

GOD'S JEWELS

"Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." Malachi 3:16-17.

At no time in history has God left Himself without a witness. There have been times when the light has been almost extinguished; when it has seemed as though God were beaten out of His own world; but it has never really been so. The light has not ceased to shine. Elijah, you remember, in his day, was sorely troubled over this very matter. He cried, "I, even I, only am left," and there was no disguising the bitterness of despair in his voice. But, God said to him, "Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal." Thus it is in every age. When it has seemed to men as though faith and hope had perished from the earth, and the whole world were enclosed in impenetrable darkness, history has shown the falsity of their judgment. Somewhere or other, hidden from the sight of all but a few, the light has continued to burn.

Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in the times of Malachi, the prophet. Darkness was upon the land in those days; but notwithstanding the "blackout" of faith and morals, there were a few people, for the most part obscure and undistinguished, through whom the light still shone. Where the nation at large was weak, however, the godly people, whose behaviour the prophet praised, were unshakeably strong. "They spake often one to another." In contrast to the division which was only too sadly apparent on every hand, they were knit together in feeling, in principle and in desire. This remnant, indeed, so small and insignificant that it escaped the notice of all but God, was the one thing that saved the nation from total extinction.

For us today nothing is more worthy of imitation than the behaviour of these godly people. If, in those dark days, the lamps of truth, of hope and of faith were kept burning, so, in like manner, may they in our day. If there was ever a time when men's hearts might have failed them for fear, it was in Malachi's day. It was a day of practical atheism and great wickedness. Even then the godly remnant thought upon God's name. His honor and glory were their chief concern. His cause was a sacred trust committed to their charge.

God's Word is always a timely book. It speaks home to the heart of every age. It is especially rich in comfort and encouragement for dark and difficult days. Scattered all over its biographical pages are the portraits of the godly men of unfavorable periods, made strong by grace to meet their trying surroundings, and not only to meet and endure them, but to illuminate and bless them.

Malachi was the last messenger sent by Jehovah to the restored remnant of Israel after the seventy years' captivity. The burden of his message was the love of God, the sins of the people, and the inevitable day of the Lord. He prophesied in the midnight of the religious life of Israel. The worship of the people, for the most part, had become hypocritical and therefore revolting to God. They called Him their Father, but in their hearts and by their lives they worshipped Him not as such. They desecrated the holy temple. They polluted the sacred altar with unclean beasts. But, praise God, in the firmament there shone one bright star. A small remnant still in love with the Lord, and true to His Book, refused to follow in the ways of sin. They assembled themselves in the worship of Jehovah, much to His joy and delight. Looking over the parapet of heaven, He saw them and heard them, and said in effect, "I will write a book of remembrance concerning them." He had such a great love for this faithful company, living in the midst of a faithless world, that He added, "And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels."

This book of remembrance reminds us of the customs of ancient courts. The king used to bring out and display his jewels on State occasions, and nearly every Eastern monarch appointed

an official journalist to keep a record of the passing events. He was called the Court Chronicler, and his business was to write the history of his times, especially the notable names and incidents, the making of wars and treaties, the coming and going of ambassadors, the rise and fall of statesmen and Royal favorites, the births, marriages and deaths of kings, princes and nobles. Naturally the pages of this book were filled with the doings of people in the upper ranks, with the exploits of kings and soldiers, with the intrigues and scandals of the Court, and with all the happenings which disturbed or excited the world of aristocracy and fashion. There was little room for the annals of the poor or for anything that touched the life of the common people.

Here the prophet lifts the thought above that Court Chronicler and book to another Book which is written before the King of Kings, and he intimates that the doings recorded there belong to a different class: socially, much lower; morally and religiously, far higher. The pages of that other book are not devoted to the men who fill the exalted stations and make a great display of wealth and power; because, as the prophet tells us, in those times the high places were ruled by injustice, immorality and irreligion. The rulers and the soldiers and the nobles and the priests were notorious for their greed and haughtiness and contempt of God; there was nothing in their lives fit for the pen of the heavenly scribe. But there were a few people whom the searching eyes of God followed with tender love and approval, for the most part obscure people, lost in the crowd, and remote from the world of fashion; people whom the Court scribe would dismiss as so much dirt. But they were the only objects of interest to the greater King, for they alone in those godless times were loving soberly, righteously and godly, keeping the old religious fires burning.

This is not the only mention in the sacred Scriptures of that book of remembrance. In fact, we hear of it more or less all through the Bible. It appears as far back as Moses, who spoke of those who are written in God's Book; it is found more than once in the Psalms of David, who trusts that his very tears will be found written in the book; it occurs in Isaiah and in some of the minor prophets, and it is referred to as the Book which God keeps to record the doings and perhaps the sufferings also of His faithful ones who are forgotten or despised by the world. The thought is taken up and carried on by our blessed Lord Himself.

Remembrance enriches life by bringing into focus the hazy, indistinct, silent past and making it vivid and vocal. The Book of Remembrance to which Malachi refers was one of Jehovah's most valued treasures, a book inscribed with the names of His most heroic and loyal worshippers, whose deeds were to shine with eternal lustre never to be tarnished by the breath of forgetfulness.

Those of whom Malachi wrote in our text certainly never thought of themselves as precious. They probably only thought of themselves as ordinary, unknown and stumbling mortals who were not having any effect on life at all. But God spoke of them as jewels. He called them, "My jewels."

According to the Bible, the position of the true believer is in no wise a mean one. In the Book we are called "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ." We are designated as "sons of God." In our text we are regarded as the peculiar treasure of heaven, and in the day when the King of kings adorns His regalia we shall come into our own.

For centuries, men have paid fabulous sums of money in order that they might acquire possession of precious gems. Nations have been bathed in blood, thrones have been torn down, and monarchs have been beheaded, all because they obstructed the progress of the jewel hunter. It is a rare thing that a jewel is found on the surface of the earth. The heart of the mountains is cut out to find it. Boring, blasting and huge machinery make the rock open its fist and drop the jewel. There is the sawing and splitting process by which the gem is taken from its rough state and changed into that which the lapidary chooses.

There is a way in which the lapidary tells whether a diamond is genuine or not. He breathes on it, and if the breath lingers there it is not a real diamond; but, if the breath vanishes immediately, it is genuine. Then, if that method fails, he has the grinding process. In

like manner you can tell God's jewel. If the breath of temptation comes on it, and soon vanishes, it is a real diamond. If that breath lingers and continues to blur it, it is not genuine. But better than all is the grinding machine of affliction. If a soul can go through affliction and keep bright, it is one of God's jewels. God's children come up out of the ruins of misfortune and disaster as bright as when they went down. A counterfeit diamond may be broken if sufficient force is applied to it, but the article that is real will stand the test and survive without a flaw. There are many professing Christians who cannot stand up for one day when Satan's pressure is brought to bear upon them.

In the hour of trial Christians reveal to the world the luster of their spiritual experience. What is more beautiful than a Christian living for God? No matter how homely a setting a diamond may have, it is always a diamond. Pick it up out of the gutter, and it is still a diamond. Even so it is with genuine Christians; no matter how poor or illiterate they may be; no matter how humble their home; if their lives are hid with Christ, the world will perceive and marvel at the brilliance of their faith.

In the days of Nero and other Christ-hating pagans, the Christians demonstrated that they could endure hardness, by the grace of God. See how they went bravely to the arena and were crunched by the lions' teeth. They walked to the stake with head erect and shoulders squared, and from the midst of the flames their enemies could see their smiles and hear their testimony to the saving grace of God.

God's jewels are different. They are different in history, in education, in taste and in preference. Do not worry because God made you different from others. Do not worry because you do not have the faith of that man, or the praying qualities of this one, or the singing qualities of another. It were as unwise for a japonica to fret all the color out of its cheek because it is not a rose. God intended you to be different.

Jewels are the production of the divine creation, and not of human manufacture. A chemist may successfully analyze the component parts of a jewel, but he cannot duplicate one. An attempt may be made to form precious stones from a cheap glass, but, under the skilful scrutiny of a jeweler's trained eye and his microscope, the deception is soon detected. Just as surely as a true gem is the product of God's making, so is a Christian. No human endeavor, either moral or religious, is capable of creating even one Christian. A Christian is made by the power of God through the Holy Spirit. Please do not trust to your good works, your ethics or your religion, but stop long enough on your way to eternity to ask yourself the solemn question, "Do I know objectively, on the authority of God's Word; and, subjectively, by the authority of the Spirit within, that I am a Christian?"

Like the jewels of the earth, there is a vast difference between professing Christians, in that some are genuine and others are mere imitations. Like jewels, man is precious to his owner because of the tremendous cost in procuring. Also, like jewels, the Christian shines best against a dark background. Jewels and Christians are for the same purpose, namely, to make more lovely and to bring honor to their owner.

Now, our text tells us that, as yet, God's jewels are not made up. "That day" is future, and the tense would lead us to ask, "Why are the jewels not assembled now?" New jewels are to be found. God's jewels are not all gathered in. In the secular world, for centuries treasure hunters have been digging for peculiar and precious treasures. Although billions of dollars' worth of rare objects have been found, yet men continue seeking for more. Likewise for more than nineteen centuries the gospel of Christ has been preached. Millions have been won to Christ through the preaching of the gospel of Christ. From the greatest depths of sin the Lord Jesus Christ has often gathered up his brightest jewels. Paul was a persecutor, Bunyan was a blasphemer, John Newton was a libertine; and yet the grace of God went plunging through the fathoms of their abomination until it found them and brought them up to the light. There is no depth where that grace can not touch the bottom.

Are you one of God's jewels? Christ died that you might live. Miraculous though it be, it is true that God, through the power of the cross, can transform you into a precious jewel. He can take you into His laboratory of grace and by the chemistry of atoning blood process

you so that you can and will come out as His jewel. Then after a time of cutting, buffing and polishing, He will present you at last before His throne absolutely flawless. What a joy it is to go through life knowing that you are among God's gems, and "in that day" when He makes up His jewels you will be included.

"When He cometh, when He cometh,
To make up His jewels,
All His jewels, precious jewels,
His loved and His own:

"Like the stars of the morning,
His bright crown adorning,
They shall shine in their beauty,
Bright gems for His crown."