

March 29, 2020 Sunday School Lesson

Good morning, I hope you are well and blessed. "This is the day that LORD has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it". I trust this note finds you well and in good spirits.

At this time let's go to God with our prayer requests: give praise honor and glory to God for blessing and providing for us, with our prayer requests for members of our church, family and community that are ill, suffering, and going through medical treatments, and for God to eradicate the Coronavirus. Pray for those who have lost loved ones through this disease, and pray that God will bring healing to all those who are infected. Pray for the medical community as they continue to care for the sick. Pray for our national, state, and civic leaders that God would give them the wisdom to know what to do as they lead in this anxious time. Ask God to lead us to serve others with love and that God's goals on earth be accomplished as He empowers us. Ask God to forgive when we have failed to honor His commandments. Let's ask all these things in our LORD and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen

One of our daily readings this past week was Psalm 50. Review Psalm 50 if you haven't. Here is a small summary.

In this Psalm, God first summons His own people, He rebukes them, not for the actual sacrifices, but for their attitudes in giving the sacrifices. The children of Israel were offering sacrifices with the attitude that they were doing God a favor, as if God needed the sacrifices they were offering. With this attitude, they felt that God would be indebted to them for the sacrifices they were

offering. God points out to them, such an attitude is ridiculous. Just as God didn't need their sacrifices, so also does He not need our service. We should never serve Him as if we are doing Him a favor. He could, at any time, raise up rocks and stones to take our place. Our attitude should be one of thankfulness to Him. God commands His people to show their thankfulness and express their need for Him. What a blessing that we have a God who welcomes us to "call upon Him in the day of trouble". God also addresses those who are not His people: "But to the wicked, God says: 'What right have you to recite my laws or take my covenant on your lips? You hate my instruction and cast my words behind you'" (vss. 16-17). God addresses the "wicked", those who "hate His instruction and cast His words behind them." There are those who think that God is greatly imposing on mankind by giving us rules and commandments. With no moral foundation, they are led by temptation into every sin that presents itself to them: "When you see a thief, you join with him; you throw in your lot with adulterers. You use your mouth for evil and harness your tongue to deceit. You speak continually against your brother and slander your own mother's son" (vss. 18-20). After entering into a life of sin by putting God's words behind them, the wicked then, because they are not immediately punished by God, think that God approves of their activity: "These things you have done and I kept silent; you thought I was altogether like you" (vs. 21). They will be surprised when they meet God face to face: "But I will rebuke you and accuse you to your face" (vs. 21). God is gracious. He puts off that face-to-face meeting with Him, and gives us time to repent, and turn to Him. Moreover, He encourages us to repent, and shows us the

way to salvation: "Consider this, you who forget God, or I will tear you to pieces, with none to rescue: He who sacrifices thank offerings honors me, and he prepares the way so that I may show him the salvation to God" (vss. 22-23).

Lesson for March 29, 2020 "Leading Justly" from Malachi chapter 2:1-9 & chapter 3:5-6

Information regarding the prophet Malachi, was obtained would from Thru the Bible Commentary by Vernon McGee, Exploring The Minor Prophets by John Phillips and The Present Word Adult Bible Lessons

Background: The Jews had returned to Jerusalem from Babylon. They'd obeyed the messages of God from the prophets Haggai and Zechariah. They'd rebuilt the temple of God. And nothing happened. No Messiah, no great divine war against Israel's enemies, no worldwide kingdom of God, none of the good things those prophets said would come about. So the people grew indifferent. They offered faulty sacrifices (Mal 1:8,13), married pagan women (Mal 2:11), were unfaithful to their wives (Mal 2:14), and withheld tithes and offerings (Mal 3:8). The priests of God were misleading the people and disrespecting the God who had called them to ministry (Mal 2:8). God has made sacred covenant with His people. He's their Father and Master, the one who loves them and disciplines them. A prophet named Malachi (which means "my messenger") points out the great disconnect between God and His people: He cares for them, but they don't care for Him. The people and the priests have become estranged to God, and the disconnect had grown to a point where the

people just can't wrap their minds around God's nature and expectations.

Malachi will state the way God sees things, but anticipates that the people will not understand. Malachi often says something to the effect of, "This is what you have done, yet you say, 'How have we done this?'"

Here are a few ways the disconnect takes shape in the people:

- They doubt God's love for them (Mal 1:2).
- Priests did not know God's will and they the people astray (Mal 2:1-9)
- They don't understand how God view their offerings (Mal 2:13-14).
- They forget the way God values justice (Mal 2:17).
- They neglect their tithes and offerings (Mal 3:8).
- They claim that serving God is useless (Mal 3:13-14).

Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament. Malachi finishes off the Minor Prophets, the last 12 books of the Old Testament. When God had a message for the people, He spoke through the prophets. His word came in visions, oracles, dreams, parables, and the like. Most of the Minor Prophets wrote about the coming destruction of Judah, Israel, or the surrounding nations, but Malachi is different. Like Haggai and Zechariah, Malachi shows up on the scene long after the destruction took place—and warns against repeating the sins of the fathers (Mal 3:7).

The prophet Malachi isn't mentioned anywhere else in the Bible, but he deals with some of the same issues that Ezra the scribe and Nehemiah the governor deal with when the Jews disregard God's law in their times:

- Corrupt priests (Nehemiah 13:4-9)
- Intermarriage with pagans (Ezra; Nehemiah 13:23)
- Lapses in tithes and offerings (Nehemiah 13:10)

From The Present Word text: "Open our minds and our hearts to the prophet's word from centuries past, words that convict us anew today. Amen"

Malachi paints a stubbing picture of Israel's faithfulness that clearly show them to be worthy of punishment, but woven throughout this message is hope, the possibility of forgiveness.

Malachi chapter 2: In calling the priests back to faithfulness, Malachi recalled God's covenant with the tribe of Levi. The covenant with Levi is the covenant between God and the priests. Levi walked with God and turned many from sin. Moses' brother, Aaron, was the first high priest of Israel, and Aaron's sons and their descendants were to be priests of Israel.

In the Bible, God binds, God's self to people, and the people respond by pledging loyalty to God. Remember the covenant God made with all creation, to never again destroy the world with a flood. In the New Testament, Jesus declares that the cup of wine at the Lord's Supper is the "new covenant" in his blood (Luke 22:20).

Covenants usually contain both blessings for those who obey and curses for those who disobey. In this covenant with Levi, God promises the blessings of life and well-being for the priests. For their part the priests vow that they will always revere the Lord. God told the priests if they did not listen and if they did not set their heart to honor His name, He would send a curse upon them. The curse was graphically stated in chapter 2:3. That He would take the vile filth removed from the animals set apart for the feasts and spread the dung on their faces. By law this animal filth was to be taken outside the camp and burned. The priests didn't take seriously, set their hearts to God's priority, even though he had reminded them the through his word many times.

Some Bible translation used the word fear instead of revere. Fear, in this sense, means awe and wonder. We should understand that what it means: to fear God is to hold God, and the things of God, in reverence.

Priests are teachers with spiritual abilities to instruct people in the knowledge of God and His will, and not to mislead them. The goals of a true and faithful priest are to teach and preach God's Word that will turn the people from their sins to salvation, justice and righteousness. Priests love God and live justly with other people without compromise in the discharge of their duties.

Malachi mentions the priests' carelessness and laxity in teaching as evidence that they were no longer revere God: But you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by you instruction (2:8). God stills holds out hope to the priest, spiritual leaders and the nation as a whole. God does not change. "The Lord,

a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." (Exodus 34:6) God was the same in Malachi's day, in Moses' day and today, God is still full of mercy and grace.

From the section stepping into the world: every time someone is baptized, we rehearse the covenant promises. The Lord's Supper is a covenant meal that we celebrate with the Risen Christ in our midst. Our relationship to one another in the community of faith, is a covenant relationship.

Our responsibility in this covenant relationship is the same as the priests' charge in Malachi: to revere God. In the words of Micah from 6:8; God has shown what He requires of us, "To act justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." Walk humbly is a description of the heart's attitude toward God.

Malachi 3:5-6 "So I will come near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice, but do not fear me, says the LORD Almighty. I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed."

This is a pointer to the fact that God has concern for the less privileged and defenseless. God revealed His plan of judgment against evildoers (v5). In the passage is God's readiness to bear witness against evildoers. He will personally testify against and punish those who have acted contrary to His command to love and promote justice. He reaffirmed His lordship, which does not change; therefore, the descendants of Jacob were not yet

consumed (v. 6). God has provided a foundation for faith and hope for those who believe, even when they are oppressed and cheated. Malachi was specific about those whom God will judge.

They are those who:

- Practice sorcery and invoke curses, those who seek power or guidance through demonic activities, because they are abomination to God (Leviticus 19:31);
- Commit adultery, because it contradicts the covenant and sanctity of marriage;
- Swear falsely while making a solemn affirmation;
- Cheat their employees by refusing to remunerate them adequately;
- Oppress and take advantage of the defenseless and deny strangers justice;
- Do not fear God.

The fact remains that God will surely judge evildoers and a messenger will be sent ahead to prepare the way (Malachi 4:5). In various ways, God had expressed concern for the well-being of widows, the poor, oppressed the disadvantaged, and even the foreigners who have been denied justice. According to the lesson, He is ready to plead their case. Oftentimes, He revealed Himself as their refuge, their help, their deliverer, and their provider. Today, these evils are prevalent. Some of our leaders have ignored God's standard and gone their ways, but they will not escape His judgment. God will not change in His determination to punish sin and reward obedience. Christian leaders should not ignore God's covenant and the privilege to serve as God's servants. We should remember that any act of disobedience to God's command will be judged and punished accordingly.

God is the ultimate Judge. God is God of justice, and His justice demands that He punishes disobedience.

Christians should value God's covenant and reverence Him always. Our activities should not cause others to stumble. God does not change; His faithfulness endures forever. God tells us to return to Him and He will return to us.

The New Testament teaches us, that it is impossible to revere God if we do not do also revere people. "Those who say, I love God, and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen" (1 John 4:20).

Closing: For the love that cast out fear, the faith that sustains and the hope that never perishes, be with us now and forever more. Amen. God watch over us and take care of us.

Next week Sunday school lesson is from Isaiah chapter 42:1-9