

2013_11_24 Christ the King | Sermon (Ascension Batavia)
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
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The KING Makes You His Own

Malachi 3:13-18

INI

Grace and peace to you, from the Lord our Savior, who has laid up for you the crown of righteousness, the crown which He will, on that Day, give to you and all who believe. Amen. (2 Timothy 4:8)

All Scripture is God-breathed. That inspired Word which God's Spirit has prepared to prepare you for the return of the King, comes from

Malachi 3:13–18 (NKJV)

13 "Your words have been harsh against Me," Says the Lord, Yet you say, 'What have we spoken against You?'

14 You have said, 'It is useless to serve God; What profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, And that we have walked as mourners Before the Lord of hosts?'

15 So now we call the proud blessed, For those who do wickedness are raised up; They even tempt God and go free.' "

16 Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, And the Lord listened and heard them; So a book of remembrance was written before Him For those who fear the Lord And who meditate on His name.

17 "They shall be Mine," says the Lord of hosts, "On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them As a man spares his own son who serves him."

18 Then you shall again discern Between the righteous and the wicked, Between one who serves God And one who does not serve Him.

...from fearless

...to fearful

...to fearing, loving, and trusting
in Him above all things

The KING Makes You His Own

Let us PRAY: O Christ, you live and reign together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, as One God, One Lord. Keep us ever humble before You, moved by Your love and grace to serve You in true faith. Amen.

In Jesus name, dear heirs of His kingdom,

Raise your hand if you've ever met a king. We probably don't have much sense of what it is like to fear one person who has sovereign rule over all we say and do. However, I imagine most of us have some sense of what it is like to stand before an authority figure – a parent, a teacher, a boss, a police officer, a judge. We know a bit about what it means to fear a higher authority. Yet the type of fear we experience can vary depending on which one of those authority figures you have in mind.

You see, there are really two kinds of fear. Our Lutheran confessions make this distinction with the terms: "child-like fear" and "slave-like fear." For example, the fear we have for an oppressive, demanding boss is different than the fear we have for a loving, caring dad. The first is a slavish obedience. This fear is motivated only by threats: loss of paycheck, loss of job. The second is a child-like obedience. The child obeys not just because of a potential consequence, but also because he loves and trusts his father.

In the Defense of the Augsburg Confession, Art. XII, we read, "Child-like fear can be clearly defined as an anxiety joined with faith, where faith consoles and sustains the anxious heart, whereas in slavish fear faith does not sustain the anxious heart" (XII.38).

Today is Christ the King Sunday, the last Sunday of the church year. It is a time to reflect on what it means to stand before the King of kings, to bow before Him whom heaven and earth adore, to crown Him Lord of all.

It is a time to examine just what it means to "fear the King." On the one hand you have the person who fears the king only because of threats and demands. He obeys only by fear of the consequences. On the other hand you have the person who obeys out of respect. He sees the king as honorable, caring, and trustworthy. Of course, there is a third sort – the person who has no fear at all. This is the worst, because he both disregards the command, the consequence, and will never know the love which alone can spare us from the punishment we so rightly deserve. So our King endeavors to make you His own – to leads us from being fearless; to being fearful; to the fulfillment of the first commandment, that we fear, love, and trust our King above all things.

... from fearless

One thing I've had to get used to since moving from Eau Claire, WI, is a difference in traffic. In Eau Claire, what you had to watch out for was people who just didn't know how to drive. Here, however, I've learned to watch out for is people who know how to drive too well. They have a knack for ignoring traffic signs. They are experts at squeezing in the merge lane at the last second. They are well experienced at timing red lights so as to squeak through without getting in an accident.

I begin to notice: everyone is doing it. I begin to say: "Look! Those who do wickedness are raised up, established firmly; they tempt God and go free!" And I begin to think: why not me? "What profit is it that we have kept His ordinance?" (v.14) We might as well do the same. Before we know it that same boldness for sin has reached our thoughts, and evoked our flesh. We decide, its my turn to ignore the traffic signs; its my turn to cut off the next guy; its my turn to run that red light. Everyone else is doing it – so why not me? And we begin to "call the proud blessed."

There comes a point where disobedience has become so common place that it becomes the norm – the accepted behavior. There comes a point when all the state can do is raise the speed limit to try to make things appear right. It can't make people fit the law, so it makes the law fit the behavior.

It is more than traffic signs we're talking about. We're talking about changing what is right and what is wrong depending upon what best suits our behavior. We're talking about making marriage into something that fits the culture rather than God's timeless truth. We're talking about same sex couples, fearless in violating God's natural order of creation, because "everyone is doing it." We're talking about a boyfriend and a girlfriend, fearless in enjoying that blessing which is reserved only for a husband and wife, because "everyone is doing it." We're talking about fearlessness. Fearlessness in the movies we watch, the websites we visit, and the magazines we read, because "everyone is doing it." Everyone ignores the traffic signs, and I am ready to join in. What profit has it gotten us that we have walked about as mourners? Let us eat, drink, and be happy.

"No Fear" is the state of a hardened heart. The LORD says, literally: "Your words have been hardened against me." And we ask ourselves, is this about them or me? Because there is a stubbornness that resides within us all. There is a rationalizing mind that somehow sees sins everyone else is doing, and ignores what is going on right here in my own heart. Do we fear not fear the King? Do we not tremble at the thought of the

righteous King who rules all, sees, all and will judge all? Or is the sinful flesh gotten behind the wheel – running red lights, cutting other people off, driving dead drunk. Such a recklessness is what happens when a person has been cast out of the King's presence. Such a fearless attitude means a person does not belong to the King. Such is the distinction between the righteous and the wicked.

... to fearful

Certain areas have begun to monitor traffic by mounting radar detectors around town. They'll catch you when you are least aware. As we hear this, suddenly we are not so quick to run that red light, we slow down a little more in that 45 mph speed zone. Fear is suddenly curbing their behavior. Suddenly we are taken from fearless to fearful.

Knowing we have a righteous King curbs our thinking. It reminds us someone is monitoring our behavior. God's Law is a radar detector zoned in on our heart at all times. This not only makes us cautious, it truly strikes fear into our hear. What will be the consequences of our actions? Such is the fear of a slave – one which obeys only to avoid the consequences: a ticket, jail time, lose a paycheck, lose a job. But this is not really the fear of the LORD. Such anxiety is not what it means to belong to the King. Such fear is no difference than what the King's enemies might feel. There is yet no love, no trust, and no matter how we might try to obey the signs, the 1st commandment is still left broken. Still obedience is only outward and only self-interested. Such anxiety needs to be comforted. Such fear needs to be joined with love and trust.

This is the beginning of wisdom as Proverbs says. But it is only the beginning. The fear of the LORD is not yet complete until it can be shaped into a trusting fear. It is not complete until you are taken from fearful, to fearing, loving, and trusting in your King. And such fear cannot be ours until the King makes you His own. It is not complete until you see that this King, this authority, this judge – is Jesus.

... to fearing, loving, and trusting in Him above all things

True fear is ours when we see this King who will judge us as the King who was once judged for us. ...when we see a King who hangs there next to us; a King who was once nothing more than a thief on a cross. A head which was once crowned with thorns, a brow which was once adorned with blood.

And we begin to speak to one another as it says in v.16. We say: "You and I indeed are here justly, we deserve the due reward for our deeds. But this Man has done nothing wrong." In fact, this Man has done everything right. He did everything right.

He feared God with perfect love and perfect trust. He fulfilled the 1st commandment with – as a beloved son. He did not question, He did not argue or dispute this ordinance, this charge. He did not ask: “what profit is there for me?”

Hebrews 5:7–9 ...who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear, though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,

And a book of remembrance was written. A book which would never forget the works He performed, the godly cries and tears, the innocence. God would not leave His Son to the such a death, but has raised Him up to the heights of everlasting glory. A book of remembrance is scripted here, in these pages of Scripture so that we might meditate on the value of that name: Jesus –

Philippians 2:9–11 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Now we understand the fear of the LORD. Now we bow. Not because we are fearful. We bow because our fear has been consoled by faith. You now see a King who was willing to give up His crown of glory for you. To make you His own.

17 “They shall be Mine,” says the Lord of hosts, “On the day that I make these who fear My name My jewels. And I will spare them As a man spares his own son who serves him.”

On the day of your baptism, God made You His own; God made you sons and daughters of the King. God said, “I will spare them,” And He says it again, in this book of remembrance, you who fear Him are remembered...

Psalms 103:10–18 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him; As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, So the Lord pities those who fear Him.

The fear of the LORD is now complete and the 1st commandment fulfilled. Your King who hangs next to you on that cross, turns and says to you, "Today, you will be with me in paradise." This is the King we fear, the One now exalted to all glory and power.

There are two kinds of fear. There is the kind governed only by the threats and consequences of the Law, who obeys only so far as he is being watched. Then there is the fear which is governed by love, which is consoled by forgiveness, which is made a precious possession of Christ and His kingdom.

... that we should no longer be fearless, no longer be fearful, but that we should "fear, love, and trust in Him. As Luther put it,

He did this that I should be His very own, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and joy; just as He is risen from death, lives and reigns in eternity. (Luther's explanation to the 2nd article).

"Then you shall discern between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not" (3:18).

Amen.