The Promise Keeper

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"*Your words have been hard against me. says the Lord. But you say, 'How have we spoken against you?' You have said, 'It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the Lord of hosts? And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper, but they put God to the test and they escape.'"*

Then those who feared the Lord spoke with one another. The Lord paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed his name. "They shall be mine," says the Lord of hosts, "in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him." Malachi 3:13-18

Christians are supposed to speak up for God. But more and more today, we hear strong words, words hard to hear, harsh words, spoken against God. Maybe even you, in a weak moment, have spoken hard words. It seems all over our country these days there are an increasing number of people who seek to be independent of God or are giving up on him.

The Lord speaks to us through his prophet Malachi today. Malachi, who God called "My Messenger", is generally believed to be the last Old Testament prophet before John the Baptist, and lived about 430 years before Christ was born. It's fitting that we speak of the last Old Testament prophet on this, the last Sunday of the church year, which is also been called "Christ the King Sunday".

We learn that what is going on in our society today is nothing new. The people of Malachi's day, many of whom were supposed to be God's people, were saying all sorts of harsh words: "It is vain (meaning worthless) to serve God"; "What is the profit of keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the Lord of hosts? "; "Evildoers not only prosper, but they put God to the test and they escape."

Do you understand what they are saying? In other words, "God doesn't care about us. We're supposedly his people, but we don't get any better deal than the people who ignore him and do what they want. They don't get punished; they get off scot-free. We are wasting our time being people of God."

How did God respond? Malachi reports that those who feared the Lord spoke with one another, and the Lord heard. He paid attention and caused a "book of remembrance" to be written before him. It's not that the Lord had forgotten, but he had this book of remembrance written so that all could see. He remembers the covenants that he makes. He remembers his people. They are in his hand. No matter what happens, they should not dismay; God keeps his promises. He is "The Promise Keeper".

How do we know God keeps his promises? It's because we have our own book of remembrance-the Holy Scriptures-the Word of God. It includes all sorts of promises that God has made and kept. He promised Abraham that he would greatly increase the number of his descendants and that Abraham would be the Father of many nations. Today the descendants of Abraham are all over the world. He also promised that Abraham's wife, Sarah, who was well past the age for giving birth, would have a child. She did, and the family tree that resulted is listed in the Bible for us. He promised through his prophet Isaiah that he would send someone to be pierced for our transgressions, one who would justify many and bear their sins, and that came about. That's just a few of his promises he has kept.

It is quite appropriate that on this, the Last Sunday of the Church Year, in the Book of Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, that God gave his last word to Israel before the fulfillment of his greatest promise. What was that? Well, the next time God came around, it was going to be in the person of Jesus Christ-in the person of the promised baby of Bethlehem. The thing is, it was going to be after about four hundred more years of waiting. What God's Word says, actually happens. But is happens on God's timetable, not on ours.

Sometimes we tend to use hard words or have hard thoughts against God when things are not going to our liking. When something bad happens, we ask, "How can God let this happen to me? I've tried to be a good Christian." When evildoers go unpunished and others who don't know the Lord seem to be doing better than us, then we may be tempted to say, "What's the use in following God?"

So today the Lord, through his prophet, instructs us to look up from our own little world and trust in him, "The Promise Keeper". Malachi reminds us to have a proper respect for God and to repent of our sins.. We should not speak against God or test him by being disobedient, but remember the many promises he has kept and find joy and consolation in the promises he has made for our future.

Let us remember that the wonderful Gospel shared in Malachi 3 is also meant for us. The Lord pays attention to those who fear Him and esteem his name. The Holy Scriptures reveal in several places that God considers the believers to be his "treasured possession". He says, "<u>They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them like a man spares his son who serves him. And you again will see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.</u>" People, the day when God will settle all accounts is coming.

We see God caring for people again today in our 11:00 service. He will put his name on Lydia Lesniak-Harper in Baptism and bestow on her his forgiveness. By the power of his Word in Baptism, she is united with the death and resurrection of Jesus. For his Word does not merely convey information; his Word does what it says. It brings what it promises for Lydia, as it has for us all. So whatever your circumstances in life this morning, lift your head high, and go out from this place today knowing that you are God's treasured possession, and he will remember you forever. In the name of Jesus, Amen.