

Conversation in Malachi: Made Righteous Week 5

Message GOALS

MAIN IDEA: We are made righteous when we turn to God.

Head Change: To know that God will one day judge all people, the righteous and the unrighteous, with perfect justice.

Heart Change: To give thanks that God declares us to be righteous because of the death and resurrection of Jesus on our behalf.

Life Change: To take God and His Word seriously, committing to a life of righteousness that honours Him.

OPEN

What images does the word *righteousness* conjure up for you? Would you call yourself righteous?

Would those who know and love you best call you righteous?

Who is the most righteous person you know (and do you like them, or do they annoy you)?

We all grow up with different ideas of *righteousness* – some good, some (ironically) bad. But in this final conversation between God and His people in the book of Malachi, we learn that our righteousness doesn't depend on our good deeds and personal purity so much as it is wholly dependent on who God declares us to be, by His grace.

VIEW

What complaint do the people bring before God in this final conversation?

Whose names are written on the scroll?

How was it possible for the unrighteous people of Malachi's day to be seen by God as righteous?

Who is 'the prophet Elijah' mentioned in Malachi 4:5–6?

REVIEW

We've made it to the last part of the book of Malachi. It's been a journey hasn't it, as we've listened in on these conversations between God and his people.

Well, let's start to engage with what God has to say to us today from the scriptures.

We're here in Malachi chapter three and four as we encounter the 5th and final conversation between God and his people.

"You have spoken arrogantly against me says the Lord, yet you ask what have we said against you... you have said it is futile to serve God what do we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the Lord almighty" (Malachi 3:13-14)

Right at the heart of the people's struggle is a question *What's the point? What's in it for us?* What's the point of serving God, devoting my life solely to him when it doesn't seem to make a difference. Why should I be a Christian?

Have you ever found yourself asking why you bother following God, being a Christian, or trying to obey God?

It is easy to have this mindset in the moment...in the struggle.

Then comes the turning point in the book of Malachi.

Our attention is drawn to a 'scroll of remembrance' in verse 16 *"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 honoured his name."*

This is the turning point of the book. This is the moment we've been waiting for!

A small group of people get together and start talking with each other. This is a group who are serious about living for God.

I love this detail, where it says the Lord listened. And heard. He looks upon his people gathering as they decide to set him apart in their lives and he listens intently to them.

You can almost imagine him with a warm smile on his face as he sees devotion starting to flood through their veins and he hears them when God's people come back to him in reverent honoring devotion.

He is so quick to listen. He is eager to hear. He's just like the father of the lost son in Luke 15 who's waiting in anticipation for his son to return home...He just can't wait

Why does God listen so intently to this small group of His people?

We're told that this scroll is one of remembrance. That it was written in the presence of God.

This scroll was a list of names, each name of those who gathered to fear the Lord was to be written down in this scroll and they would be remembered as those who honored his name.

This is their legacy. Those who have brave faith and choose to step out from the safe crowd, God says he'll remember their names forever.

How do we know? Verse 17 says *“on that day when I act says the Lord almighty they will be my treasured. I will spare them just as a father has compassion and spares his son who serves him.”*

Anyone whose name is written on this scroll is described as God's treasured possession. Their names, their life would be written down in a place that will last forever.

Jesus picks up this language in Luke 10:20 where He declares over his followers that their names are written in heaven.

See there is a way for you to act in this life that will mean that you have a strong legacy.

And you may not even have a penny to your name, no fame to speak of, nor any radical ideas to change the world, but you will be remembered by God almighty forever, because your name is written in His book.

How does Jesus express this same truth in Luke 10:20? (“However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

This kind of legacy depend on wealth or fame or influence.

So, the question is, how do you get your name on this scroll?

Verse 18 *“and you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked between those who serve God and those who do not.”*

See the righteous are the ones with their names written on the scroll. Those who choose to serve God.

What does it mean to be righteous? At its heart, it's perfection, absolute purity.

This is talking about those who have done nothing wrong ever...this book's going to be empty.

Romans 3 says “there is no one righteous not even one.”

We know this from just looking at the book of Malachi.

We've seen half-heartedness, defiled offerings, unfaithfulness, injustice, selfishness, and that's just scratching at the surface.

People have always been and always will be unrighteous before God.

It's the story on page 3 and it's the story exactly the same on page 962...and yet there is a way for the unrighteous person to be seen by God as righteous.

Because in verse 16 the people fear the Lord, that is they hear what God says, and they listen. They take him seriously at his words.

They hear the challenge, they listen to the rebuke and they honor his name.

If you take God seriously at his word and come back to him saying God I'm sorry, he says he will forgive you.

When you repent, God promises to forgive you and make you righteous, removing your failure and brokenness and replacing it with purity and perfection. Why?

“because Christ also suffered once for sins the righteous for the unrighteous to bring you to God.” (1 Peter 3:18)

This group of people who get together and decide to fear the Lord...they were not the good ones, they were no better than anyone else.

But God called them as righteous and wrote their names down in that scroll for all eternity because of their choice to fear and honor Him.

So what about the unrighteous? What happens to those who don't fear God?

Chapter 4 verse 1-3 *“Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the Lord Almighty. “Not a root or a branch will be left to them. 2 But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays. And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves. 3 Then you will trample on the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act,” says the Lord Almighty.”*

A day is coming when God will act and everyone who has ignored him and the challenge he's given, will be removed and punished. Their names will be forgotten forever.

But for those who Revere the name of the Lord almighty, they will enjoy the righteousness given them by Jesus, with healing and comfort in his name.

And they will leap and jump like well-fed calves. And on this day, the righteous will trample on the wicked.

It doesn't feel comfortable saying that, but that's probably because I've not been oppressed or persecuted in any major way.

For many, the destruction and removal of the wickeds, those who refuse to fear the name of God almighty is good news. **Do verses like this make you feel uncomfortable?**

There's this beautiful ending to the book in verses 5-6:

““See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. 6 He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction.””

See the Old Testament ends with the promise that Elijah would come.

You just have to turn over a few pages and see the fulfillment of these words in John the Baptist, who Jesus himself says has come as an Elijah figure.

And what's his purpose...to turn people back to God and to prepare the way for the great day of the Lord...To point people to the Messiah, the Christ, and to show that there is a way to be safe from his judgment and enjoy the best life He has for you now.

And just a few pages on from that you see Jesus who comes to be the son of righteousness.

He came so all of your unrighteousness can be fully forgiven through his death and resurrection.

All we're left are the words of verse four, which are God's last plea to us.

"Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel."

If you want to know God's love for you that is based on his promise not your performance;

If you want to offer God your best not your leftovers and have full devotion to him;

If you want to remain faithful in your marriage and all your relationships;

If you want to be just in your actions;

If you want to give generously of your money, your time, your life;

If you want to fear the Lord almighty and honor his name;

If you realize all you've done wrong;

If you hear all that God says to you and feel the weight of your unrighteousness...then know there is a God who is waiting to hear your cry as you come back to him.

There is a savior who is willing to remove all your sin and everything it deserves.

And if you come back to him and take him seriously at his words, he will hear you. Your name will be written in heaven forever.

On that final day when God judges the world you'll stand firm through his refining because your hope is in Jesus and your honor is oriented toward God almighty.

Church...in response to everything God has done for you, and staying faithful through the disappointment, go in the name of Jesus and live a life full of devotion and faithfulness to him. Give him everything you've got and don't hold back.

LAST WORD

May you hear the call of God through Malachi today. Come back to Him. Take His Word seriously. Trust that He hears you, and that your name is written in heaven.

Remember: God's love for you is based on His promise not your performance. You get to offer God your best – not your leftovers – through a life fully devoted to Him. God empowers you to remain faithful in your marriage and all your relationships. God teaches you justice and generosity. And through Christ, God declares you righteous as you learn to fear Him and follow Him wholeheartedly.

DEEPER WALK

Write: If someone you know is weighed down by guilt and condemnation, write them a letter explaining God's righteousness. Paraphrase Romans 8, declaring over them the truth of God's acceptance, forgiveness, and transformation.