Introduction

Malachi is the last prophet of the Old Testament period before John the Baptist, whose ministry Malachi predicted. Mal. 3:1 The name Malachi means “My messenger”. Malachi lived about 100 years after King Cyrus issued the decree for the Jews to return from exile to Judah to rebuild the temple. Haggai and Zechariah were the prophets who urged the Jews to get to their job of rebuilding. Hag. 1:2-3 Finally the temple had been rebuilt and in Malachi’s time the wall of Jerusalem was being rebuilt or had been completed by Nehemiah and his crew. The Book of Malachi was written about 450-430 BC. Even though the temple had been rebuilt, things were not going well with the people. They were indifferent and lethargic. The spiritual conditions of the people were similar to those encountered by Ezra and Nehemiah. These included intermarriage with Gentiles, lack of support for the Levites, and oppression of the poor.

Read Mal. 1:1-5

I. God’s love for Jacob

A. The word of the Lord came to Israel through Malachi. What did He say? The Almighty Lord sounds heart-broken and wistful as He pleads with His people to understand how much He loves them. He covers their whole history when He says, I have loved you.” What an amazing statement from the Most High God who owes us nothing. In His own sovereign and wonderful way He has chosen to love His erring children. Of course, here this refers specifically to the descendants of Jacob or Israel. Deut. 4:37 But if you and I think back over how the Lord has rescued and provided for us, we can say in a very personal way, “I know He has loved me!” Did the children of Israel appreciate God’s amazing love? NO! They didn’t seem to know that they were especially chosen and cared for. They rudely asked, “How have You loved us?” It’s as if they’re saying, “Prove Your love for us. We don’t see it.” This shows the ultimate unconcern and lack of appreciation for the covenant love of the Almighty Creator and Sustainer. How has He loved us? We cannot count the ways!

B. The Lord goes on to say that though Jacob and Esau were brothers – in fact, twins – that God loved Jacob and hated Esau. It’s hard to imagine the Lord hating someone. Does God hate anyone? Obviously He hates evil and if a person or nation has become
totally evil, He must hate them because He is holy. Jacob was favored but Esau was rejected. Why? Did the Lord see into Esau’s heart even as a child and reject him on the basis that he would reject the Lord and his privilege as the firstborn to inherit the covenant blessing? We see a picture of Esau’s heart in Hebrews 12:15-17. There we find that he missed the grace of God, which he might have had. He allowed a bitter root to grow up in his heart that caused him to be godless. And he was evidently like Judas, unable to repent.

II. The results of Esau’s bitter root

A. We read in Hebrews that when we allow a bitter root to grow up in our hearts against the Lord and others, it will “cause trouble and defile many”. And so Esau’s descendants were defiled by his hatred of his brother. They were the people of Edom about whom Obadiah wrote. The hatred of Esau for Jacob became a hatred of the people of Edom for the people of Israel. It was so bad that the Edomites joined the conquerors of Israel in defeating them. They rejoiced over the misfortunes of Judah. Obad. 1:10-12 Anyone who dares to hurt God’s chosen people will suffer His wrath. And so God said that He turned the mountains of Esau into a wasteland and left his inheritance to desert jackals. The Edomites were defiant. They proudly said that though they had been crushed, they would rebuild the ruins.

B. “But” another voice is heard. It is the voice of the Lord Almighty. This term for God is used 24 times in this short book. Obviously Malachi wants his readers to know that He is not only the Lord, but also the Lord Almighty! There is no one greater, even though Satan tried to gain that title. What does the Lord say about these arrogant people who insist that they will rebuild the ruins? “They may rebuild, but I will demolish.” We see that the Lord is set against them. In fact, He calls Edom “the wicked land” in contrast to Israel, the Holy Land! They are a people who are always under the wrath of God. Now we understand the difference between being hated and loved by God. The Hebrew words for “loved” and “hated” don’t refer to God’s emotions, but to His choice of one over the other. It reminds me of Luke 14:26. In answer to Israel’s question, “How have you loved us?” the Lord gives them an object lesson in the way He will bless Israel and curse Edom. They would see it and say, “Great is the Lord!” God condemned Edom to complete destruction, never to be restored. Jeremiah 49:17-18

Read Mal. 1:6-8
III. Contempt for God

A. The real question for Israel is: What is their relationship to this almighty, sovereign God? The Lord points out the fact that He is their Father and Master. He has loved Jacob and so He deserves the place of respect and service in the life of Jacob or Israel. A rule of life is: “A son honors his father and a servant his master.” A son must honor the father who gave him life. A servant must respect the master for whom he works. God is our Creator who loves us and has given us life. Of course, we should honor Him. As Master of the universe, He is also our personal Master. Of course, we should respect Him. Since God was Israel’s Father and Master, they should be treating Him as one treats a beloved father or a respected master. But were they? The Lord accused the priests of showing contempt for His name. Contempt is a very strong word. It means looking at something or someone as disgusting and worthless. There is a huge difference between honor, respect and contempt! Isa. 1:2-3

B. It seems that God’s people and the religious leaders, not only showed contempt for Him, as well as lack of respect and honor. They also wanted to argue with the Lord about His criticism of them. They asked 3 “how” questions that seem to challenge and argue against what the Lord was saying. First, “How have You loved us?” Second, “How have we showed contempt for Your name?” Third, “How have we defiled You?” What right did they have to argue with God? It’s as if they were telling Him to prove His points about them. He told them that they had shown contempt for Him by placing defiled food on His altar and then saying that the Lord’s table was contemptible. Their very insolence in the face of the Almighty shows that God’s words about them were correct. They didn’t understand, appreciate, or return His love.

C. Supposedly they didn’t see how they had defiled God’s table or shown contempt for His name. The Lord spelled it out for them. They were bringing animals as sacrifices that were blind, crippled and diseased. The Law of Moses was very explicit about what kind of animals they could offer as sacrifices. Lev. 22:21-22 But the people had become careless and indifferent and were offering animals that were defective so that they could keep the good ones for themselves or to sell. Obviously, they were showing contempt for God and His house. To make His point the Lord suggested that they try offering these defective animals to their governor. Of course, he would accept only the best. He would not be pleased with their lame gifts, nor would he accept them. It’s like giving our leftovers or our used clothes that are ugly to someone as a gift. It
IV. God is not pleased

A. They were imploring God to be gracious to them. No doubt they were praying many prayers for His help and blessings. But would He even accept them when they offered defective sacrifices and so showed their contempt? Why should He be gracious when they didn’t have any respect for Him or His house? Can we expect God to be pleased if we offer our leftovers and garbage? The Lord is so displeased with them that He wants them to shut the temple doors so as not to light useless fires on His altar. What they consider worship, He rejects. It is not only useless, but also contemptible. He said He was not pleased with them and would accept no offerings from their hands. What we think pleases God may actually nauseate Him. There is no offering good enough for our sins. Oswald Chambers has written a daily devotional book that I read every evening. I like the title: My Utmost for His Highest. Anything less than our best is not good enough for our wonderful Lord!

B. The Lord makes it clear that whether they honor Him or not, others will. “My name will be great among the nations from the rising to the setting of the sun.” From the east to the west of this world God’s name will be great! In fact, in every place – not just in Israel – incense and pure offerings will be brought to Him. In Rev. 8:3 incense is connected with prayer. I think He is saying that prayer will go up to Him from all over the world and that people everywhere will worship Him in spirit and in truth. John 4:23-24 But the contrast between what will be someday and what was happening in Malachi’s time was not good. They were saying of the Lord’s table, “It is defiled”. They said of the food for the table, “It is contemptible.” Their attitude toward the worship and service of God was expressed in their words, “What a burden”, as they sniffed contemptuously.

C. The Lord asked if they thought He should accept the injured, crippled and diseased animals they offered for sacrifices. They wouldn’t think of presenting them to the governor. And they probably couldn’t sell them either. Who wants to buy a defective animal? Why did they bring them? I think they rationalized that the animals would only be slaughtered anyway as sacrifices, and probably the Lord didn’t notice or couldn’t see what they were offering. Are we guilty of the same thing – thinking that the Lord

doesn’t cost us anything. In fact, we’re glad to get rid of them. I Chron. 21:24

Read Mal. 1:9-14
doesn’t see what we do, say and think, so it doesn’t matter? The Lord pronounces a curse on the cheat who has an acceptable male in his flock that he promises to give, but then instead sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord. The Lord reminds them and us, “I am a great King”. Rev. 19:16 He is not only a great King, but the King of kings! Once again the Lord says that His name will be feared or honored or great among the nations. God will receive the glory that He deserves!

Conclusion

Do we sometimes show disrespect to our Lord by ignoring Him when we should be talking to Him in prayer and listening to Him as we read His Word? If He is our beloved Father, then we need to honor Him with our whole life – our utmost for His highest glory. If He is our Master then we need to respect Him by obeying His commands. We need to bring Him glory and let Him use us anyway He chooses. Maybe we are like the Jews at that time, thinking of going to church or Bible Study as a burden. In that way we show contempt for Him. Is our worship in church acceptable to God? Are we worshipping with all our hearts, listening to His Word and applying it to our lives? Do we offer our money and ourselves to Him? Or is it just an empty show? Our bodies are the Lord’s temple. If we do anything that defiles our bodies we bring disgrace on the One who owns them and lives in them. I Cor. 6:19-20
Bible Studies
Malachi (2)
I Will Curse Your Blessings
Malachi 2:1-9

Introduction

We saw in our last lesson that though the Jews had been given a chance to return from exile to Israel and to rebuild their temple, they weren’t honoring and respecting God. The Lord Almighty reminded them that though a son honors his father, they had not honored Him, their real Father. Though a servant respects his master, they had not respected Him, their Master and Lord. They argued with the Lord because they felt that they were doing O.K. But God’s judgment was that they were showing contempt for Him. Since His name meant His Person, they were showing contempt for His person. How? By offering to Him what they would never dare offer to their governor – crippled and diseased animals. On top of that, they said the worship of the Lord was a burden. So we examined our own hearts as to whether our worship in church and in our devotions is a burden to us, or if we rejoice in our privilege of worshiping and serving our great almighty God.

Read Mal. 2:1-3

I. Listening & honoring

A. In this second chapter Malachi writes as God’s messenger to the priests and Levites. In our churches that would refer to the pastors, teachers and missionaries. The purpose of religious leaders like the Jewish priest and the church leaders of today is to represent the Lord God and to speak in His name. It’s a serious and awesome responsibility that church leaders have. To whom much has been given, from him much will be required. A church leader – and all Christians - must first of all listen to the Lord. Otherwise, we have no message to give to others. We are privileged today to have Bibles we can read and study by ourselves and together at church and in Bible Studies. But listening is only the beginning. We must also set our hearts to honor the Lord’s name, as Daniel did. How can we represent a Lord whom we do not honor?

B. Malachi told the priests that if they did not listen to God and choose to honor Him with their lives, that God would send a curse upon them. He would actually curse their blessings! The Almighty is well able to send a curse that no one can defeat or change. This would be a curse on the very things they had been blessed with – their good health, their homes, their children, and their finances. What they have rejoiced in will be cursed and bring them sorrow instead
of joy. God said He had already cursed them because they refused to set their hearts to honor Him. It’s kind of like a rich person who refuses to put God first. He may become a target for robbers and murderers. The Lord told them that because of their unfaithfulness He would rebuke or cut off their descendants. He would punish them by mingling the blood and dung of their sacrifices with their blood. They and their bloody sacrifices would be carried off together. It reminds me of the way that Pilate mingled the blood of the Galileans with the blood of their sacrifices. Luke 13:1 Maybe that was part of the fulfillment of these words!

Read Mal. 2:4-6

II. The history of Levi

A. The Lord had sent this admonition to the priests so that His covenant with Levi would continue. The priests were descendants of Levi. We find in Exod. 6:16-20 that Moses and Aaron were sons of Amram whose grandfather was Levi. They came from one of the clans of Levi. The Levites have an interesting history. When Moses was up on Mount Sinai receiving the Law from God, Aaron was down at the foot of the mountain with the people. They wanted him to make a god for them because Moses had been gone so long on the mountain. God was very angry that they would make a golden calf and worship it. Besides that, they said that it was the god of Israel who had brought them out of Egypt. How insulting they were to the Lord God who had saved them and opened up the Red Sea for them to travel across! They were being contemptuous to the Lord Almighty as we studied last week. God told Moses that He would destroy them all and make him into a great nation. Exod. 32:9-10

B. Moses begged the Lord not to destroy all the Israelites. He told the Lord that the Egyptians would say that God had taken the Israelites from slavery only to kill them in the desert. Then He reminded God of His covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. So the Lord relented and did not destroy all His people. When Moses came down from the mountain and saw what the people were doing, he threw down the stone tablets of the Law and broke them in pieces. Then he took the golden calf and ground it to powder. He scattered the gold powder on the water and made the people drink it. Exod. 32:19-20 Moses saw that the people were running wild, making them a laughingstock to their enemies. Moses called to the people, “Whoever is for the Lord, come to me.” It was the Levites who answered his call. Moses told them that the Lord had said that they should take their swords and go through the camp, killing their
brothers, friends and neighbors. When they obeyed God’s orders 3000 people died. They had been willing to put the honor of the Lord before anything else. For this reason, they were set apart for the Lord.

III. God’s covenant with Levi

A. It was at this point that God made His covenant with Levi and His descendants – to set them apart for His service and to bless them. Exod. 32:28-29 By the unfaithfulness of the priests of Malachi’s time they were endangering that covenant. This covenant was a two-way promise, as covenants are. For instance, in the marriage covenant both man and woman promise to do their part. God’s part in this covenant with Levi was to give him and his descendants life and peace. Levi had the privilege of serving the Lord and receiving the blessings from it. Levi’s part was that he must revere or worship God and stand in awe of His great name. His attitude toward God and His honor of God was what it should be.

B. Another incident later in Israel’s history caused God to make another covenant with the Levites. This time it had to do with the grandson of Aaron who was, like his grandfather, a priest. When the Israelites were approaching the land of Canaan, they were opposed by the Moabites. King Balak tried to get Balaam to curse the Israelites so that he could conquer them. Though Balaam tried to do it he was unsuccessful because God would only give him words of blessing for Israel. Then Balaam advised Balak that he could conquer them if he seduced them to sexual immorality and the worship of Baal. Balaam knew that God would turn against His people if they sinned like that. Num. 25:1-3

C. Moses told the judges that they must kill the people who were bringing down the anger of God on everyone by their immorality and idol worship. In defiance of God and Moses an Israelite man brought a Midianite woman into his tent. The whole assembly of Israel was weeping before the Tabernacle because of the disobedience of the people. Already 24,000 Israelites had died in the plague God sent among the people. Right in front of them this man took this woman into his tent. Phinehas, a priest and grandson of Aaron, saw this. He left the assembly, took a spear and followed the man and woman into the tent. He drove the spear through them both. And then the plague stopped. God was pleased with Phinehas because he was as zealous for God’s honor as God Himself is. So the Lord made another covenant of a lasting priesthood. Num. 25:11-13 So here Malachi says that Levi and his
descendants spoke the truth, walked in peace and uprightness, and turned many from sin.

Read Mal. 2:7-9

IV. Violation of the covenant with Levi

A. The Lord has reviewed His covenant with Levi and his descendants. They were what priests are supposed to be. What is a priest or pastor or teacher or missionary supposed to be? His lips ought to preserve knowledge – telling the truth and giving wise instruction. He is like a reservoir of instruction for others. This is because he is a messenger of the Lord Almighty. He has an exalted place as the messenger of the Most High. He is the link between the people and the Lord. What was the problem or sin of the priests of Malachi’s time? It was a double sin. First, they had turned from the way. Second, they had caused many to stumble. Men were seeking instruction from them because they were regarded as messengers of God. But their crooked lives and crooked teaching had caused people to stumble instead of drawing them close to God. How many in church leadership today are guilty of these sins? Let us guard our hearts and lives lest we, too, go this direction.

B. They had violated the covenant with Levi. They were like husbands who violate their marriage covenant by being unfaithful to their wives. Instead of turning people from sin, they had caused them to stumble and fall into sin. How many TV and mega church preachers are causing people to sin instead of turning them from sin. How about us? Are we keeping God’s covenant or breaking it? He is expecting us to carry out our part of the covenant or promise between God and us. God has provided salvation for us and we can depend on His faithfulness. But what about our faithfulness? Heb. 6:11

C. What was God’s judgment on these covenant-breakers? He had caused them to be despised and humiliated before the people. They were no longer respected and looked up to. They were like prominent people in the news who have fallen away from the Lord and brought disgrace on God and themselves. What were their sins? First, they had not followed God’s ways. Second, they had showed partiality in matters of the law. Probably they were taking bribes and using their position for their own gain and profit. God hates partiality, discrimination and favoritism. James 2:1-4; Lev. 19:15 The Lord wants us to love and minister to people in all walks
of life and with all kinds of needs. **Matt. 25:31-40** When we help them, we are helping the Lord.

**Conclusion**

God has blessed us in many ways. We have been blessed to be in a free country where we can worship the Lord in church or in our homes. We have Bibles that we can read and study. God has given us access to His throne through the blood of Christ so that we can pray, bringing our worship and requests to Him. **Heb. 4:16** We can freely talk to others about the Lord anywhere. We can sing songs of praise. We can invite others to church and Bible Studies. Are we making full use of these blessings? If we don’t use today as we should, the time may come when we will lose our blessings or God will curse them. **Heb. 3:12-14** May the Lord help us to be thankful and appreciative of all God’s blessings, and use them for His glory every day.
Introduction

In our last lesson we saw that God was speaking especially to the priests, the descendants of Levi. We reviewed God’s covenant with Levi. The Lord had blessed and used Levi and his descendants because of their faithfulness to God. They put God first even in difficult and dangerous times. For that reason, God had blessed them. But in Malachi’s time the priests were no longer listening to the Lord. Neither did they set their hearts to honor His name. Therefore, the Lord said that He would send a curse upon them, and would even curse their blessings. Mal. 2:2 We applied the lesson to ourselves, noting that we have received many blessings, but if we don’t use them as we should, the time may come when we will lose our blessings or God will curse them.

Read Mal. 2:10-12

I. Judah’s unfaithfulness

A. The Lord condemns the unfaithfulness of Judah as a whole and as individuals. We can well apply this to the Church today. What has happened to the unity of the body of Christ? Malachi asks, “Have we not all one Father?” If we are truly born again, we have been born into the family of God and He is our Father. Malachi’s next question is: “Did not one God create us?” The answer to that is easy. Of course, only one God created all of us. I Cor. 8:6 If we all have one Father and one Creator, why are we not acting as one body? In Mal. 1:6 the Lord had asked them why they did not honor Him if He is their Father. Why didn’t they respect Him if He is their Master? We must ask ourselves these same questions.

B. Malachi then asks a question which is very appropriate for the church today. He asks, “Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?” The Living Bible translates this, “We are faithless to each other, violating the covenant of our fathers.” The Amplified Bible translates it, “Why then do we deal faithlessly and treacherously each with his brother, profaning the covenant of God with our fathers?” To profane something is to desecrate or misuse something holy - to treat sacred things with irreverence. I am reminded of drunken Belshazzar taking the holy goblets from God’s temple and using them to praise his evil gods. He profaned God’s holy vessels and God Himself. The word profanity comes from profane. Profanity is
swearing and using God’s holy name in a bad way. So they were desecrating God’s holy covenant with them by breaking faith with one another.

II. Destroying the unity

A. This is what we saw happen in Guam, and we’re seeing it happen around the world in various places. The covenant of the fathers is being broken and spoiled. How? It happens when some people who call themselves Christians make alliances with other gods and spirits. It is the adultery of God’s people who break their sacred “marriage covenant” with Him and join with false teachers and evil spirits. God’s covenant with Israel is stated in Ex. 19:3-6. God has made a similar covenant with the church – the Christians of today. I Pet. 2:9-10 When we go a different direction than God intended, we break the unity of His body by breaking faith with one another. We who were one in Christ become enemies.

B. Judah had broken faith by marrying the daughter of a foreign god. As a nation they had become “married” to idols and the demons behind them. The Lord called this a detestable thing. God does not take it lightly when we dishonor His holy name and His house. By doing this, Judah had desecrated, or made unholy, the sanctuary that the Lord loves. Remember that they had only recently finished the rebuilt temple. Already they were defiling it. They were guilty not only as a nation, but also as individuals. So God says that He will cut off any man who does this – marrying a woman who worships idols and demons. Even though the man brings offerings to the Lord, God will not accept his offerings or him. Ezra and Nehemiah had to deal with the same sins among the returned exiles who were rebuilding the temple and the walls. Ezra 9:1-2

Read Mal. 2:13-15

III. Many tears but no repentance

A. What value is there in weeping and feeling sorry or at least pretending to be sorry? If it is not true repentance, it means nothing to God even though others may be impressed. You remember from our study of Jonah that it was when God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, that He had compassion on them and didn’t destroy them as He had promised. Why? Because that is a sign of true repentance. Jonah 3:10 Why were the people weeping and wailing? Was it because they were repenting of their sinful ways? No! It was because the Lord no longer paid attention to their offerings. He did not accept them with pleasure. Their
offerings which were designed to placate and please God were not producing the desired results. Sometimes we want to ask why God is not pleased with all our activities, service and so-called worship. They also asked “Why?” And the Lord gave them a straightforward answer. It’s the same answer we always get when we have been going our own way ignoring the Lord’s commands. God said, in essence, “You have sinned”.

B. Malachi told the people that the Lord was acting as a witness between these men and the wives of their youth. “The wife of your youth” in the Bible means your first wife. Obviously these men had left their first wives to marry someone else. God is watching and witnessing what we do. Psa. 139:1-4 Then He is like a witness in the courtroom where we are being tried for our crimes. God does not smile when we agree to a marriage covenant and then break faith. Whatever covenant we agree to we are expected to keep. This includes not only our marriage covenants but all other covenants as well, especially the one we make with God Himself when we give our lives to Him. The question we need to ask ourselves is: “Have we broken faith with the Lord or anyone else with whom we’ve made a covenant?” To break faith is to not carry out our agreement and not keep our promises. We are responsible to keep faith, especially with God!

IV. Guard yourself in your spirit

A. Here God is especially condemning those who broke their marriage covenants. In breaking faith with their marriage partners they were breaking faith with God. Malachi asks, “Has not the Lord made them one?” The law of marriage that God gave in Gen. 2:24 was often repeated by Jesus. Mark 10:6-9 God made them male and female and God joined them together. Malachi goes on to say that in flesh and spirit the man and woman are His. Sometimes we want to separate the flesh from the spirit, thinking that the Lord owns our spirit but our flesh or body is our own. In I Cor. 6:19-20 and II Cor. 6:16 the Lord makes it clear that our bodies belong to Him. They are His temple. He has the right to do with them as He chooses. To defile them in illicit relationships is to dishonor and defile the Lord.

B. We not only disappoint and dishonor the Lord by getting into wrong sexual alliances. We defeat His purpose in making us one. Why has He made us one? “Because He was seeking godly offspring.” What better way is there for God to raise up faithful followers? The best way to grow godly people is to plant them in godly families. Of course, that is also the reason why the devil tries so hard to divide and defeat godly families. So what are we to do to avoid this kind of
division and defeat? In order to have godly offspring in a godly family, you have to be a godly person! So the Lord gives 2 commands. The first is: “Guard yourself in your spirit.” How do we guard ourselves in this inner part of us? We have to turn our eyes and thoughts away from things that inspire lust – movies, TV, magazines, books, etc. The second command of the Lord is: “Do not break faith with the wife of your youth.” We are to be faithful to our Lord by being faithful to our marriage partners.

Read Mal. 2:16-17

V. I hate divorce

A. The Lord God of Israel now makes a very strong statement: “I hate divorce.” Why is God so adamant about divorce? It’s because of the ongoing damage brought about by divorce – not only to the man and woman who divorce, but to the generations that follow as well. What God sees in divorce is a man covering himself with violence or abuse. It’s as if he covers himself with violence in the same way that he covers himself with clothes, and becomes an abusive person. He does violence to his own body, to his wife, and to his children, as well as those who watch. This is especially true if he a Jewish priest or a Christian pastor who represents the Lord. Malachi reminds us that it is the Lord Almighty who is speaking. Then once again Malachi gives the solemn warning: “So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.” When something is repeated like this you know that God’s Word is making a very strong point. 1 Cor. 16:13

B. The next accusation that Malachi makes against the priests and the people has to do with the way they have wearied the Lord with their words. God was sick and tired of hearing their words. God had said something similar to Isaiah. Isa. 43:24b The Lord was sick of their words because behind their flowery speeches and false “repentance” were their sins and offenses against Him. While they offered sacrifices and flooded His altar with tears, they carried on with other women and didn’t keep faith with their wives or with God. They were hypocrites! But were they willing to admit it and seek forgiveness and restoration? No! They wanted to argue. They asked, “How have we wearied You?” They were telling God to prove His accusation against them.

C. They were saying, “All who do evil are good in the eyes of the Lord, and He is pleased with them.” That’s an obvious lie if we check it with any part of scripture. It’s like telling someone who is evil that God loves him and everything is O.K. While it is true that God loves
everyone, nobody is O.K. until he or she repents and is restored to God. Isaiah warned us about turning things around like this. We cannot call evil good or good evil and still please the Lord, but many people are doing this today rather than telling the truth that we must admit and repent of our sins in order to be reconciled to God. Isa. 5:20 The other thing they were saying was, “Where is the God of justice?” It seems that they were accusing the Lord of not paying attention, not caring about what was going on. If we begin to doubt the character of our God, we are going the wrong direction.

Conclusion

It’s a serious lie to tell people that evildoers are good in God’s eyes. Is God ever pleased with people who continue to do evil? I John 2:3-6 This is the lie of the devil and it is being preached today in many churches. In order to get big crowds to attend their churches, they preach: “God loves you, so everything’s O.K.” But that’s not what Jesus or John the Baptist preached. Matt. 3:2; 4:17 The message of the whole Bible is: “Repent or be judged!” How many people are led into hell by hearing a false message? We do not love others when we tell them something good that assures them that they don’t need to change. We must speak the truth even when it’s hard to hear. But of course we want to speak the truth in love!
Introduction

In our last lesson we heard Malachi accuse Judah of breaking faith with God. The people had desecrated the Lord’s sanctuary. They were flooding the Lord’s altar with tears. They were weeping and wailing because the Lord no longer paid attention to them or accepted their offerings. Why had God turned away from them? It was because they had broken faith with their marriage partners. God plainly stated: “I hate divorce”. The men had abandoned the wives of their youth, broken their marriage covenants, and married other women. God was not pleased! Malachi admonished the people: “Guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.” America could well take this advice today when every other marriage ends in divorce and many live together without being married. This is a terrible shame, especially in the church and among church leaders. May the Lord help us to guard our spirits.

Read Mal. 3:1-5

I. The messenger

A. The Lord here promises to send His messenger who will prepare the way before Him. Then the Lord whom they are seeking – their Messiah – will come to His temple. The Lord who will come is the Messenger of the covenant whom they desire. This seems to be a prophetic look at both the first and second comings of Christ. In both cases He will send His messenger ahead and in both cases He will come to His temple. John the Baptist was the messenger to prepare them for His first coming. Malachi wasn’t the only one to write about this messenger who would prepare the way. Isa. 40:3 These prophecies were clearly fulfilled by John the Baptist. Mark 1:2-4 Later Jesus showed up unexpectedly at His temple to drive out the moneychangers and sellers. So, as Malachi had predicted, the Lord whom they were seeking would suddenly come to His temple. Jesus called it My house. Matt. 21:12-13

B. But this can also apply to Jesus’ Second Coming. The book of Revelation tells us that there will be 2 witnesses who will precede Him. Rev. 11 Then He will suddenly come as His feet touch the Mount of Olives and He comes to take His place as King. The Lord comes for those of us who long for Hi and desire Him. But the question is: “Who can endure the day of His coming? Who can stand when He appears?” You remember that at His arrest, Jesus
just said, “I am He!” and they all fell backwards. Who could stand then, and who will be able to stand when He comes in His glory? At His Second Coming it will be more serious as He comes to judge the world. Both times He will come as a refiner’s fire or launderer’s soap, calling people to repent and leave their sins. Some repented at His first coming. A remnant of Jews will repent at His Second Coming. Isa.59:20; Jer. 31:34; Rom. 11:26-27

II. Acceptable offerings or judgment

A. The very presence of the Lord acts as laundry soap or a fire that refines and purifies. Because He is holy and light, when He appears all dirt shows up. He is the only One who can “wash away” our filth. This is why the picture of the saints in heaven is of a people whose robes have been made white by the blood of the Lamb. Rev. 7:9, 13-14 He is not only a launderer. He is also a refiner and purifier of silver. Dan. 12:10 The Lord’s work in us is to make us purer than we are – to not only wash us clean in His blood, but also to transform us more and more into His image. Rom. 8:29 To do this He has to put us through the fire in order to refine out the impurities. The fire is painful. Many times it includes suffering. But in this way, through our trials, the Lord makes us more like Him and develops perseverance. James 1:2-3

B. The Lord through Malachi has had a lot to say about the priests and Levites in this book. Here He says that He will purify His servants, the Levites, refining them like gold and silver. Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness. Remember that in 1:7-8 the Lord accused the priests of calling His altar and table contemptible, and offering crippled and diseased animals to Him. Finally there will be men who will bring offerings in righteousness that will be acceptable to Him because they are worshiping in spirit and in truth. But when the Lord comes near He will come near for judgment as well. He will testify against and judge those who are living in a way that dishonors Him. He who refines His own people will judge those who are not His own.

III. Crimes against God and men

A. Who are these people? Some are involved in occult practices like sorcerers. Some are immoral, like adulterers. Some are dishonest, like those who lie or perjure themselves when they’re under oath. It sounds a lot like the list in Rev. 21:8 of those who will not be able to enter heaven. We are not surprised about those kinds of sinners being judged and condemned by the Lord. But look at the rest of the list. It includes those who defraud laborers of their wages. James 5:4 God
will judge those who get rich by cheating their employees. But what about the scam artists on the TV who cheat hard working people out of their money by promising miracles if they send it to them!

B. The list also includes those who oppress the widows and the fatherless. When you oppress people you push them down, mistreat and cheat them. How many widows have lost money by sending it to the cheaters on TV? The widows and the fatherless have always been the ones who have suffered down through history. Especially in times of war, the men are killed, leaving many widows, and children with no fathers. God is the Defender of the widows and fatherless. Ex. 22:22-24; Psa. 68:5 The list includes those who deprive aliens of justice. It often happens that people are treated unjustly if they are aliens who don’t really belong in the place they are living. God cares about widows, orphans and aliens, and He expects us to care about them, too. All of these are crimes against mankind, but their source is in their crime against God Himself! They do not fear the Lord.

Read Mal. 3:6-12

IV. Return to Me

A. The Lord makes it clear that He is a changeless God. He says here, “I the Lord do not change.” It reminds us of Heb. 13:8 that tells us that He is the same, yesterday, today and forever. He is the same merciful, holy God. Why does the Lord remind the people of Malachi’s time that He is changeless? It is the reason that they, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. If the Lord were changeable, then the Jews would have been destroyed. God keeps His promises, but we don’t! And the Jews didn’t keep their promises either. They had been turning away from His decrees ever since the time of their forefathers. They had refused to obey His Word. But in His great mercy, the Lord Almighty still calls to them: “Return to Me, and I will return to you.” But in their stubbornness they ask, “How are we to return?” It’s as if they refuse to recognize that they have wandered from His side. In fact, they seem to be accusing God of blaming them for something they’re not guilty of. So He gives them an example of their failures.

B. God asks, “Will a man rob God?” It’s almost incomprehensible to think of someone daring to steal from God, but the Lord says that they are guilty of this terrible crime. Not able to believe that they are guilty of robbing God, they challenge Him, in effect saying, “Prove it!” “How do we rob You?” They were robbing Him of tithes and offerings. The Old Testament Law is specific about how they were to tithe and what they were to offer. The tithes were used to support
the Levites so that they could spend their time serving the Lord. Nehemiah complained about this neglect of the Levites in Neh. 13:10-12. The Lord told them that the whole nation was under a curse because they were guilty of robbing Him. We Christians are no longer under the Law of Moses, but that doesn’t mean that we can just forget our responsibility to God and His servants. It is true that we sometimes rob God of money that is due Him. But we steal other things from Him, too, that He should have, like time, energy, devotion, fellowship, worship, obedience.

V. Test Me

A. The Lord tells them to bring the whole tithe into the storehouse. Why is it being put into a storehouse? “So there may be food in My house.” Without money the temple would not have the things necessary to keep it running. It’s like our churches. Without money they can’t continue to exist and minister to people. The priests and Levites had no way to support themselves. God’s system was for them to be supported by the tithes and offerings of the people. Num. 18:8, 21 This is why the problem developed during Malachi’s time and Nehemiah’s time. The Levites weren’t able to do their God-appointed job unless the people faithfully tithed their money and placed it in the temple. So today each of us must ask ourselves, “What belongs to God? Am I keeping some things from Him that rightfully belong to Him?” We are to bring not only our money, but our time, our strength, and our lives to Him that He may have the love and service that He so richly deserves.

B. The Lord calls us to test Him in this. In other words, He calls us to try Him out and see what happens when we put Him first in everything. The “food” God calls for from our lives may be material goods and money, or spiritual teaching. Remember Jesus’ conversation with Peter. He asked Peter repeatedly if he loved Him. Then He told Peter to feed His sheep. It seems clear that what He was saying to Peter is what He says to us today, “If you love Me, feed My sheep.” That’s a huge responsibility because it includes physical and spiritual feeding. Are we doing our part in giving money and ministering to those who need help and teaching? So the Lord challenges us to test Him. If we are faithful to do our part, He will be faithful to do His part. We cannot outgive our Lord! But it’s a question of trust. Are we willing to give to God the money we need? Are we willing to use our time and energy when maybe we won’t have enough for ourselves?

C. We have to go back to the character of God. Does He lie? Here He promises that if we do our part, He will do more than His part! He
will open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that we will not have room enough for it. When floodgates on dams are opened, the water pours forth in abundance and fills the whole valley or plain that is dry. The Lord is not specific about what He will pour out on us, except that it will be blessings. He is not like the TV scam artists who promise if you send “seed money” you will receive far more money back. God knows how to bless us and it’s not always in money. Here He promised to bless them by preventing pests from devouring their crops. He promised that the vines wouldn’t cast or lose their fruit. The Lord promised that all nations would call them blessed and their land delightful. The day will come when the downtrodden Jews will be blessed by the very presence of Jesus their Messiah who is their King!

Conclusion

Of course, the admonitions and promises in this book are primarily for God’s Chosen People, the Jews. But there are principles that apply to us as well. How about the “pests” that are devouring our money today, like high gas prices? What about the fruit of our service that we don’t always see? Does this mean that God has failed? Are all the promises only for the Jews? Of course not! The New Testament is full of His promises to us who are also His children. Matt. 6:25-34 Although we are no longer under the Law, we are responsible to put God first in everything. If we are open to His leading, He will show us where to give our money, how to spend our time, who we can help. But the big question is: Are we giving cheerfully, from a heart of love? II Cor. 9:6-8 Do we really believe that God is able to make us abound in every good work? That in all things at all times we will have all that we need?
Bible Studies
Malachi (5)
They Will Be Mine
Malachi 3:13-4:6

Introduction

In our last lesson we heard the Lord call the people of Malachi’s day saying, “Return to Me and I will return to you.” This remains God’s call to us as well. But so often we are like the Jews were at that time. We want to ask the Lord, “How are we to return?” It’s as if we feel satisfied with our level of Christianity. So the Lord comes back to us as He did to them with a questioning accusation: “Will a man rob God?” We want to defend ourselves so we ask, “How do we rob You?” And the answer comes back loud and clear. We rob or cheat God by not giving Him the money, time, energy, devotion, worship, and obedience that He deserves. So we found last week that God called them – and He also calls us – to test Him. He tells us to bring to Him all that He deserves and see if He will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour down blessings.

Read Mal. 3:13-18

I. Harsh things said against God

A. The Lord had accused them of wearying Him with their worthless words and robbing Him of their tithes. Now He blames them for saying harsh things against Him. As usual, they aren’t ready to accept criticism so they question His accusation as they have done before. As if they are innocent, they ask, “What have we said against You?” Do we sometimes say or think harsh things against God? He is the only Perfect Person so it leaves nothing to say except praise and honor if we know and love Him. Their complaint was the same as the complaint of Asaph in Psa. 73. In verse 13 he complains that his innocence and purity has gained him nothing with God. These complainers said that it was futile and worthless to serve God because they hadn’t gained anything from obeying His Law and mourning before Him.

B. They felt they hadn’t gained a thing by faithfully following God’s Law and keeping the required fasts and sacrifices. This attitude makes it clear that their hearts were far from God and they considered service to Him a bore and a ritual with no reward. They had no living or loving relationship with Him. Do we obey God in order to gain something from Him? This is the attitude of the Word Faith people today. They think that God owes us things that we can just demand from Him. And they promise us riches, healing and miracles from God if we give them enough money! Those who
supposedly obeyed God weren’t getting what they wanted from Him. Does God owe us anything? NO! We owe Him everything! Why do we serve the Lord? Is it to get something out of Him or to honor Him because we love Him?

C. They were saying that the proud and arrogant seemed to be blessed. They were doing just great and seemed to be getting away with their pride. It was as if God didn’t notice. They saw the evildoers prosper. How could God bless those who were evil and did evil things? Even those who challenged God seemed to escape with no repercussions. It’s that way today! Those who flaunt their rebellion in the face of God seem to escape with no debts. If the arrogant, the evildoers, and the rebellious all get along just fine, what’s the use of living right and pleasing God? Asaph wrestled with this same question in Psalm 73. He said that he nearly lost his foothold on faith when he saw what was happening. v. 2-3 Later when he went into God’s House he understood that God is keeping the records and He will be their Judge. v. 16-20

II. A scroll of remembrance

A. As the church today drifts into “worship” that is not true worship, and “morality” that is immoral, the Lord, who is grieved, is looking for those who honor and love Him. A large part of the church today is offering contemptible sacrifices. It is teaching things that cause people to stumble. It is morally impure. It is robbing God of what He deserves. It is saying harsh things against God. It is acting like it is useless to serve God. In His grief and disappointment over these insults, the Lord is searching for those who really care about Him. Then those who feared and honored Him spent their time talking with each other about Him. How much do we actually talk to each other about the Lord – how wonderful He is, what He has done and said? Is it our joy and delight to talk with each other about our amazing Lord? Maybe we talk too much about negative things and sinful people and not enough about the beauties of our Lord and what He has taught us about Himself!

B. When we talk about Him out of love and the joy of knowing Him, He listens. And He not only listens. He tells the angels to write it down! This is what was done in the time of great kings. King Ahasuerus had the event recorded when Mordecai saved his life. It was a “scroll of remembrance” for him to refer to later so that he could rightly reward and honor Mordecai for his good deed. Esther 2:21-23 Later the King referred to the scroll or chronicles and remembered that he hadn’t rewarded Mordecai for saving his life. Esther 6:1-3 The Lord is not a harsh or unjust master as the Jews
of Malachi's time indicated. On the contrary, He is a loving Father, longing to bless those who fear and honor Him. He says, “They will be Mine.” We who love Him will belong to Him and be with Him forever. The Lord here calls us His treasured possession. We will be His greatest treasure. **Deut. 7:6**

C. The Lord promises to spare these who love Him enough to talk together about Him. Others will suffer His terrible wrath, but these who bring Him glory and love to talk about Him will be spared. The Lord says He will spare us as a father compassionately spares his son who faithfully and lovingly serves Him. **Psa. 103:13** We will be His – the possession He most treasured and the son whom He spares. Then the questions will be answered about why the arrogant seem to be blessed and the evildoers seem to prosper. The Lord will make a clear distinction between the righteous and the wicked – those who serve God and those who don’t. **Gen. 18:25** God will finally be proven to be faithful and just, and God’s loved ones wiser than the rest. Then at last the world will see that there is a difference between the righteous who serve God and the wicked who care nothing about the Lord. In **Psalm 73** Asaph saw that this life is not the whole story. The question is: “How and where do we end up?”

**Read Mal. 4:1-6**

**III. The day is coming**

A. During all the hard years when the arrogant seem to be blessed and the evildoers prosper, the Lord will be listening for the voices of His children who talk to each other about Him. He will spare them and count them as His treasured possession. Then the day of reckoning will finally come. It will be a day that burns like a furnace. It will be a day of judgment for the arrogant, the evildoer, and those who challenge God. For awhile they seemed to have escaped Scot free. But they are named again in **verse 1.** Only this time they are called “stubble” and are ‘set on fire”. Even the roots with the branches will be devoured – those who came before and after, following their evil ways. There will be no root or branch left to them. Probably the root refers to ancestors and the branch to descendants. Nothing will be left of all they had banked on. **Isa. 5:24**

B. Next the Lord draws a sharp line of distinction between them and us. **But for you...** Now the Lord writes very personally to us. Who are we? **“Those who revere My name.”** If His name is precious to us and honored by us, we will be honored by Him. **II Tim. 2:12**
Lord says that the sun of righteousness will arise with healing in its wings. This seems to be a double picture. After a long, dark night, the sun will finally rise. Paul wrote about how the light of the sun makes everything visible in Eph. 5:14. This sun no doubt refers to God’s Son who is righteous, and who rescues us from the darkness and brings healing.

C. Then will come the great day of rejoicing! We will be leaping and dancing like calves that have been released from their stalls. We’ll jump around like kids, free and rejoicing in our Lord. Our years of darkness in this painful “prison” will end as we burst forth victorious over all our enemies. Then it will be evident who is blessed and who gets trampled as ashes. It’s our responsibility at present to wait patiently on the Lord’s timing, to faithfully love and revere Him, to talk about Him often with each other, and to believe that a much better day is coming. James 5:7-11 We will get out of our prison-like stall, and the wicked will get their just judgment.

IV. A reminder and a promise

A. Malachi closes his prophecy with a reminder and a promise. The reminder is to keep the Law of Moses. The Lord wants them to remember the laws He gave them at Horeb. They must not only remember, but also obey what He has told them. We are no longer under the Law of Moses as Christians, but we are all instructed to obey Christ’s commands. I John 2:3-6 Christ’s commands are different from the rituals and traditions of the Law. They were good, but often they were only followed on the surface without the heart or the spirit being committed to be like God. When Jesus taught His disciples about the principles of giving, praying and fasting in Matt. 6, He cautioned them not to just go through the motions for the praise of men. Three times there He told them not to be like the hypocrites who looked good on the outside, but their hearts were not right. Matt. 6:2,5,16 John emphasizes that our love for Christ and the brethren must be at the center of all we do. John 3:14-18

B. God’s promise here is that He will send the prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. It will not be dreadful for those who love Christ and are waiting for His appearing. Jesus said in Matt. 11:14 that John the Baptist fulfilled this prophecy. The angel Gabriel explained to Zechariah who became the father of John the Baptist what his ministry would do. Luke 1:17 John would be used by God to prepare the people for the Lord Jesus by turning their hearts. How did he turn their hearts? He preached repentance! Repentance is turning. Once again I believe that this prophecy may have a dual fulfillment. As Christ has already come and yet will
come again, I believe that while John the Baptist prepared the people for the first coming, the 2 witnesses of Revelation will especially prepare the Jews for His second coming. **Rev. 11:3** God is faithful about calling people to repentance before He must bring judgment. Look what He did for Nineveh!

**Conclusion**

Does the Lord know about our struggles and problems? Does He care when we have a hard time paying our bills or when we have lost something very valuable, like our health? What a comfort it is to know that God is blessed and rejoicing when He sees us being faithful and trusting Him in spite of all the difficulties we face in this world. His eyes never leave us. **Psa. 33:18-19** We found in this passage that He listens and hears our conversations about Him. And we know that He hears the prayers of His people who are His treasured possession. **Psa. 34:15-16** What a privilege we have to be the treasure of our Almighty Lord. It’s not His stars and galaxies that He treasures most, but us little, unimportant people. We are the children He will spare even though He didn’t spare His beloved Son but sent Him to die in our place. Let us look for ways to bring Him joy and let Him know how very much we love Him.