

***Malachi 3:16 Part II******The Voice of Grace****Jimmy Snowden**Sovereign Grace Fellowship—September 13, 2009****Introduction/Recap***

Last week we started the conclusion to the book of Malachi. I mentioned the fact that the small word 'az (the word in vs. 16 translated as “then” or “at that time”) is of utmost significance in the book of Malachi. This word gives us a clue that the oracle that God had given Malachi to deliver to the Israelites ends in 3:15. What we find in 3:16 to the end of the book is a conclusion. This conclusion consists of three *primary* elements: (1) the response of the faithful to the word that God preached through Malachi, (2) a final word of warning to the unrepentant, and (3) a final word of hope to the true God-fearers within Israel.

Malachi 3:16-18 has everything to do with responses; it has to do with the response of the godly to God's word and God's response to the godly as they respond to His word (what a doozy!). Last week we discussed the response of the godly to the preaching of the word of God. This week we will be discussing God's response to the godly as they respond to the preaching of His word.

First of all, by way of review, how did the godly respond to the word of God? They took it seriously. They did not consider their job done when the sermon was over. In fact, they really saw that their job had just begun. They were intentional and proactive in their response to God's word. They didn't just go their separate way when Malachi's prophetic utterance was over. No! They gathered around and “spoke to one another”—they discussed the truth, relevance, and practical ramifications of God's word for their individual lives and for the life of their nation. So... I must invade your spiritual (body)bubble; how did you respond to the word of God that was preached from this pulpit last week? Did you discuss the truth of it, the relevance of it, the practical ramifications of it for your life? Or did you just simply go your own way home. You see, those who fear the Lord take His word seriously, and they are intentional about learning it and living it. The saints in Jerusalem did not simply go their own way after hearing God's word through Malachi. They sought each other out to discuss it and to make commitments to live it. When the sermon is over, your job has just begun. The word of God must be meditated upon—milked for all its worth—believed, applied, and lived.

What we are going to find as we take a look at God's response to those who fear Him is that He is so very gentle and tender with those who are contrite of spirit. Last week we took a look at Isaiah 66:1-2. I just want to draw your attention to verse 2; “I will look favorably on this kind of person: one who is humble, submissive in spirit, and who trembles at my word.” Those in this holy huddle are a broken people—they are feeling the weight of their own sin, the devastation of their nation, the outright rebellion of the majority of those who profess the name of Yahweh. They are broken, hurting, and humbled. They are in need of God's voice of grace. Have you noticed the radical change in the tone of God's voice? In Malachi 1:2-3:15 we hear the voice of a roaring lion while in Malachi 3:16-18 we hear the voice of grace. In Malachi 3:16-18 God is no longer attacking, no longer accusing, no longer warning; rather, He responds with words of assurance, comfort, safety, and hope—He assures them that they are His. What a contrast!

Why do you suppose the tone in God's voice is so radically different in 3:16-18? Because His audience has changed. In Malachi 1:2-3:15 God is speaking to a group of unrepentant rebels; in Malachi 3:16-18 He is speaking to those who are "humble, submissive in spirit, and who trembles at my word." His tone changes because He is speaking to a different group of people.

This morning we will be looking at God's response to the godly as they respond to His word. I want you to notice two different things about God's response to the godly.

### ***1. God Takes Notice and Hears***

When you are at work you feel the urgency and need to catch your boss' eye. You want your boss to see your work ethic, your faithfulness, your consistency. As you are sitting in your cubicle or standing at your post you are praying to God that the boss will simply walk by and notice what you are doing. Sometimes at work your boss will pair you up with another employee to do a specific task, and sometimes you will be paired up with the most ridiculously lazy employee. As you work your tail off trying to both do your half and make up for your fellow employee's laziness you hope the boss just happens to stop in and notice so that you don't get blamed for your coworkers sloth. The problem with working in the world, however, is that bosses and supervisors are neither all-knowing nor all-seeing. So as you work your tail off day in and day out you are praying to the Lord that your boss catches a glimpse of your consistent work ethic at least every now and then.

However, we ought not have the same fears with God. Our God is both omniscient (all-knowing) and omnipresent (everywhere at once). Nothing escapes his notice. Oftentimes the all-seeing and all-knowing nature of God is presented in a negative light<sup>1</sup>—we tend only to consider it in regard to sin. In other words, when we think of the omnipresence and omniscience of God we are reminded that he knows every thought and picture that goes through our heads; he sees everything we do—nothing is hidden from his eyes. In this way, the omniscience and omnipresence of God strikes fear into the heart of man. It is a reminder that we can hide nothing from Him. But we must also understand that there is a positive element to the omniscience and omnipresence of God as well.

The positive implications of the omnipresence and omniscience of God is that He does not miss a beat—He sees and fully remembers every little sacrifice that we have ever made for His glory. How many of you here this morning know that you do way more for the body of Christ here at SGF and for the kingdom of Christ than you get credit for? How many of you in here this morning know that others would be blown away if they realized how much time (or whatever you give) you give to the body and Kingdom of Christ? Well... do not feel as if your labors are unseen. God sees it all, and the most wonderful thing is that the one who sees it all is the same one who dishes out rewards.

Notice in verse 16 that the Lord "took notice and listened." These two words ("took notice" and "listened") can also be taken as synonyms. They can roughly refer to the same idea. The word for "took notice" can refer to inclining the ear or giving great attention. The word for "listened" literally means "to hear." The idea here is that God listened emphatically to those who take His word seriously. What God wants us to get

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<sup>11</sup> By "negative" I do not mean "bad"; I simply mean that we only tend to think of the negative implications of this teaching to the neglect of the positive, encouraging implications.

from this is that He took them as seriously as they took Him. He takes our words as seriously as we take His. He heeds our prayers as much as we heed His word.

Isn't this a common element throughout the Scriptures? What does the psalmist say in Psalm 37:4?

*“Take delight in the LORD, and He will give you your heart’s desire”*

When will the Lord grant us our heart’s desire? After we delight in Him. God takes the desires of those who fear and delight in Him seriously. Also, how does Jesus teach us to pray in Matthew 6:9-13?

*Therefore, you should pray like this: Our Father in heaven, Your name be honored as holy. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Gives us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And do not bring us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]*

How does Jesus teach us how to pray? He teaches us to prioritize our praying. This does not mean that we must pray in some specific order as some would suggest; rather this means that we must make God’s concerns our greatest priority in our praying. The Lord emphatically hears those who fear and esteem Him. This does not mean that we boss Him around—after all, no one who fears the Lord would think of doing such a thing. But it does mean that if we truly fear Him and esteem His name, He will emphatically pay attention to us.

Many have suggested that there must have been some serious prayer going on in the holy huddle because it says that God “heard.” This may definitely be the case, and especially if a good number of those in this holy huddle were newly converted. I am sure that there was some serious prayer going on. Prayers of repentance, prayers for forgiveness, prayers for pardon and mercy, prayers for revival. And the Lord gives assurance that He emphatically hears those who fear Him.

## **2. God Takes Attendance**

Second, we see that God takes attendance. Where do I get this? Notice what Malachi says in 3:16.

*The LORD took notice and listened. So a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who feared Yahweh and had high regard for His name.*

The big question that was asked me last week was, “What is the book of remembrance?” There are two different views. Both of them are definitely possible, but I do think that one holds a bit more weight than does the other. I will lay forth the view that I am less partial to first. 1. Some hold that this “book of remembrance” was written by those who feared the Lord. Those who hold to this view suppose that those who gathered together in this holy huddle formalized on paper a commitment to repent of their evil and pursue the righteousness of Scripture. It was a book written by the people to serve as a tool of remembrance in the future. This reminds me of the old method of Billy Graham

and the other tent revival preachers of the 50's-80's. After preaching they would give an invitation to those in attendance to flood the stage and commit their lives to Christ. After someone would pray the sinners prayer to receive Jesus the evangelist would say, "Now go home and write the date of your conversion in the front flap of your Bible so that later on when you get discouraged and the devil tries to get you to question your salvation you can look in the front cover of your Bible and remember the commitment you made to follow Christ." Or they would have them get a stake and write the date of their conversion on the stake and sign it and then drive it into the ground in a visible place in their yard so that later in life when they get discouraged and feel like giving up they can see the stake and be reminded of the commitment they made for Christ on that specific date. This is certainly how the word "remembrance" was used in Joshua 4:4-7;

*So Joshua summoned the 12 men selected from the Israelites, one man for each tribe, 5 and said to them, "Go across to the ark of the LORD your God in the middle of the Jordan. Each of you lift a stone onto his shoulder, one for each of the Israelite tribes, 6 so that this will be a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, 'What do these stones mean to you?' 7 you should tell them, 'The waters of the Jordan were cut off in front of the ark of the LORD's covenant. When it crossed the Jordan, the Jordan's waters were cut off.' Therefore these stones will always be a **memorial** for the Israelites."*

The word "memorial" is the same exact Hebrew word as used in Malachi 3:16 in regard to the 'book of **remembrance**.'

2. I do not think that the first option is correct simply because there nothing in this verse to suggest that the Israelites were the one's who doing the writing. Rather, this book was written "for" those who feared the Lord (as the HCSB, ESV, NASB, and NKJV suggest), and not 'by' them.. I believe that this book was written by God's servants, His angels. In essence, therefore, this 'book of remembrance' is God's way of taking attendance. I think the NLT and the CEV adequately translate this, getting at the heart of what is going on in Malachi 3:16.

*NLT: Then those who feared the Lord spoke with each other, and the Lord listened to what they said. In his presence, a scroll of remembrance was written to record the names of those who feared him and always thought about the honor of his name.*

*CEV: All those who truly respected the LORD and honored his name started discussing these things, and when God saw what was happening, he had their names written as a reminder in his book.*

I have an important question: What makes this book of remembrance so valuable to the people of God? Well, how is God going to distinguish between the righteous and the wicked on the day of judgment? The majority of the Israelites were deserving of the judgment of God, and here we have a small handful of God fearers, the remnant. They are like fish in water. How is God going to distinguish between the righteous and the

wicked? The book of remembrance! Consider what David Petersen has to say about the significance of the ‘book of remembrance.’

“On ‘the day’ Yahweh will construe these ‘fearers’ as a special possession. This book will allow him (and them) to identify those who belong as his treasure. Without the book, it would not be clear—as it was not in Mal. 3:15—who the fearers might be... Moreover, the book’s function on ‘the day’ will be to enable the ‘fearers’ to make the sorts of distinctions between the righteous and the wicked that had heretofore been impossible to make... because of this book, both God and at least some Yahwists, namely, the ‘fearers,’ will be able to distinguish between the good and the bad within the Judean community.”<sup>2</sup>

It is not as if God needs this book; after all He is omniscient—He doesn’t have a bad memory like us.<sup>3</sup> This book of remembrance is more for the comfort of the faithful than it is a need for God. God has perfect, flawless recollection. However, the people of God thrive on the comfort that comes from knowing that God has officially and formally recorded their names in His book of remembrance.

We do see a theme throughout the Scriptures regarding this idea of God having a book of remembrance which He will use as a tool to distinguish between the righteous and wicked on the day of judgment (see Exodus 32:32; Psalm 69:28; Isaiah 4:3; Daniel 12:1; Luke 10:20; Philippians 4:3; Hebrews 12:23; Revelation 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:27).<sup>4</sup> Lets just look at two of these references. First of all, turn with me to Revelation 20:11-15.

*11 Then I saw a great white throne and One seated on it. Earth and heaven fled from His presence, and no place was found for them. 12 I also saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life, and the dead were judged according to their works by what was written in the books.*

*13 Then the sea gave up its dead, and Death and Hades gave up their dead; all were judged according to their works. 14 Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And anyone not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.*

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<sup>2</sup> David L. Petersen, *Zechariah 9-14 and Malachi*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 222-223. This is not the same David Petersen who wrote *Possessed by God*. David L. Petersen is the OT scholar and David G. Petersen is the NT scholar.

<sup>3</sup> And Paul Washer helpfully clarifies the fact that the omniscience of God does not merely refer to the truth that God is all-knowing. He suggests that it refers to the fact that “God possess perfect knowledge of all things past, present, and future—immediately, effortlessly, simultaneously, and exhaustively.” Paul Washer, *The One True God* (Hannibal: Granted Ministries Press, 2004), 60. At another time I heard Paul Washer suggest that the omniscience of God refers not just to the fact that he knows everything, but that “he knows everything effortlessly; that is, without need for calculation.”

<sup>4</sup> This list of verses came from Robert L. Alden, *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary, Vol. 1: Old Testament*, Premier Reference Series, edited by By Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 1548.

God uses the book of remembrance as the way of determining who goes where after death.

Look with me at Luke 10:17-20;

*17 The Seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in Your name."*

*18 He said to them, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a lightning flash. 19 Look, I have given you the authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy; nothing will ever harm you. 20 However, don't rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."*

Jesus sent out the 70 to preach the kingdom of God and to do all sorts of miracles in His name. In 10:17 we see that they have come back and are all strutting around because of God's mighty empowerment of them. They think that they must be something special for God to use them in such extraordinary ways. Jesus is not telling them that they should not be excited about what He is doing through them; rather He is pointing them to a greater source of joy. He says, 'Don't find the climax of your joy in what I can do through you; find the climax of your joy in the fact that your names are recorded in heaven.' William Barclay says; "It will always remain true that our greatest glory is not what we have done but what God has done for us."<sup>5</sup> After all, God can use the worst of sinners to accomplish His work. Robert H. Stein in his commentary on Luke says;

"Even as earlier the disciples were warned against thinking that greatness lies in being served by others (Luke 9:46-48), so here Jesus gave another warning against the kind of attitude that boasts in what one has done for God, or, more piously, 'in what God has done through me.'"<sup>6</sup>

And we know that what makes a person extraordinary is not necessarily how mightily God may use a man, but rather what makes them extraordinary is if God knows him (Galatians 4:9), and has recorded his name in heaven. Jesus speaks of a false assurance that can often times come when a man is used mightily by God.

*Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of My Father in heaven. On that day many will say to Me, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in Your name, drive out demons in Your name, and do many miracles in Your name?' Then I will announce to them, 'I never knew you! **Depart from me, you lawbreakers!**'" (Matthew 7:21-23)*

The thing that separates a truly blessed man from the rest of mankind is the record of his name in God's book of remembrance. Being used by God will do very little for you on the day of judgment if your name is not in His book. The book of remembrance (or the

<sup>5</sup> William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New Daily Study Bible (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 161.

<sup>6</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Luke: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture, Vol. 24*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 310-311.

book of life) is for our comfort. This ought to be the source of our hope—that our names are recorded in the crimson blood of Christ—never to be erased or etched out. The book of remembrance is God’s way of making sure that we know that He will not forget us on judgment day and accidentally pour out His wrath on us.

### *Conclusion*

Are you confident that your name is in God’s book of remembrance? Do you fear the Lord? Do you esteem His name? Have you come to Jesus as your only source of hope? If you are unsure as to whether your name is in God’s book or not, please see me after the service. You can have assurance—and the only way assurance is found is through faith in Jesus Christ. See the compassionate, gentle, tender hand of God toward those who truly fear Him. He does not chase them with scary words of judgment. No... he consoles them, and encourages them that their sins have been pardoned, and that there is therefore now no condemnation for them.