

Sunday Sermon – Thankfulness and Faithfulness
Pittsford Community Church
November 20, 2016
Malachi 3:6-15
Major Theme: Thankfulness and Faithfulness

Thank you, Christine, for your willingness to be stretched by the Lord. Hopefully Christine's story was encouraging to you and gave to some thoughts toward how you can continue be intentional about reaching out in your own communities with the light and love of Christ. Please continue to share your stories with us. Stories are an encouragement to the body. So we would love to hear your stories, great or small, of how God is working in and through you.

Around Thanksgiving several years ago, radio commentator Paul Harvey shared a true story of a woman and her frozen Thanksgiving turkey. The Butterball Turkey Company set up a telephone hotline to answer consumer questions about preparing holiday turkeys. One woman called to inquire about cooking a turkey that had been in the bottom of her freezer for 23 years. That's right—23 years. The Butterball representative told her the turkey would probably be safe to eat if the freezer had been kept below zero for the entire 23 years. But the Butterball representative warned her that even if the turkey was safe to eat, the flavor would probably have deteriorated to such a degree that she would not recommend eating it. The caller replied, "That's what I thought. We'll give the turkey to our church."

In many ways my sermon today is a pre-advent sermon, as the advent season is all about the preparation, the faithful waiting for the Lord. But I'm also aware that this is Thanksgiving week and I think we would be remiss, to jump over the importance of Thanksgiving in a life of faith, so today we are going to merge the two, and that brings us to the book of Malachi.

In a world where we like to get everything now, instant gratification...a world dominated by cell phones and fast food, internet, and microwaves, it is important for us to remember that sometimes, many times, part of living a life of faith is to have the faith to not only believe the Lord's promises but also to remain thankful and faithful in the waiting for their fulfillment.

Malachi was written to address compromise within God's people

- Post-exile Israel (brought back, rededication, all's well, complacency/apathy)
- So we see that both the priests and the people had become flippant in their worship of God
- sacrifices were no longer an act of honor to God (pragmatically - why should I lose out on a really good animal? I'll give the bad one to God)

- people were replacing commitment to God in their lives with idols – self becoming the center (marriage with unbelievers, low commitment/high divorce, sorcery, adultery, perjury, fraud, oppression, and injustice)
- Guess who gets to stand up and open his mouth against this? Malachi – we can imagine that his call in this context was probably a hard one.
- Last thing I'll say about the background: If you read the book of Malachi, it may seem that Malachi was overly concerned with the ritualistic parts of religion. But he is actually more concerned with what Jesus called (Matt. 23:23) the “more important matters of the law – justice, mercy, and faithfulness.”
- The theme of the book is the person and work of God himself. He recognizes that any action in the Christian life should flow from a healthy understanding of who God is and what he has done. A God who we can see is still committed to people, whom he deeply loves. A God who is and remains faithful, even when we are faithless and idolatrous in our lives and hearts.

Let's see what God might have for us this morning.

Read Malachi 3:6-15

I've titled the sermon this morning “Thankfulness and Faithfulness”

If your Bible has headings, this section is probably labeled something like “Robbing God” and that's true, it's a fine title, but really the issue that Malachi is addressing here is a lack of relationship with God. A church, a people just going through the motions. And he lays out for us in this passage a consecutive 3-step process which takes place in the life of a person or a community that moves them away from a living faith into the lifelessness of empty religious practices. This 3 step process is 1) a loss of perspective about God 2) that results in a lack of gratitude which 3) produces a faithlessness among people. This morning we are going to take a lesson from Malachi and examine what he has to say to us concerning these three things: perspective, thankfulness, and faithfulness.

1) Perspective: We need to know that God is the hero in the story – he should be our hero. When it comes to perspective where we often go wrong is we place ourselves in the center of the story where our passions are about us, and our blessings are about us, and our loves are about us. But what is lost when that happens is the perspective that we are actually part of a much bigger story.

It's God's story. It's the story talked about in the Bible – Creation, to Redemption, to Consummation, the story of God chasing after people who are lost and without hope and dead in their sin and on a path to eternal destruction, and God comes and he rescues them from that fate by trading his own life for ours. God is the hero of the story. He has been faithful to us throughout all generations. But the problem with a loss of perspective is that we begin to take for granted his character and his faithfulness.

v. 6-7 – “For I the LORD do not change, therefore you are not consumed”

- In the story: God is the hero, he has been faithful to his people since the beginning – created in relationship, humans turned back on God, they went their own way – God gave audacious promise: “I will never leave you or forsake you” – sometimes overtly, sometimes in the shadows but he is there, in times judgment, in exile, in bondage, in sickness and brokenness, and in our ultimate deliverance from sin through the Lord Jesus Christ – God has been faithful to humanity, who he deeply loves, throughout all generations, throughout his story.
- Faithful throughout my personal story: My relationship with Lori
- It is only because of him, his character, his faithful presence throughout the story and throughout our story that we have not been consumed. Even though we have all had times where we have turned aside from him, he is faithful to us.
- Praise God! That’s the perspective. Here’s the result. When we have the proper perspective of God, his character and faithfulness, what can only result is gratitude.

2) Thankfulness/Gratitude: That God would do/care/love this for me. Who am I? When we lose perspective of the goodness of God, thanksgiving is replaced with selfishness, stinginess, entitlement.

v. 7b-10

When we lose perspective, we put ourselves back into the center of the story. When we do that we pervert God’s goodness. It’s no longer about the people whom God deeply loves, it becomes about you and me and my wants, desires, comfort. And when that happens there is no glorifying of God, there is no thankfulness to him. We begin to look at life and all that is in it, including our relationship with God, in terms of self and how it benefits me, and how I can get ahead, and how I deserve so much, and we become withholding and reluctant to give away anything which we deem is ours (money, time, resources, rest, comforts). The truth is when that happens God says, “You are robbing me.”

- Tithes and contributions = money – goes way beyond that
- God’s issue is not as much concerned with what we are withholding from him but why we withhold it.
- Issue: we put more of our trust in our stuff than we do God.
- V.10 “Put me to the test” – Jesus/Satan Luke 4 (Deut. 6:16) – entitlement vs. faith – give yourself wholeheartedly and see if I don’t respond to you.
 - o God not concerned with the ritual of the institutional church, he is making a very personal and relational statement. God wants you to have a relationship with him. He invites us into communication with him. Let’s dance you and I. Talk with me, challenge me, reason with me, yell at me, pursue me, follow me, put me to the test – and I will prove my character and my faithfulness to you. Try me! and see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.
 - o Let me clarify something – Need – this is not the false prosperity gospel that tells us that by following Christ we will never have any

pain, or suffering, or trial, or hardship. He's not talking about comfort or financial compensation, he is talking about bringing satisfaction to our lives where we are set free from the consuming bondage of constantly needing something else in order to feel whole.

- Jesus – John 4:13-14, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I give will never be thirsty again.”
 - The life of Paul shows this reality – Phil 4:11-13, “Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”
 - Anna – what do you want for Christmas? I don't want anything, I have enough toys. – view wants as blessings, not needs because I am satisfied.
- Application: God has given us the secret to contentment it's found in him. He is ultimately the satisfaction of our hearts deepest desires. And because he is our creator it is only he that can truly fill that void in our lives. Contentment and thankfulness go hand in hand. God says “Try me, and I may not give you everything you want, but I will take care of your deepest needs, I will satisfy your heart.”
 - Let me ask you a question this morning: If this were true, would we not go after him with all that we are?

So what? So we lay hold of this truth. We become a thankful people knowing and seeing all that God has done for us and all he still desires for us. What does that result in? What quality does that produce in his people?

3) Faithfulness

- Having proper perspective, being a thankful people, that is what will produce in us faithfulness to our God. Because when we lack these two things: perspective and thankfulness – it's the sign of a broken non-existent relationship. And when the relationship isn't there we begin to adopt the same attitude and same thinking that we see in the people of Israel here in the text:
v. 13-15, *“You have spoken arrogantly against me,” says the Lord. “Yet you ask, ‘What have we said against you?’ You have said, ‘It is futile to serve God. What do we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the Lord Almighty? But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly evildoers prosper, and even when they put God to the test, they get away with it.’”*

In other words people were saying, “Life is better doing what I want than it is following God because

A) I don't see the benefit to following God and everything I see the people of God, the church, doing just seems to be worthless ritual and no one even seems really happy doing it.

B) Because everyone who seems to have chosen not to follow God and do their own thing seem to be getting along just fine and nothing bad happens to them."

Anyone ever struggled with this?

While this is a legitimate question and a legitimate feeling among God's people, God says, "Be careful with this! This thinking, this speaking is fueled by arrogance, by pride, by self. And it is short-sighted thinking in terms of God's justice.

- God wants us to be faithful to him. But it's not about what we do it's about our heart being open and connecting to him on a personal level. God wants to put his Spirit in us so that we have a real relationship with him. Where we go wrong is we think that by just doing the right things, showing up to church, attending youth group, paying our tithe, filling an operation Christmas child box that will get us into a relationship with God - it won't. And God point here is that without the actual relationship with him everything else we do is empty.

Lack of relationship leads to worthless ritual

Worthless ritual leads to emptiness

Emptiness leads to faithlessness. It has to because there is no life in it.

But God wants a relationship with us. That is why he sent his son Jesus Christ to break the yoke of sin which separates us from him. And that is why he gives all who believe in Christ his promised Holy Spirit to live in us. Relationship.

Because God knows that it's that relationship, that knowing him, that creates this perspective in our life, who he is, all he has done for us, the story in which he is our hero. God who has given everything to us. We should be a thankful people. And it's that relationship that will keep us faithful even as we are tempted to go astray.

Conclusion: Looking forward to the Advent season, a time of eager anticipation, of waiting for the Lord to come. The book of Malachi contains the promise that the Lord himself would come one day and asks the question "would he find his people faithful when he does?" We know that God fulfilled his promise on that starry night in Bethlehem's manger, but that was only after 400 years waiting. That's what we celebrate in the coming season of Advent. But it's more than that. Jesus has promised his bride the Church that one day he would return. The season of Advent is also us looking forward and preparing for that day. Will he find his people still thankful and faithful when he comes?