-12. In both cases, we have a 'cause and effect' situation. In the first case, God says, **(i)** "Ye have robbed me"; that is the cause, and **(ii)** "Ye are cursed with a curse"; that is the effect. In the second case, God says, **(i)** "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse"; that is the cause, and **(ii)** "I will.....pour you out a blessing.....all nations shall call you blessed"; that is the effect.

3) THE CONDUCT OF THE REMNANT, 3: 13-18

The final section of the chapter clearly falls into two parts: **(A)** The attitude of the nation, V13-15. "Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinances, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?" **(B)** The attitude of the remnant, V16-18. "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another." The well-known and well-loved words in V16-18, are set against the dismal and discouraging words in V13-15. We have often noticed that God, a master-jeweller, displays His brightest gems against dark backgrounds.

A) THE ATTITUDE OF THE NATION, V13-15

They were **(i)** Unaware of their attitude to God, V13; **(ii)** Uncomplimentary about the service of God, **V14**; **(iii)** Unthinking about the character of God, V15.

i) They were unaware of their attitude to God, V13

"Your words have been stout against me, saith the Lord. Yet ye say, What have we spoken so much against thee?" The word "stout", means 'hard' or 'bold.' So this wasn't the desperate and unthinking cry of people under pressure. It was a hardened and deliberate protest. But they seemed completely unaware of their displeasure to God. This is the last occurrence of the question and answer formula that punctuates the book, and emphasises that there was no sense of decline amongst God's people. Sadly, this was equally true at the end of the New Testament: "Thou.....knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked", Revelation 3: 17. This might be a good opportunity to examine ourselves. Does it have to be said about **us**, "Where is then the blessedness ye spake of?", Galatians 4: 15.

ii) They were uncomplimentary about the service of God, V14

"Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinances, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?" God describes this attitude as "stout against me." This is most searching. We too can oppose God by disparaging His service, by disparaging obedience to His word, and by disparaging godly living.

a) They disparaged God's service. "It is vain to serve God." It seemed pointless. There was no improvement in their circumstances, and the wicked continued to prosper. Do **we** sometimes think that it is "vain to serve God?" After all, there often seems to be so little return on the capital expenditure of time, energy, and finance. All those tracts and invitations. All that preaching. All those prayers. All that personal witnessing to family, friends and neighbours. Is it really worth it? We must let God answer: "Be stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord", 1 Corinthians 15: 58. "Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour", 1 Corinthians 3: 8. We can be sure that God "will hasten his word to perform it", Jeremiah 1: 12. Note JND here: 'I am watchful over my word to perform it.' See also Isaiah 55: 10-11. If we make our excuses, and give up our service for God, we are 'stout against Him.' The attitude of the perfect Servant was so different! "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart", Isaiah 40: 8.

b) They disparaged obedience to God's word. "What profit is it that we have kept his ordinance?" For the technically minded, two different words are used for "ordinance" in this chapter. In V7 ("ye are gone away from mine ordinances"), the word *choq* refers particularly to ritual observances, whereas here the word (*mishmereth*) refers to general religious duties.

Their complaint reminds us that obedience to the word of God is not necessarily accompanied by immediate and spectacular blessing. We should obey God's

word whether or not He is pleased to show His approval at once. We should obey God's word, because it *is* God's word. This applies to our personal lives, and to our assembly life. We are sometimes tempted to wonder why some 'churches' with little or no desire to conform to God's word in either doctrine or practice, seem to flourish. Whatever the answer to that problem, it remains our duty to obey God's word. The apostle Paul was able to say at the end of his life, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have **kept the faith.**" The Lord Jesus commended the church at Philadelphia for their faithfulness: "thou hast a little strength, and hast **kept my word**, and hast not denied my name", Revelation 3: 8. This leads to:

c) They disparaged godly living. "What profit is it.....that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?" Paul thoroughly disagreed: "Godliness is profitable unto all things (spiritually, mentally, and physically), having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come", 1 Timothy 4: 8. The word "mournfully" is, literally, 'in blackness', and reminds us that godliness involves self-judgement and self-restraint. It is not always easy to "mortify the deeds of the body" (Romans 8: 13; compare Colossians 3: 5), especially when people around us do as they like, and seem to suffer no ill effects. We can understand why the Psalmist said, "I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked", Psalm 73: 3. Was Paul really right in saying, "godliness is profitable unto all things?" The answer will be made very clear when we come to the end of the passage. See V17-18. But what generated these questions in the first place?

(iii) They were unthinking about the character of God, V15

"And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up (meaning 'prosper', or 'successful'); yea, they that tempt God (same word as 'prove' in V10) are even delivered." The wicked challenge God with their evil, and apparently get away with it. Doesn't this remind us of 2: 17, "Ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them?" You can just hear them: 'The wicked seem to be having such a good time, so why bother about obeying God's word and trying to please him?' Compare Psalm 73: 2-17. We are about to see that these arguments ignore the character of God. God **does** differentiate "between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not", V18. This brings us to:

B) THE ATTITUDE OF THE REMNANT, V16-18

"Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name." They have been described as 'a remnant within a remnant.' The little word "then" is most significant. The Bible does not say that these godly people **began** to fear the Lord, but that they **already** feared the Lord, and the ministry of Malachi had a salutary effect on them. His preaching helped and encouraged them. This

reminds us of Isaiah 9: 8, "The Lord sent a word into Jacob, and it hath lighted upon Israel." In other words, God spoke to all the people, but it only took effect in the lives of those who were spiritually minded. So the ministry of Malachi promoted further godliness. See Proverbs 9: 9-10, "Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding." We must now notice **(i)** What they did, and **(ii)** What God did:

i) What they did

They did three things: **(a)** They "feared the Lord"; **(b)** They "spake often one to another"; **(c)** They "thought upon his name."

a) They "feared the Lord." This is how they ***lived***. The "fear of the Lord" is a reverential awe of Him. It is a fear of grieving Him, not out of terror, but love for Him. The range of references is immense. Here are some of them: "The fear of the Lord is clean", Psalm 19: 9; "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom", Proverbs 1: 7; "The fear of the Lord is to hate evil", 8: 13; "The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life", 14: 27; "The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom", 15: 33; "The fear of the Lord tendeth to life: and he that hath it shall abide satisfied", 19: 23. Bearing in mind 1: 6 ("If I be a master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of hosts"), these godly people must have brought the Lord great pleasure. He will honour them at His coming. See 4: 2.

b) They "spake often one to another." This is how they ***spoke***. They didn't just speak, they spoke ***often***. They certainly fulfilled the instructions in Deuteronomy 6: 7, "Thou shalt talk of them ("these words, which I command thee this day") when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." It wasn't a case of addressing meetings either! They "spake often ***one to another***", and displayed the spirit of Hebrews 10: 24-25, "Let us consider ***one another*** to provoke unto love and good works.....exhorting ***one another***." This wasn't social 'chit chat': it was spiritual conversation and true fellowship. Remember, fellowship is more than friendship! Do notice that it does not say that 'they spake one ***about*** another', but "one ***to*** another!" There was no 'biting and devouring' here. See Galatians 5: 15.

We know what they ***spoke*** about, for the simple reason that we know what they ***thought*** about. They "thought upon his name", and "a good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good.....for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh", Luke 6: 45. It was said of James Cuthbertson (Hamilton, Scotland) that whilst 'others tended to speak about men and meetings, he spoke about the Lord.' (A. Leckie). Here are some excellent examples from the Bible. "These things saith Esaias when he saw his glory (Christ's glory), and ***spake of him***", John 12: 41. She (Anna) ***spake of him*** to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem", Luke 2: 38. "And many resorted unto him, and said, John did no miracle: but all things that John ***spake of this man*** were true."

We know **how** they spoke, because they were people that "feared the Lord." They would have scrupulously observed the guidelines in Ephesians 5: 3, "But fornication, and all uncleanness, let it not be once named among you as becometh saints. Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks." Here are some relevant passages from the New Testament. "Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt", Colossians 4: 6. "Speaking the truth in love", Ephesians 4: 15. Read James 3.

(c) They "thought upon his name." This is how they **thought**. They did not "despise His name, 1: 16. It is very important to read and **think** about God's word. Notice the following: "His delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he **meditate** day and night", Psalm 1: 2. "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth: but thou shalt **meditate** therein day and night", Joshua 1: 8. "**Consider** what I say; and the Lord (will) give thee understanding in all things", 2 Timothy 2: 7. Now read Philippians 4: 8.

More specifically, they "thought upon his **name**." The name, '*Jehovah*' (AV, "Lord"), occurs three times in this verse. According to Thomas Newberry, the name '*Jehovah*' occurs about 7,600 times in the Old Testament. Newberry is worth quoting: 'The signification is, He that always was, that always is, and that ever is to come (see Revelation 1: 8).....It is a combination in marvellous perfection of the three periods of existence in one word, the future, the present, and the past. First, '*yehi*', "he will be", long tense. Second, '*hove*', "being", participle. Third, '*hahyah*', "he was", short tense used in the past.' When these people "thought upon his name", they enjoyed the widest possible horizons. To prove the point, just think about the following 'Jehovah-titles.' **Jehovah-Jireh**: 'The Lord will provide', or 'The Lord will see to it', Genesis 22: 14. **Jehovah-Ropheka**: 'The Lord that healeth thee', Exodus 15: 26. **Jehovah-Nissi**: 'The Lord my banner', Exodus 17: 15. **Jehovah-Mekadishkem**: 'The Lord that doth sanctify you', Exodus 31: 13. **Jehovah-Shalom**: 'The Lord send peace', Judges 6: 24. **Jehovah-Zabaoth**: 'The Lord of hosts', 1 Samuel 1: 3. **Jehovah-Tsidkenu**: 'The Lord our righteousness', Jeremiah 23: 6. **Jehovah-Shammah**: 'The Lord is there', Ezekiel 48: 35. **Jehovah-Elyon**: 'The Lord most high', Psalm 7: 7. **Jehovah-Rohi**: 'The Lord my shepherd', Psalm 23: 1. Who said the Lord's people were narrow-minded!

(ii) What God did

God did three things **(a)** He "hearkened, and heard"; **(b)** He commissioned a book; **(c)** He promised future blessing.

a) He "hearkened and heard." This means that He listened intently. What does He hear **us** say? Does He hear conversation akin to V14 ("It is vain to serve God"), or V16? Remember, He listens carefully: He hears **everything**: "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgement", Matthew 12: 36.

b) He commissioned a book. "A book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name." This book was not written, and then consigned to the archives, or to some dusty library: It was "before him." No one was overlooked. Every person and every detail was "before him", and, as we shall see, will be suitably rewarded. In Solomon's court there was a 'remembrancer' (1 Kings 4: 3 margin) who evidently recorded events of special significance, and the names of those who rendered special service. This reminds us that when the Lord Jesus comes, He will "both bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God", 1 Cor. 4: 5. Like Paul, we can confidently leave the issues of our lives and service with Him. "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day", 2 Timothy 1: 12. The lists of names in the Bible often remind us that God overlooks no one. See, for example in Ezra 2, which emphasises His interest in each individual with a desire for His glory. But Ezra 10 reminds us that He is equally aware of everyone who disobeys Him! Searching, isn't it?

(c) He promised future blessing. "And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." We must notice the lovely ideas of personal possession ("mine") and preciousness ("my jewels"). Other translations are not quite as beautiful! For example: 'And they shall be unto me a peculiar treasure, saith Jehovah of hosts, in the day that I prepare', JND. The word '*segullah*' (AV "jewels") means 'a peculiar treasure or property' (Young's Concordance), and occurs in Exodus 19: 5 ("ye shall be a **peculiar treasure** unto me"), Deuteronomy 7: 6, (The Lord hath chosen thee to be a **special people**"), Deut. 14: 2 (The Lord hath chosen thee to be a **peculiar people**"), Deut. 26: 18 (ditto), Psalm 135: ("The Lord hath chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his **peculiar treasure**"). See also 1 Peter 2: 9 where the words "a peculiar people", mean, 'a people for a possession.' There is little point in possessing "jewels" (let's stay with the AV rendering!) unless people can see them, and God is going to display **His** jewels for all to see. He will do this 'in the day that I prepare' (JND), or 'the day when I act' (RSV). See Chapter 4. He is going to display the Lord Jesus in **us**: the Lord Jesus "shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired (wondered at) in all them that believe", 2 Thess. 1: 10.

The words, "And I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him", convey a father's compassion. Their faithfulness will be rewarded. They will be spared from coming judgement, in the same way that the godly remnant at the end-time will be preserved during the Great Tribulation. **"Then** shall ye return, and discern (or 'shall again discern', JND margin) between the righteous and the wicked; between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not." Clearly, "the righteous" and "him that serveth God", are one class: so are "the wicked" and "him that serveth him not." The problem raised in V15 will then be

completely answered! See Psalm 37. But there is a mystery that will never be solved. God will "spare them, as man spareth his own son that serveth him", but "He spared **not** his own Son, but delivered him up for us all", Romans 8: 32. What infinite love!

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