

Reading: Malachi 3:16-4:6

Theme: Precious Truths.

Let's remind ourselves of what has been going on previously as we come to the end of Malachi 3. In v13-15 the Lord showed He had heard the harsh words of self-seeking, self-centred religionists. Yes, they still claimed to follow and worship the Lord, but it was just an outward show, a pretence and they had no heart love for God and would serve Him out of self-interest.

The Lord's message through Malachi caused some to pay attention and they were wise people as they feared the Lord, spoke honourable words continually concerning the Lord. These words were precious to the Lord and He assured them that their softest whispers to others of Him were recorded in a scroll of honour and remembrance before Him - not that He would forget, but it spoke of the preciousness of their words and being.

This evening I want to note 3 precious things from v17-18 that would be an encouragement and comfort to the godly hearers and speakers of Malachi's time. These things should also be a real encouragement comfort to us in our day and age. We will see things concerning these ones and also ourselves:

1. Precious Treasure. (v17a)

If your house was on fire and you safely had 5 minutes to get out, what would you rescue, retrieve, take with you? People who have been asked that question and they say all sort of things - from TVs, CDs, DVDs, computers, jewellery and money. After getting the insurance papers, I think I would go for the photo albums! To lose them would be so sad - photos, courtship days, our wedding, honeymoon, the children as babies and growing

up, places visited, family times, holidays and church events. In recent years I know many photographs are stored electronically and are often stored in the 'cloud' somewhere. Photos would be something precious to me and Siân.

The Lord had just spoken of the preciousness of the words of those ones who spoke together about Him, words that were so precious they were recorded on a scroll in His presence. This godly few had said precious things, but the Lord goes on further speak of how precious these ones themselves were to Him. They were not just on a roll of honour to be remembered on some occasion from time to time e.g. "*We will remember them*", but they were so precious to Him that they were always actively in His mind and heart, so precious to Him that He had made great and glorious plans for these ones.

At the start of v17 the Lord speaks of owning them as His. These ones were probably mocked and ridiculed by the formalists and the cynical time serving priests. They may have been scorned and derided for speaking of the Lord as if He cared or mattered. They were possibly despised by the growing numbers of those who lived for here and now - eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we can do the same or we could be dead - secularism ruled.

To these ones, the Lord says "*They will be mine*". Yet they were already His, He had chosen them and set His love on them, brought them to know Him, their names and words were written in a scroll, but here He means that they would be **seen and owned** as His on a day when the Lord would gather together His "*jewels*" (AV & NKJV), or "*treasured possession*" (NIV & ESV), "*special possession*" (RSV), "*own possession*"

(NASB). They would be seen and owned by Him as His Society, the people around them may have ignored or despised them, thought they were odd, but the Lord said that there was a time coming they would be owned as His - not owned in a sad or quiet manner, but owned in joy, triumph and publicly.

The phrase “*They will be mine*” speaks of the determination and the purpose of God’s love. He will gather His people - the few, the faithful remnant who love Him, fear Him and speak of Him. He would gather these as a man would his treasure trove - his jewels, his treasured possessions. This term jewels, treasured possession is used in OT to speak of the value and preciousness of the people of God to Him e.g. Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 7:6, 14:2, 26:18; Psalm 135:4 (*interestingly 3 other uses of the word refer to the king’s treasures*). These ones are said to be precious to the Lord, His treasure trove which He values highly and therefore He would guard and watch over.

If we are a Christian this evening, those who are really born again of God and not just a religious person, then we belong to the precious treasure of God and He has lovingly determined we are such. He set His love on us before time began and we are part of the reason the Son of God left heaven’s glory to come to earth to die to save us - in order that we could become God’s treasured possession. God was so lovingly determined to make us His treasured possession that He willingly gave His Son and His Son willingly came to save us. If we are a Christian, then at this moment we are His and precious to Him, but there is a day coming when He will come and gather all His people to Him in one place (2 Thessalonians 2:1) at the same time, when they will no longer be in scruffy, fading caskets and containers (*i.e. our mortal bodies*), but the glory He has given them will be fully

revealed in them and they will shine as jewels in the noon day sun in our resurrection bodies.

Then all creation, all principalities and powers will see, recognise and marvel at the glory of believers and will glorify their Saviour's love, power, wisdom, grace and mercy, as well as His glorious work and person. Then all believers will fully know how precious they are to the sovereign Lord of history – how much He loved them, how much He gave for them to make them His, how great a salvation they have, how greatly precious they really are to Him and every one of them will understand of His love, value and care for them while on earth. Although they will be stunned, awed by such; nevertheless, they will burst forth into exuberant, ecstatic, delighted praise as they glorify Him and enjoy Him forever.

We, if we are Christians will enjoy and delight in His joy and delight and we will know that for all eternity. Question is, do you know anything of it in your life now, so that you will know it then? If you're not His, not owned or loved as His treasured possession, then you will not be part of that joy and delight, but you will only know His wrath and punishment in hell. That is an awesome thought, but the one who warned the most of it, who warned more of hell than He spoke of heaven, is the Lord Jesus Himself. We are to realise there's a hell to flee and a heaven to be gained. In the gospel the way to escape hell and gain heaven is made very clear, and I cannot understand why many people seem determined to go to hell. Moving on we see:

2. Precious Compassion. (v17b)

The pictures the Lord uses is now switched from treasure to a son. Now it is not the preciousness of wealth that is in focus, but

the preciousness of a son. Yes, I may well go for the photo albums if our house was on fire, but if it was the albums or a member of the family or a friend, I'd go for the family or friend.

Here the Lord speaks of His love, His compassion for those ones who fear the Lord. He would spare them as a father does a son who works for him. Sometimes fathers and sons clash - as they may be too much alike, are too different, or they may want different things. Yet a father will love his son, or should do, and ultimately want his best. Our heavenly Father is the perfect father, not a brute, not an ogre, not an unwise father, but perfect, wise, loving and He works all things together for good to those who love Him, those who are called according to His purpose.

In His love and wisdom, He will spare us much - spare us much through our obedience; spare us much by His providences, even in His seemingly dark and difficult providences He is sparing us and not giving us what we deserve. We, even as His children, fail, fall and sin. If He marked iniquity then who of us could stand? Yet in His grace and mercy He spares us. If we count our blessings and look at our lives honestly, we will be able to see this loud harmonious note of Him sparing us very clearly in our lives. Others have not been spared - the fallen angels were not spared, but reserved to judgement; the old world before Noah was not spared, but perished; the Jewish nation in NT times was not spared, but judged and destroyed; amazingly even the Son of God Himself was not spared - Romans 8:32 *"He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?"* God did not spare His own Son so that we could be spared - spared eternally and often spared in this life. Yes, we may be afflicted, be chastised, but even at its most severe it is done in love

because He loves us too much to let us be spoiled and He wants us to learn of Him, be like Him and show Him more and more in our lives.

The Lord in all His dealings with us has precious compassion; the compassion and love of the perfect father even for ones like us - stubborn, wilful children. Pray that we would have a growing and right appreciation of His precious compassion and all its outworking is in our lives. Pray we would see His compassion active in our lives and be ready and quick to praise Him for all that is past and to trust Him for all that is to come.

3. Precious Distinction. (v18)

The Lord had heard all that had been said by those who feared Him and also by those who spoke hard and harsh matters against Him. Back in 2:17 the harsh talkers had questioned God's standards, they lived as if God didn't matter and were warned in 3:5; yet they had carried on saying harsh things against God, saying it was futile, a waste of time and effort to live as God wanted and that they could do as they like with no worries (3:14-15).

It could have been so easy for those who feared the Lord to cave in and go along with society around them, to fall in line and do as everyone did. To prevent that, to encourage them, and us, not to do so, the Lord speaks of a precious distinction, when those who despise God and those who feared God would be most clearly seen as distinct and not all mixed up, confused together – which we so often are here on earth - not only in society, but also in churches.

Those who were living for the here and now, who despised God, who spoke harshly against God, who looked to God and religion for selfish benefit and self-gratification, would be shown to be Losers (*with a capital L!*) those who seemed to lose out in space and time because of their love and fear of God, would be shown to be those who really were Winners (*with a capital W!*).

The Day of Judgement is coming, when all wrongs will be put right, when topsy-turvy values, judgements, ideas and the like will be put the right way round; when lives and words will be accounted for, when God will have to be faced, when real and eternal issues will be faced. Then there will be no opportunity to hide, to evade, ignore or dismiss them. Then there will be no chance to become a saved believer in God. Yes, all will be believers then for all will know this God is awesome and cannot be ignored. Sadly, for many, maybe even some here, it will be too late. All your carelessness, all your Christian upbringing and its privileges, all the times you heard the gospel, all the times you carefully ignored, neglected, or even deliberately rejected the gospel and lived for self, selfish desires and pleasure, all these will be regretted as missed opportunities and you will be condemned and judged (4:1).

For those who have feared God and sought Him to be at peace with Him through the Lord Jesus Christ, then that day will be a day when the distinction of being a child of God will be revealed (4:2) - the children of God will be as leaping calves from the stall - joyful, exuberant and energised!

There is a day when the distinction will be revealed. We do not know when that will be. That is why it is so important to trust the Lord Jesus and all He has done **now**. We are not to be

religious, try and be good enough, try to be moral and think all these things will make us ok with God. There's only one way to be right with God - by trusting the Lord Jesus as our Saviour and trusting all He has done - not Jesus and our best efforts; not Jesus and our feelings; not Jesus and our being good enough, but **Jesus only**.

We are not to insult Him by thinking we can add anything to the salvation process. All we contribute is our guilt, sin and vileness. Jesus proclaimed on the cross "*It is finished*" - all that was necessary for our salvation was done, dusted and completed in the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. We are not to insult Him by trying to add to His completed work - as that says that we feel it wasn't enough when He died and we know better! The only terms for salvation are Jesus' terms alone.

When we trust the Lord Jesus as our Saviour, then we are His precious possessions and treasure, have His precious love and compassion forever and on the Day of Judgement then it will be revealed what is true of us now, that it is a precious distinction. Do not face the Judgement Day without the Lord Jesus as your Saviour - to do so is complete and utter madness. Yes, we may lose out in this fleeting life, but as Jim Elliott once said "*No fool is he who gives up but he cannot keep, to gain that he can never lose.*" If he is right, then why do we still resist?

Those of us who are Christians, we can truly rejoice that in an uncertain and insecure world, we have certainty, security and reality and we are able to show such, to tell of such a Saviour who will bring us safely to heaven in the way and at the time He knows is right.