

Monday, November 17, 2008

One nation under God.

It is interesting to look at that statement and I think you will find this week that the Jews viewed themselves this way as well. It wasn't always true for them and it really isn't true for all of us either.

I would like to take a look at Malachi with you this week. We looked at a small section in the message, but it may just be that you have never looked very closely at this particular book. I believe we will find that it has some great relevance for our topic this week.

Would you please read the whole book this morning to get an idea of what is being said?

Kind of a negative outlook, isn't it?

Traditionally, Malachi is considered to have prophesied in the same era as Haggai and Zechariah. It is thought that he wrote his book about the time of Nehemiah. As such it is considered to be the last communication of God to His people for 400 years until John the Baptist came on the scene (as spoken of in Malachi 3:1).

So what was the last thing that God wanted His people to think about? Him.

As I read this book I am overwhelmed by the request of God for His people--especially His priests--to offer Him pure sacrifice that would bring honor to Him and to His name.

He wanted them to be His nation under God.

They couldn't seem to do it.

They had been through quite a bit with God. He had kept them as they were captured and He had arranged it so that they could miraculously return and rebuild the temple and the walls. They started out with great excitement, but then they halted the work and it was actually quite a few years until they got around to finishing it after some prodding by Haggai, Zechariah, Ezra and Nehemiah.

In the meantime they were offering some sort of sacrifices on altars, but they were not offering pure worship.

The measure of comfort and security that they had as a people under the Persian Empire encouraged them to let their focus fall in the task of building their nation under God.

Normalcy, laxity, lethargy and leniency in spiritual things developed as the people looked to the governor for their freedom. They didn't give their best to God. They didn't honor His name above everything else so the nations couldn't see that God is the great King (2:14).

It's a little like that for Christians in America, isn't it?

Maybe it's a lot like that.

Family Discussion Question: *How are we looking to our government to make us a nation under God?*

Tuesday, November 18, 2008

Malachi is a book of questions. Malachi anticipates the questions that his readers will ask and provides the answers for them.

Will you look at the first 5 verses of chapter 1?

The prophet starts with a statement of God's love.

"I have loved you," says the LORD

He anticipates that the response will be, "We don't really see that."

When you stop to think about it, everything starts with God's love. If we are to trust God and make His name great in the process, we need to know and understand His love. Sadly, many times we doubt His love without even knowing it. We may not come right out and say it, but our actions prove that it is true.

"How do our actions prove it is true?" you ask.

The same way Edom did. When you think that you are able to do things on your own without God's help you doubt His hand. We do that by offering prayers to Him and then instead of waiting for Him to work, we force our plan on Him. Or else when we do see His hand we want more. Has it ever happened to you that God answered a prayer and then later you have resentment for that answer?

I marvel at how many times in my life and in other people's lives we ask for God to work and He does--jobs are provided, houses are sold and bought, relationships are formed, people are healed, all different things God works out in our lives. Then we praise God for answering prayer. A few months later, we are ready for a new job or a new house or new relationships or the new things just aren't right and we wonder why God isn't moving in our lives--we get dissatisfied with what He has provided. It is never quite enough. That is not seeing His loving provision for your life.

God loves you.

Have you heard Him tell you that?

Are you aware of His love for you? Do you live your life in that love? It is the basis of a life lived bringing honor to our great King. I pray it is.

Many people are slaves to a king that does not love them (sin). Only we as followers of Christ are able to be serving a King who starts His communication by saying "I love you!"

Our lives change when we get this understanding down. I love Zephaniah 3:17. It is a verse that lets me understand my King's love for me. He sings over me. He sings over you. He rejoices in me. He rejoices in you.

How would your life be different today if you were swept away by the King's love for you? Perhaps you remember the first time someone said they loved you. Perhaps you have been longing for someone to say it. Your King has.

"I have loved you," says the LORD.

I don't know about you, but I don't think it gets any better than that!

Family Discussion Question: *Is it enough that my King loves me?*

Wednesday, November 19, 2008

Today I would like for us to look at the first 9 verses of the second chapter of Malachi, particularly verse 7 and 8.

Our prophet here, in speaking for God, is bringing commands to the priests.

The priests were the ones who were to be ensuring that God's name was lifted up and honored. It was their role to make sure that the offerings were pure. They were not carrying out their role.

What we may not understand is that the way the priests fed their families with a portion of the sacrifice that was offered. So, if they did not accept a sacrifice that was brought, they were in essence turning down a meal for themselves. The people of the time were not real interested in giving their best to God, so they were bringing in second and third best. It was the normal thing to do.

Instead of standing up against that and speaking to it, the priests accepted it and raised no concern or complaint in part so they could eat.

God was not honored by this and He makes it clear that He is not honored. Verse 3 of chapter 2 is a striking verbal assessment of how God felt about the so called worship He was receiving from them. Offal is the internal waste of the animal that was to be taken outside the city and disposed of.

It is a striking contrast to how He feels about the worship that was brought to Him by a true Levite. Do you see in verse 6 why God so values a true Levite? Truth, nothing false, walking in peace, walking in integrity and holiness and *turning many from sin*.

The role of a priest was to be an example of pure worship that would turn others from sin to God--from the evil king to the loving King. The chosen people were to reveal God to the world so that the world could worship God.

In this particular time, God had worked the miracle of their release and return to Jerusalem to build the temple and present pure offerings to His name so that the entire world could see that He is the great King!

Will you please look at 1 Peter 2:9-10?

From this passage we see that we are the priests of today. We are the chosen people. We are the true Levites who are to be offering pure sacrifices so that the world may turn from their sin. We are the ones who can help people turn to the King that loves them.

Will you reread Malachi 2:7 putting your name in the place of priest?

You are the messenger of the Lord of Hosts! You are the preserver of His knowledge and the speaker of His truth by your words and your actions. It is for you to present pure offerings that honor His name so that His name will be great.

Family Discussion Question: *Do my life and my words display that I am a true priest of the LORD Almighty--a true Levite?*

Thursday, November 20, 2008

Malachi 2:10-16

Our prophet now looks to the unfaithfulness of the nation.

In the Old Testament God made promises collectively to the nation. These were promises of blessings that were to be shared by all as all obeyed. That made it a little difficult for the individual. Surely, there were always some that were truly following the commands and desires of God, but the nation was not, so the blessings of bounty and rain and protection were removed.

Each time this happens, it is a call on the part of God for His people to return to Him so that His name can be understood by the world. (See the theme?) It is a call of love.

The world knows the love of God as they see it in our lives.

Part of the way that is seen is in the love we have for each other and Malachi uses the marriage relationship to bring that point home. This is a passage that is used often to convey how God feels about divorce but we miss the bigger analogy at times.

First and foremost this is a picture of God's love and marriage to His people and their rejection of Him. He longed for His people to be pure so that their offspring would be pure.

Which offspring?

Look at Genesis 3:15 and 12:3.

The offspring was the Messiah--Christ. Israel needed to be pure so that the Christ would be born to a pure nation. In this light God hates divorce. It is metaphorically a divorce from Him.

It is for us today a reminder that as priests we are to keep our vows to Him. Not only those visible, but those made in private to Him. There is really no other time in our culture that we stand before God and make vows to Him orally with witnesses present.

When we allow those vows (and all vows made to God) to be broken it sends a message to our nation that our King is no different than theirs.

God hates divorce. Notice that God does not hate divorced people.

This text tells us that God hates actions that take people away from Him. Broken vows do that. They dishonor His name in front of everyone looking on.

I think if we are honest with ourselves we see all sorts of things that we promise to set aside for God and then take back.

There are really not any promises made specifically to our nation in Scripture and at times we take the promises made to Israel and apply them to the USA. Really all we can do is apply the principles of the promises.

If we as individuals who know the great King give ourselves over to pure worship of Him and keep our vows made to Him and do that in a way so that the voice of truth overwhelms the voice of deception, then our nation will be great because the name of God will be great in our nation and then we will truly be a nation under God.

Family Discussion Question: *Are there any vows we have made to God that we have broken? Is our worship of Him pure?*

Friday, November 21, 2008

Today is Malachi 3:6-18

What difference does it make in our lives that our God does not change?

This is a great truth that we must hold on to and relish. Immutability is the big word for it. It is one of the foundations of our faith. If God could change then our actions could alter His character and we would be left with a god created in our image. God is not like us and we get into trouble when we allow that thought process to seep in (Ps. 50:21) because then we fall into impure worship.

That is what Malachi has been demonstrating and now it brings it home with an accusation against the way they obey in giving. He tells them they are robbing from God.

But before he mentions that, he reminds them that God loves them and longs for them to return and that if they do, He will take them back. Isn't that amazing? God will always take you back even if you rob from Him.

So, have you robbed from God? The only way you can rob from God is if you have an inaccurate view of who He is. Have you set things apart for Him and then taken them back? That is really an act that proves a lack of trust and a lack of awe for your great King.

I was pierced one time in a message when the preacher was speaking about offerings. He asked us to consider whether or not we were honoring God with our giving. I was able to convince myself quite quickly that I was. He went on to ask if we were honoring God with our spending. That question is not so easily defended.

Everything you "own" is His. It belongs to your great King. Are you bringing Him honor with your giving and your spending of His funds? Would God use His funds to rent *that* movie or to buy *that* beverage, would God use His funds to promote *that* issue, would He spend His funds to accumulate excess material things? Would God take out that kind of loan? Would God use His funds the way you are using His funds? These questions humble me even as I write them and they cause me to reflect on the ways I may be robbing God.

We are His stewards.

If we are not honoring God with our giving and our spending we are robbing Him and in the process we are robbing ourselves of the ability to be priests that are bringing our best offerings to Him and we are guilty of impure worship.

But there is God saying, "Return to me, and I will return to you."

We are entering uncertain economic times in our nation, but if we who follow Christ are honoring God in our finances it will shout to the world that "in God we trust" and His name will be great in our nation.

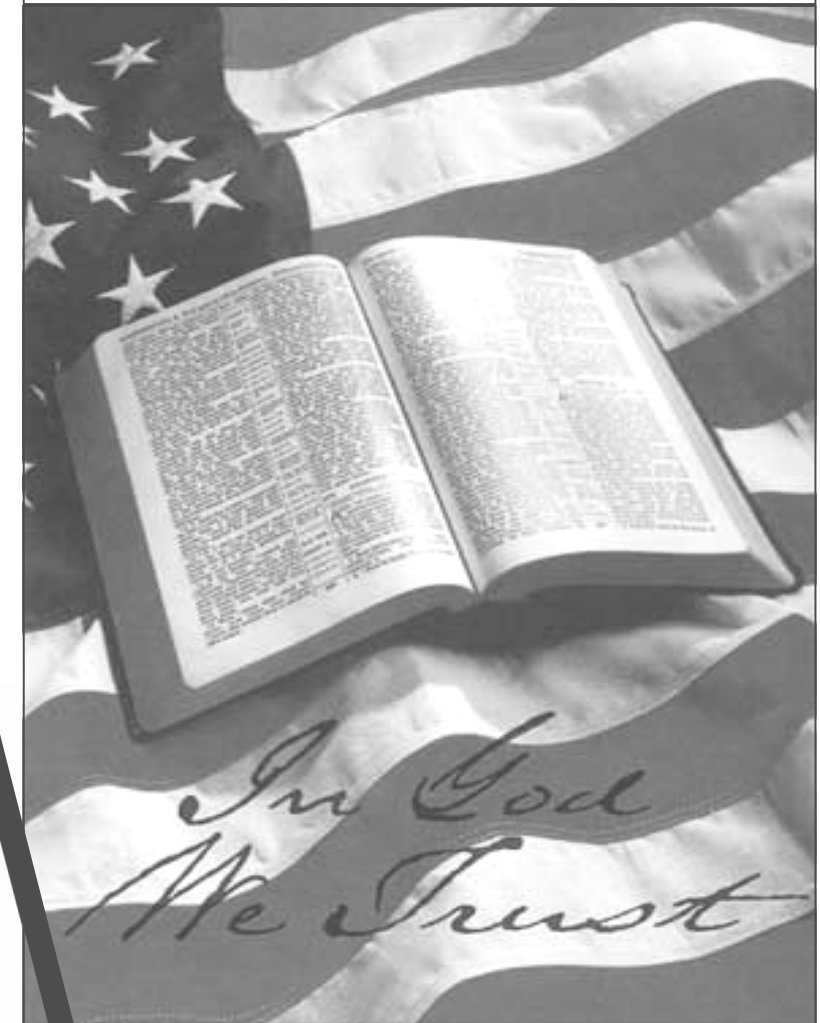
Family Discussion Question: *Are there any ways in which we are robbing God?*



Pastor Chuck Cervenka

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His Name Is Great



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Highway 50 & Harris Road
P.O. Box 1200 • Williams Bay, WI 53191
(262) 245-6294
www.calvarycommunity.net