

My Treasured Possession

Last Sun. of Church Yr. – 11/23/25 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Malachi 3:13-18 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 17, [Yahweh speaks of His faithful believers, (as a literal translation from the Hebrew),] **“And they shall be to Me, says Yahweh of armies, in the day when I, indeed I, make My treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man goes to spare his son who serves him.”**

Introduction

✧ It's truly fascinating to read and study the prophets' writings; just to think of our almighty God revealing and entrusting, in this case a single man designated only by the title “Malachi”, which means “messenger,” to convey Yahweh's message to all of His people Israel.

➔ Of course, the Old Testament books were written in Hebrew, which by itself is a bit of a challenge, since each language has its own idiosyncrasies. And some of these “Hebrew”isms make it easy for us to miss some of the nuances that are intended by God to add a bit of His inspired spice to the meaning.

I. Fearing Yahweh and Confessing our Sin

✧ For example, at the beginning of our Old Testament Reading today, we hear God confronting the Hebrews – those who have strayed from Him, with their own words; things they didn't think that God heard them say. Verse 14, “You have said, ‘It is worthless (or empty) to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping His charge?’”

➔ Can you think of anything sadder than that? To think that God can't hear what you say or think? That's the same as rejecting that God even exists. He even repeats their own frustration at the fact that their false repentance; their acts of just pretending to be sorry for their sin doesn't seem to work at fooling God. At the end of verse 14 they complain, “We're walking around as if we are in mourning; to make it look as if we're really sad about our sin; but we're doing it only for show, because we really have no intention of changing our ways.” And now to hear God uncover and repeat their deception back at them has to hit them right between the eyes, for it shows the depth of these people's rejection of the one true God who only wants to save them.

✧ Well, my fellow sinners, you and I should probably just be honest here. We could just as easily have uttered this same kind of sentence, couldn't we? It's one thing to agonize over something that keeps happening in our lives; something that leads us to cry out to God, “Why?!?” I mean, the prophet Habakkuk sincerely asked “Why?” three different times in his short book. But it's altogether different to turn one's back on God and determine that you will no longer even try to live in God's ways; no longer believe in the salvation He has provided for you in Jesus.

➔ That's why it's so sad to hear of people – maybe even people you know, who experience some kind of trauma or a series of setbacks and then they turn away from God. Scripture has even told us what to expect; that this earthly life is going to be one problem after another. But that's because everything is all messed up with sin – the sin in which we all share. Nearly everything is unfair and conflict is more common than peace. In fact, it's only by God's intervention that life can sometimes seem “normal;” as normal as a sin-soaked world could ever be.

✧ Still, the interesting wording that we find in the first part of Malachi's text reminds us of the very things we see and hear now today. In verse 15 God hears the people admit, “We call the arrogant blessed.” That's just what Isaiah warned against when he said, “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil...” (Is. 5:20).

- We've become so used to that happening today, that we don't even recognize it for what is half of the time? Perhaps the saddest examples are those who publically advocate for, and claim that killing their unborn babies is really a good thing. And then, at the same time, those who encourage women to protect their babies all the way to birth are called racist or persecutors or oppressors of women, etc.
- ✘ What's most important here though isn't just that we acknowledge the evil around us in this world, but that we are fully aware that we are evil by our own nature and by what we do as a result of that nature. It's not just all those people "out there" who do evil; it's all of us in our own hearts as well. And like those God confronts in our text, we also try to cover it up from those around us; even those close to us; and worst of all, God.
 - ✘ So it's critical that we are all honest about ourselves, in order for us to move in the direction that our Lord would have us move in response to Malachi's words.
 - Verse 16 leads us in the right direction when it says, "Then those who feared Yahweh spoke with one another." That's us, isn't it? We are here both as God's people who know and fear the one true God, at the same time that we know the depth of our own sinfulness.
 - Look, we are blunt with each other when we confess our sins at the beginning of every Divine Service; as we admit to God together that we sin daily in thought, word, and deed. It's then that, we stand, each time, before God as beggars; knowing that we deserve nothing of the good that He is and gives to us. Yet, we confess the evil of our sin, over and again. Why? because we can't deny the truth that God already knows. Therefore, it's crucial that we confess our sin; for our own ears to hear it as much as for God to hear us.
 - ✘ And as soon as we have done that, what are those most wonderful words that we hear from Christ through His mouthpiece, our pastor? "Your sins are forgiven."
 - In essence, that's just what this passage says to us today, though He uses different words. Verse 17, "They shall be to Me ... My treasured possession, and I will spare them..."
 - Those are the very words of what the English translation calls "the LORD of hosts." Literally in the Hebrew He is "Yahweh of armies"; the Creator of the ends of the earth who has at His disposal armies upon armies of angels, more powerful than any armies on earth and more numerous than any of us can count.
 - And yet, as little and insignificant as that may make you and me feel, this Almighty God is saying here that those people who fear Him, that is, those who know and believe in Him, are guaranteed to receive the best thing that can ever be received; the gift of being His very own possession. The Hebrew word actually describes it as God's most "treasured possession"!

II. God's Treasured Possession Only through Jesus

- ✘ It's appropriate then to ask at this point, how it is that both a person, and a people, becomes a treasured possession of God. After all, I just finished pointing out what we see of our inner selves when we look into the mirror of God's perfect Law.
 - Since we are so thoroughly steeped in sin, it's obvious that you and I cannot possibly make that change come about in our nature, can we? And if you want to question that fact, just look at how miserably short we fall by continuing to commit sin each and every day.
 - Yes, we might think that our sins are not as bad as some, or even that we do a decent job of making ourselves look good before others, but deep down we all know what it is in our heart of hearts.

- ✘ Yet still, God says we will be His. So, for that to be the case, God Himself is going to have to be the One who makes the change, instead of us. You know the old saying: “A leopard can’t change his spots.” Neither can you or I change our sinful selves, but God can, and God does!
 - ➔ And He speaks of that very thing in verse 17 when He says, “in the day when I, indeed I, make My treasured possession.”
- ✘ There’s two important truths there in those few words. First, “the day” could either be the day that He gathers all who fear Him, that is, all who believe in Him, into the glories of heaven, or it could be the day that a believer becomes a believer, which is Yahweh building His church one by one.
 - ➔ Both of those days are exceedingly important for you and me as individual believers. Maybe it’s best to think of it, though, as the Last Day of time that we are thinking about now on this, the Last Sunday in the Church year; that final Day, when Jesus gathers all who belong to Him to Himself; into the presence of God Almighty. Oh, what a great and glorious day that will be!
- ✘ Which speaks to the second great truth. Did you notice that God says that on that day “I make My treasured possession” (singular), not possessions. Again the language is importantly precise. Because each day that an individual becomes a believer in Christ, that day, as Jesus says in Luke 15:7, “there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance.” But equally true is the fact that on the Last Day; the Day when Jesus returns is when He will gather all of Jesus’ believers together from every corner of the earth and every time in history into one grand “treasured possession” – the Holy Christian Church to be with Him forever in eternal glory!
- ✘ And all of that comes about in the good news at the end of verse 17. God promises to “spare” His people from the very thing that we all deserve; eternal condemnation.
 - ➔ Think of it this way: Suppose you’re working at a conveyor belt filled with fruit. As the fruit goes by your job is to pick up the best and most beautiful fruit – which is then to be handled separately and sold at a premium price. The rest goes on to be used for other things, maybe for juice or jam, but not to be sold as premium fruit. If you didn’t pluck up those good ones, then all of them would go to that other, less noble use.
 - ➔ Now, think of all people being on that conveyor belt of life. We are all headed to the same place unless *someone* reaches out and plucks certain ones to be in an extra-ordinary place.
- ✘ As we’ve already talked about, all of us – along with all other people are both sin-damaged and sin-committing souls. We all deserve to be separated from God and His holy presence. But, here’s the critical point: the Holy Spirit creates faith in those who do not reject His free gift of life and, in effect, He then plucks us up off the conveyor belt headed to hell and He places us in the most premium of all places, in heaven with Jesus. None of us earns it; none of us deserves to be there.
 - ➔ Yet God, in His undeserved love, comes to us; gives us faith to believe, and guarantees us that the home above all homes is now ours. And the only reason that this happens is Jesus!
 - ➔ He’s the One who came to earth as God in human flesh; who died on the cross, and who rose again to conquer death for us all. Both the people of Malachi’s time, some 400 years before Jesus and those of us, now 2000 years after Jesus, who have all had the same faith in Jesus as the promised Messiah – we are now “spared” from God’s condemning judgement by the Son of God and His sacrifice in our place.
- ✘ So, whichever side of Jesus’ time a person happens to live on this earth, the result of God’s gracious selection remains the same, that we, by faith, are now His most treasured possession on account of His beloved Son!

Conclusion

✘ That means that today, on this Last Sunday of the Church Year, we hear these words as if they are the last words we will ever hear on earth; as if the next words that we hear will be Jesus Himself, speaking to us in the glories of heaven! Will that come tomorrow? It could still be today! But whenever that Day comes, we know that because of our faith; because of all that Jesus has done, we will hear Jesus welcoming us into Himself and His holy Church in the “Forever” of Heaven.

➔ To God be all the glory! Amen.