

# Malachi

## 1. Living halfheartedly

April 29, 2010

I believe that the Lord wants all of us to live wholeheartedly. Our God does not like us to live halfheartedly – He calls it luke warm. As a matter of fact, He hates it.

*Revelation 3:16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.*

As the last Book of the OT, the Lord wants us to understand how we should live for Him in several important areas of our lives – worshiping Him, marriage, our finance, etc.

### A. THE AUTHOR AND THE TIMELINE

*Malachi 1:1 The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi.*

The name Malachi means “My messenger”. He wrote nothing about himself. We have no biblical information about his ancestry, call or personal life. But the important thing about messengers is the message they bring, not who they are or where they came from.

Malachi was prophesying around 400 B.C., during the final days of Nehemiah’s leadership. Haggai and Zechariah were encouraging the people in the rebuilding of the temple under the leadership of Ezra.

Now Nehemiah was leading the people in rebuilding the city of Jerusalem, and Malachi was providing messages from God for them. It was a low time spiritually for Judah and they needed to hear the Word of God. The Lord was making the last call through prophet Malachi before the 400 years of silence.

### B. THE THEME OF THE BOOK

The theme of the Book of Malachi is God’s passionate love for us and His call for justice.

As I’ve stated earlier, Malachi was the last prophet recorded in the OT. He rebuked the priests and the religious people who had form of godliness and denying its power. 400 years passed, but the same kind of religious people continued their half-hearted lifestyle from one generation to another. When John the Baptist showed up in front of the public eyes, he also rebuked the Pharisees and the religious leaders. Jesus didn’t mince words about them either.

The prophecy of Malachi is built around seven questions the people asked God. These questions revealed their doubting, discouragement, sinful heart.

- In what way have You loved us? – Malachi 1:2
- In what way have we despised Your name? – Malachi 1:6
- In what way have we defiled You? – Malachi 1:7
- In what way have we wearied Him? – Malachi 2:1
- In what way shall we return? – Malachi 3:7
- In what way have we robbed You? – Malachi 3:8
- In what way have we spoken against You? – Malachi 3:13

## C. GOD'S LOVE FOR REBELLIOUS ISRAEL

*Malachi 1:2-5 "I have loved you," says the Lord. "Yet you say, 'In what way have You loved us?' Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" Says the Lord. "Yet Jacob I have loved; 3 But Esau I have hated, And laid waste his mountains and his heritage For the jackals of the wilderness." 4 Even though Edom has said, "We have been impoverished, But we will return and build the desolate places," Thus says the Lord of hosts: "They may build, but I will throw down; They shall be called the Territory of Wickedness, And the people against whom the Lord will have indignation forever. 5 Your eyes shall see, And you shall say, 'The Lord is magnified beyond the border of Israel.'*

The task of a prophet is not to smooth things over but to make things right.

Naturally, ungodly people don't like a godly prophet for this kind of message. The first sin Malachi named was the people's lack of love for God. That also was the first sin Jesus mentioned when He wrote to the seven churches of Asia Minor in Revelation 2.

*Revelation 2:4 Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love.*

It is listed first because lack of love for God is the source of all other sin.

The phrase in v2-3 makes many people argue about predestination and the sovereignty of God. The verb 'hate' must not be defined as a positive expression of the wrath of God. God's love for Jacob was so great that, in comparison, His actions toward Esau looked like hatred. By now, you would remember what Jesus said to His disciples about hating one's family to follow Him.

*Luke 14:26 "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.*

What Jesus meant was that our love for Him should make our love for our family look like hatred.

One of the women in Charles Spurgeon's church commented to him about v3, "I cannot understand why God should say that He hated Esau." "That," Spurgeon replied, "is not my difficulty, madam. My trouble is to understand how God could love Jacob." With our sins, it is only logical for the God of holiness and righteousness to hate us, but He chooses to love us.

Malachi is not speaking about the predestination of the one brother and reprobation of the other. He was merely contrasting. By the foreknowledge and sovereignty of God, He knew what kind of choice both nations would make. I don't understand why some theologians make this so difficult. I don't understand why they always think that they have to understand the unfathomable mind of God. Just believe that God knows what He is doing and leave it at that.

*Psalms 131:1 Lord, my heart is not haughty, Nor my eyes lofty. Neither do I concern myself with great matters, Nor with things too profound for me.*

Our greatest error in considering God's election is to think that God chooses for arbitrary reasons, as if He made choices in an "eeny-meeny-miny-moe" way of choosing.

One might say, "I don't believe in Jesus; therefore I must not be chosen." That is his choice, but then he cannot blame God at all for not choosing him if he refuses to choose the Lord.

## **D. THE DEFILED SACRIFICES**

*Malachi 1:6-8 "A son honors his father, And a servant his master. If then I am the Father, Where is My honor? And if I am a Master, Where is My reverence? Says the Lord of hosts To you priests who despise My name. Yet you say, 'In what way have we despised Your name?' 7 "You offer defiled food on My altar. But say, 'In what way have we defiled You?' By saying, 'The table of the Lord is contemptible.' 8 And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, Is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, Is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably?" Says the Lord of hosts.*

Now Malachi directs his message especially to the priests who, instead of living exemplary lives, were guilty of breaking the very law they were supposed to obey and teach. The way they were serving the Lord was a disgrace to His name.

When the priests were confronted, they arrogantly asked, "In what way have we despised Your name?" To begin with, the sacrifices they brought to the altar were defiled and imperfect.

According to the law from the Lord in Deuteronomy 15 and Leviticus 22, all the sacrifices they brought to the Lord should have been without blemish which pointed to the Lamb of God, Jesus later. The priests knew better, but their hearts were far from truly following the Lord. That is why their sins were worse than the ones who didn't know the law.

In ministry, it is easier than many people think to mindlessly continue their work all the while their sins are hanging around in their lives. There was an incident of wife swapping among the deacons of a local church in Sahuarita sometime ago. These deacons took the other deacons' wives secretly and went through the motion of serving God at the church until the Lord exposed their totally abominable sins.

How do we serve the Lord? Do we serve Him with everything we have in our hearts, minds, souls and bodies? Or do we just go through outward motions so that others can notice what we do? Do we bring our defiled sacrifice to Him? The altar is the place of our sacrifice and it belongs to the Lord.

Some of you might be thinking, "This is about priest. That means you, preacher." But I say, "No, it is for all of us since we are the royal priesthood of Jesus Christ."

*1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;*

I really like the answer given by king David when one of his subjects told him that he could have anything he wanted in 2 Samuel 24:

*2 Samuel 24:24 Then the king said to Araunah, "No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God with that which costs me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.*

## **E. DISHONORING GOD'S NAME**

*Malachi 1:9-14 "But now entreat God's favor, That He may be gracious to us. While this is being done by your hands, Will He accept you favorably?" Says*

*the Lord of hosts. 10 "Who is there even among you who would shut the doors, So that you would not kindle fire on My altar in vain? I have no pleasure in you," Says the Lord of hosts, "Nor will I accept an offering from your hands. 11 For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; In every place incense shall be offered to My name, And a pure offering; For My name shall be great among the nations," Says the Lord of hosts. 12 "But you profane it, In that you say, 'The table of the Lord is defiled; And its fruit, its food, is contemptible.' 13 You also say, 'Oh, what a weariness!' And you sneer at it," Says the Lord of hosts. "And you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick; Thus you bring an offering! Should I accept this from your hand?" Says the Lord. 14 "But cursed be the deceiver Who has in his flock a male, And takes a vow, But sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished-- For I am a great King," Says the Lord of hosts, "And My name is to be feared among the nations.*

Better there were no religion at all than a religion that fails to give God the very best. If our concept of God is so low that we think He's pleased with cheap halfhearted worship, then we don't know the God of the Bible. In fact, a God who encourages us to do less than our best is a God who isn't worthy of worship.

Speaking of worship, the songs we sing before the teachings start are not for us as I've said many times. They don't need to be the songs you like, nor the styles you like. It is all about Him.

During worship and praise in American Christian churches, many people absolutely choose not to participate in singing to the Lord. When I ask them the reason for not singing, they reply, "You don't want to hear how I sing." I don't care if you can not carry a tune in a bucket. You do not sing to me to impress me, but to say, "I love You, Jesus" in songs. If this challenges you to come out of your comfort zone, by all means come out of your comfort zone and sing praises to the Lord out loud with all of your heart next time.

Our sacrifice to the Lord doesn't stop at singing praise and worship songs. Not everything that is offered to the Lord as worship is accepted by Him as worship. Christian leaders, in general, are concerned with church growth, evangelism and planting churches. Yet in many cases, the Lord may want to shut the doors on many churches because they do no honor to Him.

I agree with what a great theologian G. Campbell Morgan said, "I am more afraid of profanity of the sanctuary than I am of the profanity of the street." Even with my limited knowledge about the churches in America, I see so many profanities – I am not talking about profane language that are used by some church leaders – in a multitude of churches as they go against the Word of God.

To these Jewish priests, serving at the altar was a job, not a ministry, and they did it to please themselves, not to please and glorify the Lord. Unfortunately, that same attitude still is in the church today.

In v14, according to the law of sacrifice, the Lord told them to bring an unblemished male from their flock, but these worshipers brought lame, blind or sick female animals which they didn't want, to the Lord. In bringing God less than their best, they were deceivers, like Ananias and Sapphira from Acts chapter 5, who pretended to surrender everything to the Lord but really did not.

## **F. QUESTIONS**

- 1) Jesus died for our sins while we were sinners and against Him. Is there anything that we would not do for Him?
- 2) What is it in our lives that block our total commitment to Him?
- 3) When we offer up our service and resources to the Lord, are they our best or leftovers?