

A Book of Remembrance

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 July 2022

Preacher: Rev. Murdo M Campbell

[0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this evening, for a short while, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read, the book of the prophet Malachi, Malachi chapter 3, Malachi chapter 3, and there's lots of great texts in this book, but I want us to look at verses 16 to 18.

Malachi chapter 3, verse 16. Then those who feared the Lord spoke with one another. The Lord paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed his name.

They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his sons who serve him. Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between the one who serves God and the one who does not serve him. After a special occasion such as a birthday or a wedding, my sister-in-law, she often puts together a photo book, which is a collection and also a collation of all the photos of that special occasion in this printed book, and you can read through it again and again. And in many ways, a photo book is just like a photo album, and a photo book or a photo album, we would probably look at them and think, well, that's a book of remembrance. It's a book of remembrance.

But you know, the book of remembrance mentioned here in Malachi, it wasn't a book to remember a special occasion. It was a book to remember a special people. It was a book to remember a remnant.

It was a book to remember the faithful few, the faithful few who feared the Lord and followed the Lord and remained faithful to the Lord. It was a book to remember the Lord's people, the Lord's people who pressed on, who were always present in worship, and who persevered to the end.

[2 : 3 0] It was a book of remembrance. And this evening, I'd just like us to consider this book of remembrance under two very simple headings, the context of the book and then the content of the book.

The context of the book and the content of the book. So first of all, the context. The context of the book. Look at verse 16. Then those who feared the Lord spoke with one another. The Lord paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed his name. Now, as you can see, in our English Bibles, Malachi is the last book in the Old Testament.

But Malachi wasn't the last book of the Hebrew Bible because 2 Chronicles was the last book in the Old Testament, or the Hebrew Bible, which is the Old Testament. And in fact, it wasn't actually 2 Chronicles because 1 and 2 Chronicles was actually one book. It was the book of Chronicles. And the book of Chronicles was the last book of the Hebrew Bible because it was the last Old Testament book to be written.

Because the book of Chronicles was actually written after the book of Malachi. And what's interesting is that the book of Chronicles was written as a book of remembrance.

The book of Chronicles was written as a book of remembrance, a book to recount and even to record the chronological history of all of the Lord's people. And when you read the books of Chronicles, when you read it as one book, you see how the Lord was faithful to his covenant people and his covenant promises from Adam all the way to the exile. The Lord was faithful to his people and to his promises. And the book of Chronicles was written in order to encourage and to enable the Israelites to remain faithful to God's Word and to remain focused upon God's promises.

[4 : 39] And some have suggested that because the book of Chronicles was written shortly after the book of Malachi, that the book of Chronicles is actually the book of remembrance that is mentioned there in verse 16. But you know, the reason our English Bible has Malachi as the last book of the Old Testament is simply because Malachi was the last Old Testament prophet. He was the last messenger to bring God's message to God's people. In fact, that's what the name Malachi means. It means my messenger.

So the name Malachi is my messenger. And Malachi was given the Lord's last message before the Lord would fall silent for 400 years. You know, for us, it's just turning a page. But that little page is 400 years long. There's 400 years between Malachi chapter 4 and Matthew chapter 1. And it's 400 years of silence where the Lord doesn't speak. He doesn't speak through any of his prophets, his priests, or his kings. There's just silence. 400 years of silence. But as you know, that wasn't the first time that the Lord was silent in the story of redemption. You remember when we were studying Joseph, we came to the end of Joseph's life. And between the death of Joseph at the end of the book of Genesis and the birth of Moses at the beginning of the book of Exodus, there's this 400-year period of silence. And yet, what's remarkable is that the Lord was still working in the silence. The Lord is always working, even in the silence. Because the Lord was sovereignly but silently working out His perfect plan, path, and purpose in the providence of His people. And you know, when you bring it back to yourself, there are times in our lives when the Lord might be silent, where He's not speaking to us maybe as personally as He once did, or as powerfully as He once did. But you know, that's what it was like with the Lord's people. And we have to remember that even though the Lord isn't speaking as personally or as powerfully as He maybe once did, we have to remember that the Lord is still sovereignly but silently working out His perfect plan, path, and purpose in the providence of His people. And that was certainly true for the people of Malachi's day. Because just before this 400-year period of silence, the Lord spoke through His prophet. He spoke through Malachi. But you know, the message that Malachi preached and proclaimed, it was actually quite hard-hitting. Because the people, even as we saw in the chapter, the people questioned everything the Lord said. And you'll see that even when you read through the book, they're questioning everything the Lord is saying. You see it even from chapter 1 at verse 2. The Lord says, well, He says verse 2, I have loved you, says the Lord. But you say, how have you loved us? In what way have you loved us? The people questioned. They questioned every promise and every proclamation of the Lord. They questioned God's Word. They questioned God's will.

They questioned God's way. They questioned the Lord's perfect plan, path, and purpose for His people. But the reason they questioned the Lord was because they were in a bad place spiritually.

They questioned the Lord because they were in a bad place spiritually. Now, that's not to say that it's wrong to question what the Lord is doing in our lives. You know, it's good to question what the Lord is doing in our lives. But for the Israelites, they knew that they were in a bad place spiritually.

They knew that they weren't committed to the Lord as they should have been. They knew that they weren't walking closely with the Lord as they should have been. Because, and the reason for this was that they hadn't learned the lessons of lockdown. They hadn't learned the lessons of lockdown.

[9 : 04] As you know, years earlier, the Israelites, they had been exiled into Babylon. They lived in lockdown in Babylon because of their immorality and their idolatry and their indifference to the Lord.

And they remained in Babylon, as you know, for 70 years. And they remained there to learn the lessons of lockdown, to learn from the Lord. But when that remnant returned, there was about 50,000 of them, and they returned to the promised land of Israel to rebuild the temple and rededicate their lives to the Lord. And yet how quickly we see they became distracted. And they diverted their attention to selfish things, to self-centered things. And that was until Haggai appeared. And then Zechariah appeared.

They appeared on the scene and they issued a command to rebuild and a call to repent. And the people responded at that time to, they responded by rebuilding and restoring the temple. And then over the next few years, you read through the narrative and the history, you see that Ezra appears. And then Nehemiah turns up and he instructs the people to refocus their lives upon the Lord and rebuild the walls surrounding Jerusalem. But sadly, by the time Malachi begins his prophecy, which is around 430 BC, Solomon's proverb has already come true. The proverb where Solomon says, like a dog that returns to its vomit, so a fool returns to his folly.

And you come to Malachi and you realize in the context of this whole book, and you see that they hadn't learned their lesson. They hadn't learned the lesson of lockdown because they were still immoral. They were still idolatrous. They were still indifferent to the Lord.

They were still questioning God's word and God's will and God's way. In fact, when you read through the book, the spiritual leadership was non-existent. The priests were lazy and lethargic in their service to God. They were arrogant and even apathetic towards the God they were meant to be serving, which inevitably had this impact and it had an influence upon the people because they didn't view the worship of God as serious. They didn't see it as something solemn. They hadn't learned the lesson of lockdown and they polluted the sanctuary of God. They had half-hearted offerings. They profaned the name of God by their lack of commitment to His covenant. They were lukewarm. They were laxadaisical.

[11 : 54] They had this lazy approach and attitude towards the Lord. But you know, what the Lord makes clear from the context of the book of remembrance is that those who were immoral and idolatrous and indifferent to the Lord, those who were lazy and lukewarm and laxadaisical and lethargic in their leadership, those who were consumerist worshippers and casual in their commitment and their character and their conduct and their conversation, those who were proud and profaning and polluting the public worship of God, the Lord says they were not written in the book of remembrance.

They were not written in the book of remembrance. It's quite solemn, really. But you know, it's just what Jesus said, isn't it? Jesus said, you shall know them by their fruit. You shall know them by their fruit. For not everyone, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven.

There will be many on that day and I will declare to them, I never knew you. Depart from me. But those who were written in the book of remembrance, they were this remnant within the returned remnant.

They were a small group of people. They were the faithful few. The faithful few who feared the Lord and followed the Lord and followed the Lord and followed the Lord. They were the Lord's people who pressed on and who persevered to the end despite the impact and the influence of all that was going on around them. They were the faithful few who feared the Lord and remained faithful to the Lord.

Which brings us to consider, secondly, the content of this book of remembrance. So the context of the book and then secondly, the content of the book. The content of the book. Now look again at verse 16.

[14 : 14] It says, So as we said, the book of remembrance wasn't a book to remember. A treasured possession. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.

So as we said, the book of remembrance wasn't a book to remember a special occasion. It was a book to remember a special people. It was a book to remember a remnant within this returned remnant. Because many of the returned remnant, those who had come out of lockdown, those who had come out of living in lockdown in Babylon, they had questioned the Lord. They questioned his providence. But this faithful few, the faithful few, they feared the Lord.

They followed the Lord. They remained faithful to the Lord. And we're told that a book of remembrance was written by the Lord. It was written by the Lord to record their names.

But as we consider the content of the book of remembrance, we see that what distinguished them as the faithful few was that first of all, the beginning of verse 16, they feared the Lord.

They feared the Lord. That's what distinguished the faithful few. They feared the Lord. Not that they were afraid or anxious about the Lord, but that they had reverence for the Lord. They had respect for the Lord. They were wise unto salvation. Because for them, the fear of the Lord was the beginning of wisdom. And because they feared the Lord, they had a desire and a determination to gather together to worship the Lord. Which means that the faithful few not only feared the Lord, we see that they also had fellowship with one another. They had fellowship with one another. We're told that they spoke often to one another. They talked with one another. They talked about God's Word and God's will and God's way.

[16 : 31] They spoke and they shared their encounters and their experiences in their life. They talked and told of how the Lord how the Lord had strengthened and sustained them through some of the toughest experiences that they've gone through, through sin or sickness or suffering or sorrow. They had fellowship. They had fellowship with one another. So this faithful few, they feared the Lord. They had fellowship with one another. But they also focused in prayer. That's what we see. They focused in prayer because we're told that the Lord listened. The Lord paid attention. The Lord heard them.

As the faithful few gathered together to focus in prayer, to pray together as the body of the Lord's people and to pray for one another about the needs and the necessities that were going on in their covenant community, they brought these prayers and these petitions to the throne of grace. And they acknowledged and they appreciated the listening ear of the Lord. They cast all their cares and their concerns upon the Lord because they knew that the Lord, the covenant God, He cared for them and He had a concern for them. They focused in prayer. The faithful few focused in prayer. But there's one more thing we read about the faithful few. We read that they feared the Lord. They had fellowship with one another.

They focused in prayer. And they followed God's Word. They followed God's Word. We read that at the end of verse 16 where it says that they esteemed His name. They esteemed His name or they honoured His name. They meditated on His name. They thought about His name. They preserved His name. Literally, the word is weave. The word is weave. That's the word that's used. The word esteemed. It's the word weave in the sense of a weaver weaving fabric. And that's what the faithful few did. They let God's Word weave into the fabric of their lives. They let God's Word weave into the fabric of their lives. And you know, I don't know about you, but when I discovered that this word means weave, I immediately was reminded of that anonymous poem, The Divine Weaver. And I was thinking, well, the faithful few, the faithful few who fear the Lord and have fellowship with one another and focus in prayer and follow God's Word, they can confess, my life is but a weaving between my Lord and me. I cannot choose the colour. He weaveth steadily.

Of times He weaveth sorrow, and I in foolish pride forget that He sees the upper and I the underside. But not till the loom is silent and the shuttle cease to fly, shall God unroll the canvas and explain the reason why the dark threads are as needful in the weaver's skilful hand as the threads of gold and silver in the pattern He has planned. He's the divine weaver. He's the one who weaves His Word into the fabric of our lives. And that's the experience of the faithful few.

They fear the Lord. They have fellowship with one another. They focus in prayer. And they follow God's Word. That's the experience of the faithful few. It's amazing. They fear the Lord. They have fellowship with one another. They focus in prayer. They follow God's Word. And notice what we have to notice about the faithful few. They didn't do this independently. They don't do it individually.

[20 : 29] They don't do it in isolation of one another. No. It was always a collective gathering. It was a communal gathering. It was a congregational gathering of a covenant community where together they fear the Lord. Where together they had fellowship with one another. Together they focused in prayer.

And together they followed God's Word. But you know everything that Malachi is describing here, for us it's the means of grace. That's what he's describing. He's describing for us the means of grace. The faithful few experienced it and enjoyed together the means of grace. Because they feared the Lord together. They had fellowship with one another. They focused in prayer. They followed God's Word.

And is that not the means of grace? Are they not the means by which God has appointed to communicate and to convey grace to our hearts? The means of grace. Because it's through the means of grace that we fear the Lord. We have fellowship with one another. We focus in prayer. We follow God's Word.

It's through the means of grace. It's through Bible reading. Through prayer. Through public worship. Through the Lord's Day and the Lord's Supper. It's through the means of grace that we grow in grace together. And together we grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Therefore, therefore, said my good friend J.C. Ryle, therefore take heed that you are diligent in the means of grace. Take heed that you are diligent in the means of grace. It is vain, he says, to expect spiritual prosperity when we are careless about these things. And it's so important.

[22 : 27] Take heed that you are diligent in the means of grace because it's through the means of grace that we fear the Lord, have fellowship with one another, focus in prayer, and follow God's Word.

And this is what Malachi is emphasizing and explaining. The Lord remembers the faithful few who are faithful in the means of grace. And we might wonder, well, what is the world care that we're gathering here tonight is a small number? And yet Malachi, or the prophecy of Malachi, is emphasizing to us that the Lord remembers the faithful few who are faithful in the means of grace.

Because the Lord says that the faithful few who fear the Lord and have fellowship with one another, and focus in prayer, and focus in prayer, and follow God's Word. They, verse 17, they shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. And you know, I love these verses, especially verse 17, because it's full of covenantal language, full of language that brings us back to God's marriage to his people, God's covenant with his people. It's full of covenantal language. The phrase, they shall be mine, wonderful phrase, a wonderful phrase, they shall be mine. It's actually an abbreviation of the covenant promise. The covenant promise that's repeated and reaffirmed throughout the history of God's people, where you see that covenant promise appearing and reappearing all the way through the story of redemption. I will be your God. You will be my people.

I will be your God. You shall be my people. I will be your God. You shall be my people. That's the covenant promise. And that's what the Lord is saying here. They shall be mine.

They shall be mine when I make up my treasured possession. The authorized version has the word jewels. When I make up my jewels. I think it's far better. But it gives to us that beautiful image, doesn't it? That image and illustration of the faithful few being jewels in the crown of Jesus.

[24 : 58] The faithful few being jewels in the crown of Jesus. But again, that phrase, treasured possession, it's a covenantal word, covenantal phrase. Because that's how the Lord described his people down throughout the centuries. He described them. He described the faithful few, those who feared the Lord and had fellowship with one another and focused in prayer and followed God's word. He described them as his treasured possession. And there is treasured possession because he rescued them. He redeemed them. He called them by name. He called them from slavery to sin and to salvation. He called them by name. And that's why when you go into the New Testament and you have the apostle Peter trying to encourage the church. A church that was small. A church that was so few in number, yet growing. And a church that was being persecuted. And they're the faithful few, he says to them.

The faithful few who are following Jesus Christ. And what does he say to them? You are a chosen generation. Don't forget it. You are a chosen generation. A royal priesthood. A holy nation.

A peculiar people. A peculiar people. Or a treasured possession. The Roman Empire is against you. But you are the faithful few. Why? So that you might show forth the praises of him who hath called you from darkness into his marvelous light. For you were once not a people, but you are now the people of God. You had once not obtained mercy, but now you have obtained mercy.

You are the faithful few. You are the treasured possession. You are the jewels in the crown of Jesus. You are the jewels in the crown of Jesus. But you know the last thing that's contained in this book of remembrance is the difference and the distinction between the faithful and the unfaithful, between the righteous and the unrighteous, the godly and the ungodly, the saint and the sinner. And you know, it's fascinating. I was actually thinking of doing a sermon on the different books in the Bible.

Because, well, we all know the contents of this book. This book, as you know, is the book of books. The Bible is the book of books. It's the book. It's a book containing 66 books. 39 books in the Old Testament, 27 in the New Testament. But within those 66 books, we're told about other books.

[27 : 47] We're told about this book, the book of remembrance. We're also told about the book of the law, or the book of the covenant, as it's called in other places, which is the Ten Commandments.

That's the book we're to follow, live our life according to. There's also the book of living, book of the living. And the book of the living is really interesting because it's the book in which the Lord records all the names of those who are alive. So we are in the book of the living tonight.

We're in the book of the living. And in the book of the living, the Lord is recording all the sins. And all the sicknesses and all the sufferings and all the sorrows that the living face while they're living. It's the book of the living. And the Lord writes down and he records all the tossings and the temptations and even the tears. Even the tears. That's what we were singing in Psalm 56.

I love those verses in Psalm 56 where David said, My wonderings all, what they have been. Thou knowest their number took. Into thy bottle put my tears. Are they not in thy book?

They're in the book of the living. They're all recorded. Nothing goes unnoticed by the Lord. That's the amazing thing about our God. He notices everything about his children. He knows what's going on in their lives. He knows what's going on in your life and in my life. Even the tears. And they're put into his bottle and recorded in his book.

[29 : 30] And so there's the book of the law. There's the book of the living. And there's also the book of life. The book of life, which as you know, is the book in which all the names of the elect, all the names of God's people, they are all written there.

They're all written there. Maybe I could say that they're written there in blood. But they were written before the foundation of the world. And they're all written. These names will not be erased. They will not be added to. They are all written. And that book is still closed.

The book of life is still closed. And as Scripture affirms, anyone's name who is not written in the book of life, in the Lamb's book of life, will be cast into the lake of fire.

Our names are in it not because of anything special in us, but only by grace and by grace alone. And you know, that's what the book of remembrance is actually there to remind us about.

It's to remind us that on that day, when all the books are opened, and that's why Malachi actually goes on to speak about the day of the Lord in the next chapter. On that day, when all the books are opened, so when the book of life is opened, on that day, verse 18, then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between the one who serves God and the one who does not serve Him. On that day, when the book is opened, there will be a difference and a distinction made between the faithful and the unfaithful, the righteous and the unrighteous, the godly and the ungodly, the saint and the sinner. Therefore, and time has completely gone, and this is, but this is the point and the purpose of the book of remembrance. The book of remembrance is there so that the faithful few, the faithful few continue to press on, that they continue to be present in worship, that they continue to persevere to the end. As the faithful few, that's what Malachi is encouraging us, as the faithful few, we are to continue to fear the Lord and have fellowship with one another and focus in prayer and follow God's word together.

[32 : 12] So we're to fear the Lord, have fellowship with one another, focus in prayer and follow God's word together. And we're to do it until, until the book is opened. Until the book is opened, that day when the Lord makes up his jewels, when you are a jewel in the crown of Jesus Christ.

So my friend, you keep fearing the Lord, keep having fellowship, keep focusing in prayer, keep following God's word as the faithful few, keep persevering to the end.

Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we bless and we praise thee tonight for thy word, that there are so many promises in it. There are so many times where we are reminded of thy faithfulness to us. And Lord, when we consider ourselves, we know how unfaithful we are, how much we faint and how much we faint. But Lord, we pray that, that we would be that faithful few, that we would be those who, who fear the Lord and that we would gather for fellowship and, and focus in prayer and seek to follow God's word. O'er that we might be jewels in the crown of Jesus, to know that we are redeemed, redeemed by precious blood and called by his name. Watch over us, Lord, we pray. Bless us, together we ask. Keep us in our going out and our coming in from this time forth and even forevermore.

Take away our iniquity, receive us graciously for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen. We're going to sing again this time in Psalm, Psalm 27. Psalm 27 in the Scottish Psalter.

Psalm 27, we're going to sing verses 4 and 5 and then verses 13 and 14. So Psalm 27, it's on page 236. We're singing verses 4 and 5 and then 13 and 14.

[34 : 39] So Psalm 27, to God's praise.

And he shall spread the fore Unto thy heart, ye do thy breath I say upon the Lord Thank
you Thank you