

Advent 2, 2009
Good Hope Lutheran Church
Malachi 3

Today we turn our attention to the Old Testament lesson, found in Malachi chapter 3. We'll look some at this lesson in particular, but we'll begin more in general, with an overview of Malachi as a whole.

Grace mercy and peace be multiplied among you all, in the knowledge of God, and of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, AMEN.

Ok, fess up folks. How many of you have ever actually read the book of Malachi? You're in church and the preacher's asking you a question now, so you have to tell the truth—how many of you have actually read the book of Malachi? How many of you remembered that Malachi was even in the Bible?

Ok, you're forgiven, I have to admit it's been a while for me too. But there are some important lessons to learn from Malachi, and I believe we need to take time for them today. So here we go, the book of Malachi, #1,

and so you know. Malachi is not a name; it's a title. The book of Obadiah was written by a man named Obadiah; and the book of Joel was written by Joel. Ezekiel was written by Ezekiel, Isaiah by Isaiah, you get the picture, you would assume. That Malachi was written by a guy named Malachi, right? Wrong. Malachi is not a name, it's a title, it simply means, The Messenger; we don't know who this guy was. We don't know who he was

all we know is his title, The Messenger. Like calling Kyle teacher, or Rich doctor, or me pastor, or better yet. Better yet, it's like calling you mom, or dad; you know, you had a life once, you really did. You had hobbies and you had interests and places and to go and things to do you were young and interesting, you had a life! Now you have children. You're not a name anymore, you're a title, mom, dad, grandma, grandpa, because it's not about you anymore is it? Mom, dad, it's about the kids, and you wouldn't have it any other way. So also with Malachi, The Messenger, he had a name. He had a life! He had interests and hobbies and favorite football teams but you know what? More than that he had a God. He had a Lord and a Savior, he had a God and he had a message from this God. So it wasn't about him anymore. It wasn't about *him*, it was about God and the message from God, a message that just had to be proclaimed.

We talk about humility, and sometimes by humility we mean this silly “aw shucks tweren't nothing” attitude—I don't think that's what humility means in the Bible. Humility means understanding in your gut, that as of this moment someone else is simply more important than you are. Mom, dad, it's your kids, you know that, I don't have to tell you, that's why you're happy losing your name and becoming a mere title. And by becoming that title, you're more fulfilled than you ever would have been, if you were still just

you. And us as Christians. There's an old spiritual that says, "If anybody asks you who I am, just tell 'em I'm a child of God." That's it, that's all you need to know about me—I'm a child of God. My name doesn't matter anymore, my God does, and here's the thing. By letting God be God and letting God matter more than me? I'm more fulfilled than I'd ever be, if I still tried to insist on my own name and identity.

So the first lesson for us from Malachi, The Messenger: You, are a title. You, are a child of God. It is true humility to accept that, Christian. And it is also, the true and only way, to happiness.

#2. Malachi is a lesson in humility, hence fulfillment and happiness.

Malachi is also a lesson in persistence. Let's face it. This is the 39th and final book of the Old Testament. Thirty-eight other books had preached repentance, and not many had really repented. Thirty-eight other books had preached the love of God, and people had gone their own way anyway. Did Malachi The Messenger really think he was going to succeed where others had failed? Did he? Maybe, maybe not. Doesn't matter, I'm going to try anyway, he said; persistence. Perseverance, we belong to God, and we're not going to give up.

Read Malachi. He *chastised* people for fudging on worship—time for everything else, but not for this? Time for everything else but not for God?

He *reminded* people about stewardship, making offerings, you don't hesitate to spend gobs of money on self. So why is it so hard to give back to God what is after all His? And he *chided* people in their personal lives—the book of Malachi has one of the Bible's longest most eloquent descriptions of what we today might call the sanctity of marriage—how can you be faithful to God, in other words, if you won't be faithful to your own spouse?

That's in Malachi, the 39th book of the Old Testament. It's in the other 38 as well, plus the New Testament, plus every sermon you're ever gonna get, you know why? It's the message. You know what else? We may fall short, but we're not giving up. And it's because *God has not and God will not give up on us.*

Which leads me at last to my final point. The day is coming. Another messenger is on his way, says Malachi—we believe he means John the Baptist, though stop and think for a moment, he could also mean you—another messenger is coming, says Malachi, and after him: The Lord Himself. The day is coming.

“The Lord whom you seek will suddenly appear,” says Malachi today. I know you say you want that, but—are you sure? Really? You cannot stand before the Lord, and fudge. Your spiritual life, your spiritual commitment, it tends to be a bit half hearted, right? I mean, how many things *do* take

priority over faith—you know can't do that when the Lord's standing there right in front of you. The day is coming—are you sure you want it?

Think on it, says Malachi. And in the meantime remember, how very much our God wants you. God wants you enough to give you life in the first place, God wants you enough to walk with you and sustain you each day. And God wants you enough to send His Son Jesus—not just another messenger, not just another Malachi—God sent His own Son Jesus Christ to suffer die and rise again for you, for your forgiveness, for your salvation. So how much does God want you as His child forever? How much does God love you? More than He loves His own life. More than He loves His own life.

Think on that too, and the Lord be with you says Malachi, the Messenger. In the name of Jesus Christ, AMEN.