



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

www.mzluth.org

October 26, 2008

24th Sunday after Pentecost

Malachi 3:14-18

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Malachi 3:14-18

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 92

Second Lesson: 1 Thessalonians 3:7-13

Gospel: Matthew 25:14-30

Why Bother to Serve God?

To be blessed here and now?

Or because God has given us eternity?

Eyesight is a pretty valuable thing, right? I'm not wearing these glasses just because I think it's a good look for me. My eyesight is really bad without them. When I was playing football in college, I actually had contacts and every now and then I would lose the contacts during a game. But it really didn't matter because I was just one of those big, dumb offensive linemen that just had to hit somebody in the other colored jersey, and you could see that even if you're contacts weren't in. So I could get along alright without that.

But right now if I took my glasses off, for all I'd know I'd be preaching to a whole congregation of supermodels. That's how bad my eyesight is. I would have no idea what you guys look like. So it's kind of a nice thing when you have corrective lenses so you can see a little better, right? It makes life a lot nicer, a lot easier, a lot better.

The same thing is true of our spiritual life. In what I just read to you from Malachi, the Lord reminds us that sometimes as we live in this world, our eyes of faith need some corrective lenses because sometimes we get looking in the wrong direction and things look a little blurry or a little muddled to us and we can't understand where God is or what he is doing. And we can't understand why in the world we should bother to serve him then because we don't see a difference. We are reminded this morning that every now and then our faith needs the corrective lenses applied of God's truth and God's promises and God's Gospel.

Then that helps us answer the question, "Why should I serve the Lord? Why should I devote to him time and energy if I don't necessarily see an immediate answer or an immediate blessing from doing it?" My sinful nature is going to tell me to just quit. Just like those guys did at the time of Malachi, right?

But this morning we want to focus on that "scroll of remembrance" that it talks about and think about what that means for us as we go about living our daily lives and applying it to why we want to live for the Lord.

Malachi was a prophet after the children of Israel, the Kingdom of Judah specifically, had returned from exile from Babylon. Long, long before was Moses. Long, long before

was David. This is about 600 years after the time of David. In 586 B.C. they had gone into captivity. In 536-516 B.C. they came back and rebuilt things. Malachi is a prophet in about 400 B.C. So 100 years even after they had come back and started rebuilding Jerusalem. He is a prophet. The people are looking around and they had seen in their lives that they had served the Lord and went around in mourning. They put on sackcloth and ashes and did the things God asked them to do in the Laws of Moses and they were saying, "As I look at my life, I don't see a difference between how I am prospering in this world and how those prosper who do nothing with God." They said, "Now we call the arrogant blessed. They don't have to go around in sackcloth and ashes. They don't have to do these sacrifices like we do. They don't have to do all these things to serve God, and I don't see any difference between my life and their life. In fact, I think the evildoers are prospering" is what they were really saying. "Even those who challenge God, who shake their fist at God and who blatantly blaspheme against God escape." So they were struggling with the question, "Why then bother to do all of this stuff that God asks of us if it isn't doing me any good?"

It's an interesting question, isn't it? Do you ever feel that way? You serve God and try to do what is right and you think, "You know what God? I should get something out of this. I look at some people around me who don't have any time for God, for his Word, for the Sacrament. And I look at people who are just blatantly disregarding what you have said is right and wrong God, and I don't see them suffering like I really want to see them suffering. I want to see some difference in my life for why I'm taking this time to get closer to you. And you know what? Sometimes in my life Lord I'm going through some things that just flat out stink! Where are you? Why aren't you taking care of me God? Is there any good in following you, loving you, or serving you if my life just flat out stinks at times?"

Those are legitimate questions we are going to struggle with. We are going to struggle with them because we have a sinful nature and we have Satan attacking us constantly. We are going to struggle with them because sometimes our vision is a little bit out of whack, right? We only focus on what we can see in the here and now. In the here and now we can't always see God's plan, what he is doing and how he is making sure that all things work out for our good like we talked about at one of the Bible studies this morning. We can't always see it because we sense the exact opposite. We sense things that are tough.

So we might say, "What good is it then to know God, to serve God, to be in his Word, to go to worship?" We have those struggles. When we have those struggles, the key thing isn't that we ask those questions. Those questions are going to come. They are just naturally going to come. The key thing in the life of a Christian is where we go for our answers. Some people go in the wrong direction. They just stop at what they can see. They stop at what they can observe. And then to numb themselves from the pain, they turn in other directions instead of to the Lord – to drugs, alcohol or whatever it is they think is going to distract them for the moment or whatever the case may be.

You have to admit at times, as humans, as sinful, fallen creatures, we are just not that bright. Even we who are believers know the answers and at times we don't flee to them. That's why our God tells us this morning, "Here's what I want you to do. Look at what the faithful believers of Malachi's day did." It says, "Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other." I'm guessing this wasn't just getting together over coffee or some other drink to complain about how rotten life is, which we might be tempted to do. I think it's something different because it says, "The LORD listened and heard." So it sounds like this kind of talking to each other was put together with prayer to God saying, "Lord, help us to understand. Lord, help us to see. Lord, help us to focus on the promises you have given us."

That's the reason God puts us together as the people of God. That's why we don't stay on an island and say, "I can worship God all on my own wherever I am." That's why we come together, so that we grow to know each other better so that we can talk to each other and encourage each other with the Gospel, with God's promises, pointing each other to the corrective lenses of who God is, what he has done for us, and what he has promised to us. And then we remind each other that God's promises are certain. No matter how I feel about them or how I feel as I am going through difficulty, God's promises are certain. He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us good things? Won't he be there to see that things work out for our eternal good?

This is what we have to say to each other very often. We have to keep going back to the fact that God loved us so much that he left heaven, became one of us, lived perfectly, because we are filthy, rotten sinners, and then took all of our filthy rotten sins and took them to the cross and was punished for them. We have to keep going back to those simple truths that we learned as little children or that our little children are learning now. I know that Jesus loves me. I know that I'm Jesus' lamb. I know that he has taken away my sins because the Bible tells me so.

Then notice what God has done. It says then the Lord wrote a "scroll of remembrance." He had it "written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name." What that tells us is that God is using a term that they would have been familiar with. A "scroll of remembrance" was common to list the names of those who had served a king faithfully. The Persians did it all the time. It was done and spoken of in the Old Testament and other times in there that God has a "scroll of remembrance" written. That's to tell us that God knows those who are his, those who he, as we talked about this morning, foreknew and predestined and had chosen before time began. He knows us and he tells us that to comfort us.

He has this scroll of remembrance written in his presence to assure us that we are his and nothing in this world can shake that, nothing can knock us off of being his. That's why he gives us his very body and blood in, with and under the bread and wine in ways that we can't understand, but he says it. And faith believes it. That's why he gives us the water connected with the Word. It doesn't look all that impressive, but he tells us

that washed away sins. That created faith. "I've called you by name. You are my own." That's what our God says to us.

Now he reminds us and that's why we serve. The day is coming when the distinction will be clearly seen between those who are righteous and those who are wicked. God tells us he will reveal it on the Last Day. We serve because we know where we are going to stand on the Last Day.

God has taken away our sins. God has opened heaven to us. He has made us righteous. And because of that, we serve him. We don't serve him so that we will get something out of it. We don't serve him so that our life goes better in this world. He has told us quite frankly that it isn't always going to go better simply because you are a Christian. He has said that because you are a Christian, there are times when you will be persecuted. He has told us that it is through much difficulty we will enter the kingdom of heaven. He hasn't sugar coated it. He hasn't covered it up. He has laid it out in front of us and then said, "Keep coming back to me and I will keep you strong. And keep serving me because I have already given you heaven."

That's why we serve. That's why we seek to use our time and our talents and our treasures because he has made us his treasured possession. Literally he says, "My jewels, my most precious crowning jewels. That's my believers." That's why we serve, because he has already done this for us.

When we think we have to serve so that we get something out of God, we are putting the cart in front of the horse. We are turning things upside down. Our God loved us first, so we love him in return. He doesn't love us because we do something for him. What could we offer to God? We are filthy rotten sinners. We have nothing to offer him that he needs or wants. It's only by his grace that he gives us this opportunity to serve him. We could never convince him to love us because of who we are, but because he loves us, we live to serve. Even if it at times brings difficulty to us, so be it. We want to live to serve and love the One who loved us first.

As you go about your daily life, as you face these difficulties, make sure to stop and thank God that you have fellow believers that you can get together and talk with and pray with and have them remind you that your name is written on that "scroll of remembrance." That will not only help you through those tough times, it will renew your zeal to serve God and find joy in it. Not "I have to." But "I get to."