

The Elect Remnant

by G. Campbell Morgan

The Elect Remnant is a small group of people who feared the Lord and thought upon His name, despite the darkness and apostasy around them, and God hearkened and heard them, writing their names in the Book of Remembrance.

Scripture: John 1:4

Topics: "Fellowship among Believers", "Faithful Remnant"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes that God has always maintained a faithful remnant, a group of believers who fear Him and uphold His truths even in times of darkness. He illustrates this through the example of Elijah and the seven thousand who did not bow to Baal, as well as the faithful few during Malachi's time who valued God's name above all else. Morgan highlights the importance of fellowship among believers, stating that their conversations about God are precious to Him, and that He keeps a record of those who honor Him. Ultimately, he reassures that these faithful individuals will be recognized as God's special treasure when He acts in the future. The sermon calls for unity among believers who genuinely fear the Lord and cherish His name.

Transcript

God has never left Himself without a definite and clear witness to the truths upon which the well-being of humanity is based. In the first chapter of John's gospel, verses four and five, we read: "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not." The Revised Version has altered the word "comprehended" to "apprehended"; and I am not perfectly sure that it has made the passage more luminous by the alteration. The idea of the verse is not that the darkness was not able to understand the light; but that the darkness never succeeded in overtaking and extinguishing the light. "The light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not," that is - did not apprehend, overtake, or put out. There have been times in the history of man when it has seemed as though the whole world has been given over to darkness; but it has never really been so. The light of God has ever been shining. Elijah once said in the agony of his disappointed spirit, "I, even I, only am left," and God said to him, "I have left Me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal." Thus in every successive age, when it has seemed for a while as though God were beaten out of His own world, and black and impenetrable darkness had completely over-powered the light, that has only been the false vision of men and women who have not been able to enclose the Divine horizon at one glance. Somewhere or other, although it may not have been discernible to the ordinary vision, the light has still

been burning.

It was so in the days of Malachi. Notwithstanding all the fearful darkness that had settled upon the nation, God had His own people. His Elect Remnant; and through them the light still shone, and witness was still borne to the great truths and principles upon which all the Divine activity is based for the well-being of man. It is on the shining of the Divine light in that dark period of the history of the ancient people of God that we shall now fix our attention. We shall consider firstly the Elect Remnant as it is revealed in these verses; then we shall notice the Divine attitude toward that Remnant; and lastly, hear the Divine word spoken concerning them.

I

"Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another." Right in the midst of that day - when the nation, considered as a whole, had passed into the region of life characterized by perfect self-satisfaction, and by the fact that they brought no satisfaction to the Divine Heart - God pronounced His complaint against them, and they, almost speechless with incredulity, looked into His face and said, "Wherein?" Then there existed a feeble yet faithful few who were the light-bearers of God.

Let us notice the character of this Elect Remnant: "They that feared." At the close of the sixteenth verse of the third chapter (Mal 3:16), that first fact is not only repeated, but emphasized by the addition of another: "They that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His name." We have here a revelation of the character of these people, which is full of interest and of meaning. "They feared the Lord, and thought upon His name."

Let us take the first part of that description. If you turn back to the sixth verse of the first Chapter (Mal 1:6), you will find that in the opening note of the Divine complaint the prophet said: "A son honoreth his father, and a servant his master; if, then, I be a Father, where is Mine honor? and if I be a Master, where is My fear?" Here is a company that have "feared the Lord," and have "thought upon His name"; so that amid all the mass of people who had lost the sense of their fear to their Master, there was an Elect Remnant, a select few, who not only called Him "Master," but also feared Him. The thought of fear is linked, then, with the word master, and with all that that word implies. If you speak of a master, you at once think of a servant; and while the relationship of the master to the servant is that of authority and will and guidance, the relation of the servant to the master is that of obedience and service. Bearing this in mind, you notice that service is looked upon here rather as condition than action. Character is marked in this word, "They that feared the Lord"; they that lived within the conscious realm of the Divine, and responded to that claim; that number of units in the great crowd who recognized the Divine Kingship, not merely as theory, or as something of which they made a boast to other people, but as the power in which they lived their lives and spent all their days: "They feared the Lord." There were men and women all around making offering's, and crowding the courts of the temple at the hour of worship. Among those who came, God detected the men and women who really feared, and He selected only the gifts of those who presented something - not as an attempt to make up what they lacked in character, but as an output of character, and as a revelation of what they were within themselves. "They feared the Lord."

Let us now turn to the second part of this description: "They thought upon His name." The word "thought" is one of intense meaning, and I should like to trace it in one or two passages of Scripture in order that we may more clearly understand it.

In the seventeenth verse of the thirteenth chapter of Isaiah we read (Isa 13:17): "Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, which shall not regard silver; and as for gold, they shall not delight in it." The only purpose for which we have turned to this verse is that we may extract the word "regard" from it, and see how it is used in this particular case. The Medes will not "regard" silver - that is to say, that they will set no value on silver. The Medes, stirred up against the ancient people of God, will not be bought off by silver. They do not set any value upon it, they do not "regard" it. The connection between this thought and that of our text is centered in the fact that the Hebrew word translated "think" in Malachi is exactly the same word which is translated "regard" in Isaiah. They thought upon His name, they regarded His name, they set a value upon His name.

Take another case in which the same word is again translated "regard." Isa 33:8, "The highways lie waste, the wayfaring man ceaseth: he hath broken the Covenant, he hath despised the cities, he regardeth no man." That is, he sets no value upon man. The word is identical with that translated in Malachi: "They that thought upon the Lord" - that is to say, what these people did not do concerning man, the Elect Remnant did concerning God. I do not say there is any connection between these passages; we are simply getting the light of them upon a particular word in our present study. They regarded God, they set a value upon Him. In the terrible day described by Isaiah the personal man was not regarded, he was accounted as "nothing worth," valueless; but this Elect Remnant set regard upon the name of the Lord; they did for that Name what the Medes did not do for silver, and what was not done for man in the days of which Isaiah writes.

In the same prophecy a very remarkable case occurs. Isa 53:3 : "He is despised and rejected of men; a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from Him; He was despised, and we esteemed Him not." "Esteemed" is the word; it is the same Hebrew word translated "thought" in Malachi. You see the word again almost more wonderfully presented here than in other instances. "We esteemed Him not." We thought nothing of Him; we set no value upon Him; His worth in our sight was nothing, and we spurned Him from us. He came to His own, and they received Him not; they perceived no beauty in Him that they should desire Him. But the Elect Remnant esteemed the name of the Lord; they "thought upon His name" - they set a high value thereon.

To follow this thought a little further in order that we may get additional light upon it, turn to the letter of Paul to the Php 4:8 : "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." The Greek word translated "think" here is a word which means "Take an inventory." What are the things of which men, as a rule, take an inventory? Things which they value; and Paul, in writing, is practically saying, "Do not reckon as riches things perishing; but those things which make you rich indeed, the things which are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, take an inventory of these, keep your mind upon them, set a value upon them." In the Septuagint the translators have taken this word which Paul uses, and have used it in the three cases in Isaiah - to which we have already referred - so that when you read, "These men thought on the name of the Lord," it is not a matter of little moment; they did not simply meditate upon His name, and meet together to endeavor to comprehend its deep riches. All this I believe they did; but their position as described by this word is far more wonderful than that. It is that they set value upon the name of the Lord, esteemed it, made an inventory in it, accounted it as their property, wealth, riches. It was the chief thing; nothing else was worth consideration to these faithful people. They took an inventory in the name of the Lord.

That leads us to another point. The Master Himself, in the Sermon on the Mount, chronicled in Matthew 5, 6 and 7, gave utterance to these words: "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." That is one of the sayings of Jesus Christ which is of such simplicity that I may use it as an everyday truth in my experience, and yet it is at the same time the statement of a great fundamental principle in all human life. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." The masses of the people of Malachi's day found their treasure in their possessions, in their nationality, and in the temple, and consequently their hearts reached no higher altitude than the platform of things mundane; but the Elect Remnant set store by the name of the great Jehovah, and their hearts were therefore homed in God.

Turn once more to Pro 23:7, where these words occur: "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." These people thought upon the name of the Lord, and where their treasure was their heart nestled, the result being that their whole life assumed form and character from their conception of treasure, and from the things upon which their hearts meditated.

"They thought upon the name of the Lord." That word reveals a company of people who valued the Name, and counted it as their chief treasure, with the result that their character became responsive to all that the Name signified, and their life grew in closer correspondence to the will of God.

What a name was that on which they thus thought may be gathered from a study of the titles associated therewith in the mind of the Hebrew. Jehovah-Jireh - The Lord will provide; Jehovah-Tsidkenu - The Lord our righteousness; Jehovah-Shalom - The Lord send peace; Jehovah-Nissi - The Lord our banner; Jehovah-Shammah - The Lord is there. Search the matter out for yourselves, and you will find that these people had a marvellous heritage in the name of Jehovah. He had revealed Himself by names continually, and there had been along the line of their history new beauty, new glory, perpetually breaking out by means of these very names by which God had approached them time after time. These people thought upon the name of the Lord, of His provision for them; His righteousness; His banner, the proof of love in His conflict with sin; of His presence, and, thinking of these things, their nature was transformed into correspondence with His own, so that they became righteous, and they became peaceful, and they became quiet in the presence of their faithful God. So much for the character of this Elect Remnant.

A word or two concerning their occupation. "They that feared the Lord spake one to another." The word "often" is omitted in the Revised Version, and does not occur in the original. It is one of those words that seem to add to, but in reality detract from, the meaning of the text. "Spake often one to another" admits of gaps in the fellowship. "Spake one to another" tells the whole story of their communication, for it marks the attitude rather than the occupation of a life. "They spake one to another." It is the great statement of fellowship, of the gathering together in a community of hearts holding the same treasure, of characters that were growing into the same likeness; it is the statement of a great necessity, darkness all around, light becomes focused; evil spreading its ramifications on every hand, children of righteousness come close together. "They spake one to another; "and of what did they speak? Surely concerning that of which they thought; they spoke of His name, their mutual possession in that name, their mutual joy in that name, their mutual sorrow by reason of the fact that that name was being blasphemed by the nation they were bound to love, because they themselves formed a part of it.

Mark, the great value of this fellowship of kindred spirits lay in the fact that they were strong by reason thereof. Scattered souls are ever weaker than those bound together in feeling, and principle, and desire. This Elect Remnant, so weak and feeble that I venture to say that none but God would have found it, or known it existed, was the one thing that saved the nation from absolute and total wreckage and deplorable

ruin - the little group of souls who feared the Lord, and who gathered together to speak to each other concerning Him. Just notice in passing that it was not a prayer-meeting; it was a fellowship meeting, if a meeting at all. I do not say these people did not pray; but I am much inclined to think that they had passed into the higher realm of prayer, to which men and women always pass under the stress of adversity, when the storm-clouds threaten to envelop their lives. Their gatherings were the means for fellowship rather than the place for petition, and "they spake one to another."

II

Secondly, what is the Divine attitude toward this Elect Remnant? "The Lord hearkened and heard." Please to omit the word "it"! The words "hearkened" and "heard" are not identical; there is a great necessity that they should both appear. He hearkened - He heard. The root meaning of "hearkened" is to prick the ears. You have known what it is to drive a horse which is familiar with your voice and loves you. After travelling several miles along your journey you suddenly speak, and you see the animal's ears instantly pricking. That is the true meaning of the word "hearkened" - pricking the ears. "The Lord hearkened." Of course, these illustrations appear to be degrading to the thought of the Divine, and yet, the whole of human speech is human; we have not yet learned the language of the spirit world, we have not yet begun to spell out the alphabet of the true communication between God and those who inhabit that world; we are bound to take these words in all their human sense. God condescends to take up the words with which we are most familiar and teach us through this avenue, because we could not understand if He did not condense the great thoughts of His mind into the compass of simple language.

"The Lord hearkened." Mark the extreme sensitiveness of the Divine love. Here is a crowd of people bringing their offerings, uttering their prayers, thronging the courts of the temple; and the prophet is telling them of their sin, and charging them with sacrilege, profanity, and so forth, and they, with their faces transformed into veritable notes of interrogation, and stamped with surprise, reply: "Wherein?" Over there is a group who have met together to talk about God. To them He hearkened. This teaches the sensitiveness of the eternal love.

The word translated "heard" means He bent over them in order that He might miss no syllable of their conversation. The first is a word that marks arrest - "He hearkened!" The second shows the infinite patience of God; listening to their words as they talked, not to Him, but to one another about Him - "The Lord heard." While the word "hearkened" marks the sensitiveness of the Divine love, the word "heard" marks the strength of that love. These are companion thoughts, they always go together. That is not strong love which is vehement, passionate, loud, and boisterous. Strong love is the love of the soft footfall, and the beautiful patience that watches with unceasing wakefulness by the bedside of the sick, and nurses the suffering and almost flickering life back to health and strength. That is strong love - the love which through long and weary nights of watchfulness wins the life from the black angel Death. "The Lord heard" - He bent over them and attended to them, caught every syllable that fell from their lips, every intonation and inflection of their voices; and amid all the discord of that awful day in which man had wandered from Him, and forgotten Him, here was music for Him, something satisfying even to His heart - an Elect Remnant that feared Him., thought upon His name, and spake one to another.

The Lord hearkened and heard, and a Book of Remembrance was written before Him; for "them that feared the Lord, and thought upon His name," a Book of Remembrance, God's Scroll of Honor. The highest privilege that could be conferred upon the men of that or any age is that their names should be written therein. When the disciples came back from their mission, and said, "Master, even the devils are

subject to us," Christ replied, "Rejoice rather that your names are written in heaven." We had not yet learned to see these things as we shall do some day, when all the wrongs of earth are righted, and we reach consummation and finality. There is only one Scroll of Honor, and it is never kept on the earth, but in the heavens; and in that Book of Remembrance have been written the names of those who, amidst rampant apostasy, have been faithful; amidst the prevalence of darkness have witnessed to the light; amidst the seeming conquest of evil have been true to righteousness and God. Those names are inscribed in God's Book of Remembrance in indelible ink, and that little group of souls, the Elect Remnant, who feared Him and thought upon His name, although they little knew it, their names were being written in the Book of Remembrance.

III

Take the last point and notice the Divine determination concerning these people. "They shall be Mine, saith the Lord in that day I act." There has been some difficulty about this translation. The Revised has altered the old form with some apparent hesitation. The Hebrew word translated "make" or "do make" is one that is used in the broadest possible sense to indicate activity, and the reference here is undoubtedly to the day when God will act. Some people are afraid lest the thought of God's people being His jewels should be lost by this rendering, but it is not. If you read it as it is in the Authorized, "They shall be Mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I make up My jewels," you have an idea conveyed to your mind that a day is coming when God will gather His jewels and make them up into one great whole, but this, while perfectly true, is nevertheless a very partial idea. The real idea is best expressed thus: "They shall be Mine, saith the Lord in the day when I act - My jewels." The word "jewels" is in the nominative case in apposition to the pronoun "they," at the beginning of the sentence, "They shall be Mine in the day when I act, My special treasure." So that you have not merely the assuring and blessed word that God will gather these people together. His own precious treasure; but there is another word, which goes deeper and is more full of blessed assurance still, that God is coming "to do" - "to act," coming in upon all this indifference to set it right; and God says, "In the day I act, these people who have been faithful, and have feared My name, and thought upon My name, shall be My special treasure." You see there is nothing lost. We still have the sweet assurance that He will gather His own people as His jewels; but we have also the great assertion that He is coming to act, that while the present is man's day, God's day lies ahead. He will manifest Himself in greater power and glory than ever before. In that day they shall be Mine, My jewels, My special treasure."

Beside the places in which Israel is spoken of as such, this word "special treasure," only occurs twice in the Bible. First it is used of "David's treasures laid up for building the temple" (1Ch 29:3), and in the other place it is used in Ecc 2:8 : "And the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces." David stored away the precious things for the building of the temple; God is storing away His special treasure for the construction of His own Kingdom. Kings had treasures upon which they set special value; God has His also, upon which He sets special value, human character responsive to the Divine will, fearing Him and thinking upon His name; and of the men and women of such character He declares, "They shall be Mine." Thus you have the announcement that God has not forsaken His world, and the further declaration that when He comes to consummate His purposes, the faithful ones amid faithless days, shall be His - His special treasure.

From that study of the Elect Remnant let us gather one or two thoughts for ourselves. God has His Elect Remnant to-day in those who fear Him and think upon His name. I am not going to attempt, by any word I say, to measure that Remnant, and I rejoice that it has never been revealed to man in any dispensation. It

has always been known only and exclusively to the Divine heart, to the Divine love. If you show me a few people who say, "We are the Elect Remnant, we are the Remnant, we are the people who pronounce words in this particular way, or look in that particular direction, we are the people of God's Elect Remnant" - the claim is the sufficient proof of its falseness! Never! God's Elect Remnant in this age is not marked off by any little human boundary of sect or party. God has His faithful souls in the Roman Catholic Church. Let us not blunder about that. I, for one, will not join in all the hateful, indiscriminate outcry against Roman Catholics. The Romish system is one of the most awful the world has ever seen; but in that system are men who were born in it, and are devout in it, and are better than it, who form part of God's Elect Remnant. I have known such. You will find part of them in the great Anglican Church of this country; thank God there are thousands in that Church who must be, by virtue of the saintliness and tenderness and compassion of their lives, God's Elect Remnant. You find them in all sections of the Free Church, and a great number, alas! outside the Church altogether. No one Church can mark off the Remnant of God. Men entitled to that distinction are found everywhere. What are their characteristics? Men who fear Him and who are so conscious of His Kingdom that they live in it; and of His Mastership that they respond to it. Not the men and women who say "Lord, Lord," but they who do the things that God approves, Not the great heterogeneous crowd that bow the head, and say "Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done"; but the saintly souls in whose life the Kingdom is come, and the will is being done. These are His Elect people, and thank God, they are not confined to one section of this poor, broken-up, fragmentary Christendom of ours, but are everywhere. Yet, is it not important that such should gather together today in closest fellowship? That we should fear His name, and think upon His name, and learn to set greater value upon His name than upon any other? Is it not high time that we ceased to attempt, either by picnic in Switzerland, or conference at home, to arrange an organic union? Is it not better that we should recognize and nourish the true unity of heart that exists between those who think upon His name, and take an inventory, not in the wealth, nor in the organizations of to-day, but in that great Eternal Name which is a strong tower of righteousness?

If in this connection I make any plea, it is this: That in this day of large failure, those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth - and that term is synonymous with the Old Testament one, "They that feared the Lord" - should come together, and enjoy this fellowship, this oneness of heart. Take the old declaration and put it in the new dispensation: "The Lord hearkened and the Lord heard;" that marks God's present interest, and His great promise made concerning such is still "They shall be Mine in that day when I act." What interests God most in this age? I am bold to assert that there is nothing more interesting to the heart of the Divine than the "closing together" of Christian souls, not to try to make their creeds fit in, or their organizations coalesce; but in order that there may be a creation of character that is to be the shining of the Divine light amid the darkness of the world. The Lord hears, and no syllable whispered one to the other, that has in it the element of permanence, does His ear ever miss, because He is righteousness and love; and of the people who utter these words, He says, "They shall be Mine in the day when I act. My special treasure."

Surely it is such souls that salt and season all the earth. The little company gathered together when Jesus 'came, who were they? The Elect Remnant; Zacharias and Elizabeth; Joseph and Mary; Simeon and Anna; Shepherds on the plains, and Wise Men from afar - larger than a Jewish nationality, wider afield than the strip of land called Palestine - God's Elect souls united by no bond of human organization, held together by no creed of human manufacture, but one in that "they feared the Lord, and thought upon His name."

And so, when dawns God's next great day - and some of us believe the dawning very near - the Elect Remnant will be found, not bound together by human organizations, not held by creeds; but from the North and the South, from the East and from the West, from all lands and climes, from all the churches, shall come the Church - God's Remnant, fearing Him and thinking upon His name.

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