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SERMON TITLE: Giving and Receiving Respect
SCRIPTURE: Malachi 1:1-8
DATE November 20, 2022

Online service at www.fpcd.org/live

Read also Matthew 13:3-8, 19-23

Our recent preachers, Jeff Thorpe, Roy Watson, and Steve Netniss, spoke about a common theme – picking up the pieces after a devastating struggle. The world has experienced a devastating struggle the last two years. How do we “pick up the pieces?” Each preacher pointed out the solutions God’s people pursued, when they were returning home from exile. Unfortunately, their thoughts about God ran a distant second to meeting their own needs and wants.

When we make God a distant second, we lose perspective and become complacent about our mission as Christians.

Malachi says this is the difference between Jacob and Esau.

You remember the stories?

- Esau sold his birthright for a single meal. (Gen 25:32-33)
- Esau married two pagan wives, grieving his parents greatly. (Gen 26:34)
- Later, when Esau wanted his father’s blessing, he was rejected. (Gen 27:38, Heb 12:16)

Scripture tells us God rejected him because he was godless. (Romans 9:13) Faith was a distant second or not existent at all!

When you put your own needs first, you can lose perspective and fall away from God. This makes life difficult for you and me. We then become unclear in faith. We cannot see God working for us. Doubt grows.

Jesus described it in this parable:

“A farmer planted seed. As he scattered the seed, some of it fell on the road, and birds ate it. Some fell in the gravel; it sprouted quickly but didn’t put down roots, so when the sun came up it withered just as quickly. Some fell in the weeds; as it came up, it was strangled by the weeds. Some fell on good earth, and produced a harvest beyond his wildest dreams” (Mt 13:3-8 *The Message*).

Then Jesus said, “Study this story and figure out where you might be.” Let’s do so.

The seed is the Gospel. Someone, at some time, told you about the Lord. If not, you hear about him every Sunday when you come here. You have received the seed week after week. What kind of soil are you cultivating?

- The seed scattered on the road – “When someone hears news of the kingdom and **doesn’t take it in**, it just remains on the surface, and so the Evil One comes along and plucks it right out of that person’s heart.” (v. 18-19)

It is easy to be deceived when you do not go deep enough to develop a healthy faith. It is like a child continuing to eat pabulum far beyond infancy, when he should eat solid, nutritious food.

Or, in marriage, always being insecure and worried about whether your spouse loves you. You think his or her love is conditional. You have low trust in the vows. Doubt hinders the marriage. Doubt is Satan’s tool to destroy faith in God’s love.

- The seed cast in the gravel – this is “the person who hears and instantly responds with enthusiasm. But there is no “soil” of character, and so when the emotions wear off and some difficulty arrives, there is nothing to show for it.” (v. 20-21)

This is like taking a new job. You are really excited, but then the commitment gets hard. Forty hours a week seems excessive! So instead of persevering, you quit.

Or, let’s say you enthusiastically embrace working out or a healthy diet. You clearly see the goal and embrace it. But to be successful means a permanent life-change. It’s too hard! You do not have the discipline. The same thing is true of faith. Character and discipline are necessary element to keep faith healthy.

- The seed cast in the weeds – this is “the person who hears the kingdom news, but weeds of worry and illusions about getting more and wanting everything under the sun strangle what was heard, and nothing comes of it.” (v. 22)

This is like receiving a windfall, and you use it to “build bigger barns” for yourself. Or you gain success in something, and then you shift—you work for the accolade and that becomes the reward. You become self-focused because you forget that God is your source. God has brought the reward so that you can pay it forward to help others. God blesses you so you can give.

- The seed cast on good earth – this is “the person who hears and takes in the News, and then produces a harvest beyond his wildest dreams.” (v. 23)

An example of that is a missionary family with Chosen People Ministries who recently went to Ukraine. They flew to Poland, took a car to the closest border village, walked two miles, crossing two borders, then took another car, arriving in Lviv just in time for the curfew! The next day they preached at the coffee shop in this town about forty miles from the Polish border. Unbelievably, dozens of

people from all over Ukraine stopped every morning to listen to the Word of God and received Him right away! Their friends were sharing with them about the Israeli preacher, and they came, some from a few hundred miles! They write: "By the end of the week all the tables were occupied by listeners. The owners of the coffee shop allowed (!) us to have a full-sized church meeting on their premises, and on top of that, there were television cameras recording the event and the prayers (!). I cannot even dream of a bigger reward God could prepare for me: to see people praying and receiving Jesus in the middle of the war!"¹

God wants us to be strong and well-rooted. God wants us to be assured of God's love for us. God wants us to be able to stand in times of persecution, health issues, unstable political environment, and economic downturns.

We all have our weaknesses. The question is—do you also have regular times of triumph? That is what God wants for you. Because if you are living with weak faith, you probably haven't experienced what God would like to do to bless you.

Malachi is quite tough: "If you give the Lord less than the first fruits, that is the best off the top—if you give God the opposite, the leftovers . . . in those days it was an offering of old food, which meant "to despise the LORD's table." Or animals for sacrifice that were the worst—the ones which no one wanted: blind, lame, and sick animals. God asks,

"Will I be honored by your gift? Or despised?"

Depending on your response, God lets you know, 'I will be pleased with you and show you favor or you will work really hard and have nothing to show for it.'

We must examine ourselves.

What God is doing is showing you the difference between the defeated believer and the empowered believer. God is training you for success.

There was a girl named Ruby.² Her grandmother knew her well. Ruby was growing into a young lady. But the grandmother saw some problems. She was untidy. She did not always do her homework without major nagging. She had no manners and never helped with the cooking or cleanup. She rudely interrupted people, shouted, was mean to her brother, and had a hard time controlling her emotions. She loved to receive presents but seldom gave.

"What to do," thought the grandmother.

So she came up with a plan. It was slightly devious. A few days later, a professional looking envelope arrived in the mail and inside was a professional looking invitation to Ruby. She was invited to have tea with *"the Queen."*

She began telling everyone about her extraordinary invitation—the postman, her school teacher, her soccer coach, her ballet instructor, her friends, neighbors, and family. Each one

responded by saying, 'That's wonderful Ruby! But then each one confronted her with her poor behavior, "I hope you won't . . . (do this) and I hope you will (do that) . . . and, what special gift will you bring?"

And all those things she needed to learn; all those behaviors she needed to correct; and all the respect for others that she needed to show; and the attitude of being a giver instead of only a receiver were addressed by friends, teachers, and family.

The day finally came. She got up early, got dressed, and prepared her most special gift. Then she was driven to the Queen's house. And she met the Queen. . . .

Queen Grandma, who was so pleased to see her. She led her to a beautiful dinner table with fine china and the best tea and cakes. Ruby took her seat, knowing just how to act. And she was so glad she had a special gift to bring.

Won't it be the same for us? One day we will be welcomed by the *King of Kings*, who will set a table before us with the finest of everything. And we will be there with the best understanding of how to act, and so glad we have given him our most special gifts.

May you catch the important vision that as you give, you will receive. As you receive the best, you will be so glad you respected God and did not settle for less.

AMEN

Malachi 1:1-8

The word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi. I have loved you, says the LORD. But you say, "How have you loved us?" "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" says the LORD. "Yet I have loved Jacob but I have hated Esau; I have made his hill country a desolation and his heritage a desert for jackals. If Edom says, "We are shattered but we will rebuild the ruins," the LORD of hosts says: They may build, but I will tear down, until they are called the wicked country, the people with whom the LORD is angry forever. Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, "Great is the LORD beyond the borders of Israel!" A son honors his father, and servants their master. If then I am a father, where is the honor due me? And if I am a master, where is the respect due me? says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. You say, "How have we despised your name?" By offering polluted food on my altar. And you say, "How have we polluted it?" By thinking that the LORD's table may be despised. When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not wrong? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not wrong? Try presenting that to your governor; will he be pleased with you or show you favor? says the LORD of hosts.

¹ "Three Stories—to encourage your heart and strengthen your spirit this holy season!" by Mitch Glaser, President, Chosen People Ministries, e-news article received on November 16, 2022.

² Sarah Ferguson, Tea for Ruby, (New York: Simon & Shuster, 2012).