

You Still Don't Get It
Malachi 3:13-15

Today we come to the last of God's accusations through Malachi. I wasn't sure I wanted to use that word: Accusation. It's a harsh word equated with offense, indictment, and allegation. It carries with it the image of a courtroom and legal proceedings: a crime has been committed and there must be an accounting for wrongful actions, inappropriate conduct, and unwise decisions. Yet this is exactly what God is doing ... and rightfully so. Review with me the indictments God levied against his people Israel thus far in Malachi: lack of respect, half-hearted service, lifeless worship, misaligned allegiance, blatant hypocrisy, outright disobedience, theft and, as we will soon hear, malicious talk. Harsh charges, strong words, true words.

These accusations are not spoken in anger as much as disappointment. It is the heart of a father that speaks. These were a people whom God had "chosen" to be like no other people on earth. They were special to him. God had nurtured this people and set them apart to be faithful to him, to behave in accordance with his standard for right conduct for individual and corporate life, and, more importantly, to live in relationship with him. God's people, set free from slavery in Egypt, rescued time and again from enemies who would oppress them, sent into exile for blatantly disowning God in order that they might one day return to him, and then restored to their homeland and reestablished as a nation. They were a people to whom God had said, "*Be holy because I am holy*" because in that holiness their relationship with one another would grow. They were a people redeemed to God so that the whole world could see and understand that there is a God and that they, too, can have a relationship with the one true God. But Israel compromised their life-style, their integrity, and, most importantly, their relationship with God. Like a Father, God has a heart-to-heart with his children to discipline, to correct, and to enable them to change course so that they might share in his holiness.

These words are for us, too. For we are God's children, redeemed from the slavery of sin, called to be holy, set apart for an awesome relationship with God, rescued time and again from the evils within and without, and called to show Jesus to the world. And we, too, compromise our life-style, our integrity, and, most importantly, our relationship with God; don't we?

We are quick to say we want to "be like Jesus." If we are honest about what those words really mean then our desire should be to adopt the attitudes and practice of Jesus, which means we want to submit to and obey God's Word. But how often don't we find a thousand ways to compromise God's call on our lives and to resist the truth? Deep inside I think we know we should recognize the sin in our lives and want to follow Jesus; but that means letting go of control and we'd rather live the Christian life on our own terms; wouldn't we?

So, God comes to us as Father with correction. The writer of Hebrews reminds us, "*My children, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and punishes everyone he accepts as his child.*" And then reminds us "*No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful*" (12:5-6, 11).

I can't say I always like discipline and rebuke. Growing up, I remember that some of the discipline I received from my parents could be quite painful. But more painful was the ache inside that came as a result of disappointing them.

And while it didn't always come right at the same time as the rebuke and punishment, they usually would explain the reprimand or tell what I needed to do to correct my behavior. God has done this, too, in Malachi. Each time he accused them of inappropriate behavior God quickly dispels their defense response before they have a chance to voice it and then explains his rebuke, offering corrective action. Each time, that is, until this last one. This one is different.

(Read Text Here)

I think I know what happened. These were God's people. And so, while they had compromised their relationship with God, they really did desire to be in right relationship with God. So they began to work at implementing the corrections. But that's not easy.

Anyone who has been told by their doctor they need to change to a healthier lifestyle can attest to how difficult implementing corrective change can be. It's tough. And sometimes it seems as if our efforts are useless. And then we look at people who violate every health principle and don't appear to have a care in the world. I have a friend who, when we were in college together, was a bean-pole, thin as a rail. Bill decided he really would like to add a few pounds. So he ate anything and everything he wanted. At the same time I was trying to become more fit and watched everything I ate. He not only didn't gain weight, he lost weight. I had the opposite result. It was really disgusting.

It's hard when you strive to live the way you know God wants you to live, especially when you feel as if for every stride forward you slide back two. And then you look around and it appears that those who couldn't care less about God, or integrity, or right living are the ones who have it made. It seems they could get away with murder. Our natural reaction is the same as Israel's, "*What's the use of serving God? What have we gained by obeying his commands or by trying to show the Lord Almighty we are sorry for our sins? ... Those who do evil get rich and those who dare God ... go free*" (NLT). It's just not worth it. Or is it that they/we still don't get it?

Remember the parable of the Lost Son? The youngest son gets inheritance, squanders it on wild living, lives with pigs, goes home, and dad throws party. There's another son in the story we sometimes overlook. He got really angry and refused to come inside, so his father came out and pleaded with him to join the celebration. But he argued back, "*Listen, all these years I've worked hard for you. I've never disobeyed one of your orders. But how many times have you*

even given me a little goat to roast for a party with my friends? Not once! This is not fair!”

(Lk.15:28-29). It seems to me like he’s got an honest complaint. His brother took advantage of dad and now dad’s rewarding him with a party. But there’s something deeper to his complaint and it’s just like the complaint in Malachi, “I’m not getting what I deserve. I’ve given myself to God; I sacrifice time and energy. I obey him to the best of my ability. I even give the whole tithe just like he requires. And look, everyone else seems to do better and get more. I deserve better!”

Honest complaint, or do we just not get it?

I can imagine God looking at his people Israel, and us when we act the same way, and shake his head. He doesn’t respond because at this moment it won’t do any good because we still don’t get it.

All through Malachi God has sought to tell the Israelites what’s most important in life. He has reminded them over and over again what real life is, what will bring them contentment and peace, and what will restore their hope. But they still don’t get it. All through the Bible God seeks to remind us what it’s all about. Do we get it?

You see, our purpose for life is not about what we can get out of God or what a relationship with God will do for us; it’s about how we can better know and live with and for God. Until we stop focusing on ourselves we will never know God the way we are intended to and we will never know true contentment and peace of mind. Because it’s not about us; it’s about God. Chuck Colson wrote, “*We should read God’s Word not for what we can get out of it, not for what it will do for us, but for what it will teach us to do for our God*” (Loving God pg. 74).

A rich man once asked Jesus how to get into heaven. Jesus told him to give up his riches, to let go of what was getting in the way of God. The rich man went away sad – for him life, even eternal life, was all about him. Jesus said, “*It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a*

needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom.” The disciples asked, “*Who then can be saved?*” To which Jesus replied, “*With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible*” (Mt. 19:16-26). It’s all about God. We cannot live with or for God if we rely on our own intention or strength. We will only fall short and grow frustrated. But, if we will allow God first place, then God will make a way. He will cause us to know the blessing of joy, of contentment, of love, of fulfillment. More importantly, we will know God.

Do you get it now?