

Malachi 3:14-18

Many of you will probably recognize the name, **Paul Harvey**. Paul Harvey has been for many years, and still is, a radio personality who is a pretty good storyteller. As he begins to tell his human interest stories they always take some kind of a strange twist, and they usually leave some **questions** in your mind. Then the station breaks into a bunch of commercials, and when they return Mr. Harvey comes back on the air, and **resolves** all the questions in our minds. His final sentence is always, "And now you know **The Rest Of The Story**."

The words of our text for today are some of the last words recorded for us in the Old Testament. And in the days of Malachi, there were lots of **questions** which were building up in people's minds - questions about basic **justice** in the world - questions which wouldn't be answered for a long time. You see, following the Book of Malachi, there would be 400 years of **silence** from God. Nevertheless, the answers would **come**.

In the words just preceding our text, God said that the people had said **harsh** things against Him. These things they had spoken were **strong** words - **offensive** words - words that were full of **emotion**. But the people didn't even seem to **realize** what it was that they had said! They thought **God** was the one who was wrong. They thought **they** weren't guilty of **anything**, therefore, God must be the one who was **mistaken**.

It's pretty clear that the people felt God was not being **fair**. Our text begins with the words, "*You have said, 'It is **futile** to serve God. What did we **gain** by carrying out His requirements and going about like **mourners** before the LORD Almighty? But now we call the **arrogant** blessed. Certainly the **evildoers** prosper, and even those who **challenge God**, escape.'*" As they saw it, **they** had been **following** the LORD as His people, but they didn't seem to have anything to **show** for it. It seemed like everything had been turned **upside-down**. They felt that they hadn't received the **blessings** which God had promised to those who follow Him, while the **wicked** were **flourishing**, and were **escaping** with all the goodies. That's not fair, is it?

It seemed as if the **arrogant** - people who were **boiling** over with **anger** against God, and **seething** with self-righteous **pride**, even those who **openly** opposed God - it seemed as if **they** were actually the ones who were **prospering**.

The words of the Psalmist, who wrote some 600 years earlier, were still ringing in their ears. *“How long will the **wicked**, O LORD, how long will the wicked be **joyful**? They pour out **arrogant** words; all the evildoers are full of **boasting**. They **crush** Your people, O LORD; they **oppress** Your inheritance. They **slay** the widow and the alien; they **murder** the fatherless. They say, ‘The LORD does not **see**; the God of Jacob **pays no heed**.’”* Things hadn’t **changed** very much, had they? And those words still ring in our modern-day ears too. Doesn’t that sound a lot like what we see all too often in today’s **justice system**, where many of our laws seem to protect the **criminals** instead of the **innocent**? Or how about the injustice of billions of dollars of taxpayer’s money being used for the recent **bailout** of the world’s financial institutions? Doesn’t it seem like the **bad guys** are in **control**, and are **getting away** with everything?

As we look through the **history** of God’s dealings with man, sometimes it might **seem** that way. For example, how could God let a godly man like **Naboth** be robbed of his possessions and put to death by wicked people like **Ahab** and **Jezebel**? How fair is that? Or on a much more **important** level, how could God allow wicked men to arrest, and revile, and torture His own **Son**, even to the point of **crucifying** Him without a cause? How could **that** be fair?

Do we really want to **ask** such questions? Do we really want to go there? It appears that **Job** did. In his great anguish, Job thought that God was treating him **unjustly**, and he went to God with his **complaint**. As you might expect, God had an **answer** for Job’s complaint. But, do we really want God to come to us as He did when He asked Job, *“Where were **you** when **I** laid the earth’s foundation? **Tell Me** if you understand. **Who** marked off its dimensions? Surely **you** know! Will the one who **contends** with the Almighty **correct** Him? Let him who accuses God **answer Him!**”* Basically, Job was **speechless**. He simply answered God with the words, *“I am **unworthy** - how can **I** reply to **You**?”*

I think the **problem** is that sometimes we **forget** what our standing really is before God, if we try to stand before Him on the basis of **our own** merits. We **forget** what we have **done**, and what we have left **undone**. The LORD told the Israelites in the days of the Prophet **Isaiah**, *“It is **you** who have **ruined** My vineyard; the plunder from the poor is in **your** houses. What do you mean by **crushing** My people and grinding the faces of the poor?”* And Jesus **Himself** told the people, *“**Woe** to you, Korazin! **Woe** to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in **you** had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have*

repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes.” And still **today**, God’s often repeated **pleadings** and **promises** continue to fall on **deaf** ears, and on **unbelieving** hearts. Not only do we forget who **we** are, but we forget who **God** is. Whenever **we** are at odds with **God**, we always have the **privilege** of going to Him in **prayer** and **telling** Him how we **feel**. God, in turn, will **graciously** and **patiently** listen to our concerns. But we also need to realize that our **feelings** don’t make us **right**. God is **perfect**, and **holy**, and **pure** - and we are **not**. So, when have a conflict with **God**, we are **always** the ones who are **wrong**. Somebody once said, “It is better to remain silent and be **thought** a fool, than to open your mouth and remove all **doubt**.” Job should have let it go at that right from the start, and maybe we should too.

Many times God’s actions with men certainly don’t **seem** to be fair, but perhaps we just don’t have all the **facts**. We have to realize that God is dealing with **sin** in us - and **sin** is **never** fair. At the same time, God is **just** and perfectly **holy**, so He is **always** fair. Jesus promised His followers, “*In this world you will have **trouble**. But take heart, I have **overcome** the world.*” The believers in Malachi’s day had **seen** God’s grace and the fulfillment of His promises in the **past**, and they would see them **again** in the **future** - and so will **we**.

The problem for us is that we have to **wait** to hear **The Rest Of The Story** - and waiting is something that we Americans are **not** very good at. We don’t like to wait in line at the **grocery store** - we don’t like to wait in **traffic** - we don’t like to wait for a **doctor’s diagnosis**. We want things to be **convenient** and we want them **now**. Nobody wants to **wait**.

However, the Christian **Church** is a **waiting** church. Things are **not** always going to be **convenient**, and problems are **not** always going to be instantly **resolved**. But in spite of it all, Christians can and will **endure**. We are **comfortable** with **uncomfortable** situations. When something earthly goes wrong, it’s painful, but it doesn’t **destroy** us. Christians can **endure** earthly problems because we know something much **better** is coming - something **worth** waiting for.

God **tells** us about that “something” in the final words of our text. There He says, “*They will be **Mine** in **the day** when I make up My treasured possession. I will **spare** them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him. And you will again **see** the **distinction** between the righteous and the wicked, between*

those who serve God and those who do not.” God has a **lot** of good things in store for us. You see, we don’t serve **dead idols**. We don’t even serve the most powerful **living** idol of all - namely, **ourselves**. Idols can’t **help** us spiritually - idols can’t get us to **heaven**, but Jesus **can**. God sent Jesus for that specific reason - to **rescue** us from the coming **wrath**, and carry us safely to **glory**. All the work has already been **finished**. Christ’s resurrection from the dead **proves** it, and it’s only a matter of time before it physically **happens**. God has not **forgotten** us, and His **justice** is just as perfect as it has **ever** been. The final chapter in the world’s history has yet to be **written**, but it’s a chapter which will be greatly **enjoyed** by all those who cling to Jesus as their Savior from sin, death, and the devil. Judgment Day is coming **soon**, and **that day** will bring the final **revelation** of God’s **fairness**. And as Paul Harvey says, **that**, my friends, is **The Rest Of The Story**. Amen.