

"MALACHI, WALK THRU THE BIBLE."

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for Sermon: Malachi 1:1, 6; 11-14; 3:6-10; 4:5-6

Introduction.

Malachi is the last of the three post-exile prophets ministering in Judah after the return of the people from their seventy-year captivity in Babylon for their apostasy and idolatry against God. God first sent Haggai and Zechariah to rebuke His people for neglecting to build God's temple. Now about a hundred years later God the glorious manifestation of God has not returned in their midst. They begin to question if God cares or even loves them.

God sends Malachi to rebuke the people for neglecting the sacrifices and worship of God once the temple was built and for being unfaithful to their covenant commitments.

We are witnessing here the re-paganization of worship and as the worship goes so goes the culture. Malachi is relevant because it was so modern, so contemporary. This is us. We are living in a time of the re-paganization of our worship and our culture. The terms used to describe our times are post-modern and post-Christian.

When a person or a nation loses the fear of God, before long anything and everything goes. There is no shame, no guilt, no taboos. As goes our worship, so goes our lives and our culture. We worship what we fear and love, and if that isn't God then it's idolatry and idolatry destroys a person and a nation.

We are living in a time similar to the people in Malachi's time. Life is routine, nothing particularly spiritually significant is going on.

Compromise has crept in. Where's God and what's He doing? Is He being faithful to His promises? Does it really matter what we do or don't do or how we do it? Does it really matter to God? Does He notice or care?

After Malachi there is 400 years of silence from heaven. What last message would God want His people to receive? What would be the most important thing to say?

John Piper sums up the prophecy of Malachi this way:

“The people had not learned their lesson from the exile. They had grown skeptical of God's love for them [which He had proved by His electing them] (1:2), careless in worship (1:7), indifferent to the truth (2:6–7), disobedient to the covenant (2:10), faithless in their marriages (2:15; 3:5), and stingy in their offerings (3:8).

First, God declares His great sovereign, electing love for Israel manifested in His loving and choosing Jacob. But Israel has not reciprocated, Israel has not feared God or loved God or been faithful in her worship to God. Neither the priests or the people have honored God.

Malachi 1:6-7, 9-14, Faithless in worship

God begins by being very clear, direct and up front. “Where is my honor and where is my fear?” In a sentence God was being dishonored and despised through careless worship and heartless service. God brings charges against the priest.

They came to God for favor and asked for grace but they hadn't changed. There was no fruit in their repentance, they still brought defective offerings thinking God would be impressed by the words on their lips.

If you offer a prayer asking for forgiveness but have no desire to change then God will not hear or answer that prayer. God is a God of love and grace but He is also holy and will not be mocked. The attitude of the heart is what He looks at.

They were thoughtless in their preparation for worship and half-hearted in their participation. They had a “who cares, whatever” attitude. Their service seemed boring and even burdensome. But that's what meaningless things become to us. Their service was mechanical. Their hearts weren't in it.

Are we casual? Do we make no effort at preparation? Or do we come prepared, thoughtful, engaged, ready to give and receive, actively participating? Saturday night used to be for preparation for Sunday worship. Do you pray and prepare and come ready to worship?

How do we treat God in worship? Are we just going through the motions?

Revelation 3:15-16 “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! 16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.

We are here in the presence of no less than the Lord of Hosts, the creator of the galaxies, the sustainer of the universe, the redeemer of sinners. We are giving glory to the only one true God who is supreme, majestic, glorious, incomprehensible and unfathomable, and who is our Father and to whom we are His adopted children.

God is anything but boring. He is the most dynamic and dramatic being in the universe. If we're bored we aren't thinking about God. We are thinking about us. Boredom is not one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

If we worship God carelessly and without due consideration; if we worship God slothfully and half-heartedly; if we worship God with wandering minds and distractions and selfish or vain thoughts; all of this is an affront to God, a robbing Him of the honor and glory due to Him and it's the same as if we were to bring sickly, diseased, lame, blind animals for a sacrifice (paraphrased from Matthew Henry's commentary on Malachi).

Our worship needs to match the greatness of the God we are worshiping. His electing love has chosen you out of the world to worship Him.

Malachi 1:14 I am a great King, says the Lord of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.

2:13-16, Faithless in marriage.

Broken faith with the wife of their youth, Malachi 2:13-16.

No human commitment is more serious or solemn or has more far-reaching ramifications as marriage. None is so permanent, in all

situations, better or worse, sickness or health, poverty or riches, until death.

Today many people see marriage just as a formality, or a legal contract at most, that can be broken at any time for any reason. Marriage is not just a legal contract, it's a covenant entered into with vows before God, to which God is witness (Mal. 2:14).

Genesis 2:24 Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

God has made them one. What God has put together let no man put asunder.

Malachi gives three reasons why God hates divorce and why it ought not to be done.

First, marriage is a covenant. A covenantal commitment is meant to be a rock, not sand. Marriage was created and designed by God to be solid, permanent, as unchanging as the God who first created and initiated covenants. Covenants are grounded in the character and nature of God Himself. He cannot be unfaithful.

Second, our marriage covenant is made before God, with God as our witness. This is not just a human commitment based on human feelings or human intentions. God is not passive in this. God is our witness, it's recorded in heaven. It has a divine seal set upon it. What God has joined together, let no man dare put asunder.

Third, in the simplest and clearest and most direct terms possible, God hates divorce. Divorce is a contradiction to the character of our Father God in two ways. It contradicts the character and nature of God's husband-like relationship to Israel. He would never break faith in this way. God will never nullify His marriage to His elect. Israel is His wife.

And it contradicts the character and nature of Jesus in His relationship with His bride, the Church. Jesus will never turn His back on His beloved Bride.

Marriage is a picture or illustration of the most beautiful of all spiritual blessings, the relationship Christ has with His bride, the church. Divorce is a lie about the most beautiful truth. Christ would never divorce His bride, no matter how bad things get. So divorce is a picture of apostasy, of us rejecting Christ.

His words in Malachi are as strong as any in Scripture. "I hate divorce. I hate the sending away." There are very few things that can arouse the holy displeasure of God than to abuse His order for marriage. It is divinely created and defined to be between one man and one woman for as long as they both shall live. What God has joined together no man should put asunder (Matthew 19:6).

In every age and generation there must be a renewed commitment to God's order and the inviolability of the marriage covenant and the sacredness of the marriage vows.

Did I not say Malachi was modern, contemporary and relevant? We live in a treacherous age, in an unfaithful age, in a casual throw away culture. We should fight for marriage and defend it at all costs. God will bless these efforts.

It's not OK because we do not have the right to redefine marriage from how God created and defined it. To do so is an abomination to God, contrary to His Word and will and an invitation for disaster and judgment on us and on any nation that approves of such an abomination (Romans 1:32).

Let's guard ourselves, take heed, pay careful attention, take our marriages seriously.

Malachi 3:8-9, Faithless in giving; stopping robbing me.

We have already seen in Malachi how they robbed God of the honor due His name, they have robbed God of worship and of sacrifices, and by breaking His covenant. They robbed God by withholding what rightfully belonged to God.

But there was one more way that they had robbed God and God used the voice of His prophet to confront His people again. “You have robbed my in your tithes and offerings.”

Why was it robbing God to withhold tithes and offerings? Because God commanded that a tenth of everything be brought to the Temple and given to the Levites (Numbers 18:20-28).

God needs nothing, He has all wealth and riches. God required the tenth that they might acknowledge Him as the owner and source of all they had and that they might show their faith and trust in Him for all they need and that they might receive back from Him even greater blessings.

By robbing God of His tithes and offerings, they were robbing themselves of His blessings and their land from an abundant harvest.

The reason we give tithes and offerings is because God is giving. And God even gives us what He wants us to give to Him. Our giving is to honor Him and reflect how He has given to us.

Malachi 3:10, Bring the whole tithe into my storehouse.

From the storehouse the needs of the Levites and Priests were met. From the storehouse the widows and orphans and poor were served. From the storehouse the Lord’s work was supported and advanced.

Malachi 3:10-12, Test me in this and I will bless you.

God actually challenged Judah to test Him, to try God’s faithfulness. This is uncomfortable language to us. How dare we put God to any test? To test God just means to learn firsthand from experience the truth of His promises. Obey me and see if obedience is rewarded with blessing.

God was saying to Judah, do what I have told you to do, and see if I am faithful and unchanging. Test and see if you return to me, that I will return to you. Test me and find out for yourself that though you give me a tenth of everything you have, I will provide all that you need.

In fact God promises far more than just what they need. He said He would open the windows of heaven and pour down blessings.

There are two principles hardwired into the universe for our spiritual benefit and blessing. A seventh of our time and a tenth of our income belong to God. They have stood the test of time and have served us well. They guard our hearts from thinking too highly of our own labor and of our own treasure. They are given to us to foster dependence and gratitude.

We will do better in life working six and resting one. We will do better in life living on 90% than on 100% of our income. It is a paradox, but the one who can multiply a few loaves and fish, can certainly multiply our blessings.

Proverbs 3:9-10 Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce;
10 then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.

Malachi 4:1-6, the last words of the OT.

The last words of this last word begin, “For behold, the day is coming ... the great and awesome day of the Lord” (Malachi 4:1, 5).

Verse 5 looks forward to a great and awesome coming day of the Lord that all the prophets have prophesied about. He will come in the spirit and power of Elijah, as a reformer and forerunner. Malachi says there will be one more prophetic voice before the end comes.

In the NT John the Baptist is identified as this Elijah, the one ushering in the Messianic age. John the Baptist would come to turn the hearts of the people to God.

Jesus is the message of warning and the deliverer from the judgment He warns of.

Verse 6 tells us what the future ministry of his prophet will be like.

Luke 1:16-17 And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, 17 and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”

People usually remember last words, God meant for these words to be a warning. There is a danger that never goes away for the Jews. They have rebelled against God in the wilderness. They have disobeyed and rejected the Law of God. They have stoned and killed the prophets of God.

There is one final hope coming for the Jews, the coming Redeemer. If after 400 years of prayer and expectation and anticipation they reject Him and their hearts are not turned back to their Father, then all that will remain for them is curse. There is no other hope or benefit after Christ. After the sun of righteousness rises there is no other sun.

Implications and application.

As the world increasingly presses us into its mold and demands our constant attention, it is easy to forget or neglect eternal, spiritual truths. The last book of the OT urges us to fear God and honor Him by serving Him faithfully.

Malachi's message to us and to America is don't think God winks at evil or smiles on it. And don't think that He has given up caring. He has acted, He has spoken, He has warned us and told us everything He will do and everything we need to do.

Does it seem like evil has the upper hand? Does it seem like the non-Christians are in control of our world's agenda, in control of the public square? Does it seem like God is silent, and not defending Himself and His good name and reputation? Does it seem like the church is getting weaker in the face of stronger opposition?

Jesus is the Word of God, the Word made flesh. The God of Justice has spoken in His Son and by His Spirit in His Word and He will speak again at that great and coming Day of Judgment.

There is a great judgment coming and there is only one way to avoid it, to repent in the name of Jesus and believe in the name of Jesus. and when you do you will be free from the corruption and unfaithfulness of our world, free to love God freely in worship, in marriage faithfulness, free from the love of money, free to live in the light of the glory of God. And free not just to live but to leap.