

**Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> November 2021**

**Malachi 3:13-4:6**

**Rev.Scott Burton**

**Brightons Parish Church**

Let us take a moment to pray before we think about God's word

Holy Spirit, come among us and reveal the call of Father God.

Holy Spirit, be present and reveal the hope we have through Jesus.

Come Holy Spirit with power and deep conviction, for we ask it in Jesus name. Amen.

The day I became a Christian I felt sick in the pit of my stomach. I know it wasn't because the idea of becoming a Christian made me feel uneasy and it wasn't because of the hangover I had that morning. I had been out the night before and I don't remember much of the evening but the bits I do remember, as I've shared on a number of occasions, they made me sick to the pit of my stomach because I made some really bad choices that night and I woke up realizing I had a problem and at that time I would have called my problem selfishness. Now, further along the journey of faith, I can be quite honest and say it's just sin. And what's more shocking is that I thought I was a Christian. You know, I worked on a Sunday at W.H Smith and so I couldn't go to the morning service but there was holy-me going to the evening service. Surely that made me a Christian? And I volunteered with my Scout group and gave up my time to benefit young people, and I had a good reputation and people, hopefully, thought quite well of me but, but here was me that morning, the day I became a Christian, faced with the reality of my life, that, actually, in my heart was a growing selfishness, and my heart was very far from God, because God was just an idea, He wasn't a person I related to in any real way and there's been so much that I've taken from my experience but what I'd want to relate to you this morning is that it's easy to assume things are okay, it's easy to ignore the deeper issues in our lives, it's easy to get so wrapped up in the moment that we forget to take stock of our lives, and so, the day I became a Christian, I had that sick feeling in the pit of my stomach, but that day, the day I became a Christian, changed my life for the better and I've never regretted a moment since then, I just wish it hadn't taken me messing up my life quite so much to come to that realization that I had a problem and I needed God's help. And you know, this morning, you might have a bit of a queasy feeling in your stomach, and it's probably got nothing to do with anything else other than the bible passage we heard this morning because, if truth be told, it was a wee bit uncomfortable was it not. I've been stewing on it all week how am I going to preach from this? What does it mean? And if you feel uncomfortable, the person that invited you to be here for them becoming a member or them getting their child baptized they probably feel even more uncomfortable. So, when you go out the door and you're chatting about the service afterwards just bless them and be really kind and merciful to them because they had no idea what was coming today, because we've simply been working through the book of Malachi and I didn't aim for this passage to be today, it just happened to be the last bit before we go into Advent.

But you know, maybe it's timely, maybe in some ways it's timely for you and for us because, sometimes, we need something to help us sit up and take notice, something to make us take stock of life rather than getting into a real mess like I did all those years ago. And so, maybe today is helpful and the message of Malachi might be helpful for us because Malachi was also sent to our people who were completely oblivious. There was something deeply wrong but they didn't actually have a clue and so God sent Malachi one more time and He says to the people 'You have spoken arrogantly against me. 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. There's something deeply wrong with the people, something deep in the souls of their being. There's arrogance and there's distance from God and, sure their meeting His requirements, they say, and that might be like they're going to the temple and they're praying and they're giving their sacrifices, they're maybe bringing their offering. They're going around like mourners. They've already got dust and ash and sackcloth on them to show signs of repentance but actually, it's all just external, going through the motions, it's not from the heart and they're bothered by this. They say it's futile! What's the point? What good is this to me? There's no return for this, there's no profit in this for me God! What's the point? What good is it doing me? You know, they've turned faith into something very selfish. They appear to be serving God but actually they're just serving themselves and there again is echoes of my story, echoes of my selfishness, echoes of my brokenness, my sin, but it's an issue we all deal

with don't we. Because if truth be told, as human beings, we can turn just about anything into being about us and asking 'Well, what's the benefit in this for me?' or 'How can I benefit from this in some way?' We twist it.

So, for example, I was in the playground this week and I was talking to one of the other dads who's also called Scott, and we got talking and he was telling me about the parents' night and how it went for his son, and that his son was reading already, primary one, age five, same year as my daughter, and there's a part of me that's like 'Well, Hope's not reading!' And there's almost a part of you that could twist that into 'I need to get Hope reading' so that I don't feel so terrible as a parent. I, you, as a human being, you could twist just about anything family, kids, money, your job, church - ow often in church is it 'Has the service suiting me?' - as the minister, the elders, the pastoral grouping leaders, the Sunday School. Is it suiting me and meeting my needs? Just about anything in life we can twist because and I think that part of the reason is as our last song suggested, the longing of our soul is something else than where we often look, we often look to these other things and we try and have the longing of our soul met by these other things and it just can't, and so we end up twisting things. And last week we were thinking about God sorting out the world, sorting out the problems and making this world a better place, that one day He would restore all things and so we that was a really positive message hopefully and hopefully you left encouraged and hopefully you're like 'God, come on sort out the world. Come back sort out, sort out the problems out there.'

But maybe, when it comes to today's message of sorting the problems in here, maybe that just feels too uncomfortable, maybe we'd rather say to God 'You know God, just back off back off! It's my life.' or 'Treat me a bit differently God, you know, I'm not as bad as the person down the road, I'm not as bad as the person in that country, or doing that thing or that politician, just treat me a bit differently. God, come on geeza break!' But you know, to God, sin is sin and whether it's the smallest acts or the tiniest indiscretion, He knows it. And this is a truth He had to reestablish with His people through Malachi because they think serving God is futile, they think God just overlooks sin. Here's these evildoers, they're getting away with stuff. God doesn't matter. He doesn't care. What's the point? And so, He sends Malachi to remind them of the truth. He sends them to take heed because as He says - there will be a day when He will act. There will be a day when the Lord will act. There'll be a day when He will restore the world and He's going to make it all new and there'll be no more sin or death or mourning. There'll be no more brokenness or selfishness.

But that creates a problem, doesn't it? Because what does God do with you and me, the darkness in us. If not a jot of sin can be in that new creation, what does He do with us?

Another prophet put the problem this way 'We all like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has turned to our own way.' And the new hymn actually picked up on that too, I hadn't noticed until we sung it there, we all got our own way. We'll tell God to take a hike, and our culture just reinforces that message, doesn't it? It just says, be free, throw off restraints, just go for it alone, ignore God, don't let Him tell you, don't let the church tell you how to live your life, be free, because that's the way to a good life, a best life. But you know, it's a lie it's a lie because at 19 I pursued that, at 19 I pursued life my way, and where did it lead me? It just led me into more brokenness and for more for the heart for other people and so on the day I became a Christian, as I sat there with a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach, I had to own up to my brokenness, my sin, because nothing was going to change if I didn't do that first.

And part of being a Christian involves that lonely moment when you acknowledge that, when you acknowledge that reality in your life, and all our members, new members who stood there today at one point or another they've all had to own up to that reality, that they have a problem, like I have a problem, like you have a problem. That problem is sin and, as we affirmed in the Apostles' Creed, that has been the belief for 2000 years and beyond, that God was going to come back one day to deal with sin and none of us will be exempt from that. And so, God has to get these truths back into the lives of His people, people who are oblivious to this reality and they don't know

something's wrong and so He brings a wake-up call He did in my life the day I became a Christian. That was a wake-up call for me and maybe you're sitting there feeling really uncomfortable and really wishing you weren't in church today and you're really going to give the person a hard time that invited you along, despite what I said earlier, but you know maybe that uncomfortableness, maybe even that anger, because this can raise anger in us, maybe those feelings are actually God shining a wee torchlight in your life and just saying 'Look there is a problem here. There is something we need to talk about. There's a deeper issue we need to address.' but you know, God doesn't do it to be mean, He doesn't include passages like this in the Bible to be mean, and He doesn't do it to leave us feeling condemned or judged or guilty, because, most of the time, I don't live my life that way because not only did God on the day I became a Christian I'd highlight my problem, He provided a solution because He loves us, He loves you in the depth of His being He loves you.

And so, also in Malachi we read these words 'Surely the day is coming the Son of Righteousness will rise with healing in its rays.' The day of the Lord is coming and on that day, though it will be like the rising of the sun, and the rays of that event will bring healing to the world, to all creation and do away with sin forever and that idea, that hope, that reality is spoken in so many places across the scriptures. We read earlier from Isaiah, and in just before the verses immediately before what we read, we read this also from Isaiah 'Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering. Yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him and afflicted but he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was on him and by his wounds we are healed. We all like sheep have gone astray. each of us has turned to our own way and the lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.' Time and time again God tells of an event and then of a person who will come to bring this restored world about who will bring this freedom from sin who will bring healing for all.

And that event came 400 years after Malachi. That event happened in the Advent season we're about to celebrate. It happened with the coming of Jesus, when God stepped into our broken world, when God went to the cross to die the death we should for our sin. So, you might get angry at God for what He's saying this morning, I'm really uncomfortable with it, but let's remember He also provides that solution he hung on a cross and bled for you and for me that's how much he loves you, He died so that sin wouldn't have the final say, He died so that if you put your faith in Him you can share in that great and glorious day when He'll make all things new and the Son of Righteousness will bring healing from all sin and you know since that day, since the day Jesus died and then rose again, and across the centuries since then, people across this world have been putting their faith in Jesus, just like our new members did, they've been finding that the words of scripture are true that there is forgiveness through Jesus, that you can be reconciled to God through Jesus, and we've come to see that it's all of grace, it's all a gift, we don't earn it, we don't deserve it, we simply receive it through faith in Jesus and every day, even today, there are people coming to faith in this truth, they're coming to find life and hope through Jesus, this one who will bring healing when the Son of Righteousness rises.

And so, what do we do with today's message? What do we do with these two sides of the one coin? On the one side we have the really bad news that we all have a sin problem, and on the other side of the coin there's good news, that there's hope and forgiveness through Jesus. What do we do with that?

Well our passage gives us two ideas and the first, on the first thing to do is to repent, which means change your thinking, such that your heart and your life changes as well, and there were people who heard what the Lord said they heeded Him and they turned to Him, and in turning to Him, the Lord said over them they were his treasured possession and He would spare them.

Maybe you need to repent today. Maybe you're not a Christian. Maybe you've been coming to church for a long time and you know you've not made that choice yourself. Maybe today is the day

you need to repent and turn to the Lord and admit 'I've got a problem God, and I need Your forgiveness.'

The second idea of how to respond this morning is to stand and be counted. Those that responded, their names were written down they were counted, and our new members today, their names will be added to our Church Roll, they're being counted and so maybe one of the things you need to consider doing is becoming a member here in church, to publicly say 'You know, I believe in Jesus. I'm following Jesus, and this is my spiritual home.' Maybe that's the step you need to take to stand and be counted but that membership as the promises were asked today not only includes having your name on a bit of paper it involves being part of this church family through the giving of your time, talents and your money, and so maybe there's something in that for you. Maybe you're standing and being counted needs to look like getting involved or caring for the people who call this their spiritual home. It's if you're not infirm and housebound or limited in some capacity like that then really do we have an excuse? We need to stand and be counted because if we've counted this as our spiritual home and made these promises we made promises to get involved. Maybe you need to get involved.

But maybe standing be counted as also like in verse chapter 4 verse 4 here where it says 'Remember the law of my servant Moses' we think of remembering as just having a bit of information in our head but in Hebrew and in the Old Testament the idea of remembering was that you not only remembered it but you lived in light of it, you walked in accordance with God's ways, you lived your life God's way, that's what it means to truly remember and you know maybe there's an area of your life that you need to stand up and be counted. The other six days of the week you're out and about because our final promise that our members made today was to do that to witness to Jesus in all the rest of their life and you know maybe there's something in your life, an area of your life you need to stand and be counted. It might be sharing your faith, but it could be that you need to choose God's way rather than your culture's way or the way of your colleagues. Maybe you need to walk in truth and in uprightness. Maybe there's a sin in your life that you know God would want you to turn from. Maybe anger. Maybe sexual immorality of some form. Who knows what it might be.

And the question is Will you stand and be counted by walking in God's ways rather than yours or the culture? Will you live in response to the grace you've received? is basically what the passage is calling us to do. So, before we finish up, I want to give us a moment to pray. I want to give a moment first of all to turn to God in repentance. That if you've never done that, maybe today is the day to do that because I wouldn't be doing my job if I simply told you an idea but maybe just didn't help you along that next bit of the journey. So, if you want to make that step today, let me help you make that step and I'll lead you in a prayer and then we'll go on to pray as well about how we respond to the grace we've received by being stuck by standing and being counted. So, let's come to God in prayer. Let us pray:

So, if you want to welcome Jesus into your life and receive forgiveness, why don't you pray along with me just in the quiet of your heart, pray these words with me.

Lord Jesus, I'm sorry for the things I've done wrong in my life for the selfishness that's there, and I take a moment to name anything that's on my conscience this morning.

Lord, please forgive me.

I turn from everything that I know is wrong and I choose to walk in step with You. Thank-you, You died on the cross so that I could be forgiven. Thank-you for Your love. Thank-you for Your grace.

I ask for you to fill me with Your Holy Spirit that I might walk with You all the days of my life. Thank-you Lord Jesus.

Lord God, we hear a tough message from Your word today but You speak it in love, to call us deeper, to call us into Your ways, to respond to Your grace and so I pray for those that have made

that choice today, to respond for the first time, protect them, I pray, protect this choice they've made today.

And for all of us Lord, as we as we ponder the magnitude of Your love and grace, that took You to the cross, and the reality that one day You will return. Help us live between now and then to Your glory, to live lives worthy of your calling and so stand and be counted in all the areas of life.

Lord where there's a sin we may be trapped in, give us grace and break us free Lord where we need to stand and be counted by getting involved or coming into membership or making You known at work.

Lord, give us grace that we might have strength and power to witness to You and to give our lives for Your glory.

Oh God, You're a good God, a great God, and we delight in You this morning. Thank-you that You delight in us, that we are your treasured possession. May we go here from here knowing that, rejoicing in that, and inviting all to know that as well by coming to faith in Jesus, for in His name we ask this. Amen

If you have made that choice for the first time today, please come and talk to me, tell me, tell a trusted Christian you know, because it's easy to make it, just keep it very personal but you need to take that next step of faith to say 'I've made that choice and that will just help to solidify and strengthen that choice of faith you've made today. So, come and chat to me. I won't ask you a lot of questions, I'll just rejoice with you, or tell a Christian, a trusted Christian, that you're here with today.