

Seeing Distinction
Malachi 3:13-18
November 20, 2022

How many of heard comments like: “When you look around it is hard to tell the Christians from others”? Why would they say that? Part of it is Christians are people just like everyone else. They put their pants on, one leg at a time. They get up and get ready for work. Yes, they may have a devotion they work through before they go, but who sees that? They go about their day, working, providing for themselves and their families. If retired, they may go down to the senior citizens center for classes or maybe a meal. They go to the doctor more than they want to, just like everyone else.

So much of what you do, others who don’t know or trust in Jesus do the exact same things. So what do you do that might show up for others to see, that makes you different, not included with the wicked written in the text from Malachi today?

You might be thinking, “I come to church fairly regularly”. That is good. “I actually open my Bible and study it on a regular basis”. That is good too. But what do we have in the text for today? “Those who feared the LORD spoke to one another. I guess they got together to talk to each other, not about the weather or how things were going on at work but got together to discuss how each had not been the “Christians” they should be and to ask for forgiveness and then to really make it a point as they lived out their lives to “esteem” the name of the Lord. We know all too well how Jesus’ name is used in our lives. We know it is used as a cuss word or as if by speaking His name as if He was responsible for a person’s hard day or the incident they have just had to deal with.

The taking of His name in vain pricks our ears but how does it affect our voices? Not that we should come down hard even though we might like to but that we should say something even if it may take so more time out of our day to be with someone you might not even want to be around anymore. What would hurt if you asked the question as to if they thought Jesus WAS responsible? You might say something like: “I really don’t think my friend Jesus would do that”. You could make up what fits you. It might be an opening to discussing who the real Jesus is.

The LORD says: that He will make you His treasured possession. The LORD talks of it being like a man who spares his son who serves him. What would that be like? He would see that nothing would happen to his son and would do things to make sure that the son would move forward in life, with the protection of the father who wants

him to grow up to be a productive citizen and not just any productive citizen but one who is first and foremost as Christian, a son who fears the Lord and lives his life that way.

God has had to live with people that were supposed to be His own who turned their backs on Him, because they looked around them and saw the wicked prospering, having things in life they didn't have because they hadn't been blessed with all the wicked had. They looked and saw the wicked seeming to win, get wealth and go about life doing all they wanted to do without seeing any consequences for the wrongs they did, in fact they didn't even hide their evil as they grew more bold in their sin.

They even saw how they could benefit if they called evil good and good evil. Tempted with many things they saw and maybe even were caught up in it all, to where they thought it OK after awhile. And as they proceeded down that road, if God didn't step in and especially if He didn't step in while it was fresh in their sinful minds then God must not really care.

You have seen it all on the TV these past couple years. No bail laws where once they were let go they would commit crimes, time and time again, I think one guy 50 times. There was no incentive for doing good but only for evil. What kind of picture does it paint for one who thinks they can get away with something? You all know of kids getting caught early vs later in life. If caught early, then they know there are boundaries to living life among others.

We see it today but it wasn't any different in Jeremiah's day. Jeremiah 12:1 Righteous are you, O Lord, when I complain to you; yet I would plead my case before you. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive?

Jeremiah saw it, Malachi saw it and you, you see it too. First we need to make sure we aren't adding to it. How easy is it to fall into the trap of staying on the job and weather level without really looking to be one of those who fear the Lord and be a distinct person, distinct in that you are seen as different, as a righteous person who is not part of the wicked who for many, may not be wicked looking on the outside but when it comes to Jesus and their trusting in Him, they have nothing to do with Him or don't know the real Jesus.

You might be wondering what these people in Malachi's day were talking about as they viewed the world around them. What ideas do you have? Look at verse 13. It seems they had not respect for God. Had they been thinking and may even saying that if God truly loved them and wanted the best for them, then why am I having such a hard time? Then Malachi writes what he hears or maybe God hears as well that they say: "It

is vain to serve God. What profit of our keeping His charge or 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”.

So short sighted. We know the Lord sees the big picture. He allows people to get themselves in a position that when they finally get low enough or are so completely dependent on what they, on their royal throne know to be true for themselves, can show how they are not as smart as they thought they were, turning their backs on Him.

We know them. They have to hit rock bottom and the Lord knows when and where that should be to have them give up and either stay low or look to Him who can raise him up from mire they have found themselves in.

It is those who have had it, lost it and now are brought back by the Lord that will probably be seen as having a distinction from what they once were to what they are now.

When they are the Lord's, when they are made into His treasured possession, He will spare them and once more the world will see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.

How many people though, when they get away with something get to thinking that if they don't see God stopping them, wonder if there is even a God or if there is, does He even care? It is the same old world we live in as we said earlier. Something has to happen in their lives to bring them around.

The things that need to be done may take some time and thought and prayer as you go to the Lord to help you to pick up on what needs to be done and He uses you to come to those He puts in your path to show and tell of a better way, maybe not today or tomorrow but in the future. It will be the day when they are face to face with Jesus their Savior who many have to tell them, sorry, you are now getting the wages you deserve.

Jesus doesn't want to say those words to come out of His mouth. He went all the way to the cross to prevent that from happening. He took on their sins and ours and shed His blood, His perfectly sinless blood to pay the price for all sin, past, present and future. It wasn't that He didn't want to do it, He did because but it was something no other human could do, He 100% human died for you, me and the whole world in payment, the wages of sin, death on a cross.

Jesus did all that for all mankind and yet what was Malachi telling them. They had turned their backs on God. Now, think about it. What happens when someone

turns their backs on the Lord? What or who becomes the most important to them? It is their desires. Most of the time what does it take to make their desires come true? It takes funds. And if funds are needed, where are those funds going to be coming from? Whose bill is going to be put on the back burner to make it happen?

With what Malachi is saying, all we have to do is to look at what went on before Malachi 3:13. It seems that in turning their backs on the Lord, they weren't putting God first with the one thing that seems to be the first thing, was to short God with their tithes and offerings.

It might start there but if a person can get away with it for awhile, where will it lead? It will eventually turn their hearts to not really care about the Lord, so involved with their dreams and desires that God isn't even part of it anymore until something happens to bring them back around.

We don't want to be someone who is like everyone else. Yes, we have those things we do in private or just not seen by others where we are looking to the Lord but as Christians, wouldn't it be great if it was more public, not to somehow earn something more from the Lord but to be a light on a hill, a light in the darkness of this dark world.

People need the light. Oh, they may not want the light to point out their darkness, their sin and yet we know after exposure, admitting where you have gone wrong, it is great to get the monkey off your back and move forward, especially if there is a plan, a way forward where to go back is seen as not good but moving forward in the Lord is seen as the best way the only way.

Jesus through His Word and Sacraments prepares us to shine that light. Through the Word made flesh who hung on that cross and died but rose again to provide Himself in His meal for us, we have the sure hope of eternal life when this short life is over.

We know there is a distinction. It may not be seen all the time but we would like the Lord to work in us to bring about a distinction to be seen by those He puts into our lives. It may not be the same thing for all but the Lord will use, who you are to make this distinction your own. Righteous, wicked, may He help you to show His righteousness through you.