

Sermon for January 24, 2021, “Renew your mind”

SCRIPTURE: Malachi 3:13-4:6 ¹³ You have spoken harsh words against me, says the LORD. Yet you say, “How have we spoken against you?” ¹⁴ You have said, “It is vain to serve God. What do we profit by keeping his command or by going about as mourners before the LORD of hosts? ¹⁵ Now we count the arrogant happy; evildoers not only prosper, but when they put God to the test they escape.” ¹⁶ Then those who revered the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD took note and listened, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who revered the LORD and thought on his name. ¹⁷ They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, my special possession on the day when I act, and I will spare them as parents spare their children who serve them. ¹⁸ Then once more you shall see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him. ^{4:1} See, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. ² But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. ³ And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts. ⁴ Remember the teaching of my servant Moses, the statutes and ordinances that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. ⁵ Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. ⁶ He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents, so that I will not come and strike the land with a curse.

Introduction: Malachi

The prophets of Zechariah and Haggai in the Old Testament promised that when the Second Temple of Jerusalem was completed, Jerusalem would stand tall in the world, and all the peoples of the world would return to God. The Second Temple of Jerusalem was built in 515 B.C. and even after 70 years (B.C 444) nothing happened. Therefore, the Israelites spoke all kinds of complaints before God, and there was no thoroughness in the sacrifices, offerings, and godly worship to God. So God argued with the Israelites and pointed out their mistakes.

Today's text is the final debate between the Israelites and God in Malachi. In this debate, we learn that who fears the Lord should refrain from a cynical mind. In other words, the idea that nothing happens when we come to God in faith, or the belief that obedience does not return abundant fruits to us, brings ridicule to God's holy word and godliness.

Such cynical ideas in our faith reduces our faith to formalities. Today's text tells us to guard against this attitude in our religious life.

In today's text let's look at the differences between those who fear God and those who do not, and those who do not truly serve God and those who do serve Him.

Body: The three pillars of the life of faith, what the cynics do not know, and returning to the basics of faith

1. Israelites laugh at the core of piety

The debate between God and the people of Israel in Malachi seems to be putting the process on trial. When God points out the faults of the Israelites, the Israelites either accept them or present objections. Then, God provides real evidence of how the Israelites opposed God.

Today's text, **Malachi 3:13** says, “**You have said harsh things against me’, says the Lord. Yet you ask, ‘what have we said against you?’”**

And in **Malachi 3:14** that follows God provides practical evidence. “**You have said, 1) It is futile to serve God. 2) What did we gain by carrying out his requirements and 3) going about like mourners before the LORD Almighty?’”**

To say that the Israelites are futile in this verse is like the three pillars of faith that hold up Israel and God's people until now. Let's see why these are the three pillars of faith.

1) Serving God

The Old Testament clearly states that the purpose of the Exodus is to serve God. God freed the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, not so that they could live their own way. The purpose of the Exodus is for the Israelites to become God's people, serve God, and become a kingdom of priests for the salvation of the world. That is, in order to serve the world, He chose and saved the Israelites. So what does it mean to keep the commandments?

2) Keeping the commandments of God

Keeping the commandments of God means that we need God's help, because we cannot reach salvation by ourselves. God helps us live by the word of revelation. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we can live by keeping the commandments of God.

In fact, we are in sin because we have not kept the commandments of God. It is because we ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil that God told us not to eat of after creation. It is because we have violated God's commandments and have not kept them.

Also, the words of the 66 books of the Bible are sufficient for our lives. So, in the last word of Revelation, it says that **"If anyone adds anything to what is written here, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book."**(Revelation 22:18)

All these facts make it clear that the path given to us from creation to the second coming of the Lord is to keep God's commandments.

And finally, a pillar of a life of faith is repentance and hope for God's mercy.

3) Repent and hope for mercy

Repenting to God and hoping for God's mercy is an important feature that distinguishes a godly people who believe in God from those who do not. Because we are weak, we make mistakes. That is why repentance is necessary before God and forgiveness through God's mercy. But in today's text, the Israelites say these important things are useless.

Therefore, when we give up serving God, not keeping the commandments, not repenting and hoping for mercy, our lives distort God's word and go to the point where it adversely affects our neighbors and communities.

Malachi 3:15 say, "But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly the evildoers prosper, and even those who challenge God escape."

Pride, evil, and the act of testing God in this verse are all strongly rebuked in the Bible. These actions and feelings are to deny God's judgments and warnings and to do what God hates.

That is why we should not harbor the cynical heart that the Israelites had toward God. When we have that kind of heart we become opponents of God.

In fact, cynicism is somewhat based on reality. As the Israelites built the second temple of Jerusalem, they hoped that Jerusalem would be different. But nothing has changed. That is why the idealist turned into a cynic. But there is something the cynics don't know.

That is, our experiences and judgments are not everything.

2. What the cynics don't know

Now God speaks about what these cynical Israelites do not know. **Let's look at today's text 3:16; "Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name."**

Like the words of this verse, God hears and sees everything. God is angry at the voice of the cynic, but he listens to the voice of faith and rejoices.

So people who feared the LORD says that God will record what He heard and saw in a scroll of remembrance. God respects those who value His name.

Continuing today's text refers to 'the coming Day of Judgment'. **Malachi 3:17-18 says, "They will be mine, says the LORD Almighty, in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him."**(v.17)

"And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not." (v.18)

This verse tells us that although now the righteous and the wicked are mixed, they will surely be distinguished on the day of God's judgment. The wicked disappear without a trace at the time of judgment, and cannot be recovered again. But the righteous are different.

Malachi 4:2 says, “But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall.”

Like this verse, the sun of righteousness rises to the righteous. The righteousness of the righteous is no longer obscured by darkness and is revealed.

The Bible refers to the difference between the lives of the righteous and the wicked. By the way, who can say that the life of a godly one who keeps the commandments, serves God, and seeks God's repentance and mercy lives in vain?

However, there is something we must not forget about God's controversy with the Israelites today. The reason God argued with the Israelites was to recommend something better. So let's look at God's words of counsel on how we should live.

3. Let's return to the basics of faith

1) Back to the word of God

Malachi 4:4 says, “Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel.”

There is no other way. We must return to the Word of God.

2) Yearn for change

And we have to yearn for change. **Malachi 4:5-6 says, "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."**

In this verse, **“the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers,”** refers to a change in the way the loved one rejoices.

This is by no means skepticism or cynicism about faith. Our cynical minds, skeptical thoughts, cannot change the world. Only the love of the Lord can change the world.

3) Do it now.

Finally, **let's look at Malachi 4:6, “I will come and strike the land with a curse.”**

If you look at this verse, it says **'strike the land with a curse.'** But this is not God's will. It is God's earnest invitation to keep our lives from ending like this. This is not a curse, but a curse that warns. This is not to say that there is no hope for us. It means we must find hope quickly. In other words, it is an appeal of God's intended love to prevent disaster.

Conclusion: Let's go beyond cynicism and skepticism.

Now let's summarize today's sermon. A cynical heart or skepticism about faith does not lead us to God-prepared blessings.

Also, cynicism and skepticism about faith lead us to oppose God and even distort God's Word. So, in order for us to live a healthy and mature Christian life, we must be able to go beyond cynicism and skepticism. The Bible says that **"a righteous man falls seven times and rises again."(Proverbs 24:16)**

Let us rise again and go to the Word, and ask that our hearts will be further changed by trust in God. Then, beyond cynicism and skepticism, we will be those who live the glorious life that is recorded.