



**St. Luke Ev. Lutheran Church**  
**Sermon by Pastor Anthony E. Schultz**  
**Malachi 3:14-18 Pentecost 24 October 26, 2008**

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." Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name. "They will be mine," says the LORD almighty, "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."

People of God – rescued from the flaming lake of fire in hell by the innocent blood of the very Lamb of God:

Gayle was 34 years old. She was from England, but she was living in Kabul in Afghanistan. She was helping people in Kabul who were poor and needy. Can you imagine what that kind of work would be like? It means living in a place where all the things we take so much for granted do not exist! Imagine living in a place where you can't go to the store – and get every kind of fresh fruit and vegetable – from around the world – in season or out! Where you can buy whatever the local farmers picked today – after you haggle with them. Imagine living in a place where you can't buy literally 50 different kinds of bread and buns and sweet rolls and pastries – but home made bread – just baked by your neighbor – after you haggle with them. Imagine your meat – chickens – whole – live – or still warm because they just got butchered. No pork because pigs are counted unclean. Kind of fresh fish and chunks of beef – with the butcher with a stick with horse hair on it – swishing the flies away. Imagine pumping and carrying your water. Imagine no washrooms – no bars on your cell phone – no Internet – no cable TV – no fast food – no dependable electricity – no video games. Why would you choose to live in a place like that? To help people who are literally malnourished. To help people who have practically no decent medical care. To help people who live in painful poverty. To help little children who don't have clean water or a safe warm dry place to sleep. To help people who don't know that Jesus is their only Savior from sin and guilt – so they won't spend eternity in horrible unspeakable suffering and pain more terrible than words can explain. Then imagine – being a 34 year old woman – living in this poverty – to share the riches of heaven. And then on Monday morning – you are literally machine gunned – targeted and machine gunned to death – because you were sharing Jesus! Imagine being murdered – not because you were preaching sermons – but living your faith and sharing your faith with the women and children who live in your neighborhood! Do we live our faith? Do we share our faith? Do we talk about Jesus – and his forgiving love with the people around us – so that if the Taliban was in Watertown – they would target us – for spreading the Gospel? Today we will be encouraged by the prophet Malachi – who lived some 400 years before baby Jesus was born. We will:

**See The Difference Between the Righteous and the Wicked**

- 1. The wicked seem to prosper today**
- 2. The forgiven will be with the LORD forever.**

The part of God's Word we are concentrating on today is from the scroll of the Prophet Malachi. The name Malachi means my messenger! What a wonderful name for someone who was exactly that—a messenger for the LORD—the Great I AM—the Holy One of Israel. Malachi's scroll begins with the Hebrew word for an oracle—very literally a burden! This is not something painfully heavy that weighs you down—a drag on your life and time. It's something you just have to share! Jeremiah talked about it. He said, **"But if I say, 'I will not mention him (the LORD) or speak any more in his name,' his word is in my heart like a burning fire, shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot!"** Jeremiah 20:9 The Apostle Paul knew too that when Jesus' love is in your heart—you just have to tell people about Jesus. Paul said, **"Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!"** 1 Corinthians 9:16 Malachi—my messenger—just had to tell people law and gospel. He would have burst if he didn't! Malachi preached God's Word around the same time as Governor Zerubbabel was encouraging God's people to rebuild the Temple. King Artaxerxes of Persia permitted his cup bearer Nehemiah to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city walls—to keep God's people safe. Far more important than that—Nehemiah encouraged people to put their faith in the LORD into concrete action. Have you read from the scroll of Nehemiah lately? It talks about mortgages—about people who mortgaged their fields and vineyards and olive groves and homes. It talks about people who were greedy—charging so much interest from their fellow believers that this brought shame on their Heavenly Father—brought shame on the Gospel! Nehemiah talked about troubles in marriages—where people were picking a spouse on the basis of anything and everything other than a common faith. People picked boy friends and girl friends because of who was cute—who was pretty and handsome—who had a good job—who had lots of sheep and goats and camels and grapes and figs. They married people who were fun to drink wine with and have parties with—people who were attractive on the outside. But then—these people did not encourage them in their faith. Instead they led them astray—into something as simple as sleeping in—when it was time to get up and go to the synagogue—to study God's Word. People who were the priests—the servants in the Temple had become corrupt—looking out for themselves—instead of looking out for the glory of the LORD and the feeding of Jesus' lambs and sheep. And so there was danger to God's people—danger to their faith and danger to their souls!

The part of God's Word is all about attitude! It's about a bad attitude that mocks the Word and law and gospel promises of God. **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."** People were complaining bitterly against God. It is futile to serve God? Where are we ahead—they wanted to know? What did we gain by carrying out his requirements? Where is the benefit in serving the LORD? **Honor your father and mother—that it may go well with you—and that you may enjoy long life on the earth!** Show your parents love and respect. Show your teachers and police officers and fire fighters love and respect—and God will bless you. Show love and respect for your boss and your government—and there are blessings. Honor those your Heavenly Father has placed over you—and there is the promise **you may enjoy long life on the earth!** Having said that—the LORD does not owe us anything. The LORD is never ever in debt to me—for my prayers and my Bible study—for my sermons and shut-in visits and confirmation classes. Jesus does not owe me—for doing evangelism and mission work. You can see the bad attitude when the people complained, **What did we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the LORD Almighty?** People who serve Jesus going around like we are at a funeral all the time—because we are

serving the LORD? I don't think so! We don't skip meals, wear scratchy clothes, sit in ashes — hang around at the local land fill — being sad. Nor do we go around with some sappy smile on our face. Rather the Holy Spirit fills our heart so that like the Apostle Paul we can say, **"I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.** Philippians 4:12b, 13.

**"But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly the evildoers prosper, and even those who challenge God escape."** Sometimes it seems like the arrogant come out ahead. Sometimes in this world — evil doers prosper. Sometimes it seems those who shake their puny fist at heaven get away with it. But just wait! Just wait! God's justice is not *always* immediate. That's not to say it's *never* immediate. There was a man — a little while ago — who was in a very nice boat out on a lake. He looked up at the clouds and said if there is a God — he should strike him dead. The headline on the next day's newspaper said man hastens his own demise. George Carlin was a comedian who liked to blaspheme — tempting God to strike him dead, too. Mr. Carlin liked to go on a blasphemous rant about how he wanted to believe in God — but taking stock of this world — with all the pain and filth and poverty — all the war and death and bloodshed — all the grief and suffering and natural disasters and heartache — he couldn't bring himself to worship a Supreme Being who allowed all this grief. Mr. Carlin passed away the other day. Now he has met Jesus. Now he knows that Jesus is in fact the Son of God who died on the cross — to pay for the sins even of those who are so arrogant as to challenge God.

**Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name. "They will be mine," says the LORD almighty, "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."** We live in a time where there are papers everywhere. I have papers on my desk — in my desk — in my office closet — papers in file drawers and boxes full of papers. I have papers in my car — papers in my basement — boxes of papers. I have post it notes and manila folders of papers. Back in Bible times people didn't have papers. They had scrolls at the synagogue — God's Word — written down and kept carefully in packages — and kept inside clay jars — with lids waxed shut — to keep the parchment inside safe and dry. There were notes dented into clay tablets then fired to make them last. There were words scraped into pieces of broken pottery — to try and keep track. So to make a scroll of remembrance was no small thing. To write down who loved the LORD and how they served him faithfully — is something special. What is important of course — is not that our name is written on the membership list of some congregation. The important thing is that Jesus sacrificed himself to wash away our sins. By grace through faith — our name is written the only place it really matters in the book of life in heaven!

**"And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not."** Life isn't fair. It happens all the time! There was a young girl — an 8<sup>th</sup> grader named Alma. Just before New Year's she was sent by her Aunt to her Uncle's butcher shop to collect a package of meat. She was attacked and murdered! A man named Colin was accused. He wasn't worried — even when he was arrested. He was a saloon manager. He had spent the afternoon working. All kinds of people were witness to the fact that he hadn't left. He couldn't possibly be guilty. No way would he possibly be convicted. He had nothing to fear. He hadn't done anything wrong! Colin wrote again and again in the margins of pages of his Bible about the false witnesses who were testifying against him. Colin wrote on the pages of his Bible notes — that he never expected anyone to read — about his

innocence. Almost 4 months after the murder – Colin was put to death in a horribly botched execution. Even in putting him to death – it wasn't fair. It took 86 years – 86 years before Colin was finally pardoned. There are relatives of the victim who say that a pardon doesn't go far enough – that Colin should be exonerated – not just forgiven – but not guilty at all! And the guilty person – the actual murder – was never found or punished. Never found or punished in this world! There is no escape from God's justice. When we see Jesus we **will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.** We will face that day unafraid – because we know we are saved by grace alone for Jesus' sake who died and rose again to forgive us. Amen!

**To God alone all glory!**

*Rev. Anthony E. Schalla*