

Sermon Draft for November 23, 2025

Text: Malachi 3:13–18

Sermon: ‘Treasured Possession’

Malachi writes in the fifth century before Christ. It is after many of the exiles, taken to Babylon, have returned to Judah. He writes both to remind the returnees of the reason they had been taken into exile, namely, their rebellion against God and his ways and to renew the announcement of God sending the Messiah to make provision for their lost status. At the beginning of this chapter, Malachi writes of the coming of both the Messiah, who would be Jesus, and the announcer of the Messiah, who would be John the Baptizer.

Yet in spite of both the sin Malachi addresses and the good news he proclaims, the people still do poorly in submitting to the good that God gives. Thus, Malachi again announces the greatest of goods that God will override their bad and bring them to the good, that is, to life everlasting.

It is truly fascinating to read and study the prophets' writings. Of course, they were written in Hebrew, which by itself is a bit of a challenge, since each language has its own idiosyncrasies. In the variances from what we typically see in English, we can easily miss some of the nuances in those words that rather often add nice spice to the reading.

For example, at the start of our Old Testament Reading for today, the Last Sunday of the Church Year, we hear God confronting the wayward Hebrews with what they might well have been speaking to one another while thinking God didn't hear them: ***"It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge?"*** (v 14).

Such harsh words against him! Why would people ever think God couldn't hear what they said? Then God also repeats an emotional outburst they likely uttered under their breath, which might have sounded like this: "We're walking 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 don't intend to change."

It's a brutal revelation, and it shows the depth of the people's rejection of the one true God who saves.

We should be honest here. We might well have uttered something like this too. It's one thing to agonize over something plaguing us in our lives, something that keeps happening again and again and over which we cry out to God, "Why?!?" Habakkuk the prophet did just that, asking "Why?" three different times in his short book. But it's altogether different to turn one's back on God and determine that one will no longer live in God's ways and believe in the salvation he has provided in Jesus. It's so very sad when we hear of people, maybe even people you know, who experience some significant trauma and then turn away from God. The reality is that life is one problem after another, but we have to realize that that's all because everything is messed up with sin—the sin each one of us shares. Nearly everything is unfair and produces conflict routinely. And actually, it's only by God's intervention that life can have some sort of normalcy, such as can be had in a sin-damaged world.

But the interesting wording that continues in the first part of our Old Testament Reading reminds us of what we see and hear going on now, in our time. The wording of the text is, ***“We call the arrogant blessed”*** (v 15). That sounds a lot like Jesus’ admonition: You call what is evil good and what is good evil. And do we ever see that today! A blatant denial of reality is rampant these days. The saddest of all might well be that there are those who claim that killing their babies before they’re born is really a good thing. And those who wish for women to protect their babies all the way to birth are called racist or persecutors or some such derogatory label.

The key point here isn’t just that we acknowledge the evil that’s in this world. It’s also that we are fully aware that we are evil by our nature and by what we do in accord with that nature. It’s not just all those “out there” who do evil; it’s in our own hearts as well. Oh, yes, we try to cover it up for those around us, even those close to us, but that evil is in us too.

Knowing that, being honest about ourselves, is so very helpful as we move on toward what the Lord would have us learn above all from Malachi 3. We read the words, ***“Those who feared the Lord spoke with one another.”*** That would be us. We are here both as God’s people who know and fear the one true God and at the same as those who know the depth of our own sinfulness. Indeed, we are blunt with one another when we confess our sins at the beginning of the Divine Service. As we speak together those words of sinning in thought, word, and deed, we, together, stand before God as beggars. We know that we deserve nothing of the good that he is and gives. Yet he has told us to confess our sins to him and to one another. And we do just that every time we gather.

Once we’ve done that, we hear the most wonderful words that Christ has given me to say: ***“Your sins are forgiven.”*** This Malachi passage says that same thing, in essence, but in rather different words. Hear these words again: ***“They shall be mine, . . . my treasured possession, . . . I will spare them”*** (v 17).

God Almighty himself is here saying that these people who fear him, that is, know and believe in him, will receive the best thing that can be received—becoming his very own possession, and treasured possession at that.

At this juncture, it's important to ask about just how a person, a people, becomes a treasured possession of God. Indeed, knowing what we are, what we see of our inner sinful natures as we look into the mirror of the Law, we know we can't change that basic sinful self. We demonstrate that we can't change by what we do, exposing our nature by the sins we commit. Oh, they may not be as bad as some, and we may do a decent job of making ourselves look good before others, but we, deep down, know what's in our hearts and it comes out in spades from time to time. Remember sin is sin! Yet still, God says we will be his. That means that if there is to be a change in our nature so that we can stand before God, with God, as sinless, holy people, he's going to have to make the change.

You know the old saying: A leopard can't change his spots. We can't change ourselves, but God can and does.

Now, what might it mean when Yahweh says, ***“In the day when I make up my treasured possession”*** (v 17)? The day could be either 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 in the day that a believer becomes a believer, which is God building his church one by one. For the individual believer, both are exceedingly important, and so it could be either one. It might be best to think of it, though, as the Last Day of time, when the Lord gathers all who belong to him to himself, into the presence of God Almighty. Oh, how good that will be!

And when he says he will spare them. He will spare them and us from what we deserve, eternal condemnation. Because all people are both sin damaged and committing sins, all deserve that rejection, that condemnation, including you and me.

But, the Holy Spirit creates faith in those who come to believe and delivers them to heaven. God has come to us, given us faith to believe, and guaranteed for us the home above all homes.

The reason all this can happen is Jesus. Jesus, God's Son, came to earth, died on the cross, and rose again, since he did all that two thousand years ago now. The people of Malachi's time, some four hundred years before Jesus, had the same faith we have, but their faith was in a promise, a promise of fulfillment that would not happen until Jesus came.

Thus, to look back on the words of just verse 17, we hear so clearly and so wonderfully that God, now because of Jesus' death and resurrection, declares most beautifully that we, by faith, are the treasured possession of the one true God. On account of that, what we do indeed deserve, condemnation, has been removed, and we are spared from the eternal destruction.

Therefore, on this Last Sunday of the Church Year, we ponder these words as if they were the last words we will hear in time, as if the next words we hear will be Jesus himself speaking to us in the glories of heaven. Yes, we do anticipate that tomorrow will come, but because of our faith, because of what Jesus has done, because of God's most clear declaration, we know that when time ends, we will hear Jesus welcoming us to Himself in the forevers of Heaven. Amen.