**Malachi 3:13-18**

“Your words have been hard against me, says the Lord. But you say, ‘How have we spoken against you?’ **14** You have said, ‘It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the Lord of hosts? **15** And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape.’ ” **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. **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. **18** Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.

**“Being Hard On God?”**

 Grace to you and peace from Him who is, who was, and who is to come, Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen. As we come today to the Last Sunday of the Church Year. It is about the end of things where fulfillment comes with Christ as king of all. Some attempt to look to the Book of Revelation for signs to verify all that will happen. Others see the approaching disaster and dream about finding a new home for humanity in deep space. Why do we try so hard when the changing seasons already prove the point? I tilled the garden at the beginning of the week only to pull out snow shovels at the end. There was no way to deny the onset of winter, just as the Day of Christ is coming at His command.

 Of course, there is always a problem with having to wait on God. The last Old Testament prophet, Malachi, knew the same old story of how it went with Israel. God’s people were sinners subjected to their times. In Egypt as slaves, they wondered if God cared. In the wilderness as wanderers, they questioned God’s purpose. In the Promised Land as residents, they rejected God’s role in their lives. In Babylon as captives, they feared God had forsaken them. In Israel as returning exiles, they now were back at it again imagining God failed. Malachi puts an end to the Old Testament holding up how God’s promises will prevail. What seems far off is never out of sight of Him who loves us. No matter how things may be, God never forgets that He has made us His treasured possession.

1. **Putting God on trial tells us an awful lot about the times.**
* A rebuilt temple and wall in Jerusalem did not restore the hearts of God’s people.
* The return from exile was a lesser splendor than they had hoped to see.
* Gold told them, “Your words have been hard against me.” To be hard was more than bad, but actually violent!
* Their charge against Him was this, “It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the Lord of hosts? And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape.”
* In other words, “God doesn’t care, what’s the point of being His people? There are better things to do with my life. Repentance before God is ridiculous, while others ignore Him and get off without any punishment.”
* At the present, we are still both saints and sinners with hearts that can be hard against God.
* Christians have been comfortable in our western culture, but the 21st century has brought with it strong words against God.
* Such pride and out right evil by a sinful world now tempt us to despise God and His Word.
* Those questions and doubts come one after another. How is serving God a benefit to my life? There is not much profit left in belonging to His Church for gaining popularity or glory. Going against God seems to be more fun, carefree, and relaxing than this life under His cross. Repentance before God does not even seem to change my sinful habits.
* It is easy for us to end up like that other thief on the cross demanding, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!”
1. **God puts forward His promise to tell us we are His treasured possession.**
* Malachi reports how some had changed hearts to fear the Lord and came together.
* Their words sought His grace that was good, “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.”
* God needed no reminder from His people, but this book became a witness to remember that He had not forgotten them.
* His promise was to protect and save, but none would see that fullness at the time of Malachi or for that matter another 400 years.
* The same old story of being hard against God, met the outcome of His promise that at last would suffer and die before all, saying “Father, forgive them…”
* In the violence of His cross, God’s attention came upon a repentant thief for Jesus told him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”
* As God made Israel His, now He treasures any who are in Christ.
* This is what He still promises to us in a darkening western world, “They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession.”
* Since the time of Christ, God tells all the baptized in a sinful world, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession. (1 Peter 2:9)
* God has promised, “I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him.” This compassion the Father refused His Son, so the benefit is ours with, “peace by the blood of His cross.”
* Instead of hardness against God, a life of repentance receives what God has changed by forgiveness, even while the sinful battle rages on.
* When Christ at the Lord’s Supper said, “Do this often in remembrance of me.” It is not our remembering that makes it valuable, but to remember His Word. Christ keeps the promise that what you eat and drink is forgiveness from His kingdom.

 The Last Sunday of the Church is about suffering the present times, but our future always stands before Christ as king. To fear the Lord is far better than to be hard against Him. By Word and Sacrament Christ brings us together and is attentive to His church with forgiveness. Your names He has written in the book of life with blood that is precious to the Father. As God caused a separation between Egypt and Israel, as it happened on the cross before Christ between two thieves. Both the tension that tugs at life and the temptations that drag us down, Jesus will untangle at His return. “Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.” No matter how things may be, God never forgets that He has made us His treasured possession. Amen. The peace of Christ that passes all understanding be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life everlasting. Amen.