

Place Lurgan Baptist 11:3:2012

MALACHI'S MIGHTY MINISTRY

Reading: Malachi 3:113-18

7. WHY DO WE SERVE THE LORD ?

Do you ever get discouraged in serving the Lord ? Do you ever get so discouraged that you feel like quitting ? Many pastors do. A few years ago research indicated that 1,500 pastors a month in the United States were leaving the ministry. Some were leaving because of moral failure, but many leave because of spiritual burnout or discouragement because of opposition or contention in their congregations. *In some surveys eighty five percent of pastors said that they are weary of dealing with problem people.* Seventy percent said that they felt that God had called them to pastoral ministry before their ministry began, but after three years of ministry, only 50 percent still felt called. And is missionary work any different ? *Are we not living in an age where there are more short term workers and fewer long term workers ?* Apparently, many pastors and missionaries need to think through the question, “ *Why serve God ?* ” Then again, what about the local church ? For many believers, who served the Lord for many years now have dropped out.

In some cases, they drop out of church altogether, claiming that they can worship God better by avoiding the church. In other cases, they may attend church, but that's all that they do. If you ask them to serve, they say, in

effect, “ *No thanks. Been there, done that.* ” In many cases, they were criticized or attacked for their efforts. Often, they feel unappreciated and used. But whatever the reason, they are not serving the Lord. *Now why do we serve the Lord ?* Well, let's come back to Malachi. Here they were. They had come back from Babylon and with blood, sweat, and tears rebuilt the temple, Jerusalem and other cities. They had turned their back on centuries of idolatry and reinstated the worship of God. They had experienced times of renewal, revival, and restoration. But now they had become indifferent to the things of God, they had become careless as to the work of God and they had become weary in the service of God. That's why God sent Malachi and his message was a direct word to a defiled walk. One of the characteristics of this book is that no matter what God says to His people they just question it. If you go through the chapters quickly you will find that about 7 times this word “ *wherein,* ” occurs. Look for example in (1:2, 1:6, 1:7, 2:17, 3:7, 3:8, 3:13) The words “ *What have we spoken,* ” are the same as “ *wherein.* ”

There were always questioning what God said. This arrogant tone was there right through. “ *Wherein, wherein, Wherein.* ” In (Ch 2) these Jews were attacking the providence of God by bringing up the age old question, “ *Why do the wicked prosper ? and Why do the righteous suffer ?* ” And now they are it again. For on the one hand they were saying it's vain to serve God, but the proud are blessed and happy. (3:15) You may wonder, “ *Why did they bring this up again so soon ?* ” The answer is, the problem doesn't get put to rest once and for all. It keeps creeping back into our thinking. God knows

that we struggle with it and so He addresses the subject continually, so that we will maintain His perspective when we are tempted to think that it's vain to serve the Lord. Now why do we serve the Lord ? Well's look at this passage and notice,

(1) A DREADFUL RHETORIC

Do you see what God says in (3:13) ? The word “ *stout*,” means “ *hard, mean, terrible.*” They were saying dreadful things about God. The word “ *spoke*,” suggests that these words were not so much spoken to God but about God. Here were a group who were gossiping about God. We might say, “ *they were talking about God behind His back.*” “ *Yet ye say what have we spoken so much against thee,*” do you see their arrogance again ? A lady known for her constant complaining and criticism, once visited her preacher and said to him, “ *pastor, there is something about you that offends me.*” He asked, “ *What am I doing that offends you. I don't mean to be doing anything that offends you.*” She said, “ *It's the way you wear your tie. You wear it way too long.*” The pastor reached into his desk and pulled out a pair of scissors and handed them to her and said, “ *If that is what is offending you cut it off to where you think it should be.*”

She reached over and cut about 3 inches off his tie. Then the pastor said, “ *Since we are talking about being offended, there is something about you that offends me.*” She asked what it was. He replied, “ *It's your tongue. Stick it out.*” Can I ask is your tongue guarded ? Is your

prayer that of the psalmist ? “ *Set a watch O Lord, before my mouth, keep the door of my lips.*” (Ps 141:3) Here were a people who were guilty of saying “ *harsh things,*” against the Lord. I mean do you see their arrogant accusations in (3:14) Now I want you to see that,

(a) *Their Speech reveals their SIGHTLESSNESS:*

Do you see what they say ? “ *It is vain to serve God.*” (3:14) The word “ *vain*,” means “ *Foolish, insignificant, fruitless or unprofitable.*” They saw their service as vain, empty, lacking any personal fulfillment. Although this was true in their case and testified to their bankrupt souls, their assessment was utterly false. In fact the opposite is true for the only service that's brings satisfaction in life is serving the Lord. The priest may have been the leaders in this complaining but the common people were just as guilty. “ *We're not getting anything out of it,*” was their grievance. “ *Things just keep getting worse.*” Do you not hear this complaint from Christians all the time ? “ *We're not getting anything out of our church, we're not getting anything out of the morning meeting, we're not getting anything out of the ministry.*” Well, tell me this. What are you putting into it ? You see, a church is a bit like a bank or a home, you don't get anything out of it unless you put something into it. But here they were and they were saying to the Lord, “ *-serving you is a waste of time.*”

Is that what you are thinking ? Is that why you are no longer serving ? Things got too tough, you weren't appreciated, you didn't get enough praise. William Kelly belonged to the Brethren. He wrote some great

commentaries. He also studied Greek both classical and modern. He had a young nephew who went to Edinburgh University and passing out with honours in Greek the Professor singled him out and said “ *You were given private tuition somewhere.* ” He replied, “ *Yes, my Uncle knows a bit about Greek.* ” The Professor said, “ *I would like to meet some day. Do you think you could bring him round ?* ” So old William Kelly went to see the Professor. As they talked together the Professor was amazed at the knowledge that William Kelly had of the Greek language. At last he stood up and said to William Kelly, “ *What do you do for a living ?* ” He said, “ *Oh, I go around a few Brethren meetings and I break the bread of life to the flock.* ” In Greek the Professor said to him, “ *You’re a fool.* ” In Greek William Kelly said to him, “ *For what world Sir.* ” Even in the Lord’s work, are you living for time or eternity ? For the temporal or the eternal ? For the material or the spiritual ? Could it be that you’ve become cynical and shortsighted ? “ *it’s vain to serve the Lord.* ”

(b) Their Speech reveals their SELFISHNESS:

For do you see their second accusation ? “ *What profit is it that we have kept his ordinance ?* ” (2:14) They complained that obedience to God’s law brought no rewards (3:14) only the proud and wicked prospered, they said. (2:15) What’s in it for us ? The Hebrew word translated “ *profit,* ” was a technical term for a weaver cutting a piece of cloth free from the loom. The idea here is that these people expected their “ *cut,* ” or percentage, much as a gangster would demand his cut for his dirty

work. They were grumbling that God hadn’t given them their fair share. They were in it for what they could get out of it. Good living for a living. My do all of us not need to be careful here ? I mean when you look at many religious telecasts, you ask, “ *what is their true motive for serving ?* ” Is it profit, whether it be popularity, position, financial gain or ego satisfaction. Some television evangelists claim their wealth and success to be a testimony to God’s touch on their lives and they assure their viewers that they can have the same, if they only follow their formulas. You see, the flesh is inclined to self-pity, self-focus, and self-centeredness, and the world feeds this. If there’s nothing in it for you, why do it ? If the church isn’t meeting your needs, bail out. You deserve some happiness. You can’t worry about the needs of others. God understands. Your need’s come first. Peter and his fellow disciples had given up all to follow the Lord Jesus.

But having done that Peter later asked the Saviour, “ *Behold we have forsaken all and followed thee what shall we have therefore ?* ” (Matt 19:27) It was as though he was asking the Lord Jesus “ *What shall we get for following you ? Lord what’s in it for me ?* ” It was this very thing that Satan accused Job of. “ *Doth Job fear God for naught ?* ” (Job 1:9) My are you serving the Lord with an ulterior motive ? Are you giving in order that you might get ? Are you attending in order that you might influence ? Are you working in order that you might win the praise of man ?

(c) Their Speech Reveals their SHALLOWNESS:

Do you see what they say ? “ *What profit is that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts ?* ” (3:14)
 You see, outwardly, they went through the motions of fasting and humbling themselves before the Lord. But they were not doing these things out of a heart of love and devotion for God. Inwardly they were thinking, “ *This religion stuff is a drag. We want some fun out of life.* ”
 Is motivation not everything when it comes to obeying and serving the Lord ? Stephen Cole tells about an elderly Christian lady who was a shut-in. She had two daughters, both Christians, who came by to clean and help out. Both made everything shine, but the first daughter left the impression that her task was an awful burden. The second daughter was cheery and made her mother feel loved. Both daughters did the same task, but the first did it out of duty alone. The second did it out of love for her mother. Her motive made all the difference. Do you recall what the Risen Lord said to the church at Ephesus ?

I mean they were marked by activity, orthodoxy, and purity but Christ said, “ *Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.* ”
 (Rev 2:4) Tell me, is it your love for the Lord that is motivating you to serve ? Do you recall what the Risen Lord said to Peter as He was about to restore him to service ? Three times Christ asked, “ *Simon son of Jonas lovest thou me ?* ” (Jn 21:16) Tell me, do you love the Lord this ? Is this the motive for your service ? Can you say,

**I will not work my soul to save
 For that my Lord hath done,
 But I will work like any slave
 For love of God’s dear Son**

(2) A DUTIFUL REMNANT

We have seen a remnant coming out of Babylon, but here there is a remnant within a remnant. It’s interesting to notice how (3:16) begins. “ *Then,* ” to which we ask, “ *When ?* ” the answer is simply this, that when the majority were out of touch with God, “ *then,* ” there emerged a people who were quite different. They were probably the minority. They have thought that very little was happening because they met and worshipped but God was paying attention and keeping a record of their words. Their neighbours may have laughed at them but God was pleased with them, for a number of things marked them out. For example there was,

(a) THEIR DEDICATION TO THE LORD:

For they “ *feared the Lord,* ” (3:16) The word “ *fear,* ” means “ *to be in awe or reverence.* ” They had a holy reverence for God. Was this not the outstanding characteristic of the early church ? Do you recall that on the day of Pentecost three thousand were saved ? “ *And they continued steadfastly in the apostle’s doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers.* ” (Acts 2:42) But here’s what I want you to see. It says “ *And fear came upon every soul.* ” (Acts 2:43) My do we not need to recapture the reverence that marked the

early church ? They were afraid before God in those days. There was a holy awe in that meeting place. Indeed has this not been the feature that marks very age ? Do you recall the Lord talking to the Devil about Job ? “ *Hast thou considered my servant Job, there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil.* ” (Job 1:8) Now Job is one of the oldest characters we have in the Bible. If we go back to Malachi do you recall what God said about Levi in (Ch 2) ? Have a look at in (2:5) So if you bring these together you’ll find that away back in the early days of the world’s history the fear of the Lord was there in Job, if you come into the age of law you’ll find that Levi had the fear of God in his heart and if you come to the period at the end of Malachi, there is still a nucleus with a fear of God. When you come to the days of the early church, this was the outstanding feature, they feared the Lord. But what is the fear of the Lord ? The book of Proverbs says “ *The fear of the Lord is to hate evil.* ” (8:13) Was it not said of John Knox that he feared no man because he feared the Lord ? Do we fear the Lord ? Or do we have this buddy - buddy, casual approach with God ?

(b) THEIR CONVERSATION OF THE LORD:

It says, “ *they spake often one to another.* ” (3:16) You see, the minority had to counter the evil talk of the majority. They did this by getting together and talking. We’re not told specifically what they said, but they probably encouraged one another by saying, “ *Don’t listen to these scoffers. Don’t give up serving the Lord. He will reward those who serve Him and He will judge those*

who scorn Him. ” I mean here were a people, at least the remnant within the remnant whose lips were full of praise and testimony. Like the psalmist they said continually “ *Come and hear ye that fear God and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.* ” (Ps 66:16) Is this not exactly where we fail ? You see, it’s so possible for believers to meet together, to spend time in one another’s company and yet not talk about the Lord. My would you not rather be in the company of those who talk about the Lord and not about Christians ? (a) (b) And there was,

(c) THEIR MEDITATION ON THE LORD:

“ *And that thought upon His name,* ” (3:16) The word “ *thought,* ” means “ *to focus one’s mind on something of great value.* ” And there is anything of greater value than His name. My God’s name was actually a revelation of Himself. Did you notice that 24 times in Malachi and nearly 300 times in the New Testament one name is used. Do you know what it is ? “ *The Lord of Hosts,* ” (1:4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14) This is the military name for God for “ *hosts,* ” comes from a Hebrew word which means “ *To wage war.* ” My are you affected by feelings of insecurity ? Will you think upon His name ? He’s the Lord of Hosts. That reminds us of *His Power.* But then is Jehovah Jireh. The Lord will provide. That reminds us of *His Provision.* But He is Jehovah - Shammah. The Lord is there. That reminds us of *His Presence.* Do you remember those two downcast disciples on the road to Emmaus ? Their hopes were dashed, their hearts were broken, the bottom had fallen out of their world. Burdened believer is that where your are ? But “ *Jesus Himself drew near and*

with them.” (Lk 24:15) Listen, He is the Lord of Hosts, He is Jehovah-Jireh, He is Jehovah-Shammah.

Do you ever think meditate on His name ? Perhaps the order should be reversed here. They feared the Lord, they thought on His name, and then they spoke often about Him. I mean, can you see this little company ? They were encouraging one another, they were not forsaking the assembling of themselves together, and their focus was the Lord. *Now do you recall we began with the question why do we serve the Lord ?* Well, Malachi’s answer is, because the Lord notices and cares deeply for all who serve Him. For do you notice not only (1) (2) But,

(3) A DELIGHTFUL RESPONSE

You see,

(a) THE LORD REMEMBERED THEM:

Do you see that word “ *hearkened,* ” ? It means “ *To prick up the ears as an animal does when he hears something.* ”

The picture is that of a parent eavesdropping on the conversation between his children. The Jews were familiar with the idea of kings recording the names of those who had done good. Do you recall that this was how Mordecai was rewarded ? The Lord pinched Ahasuerus so that he could not sleep and Mordecai’s good deeds were read before him. (Esther 6:1) My did you know that the Lord has a book ? You see, the Lord was keeping a record of their words of adoration, their walk of consecration, and their ways of separation. He was just

assuring this remnant that He would not forget those who did not forget Him. My the Lord remembers you.

*Amid the trials that I meet
Amid the thorns that pierce my feet
One thought remains supremely sweet
Thou thinkest Lord of me*

He knows all about your sorrow: Do you recall what the psalmist said ? “ *Thou tellest my wanderings, put Thou my tears into thy bottle. Are they not in thy book ?* ”

(Ps 58:8) He knows all about your service: He knows when you take a stand for Him. He knows when you pay a price to serve Him. My do you feel that your service is unnoticed ? That your ministry is unrecognized ? That your gifts are unappreciated. No-one ever asks how you are getting along. Perhaps you feel you are ploughing a lone furrow. Maybe you are on the verge of quitting. My He knows. And “ *God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love* ” (Heb 6:10) (a)

(b) THE LORD RECOGNISED THEM:

“ *And they shall be mine* ” (3:17) How amazing. God promises that He will take special care of His “ *jewels,* ” and spare them when He visits the world with judgment. My Israel were God’s “ *peculiar treasure,* ” (Ex 19:5) but that privilege is not unique to Israel for Peter says we are a “ *peculiar people.* ” (1 Pet 2:9) Fancy that. We are His special treasure, and we are precious to Him. Do you ever hear a father say of his daughter “ *she is a little jewel ?* ” I tell you today the world notices the

rich, the powerful and the famous but we are His special treasure. The Lord says, “ *I have called thee by thy name thou art mine.* ” (Is 43:2) My we are His. Bound to Him by the old cord of creation, the strong cord of election, the red cord of redemption, the new cord of decision and when “ *He cometh when He cometh to make up His jewels,* ” we’ll all be here for we are His loved and His own. You see, (a) (b)

(c) *THE LORD REWARDED THEM:*

For He says in (3:17) they shall be delivered and in (3:18) they shall be distinguished. Do you know what the majority of Jews were saying ? That God blesses the wicked. But “ *in that day,* ” the day of Messiah’s coming God will judge the wicked and reward the faithful. Tell me, are you discouraged in your service for the Lord ? Have you forgotten that there is a day of reward ahead ? Years ago, an elderly missionary couple who had served for years in Africa, was returning to New York City to retire. *They were feeling discouraged, defeated, and afraid. Their health was broken and they had no retirement pension.* When they got to the wharf to board the ship, they discovered that they were booked on the same boat as President Theodore Roosevelt, who was returning from a big game hunt. No one paid any attention to this old couple, but they watched the fanfare as the President arrived. A band was playing and the crowd was waving and straining for a glimpse of the great man. As the ship crossed the Atlantic, the old man grew more and more depressed. He said to his wife, “ *Something is wrong. Why should we have given our lives in faithful*

service for God in Africa all these years, and yet no one cares for us ? This man comes back from a hunting expedition, and everyone throngs to see him. It doesn’t seem fair. ” His wife tried to comfort him, but he couldn’t shake his depression. As the boat docked in America, more bands were playing and more crowds had turned out to greet the President. Many dignitaries were there, and the papers carried the story on the front page. But no one noticed the missionaries. They slipped off the boat and went to hunt for a cheap apartment and for jobs.

That night, the man’s spirit broke. He felt that God had abandoned them. He complained to his wife, “ *We don’t have anyone to help us and no where to go. Why hasn’t God met our needs ?* ” His wife wisely replied, “ *Why don’t you go in the bedroom and talk to the Lord about the whole thing ?* ” Some time later, he came out of the bedroom, but his face was different. He was happy now. His wife asked what happened. He said, “ *I went in and told the Lord the whole thing. I told Him that it’s not fair. I told Him how I was bitter because the President received this tremendous homecoming, but no one met us as we returned home. And you know, as I finished, it seemed as though the Lord put His hand on my shoulder and said simply, ‘ Henry, you’re not home yet.’* ” My when you get home, I wonder will you hear His well done ?

