

Dirty Story!!

- Want to start by telling you all a dirty story...
 - **did that wake you up?!**
- **Barcaple, Easter outdoor activities camp.**
 - often wet, ground usually muddy...
 - had a rope strung through some rhododendron bushes on the side of bank;
 - blindfolded whole camp... trust game... follow the rope and your friend...
 - whole camp were muddy!! hosed down!!
- I'm not sure what was worse - getting muddy, or getting clean again afterwards!

Malachi 2:17-3:5

- As we've followed through Malachi's challenges to God's people, we've had the failures of God's people described as:
 - **blemished sacrifices,**
 - **compared to marital unfaithfulness,**
 - **now talked about in terms of unclean, dirty clothing.**
- In each case, despite the failure, God loves his people and is looking for more from his beloved, for deeper relationship, for restored fellowship...
- Here, at the end of chp.2 and through chp. 3 God is weary, tired of the unfaithfulness of his people.
 - he's been let down again by folk for whom this has become a habit
- But what is God's response?
 - to wash his hands of them?
- No, God is described in terms of two images: **launderer, refiner.**
 - **refiner** took raw ore and **heated it to burn off the impurities;**
 - learned a lot about this while I was in Motherwell - former home of a steel-works!
- Refining isn't comfortable or nice, certainly not for the product being refined:
 - all of this really struck me when I was talking with someone who'd been a brickie in Ranenscraig ("the Craig"), had worked in the blast furnaces, replacing the lining - get in as quick as you could after the furnaces had been turned off to minimise the time the furnace wasn't working, hot, uncomfortable...
 - but the result is purity, something better than that which goes in, something worth having!
 - **silver in Malachi, steel in Motherwell, righteousness in our lives!**
- Similarly, the image of the launderer:
 - laundry nowadays is comparatively easy... I can barely remember the mangle that my grand-father had... hard work!!
 - we live in a throw-away culture - too grubby, chuck it! Not way it was!
 - not "**comfortable**", for the clothes, to be scrubbed, to be beaten, to be wrung - nor for the person doing the washing.
 - chemicals in detergents are sometimes not pleasant either, dangerous even.
- But all necessary to get things clean!!
- God wants us clean:
 - in Jesus made us clean;
 - but not cheap grace, easy forgiveness - God's desire is that we grow in grace, become increasingly like him in character and action.
 - and that won't always be comfortable or easy.
- But it will be worth it!

Malachi 3:6-18

- *One particular example of how people were unclean that Malachi picks out:*
 - **robbing God**

What were they doing, what were the consequences?

- tithe - tenth part of crop and other income; to support priests and those in need;

indicative of community united in service of God.

- unlike the Inland Revenue, it was a system that largely worked on trust - you gave your tenth, and no tax inspector came round and counted your bags of wheat or whatever....
- so what the people were saying to God was effectively: "If I can get away with this I will!"
- Funny thing is that the consequence was their impoverishment.
 - God's desire was to bless, to give them the fullest expression of his goodness;
 - but the pennies they were stealing didn't even come close to the pounds God wanted to give them as they trusted him fully.
- In a funny kind of way, they were shooting themselves in the foot!
- OK, so how does this apply to us?
- Is this a "church asks for money" sermon?
- No - because I have actually been very encouraged by the general level of giving in this congregation.
 - seems we are a congregation where the majority pull their weight, where people do quite genuinely give a fitting proportion of what they have
 - that's a tremendous encouragement, for that is as it should be
- But we shouldn't become complacent in that!
 - God always looks for everything from us, not just a token.
 - whether that is money, or time, or talent, or character, he doesn't want us to steal from him that which is, by rights, his!
 - so always space to re-examine that which we are contributing, in all dimensions.

Blessing upon Blessing

- Malachi is a challenging, an uncomfortable book.
 - doesn't just pat us on the back, but continually calls us to deeper levels of discipleship and commitment.
- **But:**
 - the result of faithfulness, we are reminded, is blessing!
 - God is generous, almost beyond measure;
 - here in Malachi, those who have been faithful even when the world around them has not been, they are incredibly honoured:
 - (16) *"the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name. (17) "They will be mine," says the LORD Almighty, "in the day when I make up my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as in compassion a man spares his son who serves him. (18) And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.*
- May we learn to give ourselves completely to God, know his sometimes uncomfortable work cleaning and purifying our lives, and see his blessing upon us.