

“Malachi: Lose Hopelessness”

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All fall we have been looking at various characters in scripture, various men and various women, who have been instructing us or teaching us through the Word of God on how to be a loser. Now for those of you who are new to us, you hear that term “loser,” and in our culture it is not a positive statement, but what we have been doing all fall is realizing there are things in our lives that are weighing us down. There are things that are hindering us; sometimes it’s un-forgiveness, sometimes it’s judgmental, sometimes it’s self-reliance, sometimes it’s idols, sometimes it’s selfishness. Whatever that may be, until those things are lost, or when we allow the Lord to remove them from our lives, they hinder us from being where God needs us and from doing what God wants us to do.

Though it is Caboose Sunday, though it is the end of the track, so to speak, this week is very different from the weeks past. In the weeks past, whether it was Adam and Eve, Ruth, Samuel or Isaiah, we studied the man or the woman and sometimes they were a positive example of what it looks like when you do lose something you need to lose and what the Lord can do in your life. Sometimes there are negative examples that say if you don’t lose it then this can happen in your life. Today in the very last week, in the last book of the Old Testament, when we come to the subject matter of losing hopelessness, we’re not actually going to look at the man of Malachi, we’re going to look at the message of Malachi.

You say why would you change; you’ve been doing the same thing all these weeks so why change the format? Because every man and every woman who walks with the Lord and trusts in the Lord has hope. And every one who does not walk with the Lord and does not have faith in the Lord is hopeless. So every person who exhibited a positive model this fall exhibited hope, and every one who did not exhibited hopelessness. So today from the Book of

Malachi we're going to see how we lose hopelessness, how do we have hope again? How do we, though not in the true sense be like my children, who wake up every morning and see who can be the first to tell us how many days until Christmas? One thing that the children in the other side of the building have that most of us have lost is they have hope still. They haven't been burned like some of you have been burned. They haven't been torched like some of you have been torched. They haven't fallen like some of you have fallen. And we've all got a story; we've all got a testimony. The question isn't have we been knocked down; the question is how do we get back up.

So today is the message of hopelessness. It's going to start very negatively; we're going to talk about what are the things in our lives and in our culture that can bring about hopelessness. Then we're going to talk about what are the things that should be in our lives that can bring about hope. And then putting those pieces together, how do we respond to it? So beginning in Malachi chapter 1, the last book of the Old Testament, I just want to ask a simple question: what is it in life or how does hopelessness arise? I want to go through these points and then we'll read the text in Malachi that shows it.

The first thing that happens is this: you and I become hopeless when we experience disappointment with leaders, disappointment with those whom we expect to give an example for us. In Malachi 1 beginning in verse 6: "6A son honors his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is my honor? and if I be a master, where is my fear? Says the Lord of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name. And you say, Wherein have we despised your name? 7You offer polluted bread upon my altar; and you say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that you say, The table of the Lord is contemptible. 8And if you offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And if you offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord of Hosts. 11For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my

name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts. 12But you have profaned it, in that you say, The table of the Lord is polluted; and the fruit thereof, even his meat, is contemptible. 13You said also, Behold, what a weariness is it! and you have snuffed at it, saith the Lord of hosts: and you brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus you brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith the Lord?"

What was happening in the days of Malachi, understand historically speaking, we're roughly four to five hundred years before what we know as the time of Christ. It was a day in which the Temple had been rebuilt; they had come back from captivity; the Babylonian captivity was over. And yet what is happening here is that which was supposed to be holy has become profane. And the leadership here in Malachi's day is a little bit different from the leadership today, and you're about to see what I mean. In those days, like Jesus' days, you remember at His trial there was what we call the Sanhedrin. They were those leaders who not only upheld the law but they were also the religious leaders of the day. In Malachi's day, just as in Jesus' day, those who were the leaders, those who were the examples, those who were to model life for everybody else were both political and religious leaders combined in one.

You and I don't live in that same world today, but I think you and I would testify that both of those groups of people have given us plenty to be disappointed about. They've given us plenty to lose hope over. Let's start with the first group; how about the politicians of this world? What I'm about to say is not political. It has nothing to do with whatever party you subscribe to or tend to vote for because I've got some news for you: it seems like lately it doesn't matter whom you send, they're not helping anything. It doesn't matter what color they claim, what side they claim, what party they claim; it just appears that anything they put their hand to disappoints all of us, doesn't it? I've yet to find anybody who's really happy about much. In fact, this week what we know as the United States of America's political figures, our Congress reached an all-time low. We, the people (don't we have a document that starts like that?) think less of them than we've ever thought of them according to

the latest stats. It's a mess out there. And yet, what happens every election cycle, it doesn't matter if it's an incumbent or new person, we've got hope that if we send them things will be better. We've got hope that if we send them things will improve. Can you just testify with me that it's been a life of disappointment? Those we had hoped for did not provide the hope we needed. Those we thought surely if anybody can fix this, it's them. And it continues to fall flat. There is disappointment with leadership all around.

And it's not just the politicians. Let me get real personal with you: it's the preachers, too. After all, don't you just somewhat expect that from the politicians? Don't you expect that from those officials? But surely not from the leaders of the church; surely not the pastors and the preachers. If there's anybody we should have hope in, it should be them. Now folks, I can preach to this choir because "I are it." Have you watched the news? Have you read the internet blogs? It's an absolute disaster out there, what you see supposable men and women of God doing with their lives. I don't want to get into details and I don't want to call names, just go and do an internet search for preachers acting badly and you'll find it. It's every where.

Let me be honest with you. Maybe you're new to First Baptist, maybe you're new to the community, and maybe you're like the stories I hear day after day that some pastor, some preacher lost your trust. You sent money into their ministry and then you found out what they did with it. Or you trusted them when they talked about their family and then you heard what he did on his wife. And you're discouraged; you're disillusioned. And can I be honest with you: you've got every right to be.

And you look up here, as I'm the one on the stage, and you've got every right based on news to question is that how Jeff lives his life Monday through Saturday? Is that what he does? He gets up on Sunday and wow, he knocks it out, but what's really happening on Tuesday afternoon? What's really happening with this, and what's really happening with that? I can give you some assurance today that you can know for a fact that at least

here, and at least with me, what you hear out there isn't happening. You say how can we know? If you come next Sunday morning, Christmas morning, and I'm up here then I'm good. You say how do you know that? I can tell you that I've been married to Traci Meyers for almost sixteen years and she wouldn't hold a press conference – she'd be turning me into a firing-range! I'm serious! I married a girl from central Texas who knows how to shoot better than I do! There wouldn't be any press conferences. There wouldn't be she and I sitting on stools crying together; there wouldn't be any tears because I'd be dead, I'm just going to be honest with you. Now there are days that I'm allowed to go on vacation with my family so the next time you don't see me up here, don't panic, okay?

But unfortunately, my profession has given reasons to be disappointed. The men and the women in the world of public service and in the world of ministry have disappointed us. They've made us think is there hope anywhere with anybody? But it's not just the leaders that have disappointed us. I think another reason a lot of us have lost hope is we look all around us and we have found and discovered that what we know as the family is in complete disarray. If you'll go with me to Malachi chapter 2, I want to show you that in his day they had kind of the same issues.

Malachi 2:14: “14Yet you say, Wherefore? Because the Lord has been witness between thee and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant. 15And did not he make one? Yet had he the residue of the spirit. And wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let none deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. 16For the Lord, the God of Israel, saith that he hateth putting away: for one covereth violence with his garment, saith the Lord of hosts: therefore take heed to your spirit, that you deal not treacherously.”

Now when I read particularly verse 16, as you go around the room today, we live in a society where we have a multiplicity of English translations

of scripture. And most of those English translations of scripture, at least within the last one hundred years, have said there that God, or the Lord, hates divorce. As I read, it says the Lord hates putting away. You say what's the difference; isn't that the same thing? No; in fact as you study and this is a sermon for a different day, if you study in particular the Book of Deuteronomy the Lord gives different instructions for putting away than He does for divorce. And you say what is this and what is the difference?

For the sake of time today, allow me to give you a simple illustration. Almost sixteen years ago when Traci and I got married, had we been in Biblical days, had we been in Malachi's day, my father-in-law would have given me a dowry. Now I was a pastor of a small church in the middle of nowhere and it wouldn't have been worth much; he probably could have pulled it out of one pocket. But that being said, it was to be the equivalent of one year's wages.

There were two reasons for the dowry in Biblical days. Number one, and this isn't a bad idea if we could return to it: the dowry was given and for the first year of marriage the man was not to work and they were to establish their home, establish their family and spend some good time together. Wow; that would solve some issues we've got in marriage, right? And the other thing is that it was divorce protection. You say divorce protection? When a young lady was divorced from her husband, removed out of the house, her dad is deceased, her husband has left her, she has no means of income, no means of any type of support, how is she going to make it? The dowry was to be given back to her. That is why Jesus illustrates from the Book of Deuteronomy if you give a bill of divorcement it's not just a legal piece of paper, it's literally the bill back. So what would happen is that lady had the opportunity to either get married again or to at least live and support herself in light of her husband's decision.

Let me tell you what putting away is. Putting away is when an individual, a man, got tired of his wife of so many years (notice it says the wife of your youth) and said I either (a) don't have the money to give you or (b) I really like you being around cooking meals and taking care of the

kids so here's what I'm going to do: I'm going to put you in the guest room and I'm going to go get a new model. Now what comes with that new model? A new dowry. And you wonder why some of these guys were running around with tons of wives; it was a great way to get good income! So the putting away was taking the family, the wife of his youth, and putting it to the side for one's own personal desires or comforts.

Oh, how we've done that in our culture. We've said marriage is out of date; just enjoy the pleasures thereof but don't make a commitment. We live in a society today where roughly half of Americans think what we know as Biblical marriage is outdated, archaic, and we don't need it. We have taken the family and we've put it away. We've taken kids and we've put them away because we'd rather have our success than their well-being. We'd rather have our toys than their well-being. We are putting away what God instituted. And by the way, you know God instituted the family before He did the church? Just a thought there. So what we've done is the same thing. He said I hate when you take the family and make them second saddle; I hate when you take the family and say it's just arbitrary. It's enough to give you some hopelessness, isn't it? When you start seeing what's happening in the lives of kids, in the lives of families, in the lives of those who are without, there's not much cause for hope. It's happening in our leadership; it's happening in our families.

But there's a third area in the Book of Malachi chapter 3 that it was occurring. Not just disappointment with the leaders, not just the disarray of the family, but the disrepair of the church. Now understand in Malachi's day, I do realize it was a Temple. I realize the veil had yet to be torn; I realize that but it will be a picture for us. By the way, Malachi 3 is that famous passage where it talks about bringing all the tithes into the storehouse. I'm not going to talk about tithing; I'm going to talk about what led to having to be told to do it. Malachi 3:7. "7Even from the days of your fathers you are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts. But you said, Wherein shall we return? 8Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed

me. But you say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.”

What was happening is the actual physical structure of the Temple was in disrepair because people had not been faithful with their lives of faith. Now I'm not here today to talk about buildings, but I think we could all testify that at least in our culture what we know as the church of Jesus Christ is in a mess. Now those of you who may be guests or visitors, I'm going to speak very pointedly here, you may or may not be aware that we are technically what we call a Southern Baptist Church. And as a Southern Baptist Church we are recognized by most as being the most evangelistic, the most mission minded and the most giving of all other evangelical organizations in America, and yet for four straight years we are in decline. If the largest group of the best of the best is in a mess what can you say about the rest?

The church is in disrepair; doors are closing every day in churches all across America. The effectiveness of churches, now it does have a lot to do with the leaders that we talked about earlier, and the influence that the church used to have is no longer there. The voice that the church used to have that was respected is no longer there. We're now the bigots; we're now the narrow-minded. We are now slowly becoming the enemy of the culture. Wow - you can't have hope in the leaders, you can't have hope in families, you can't even have hope in the church any more. And you wonder why we frown so much. You wonder why we get up and don't have a spring in our step. You wonder why there is so little to really get excited about in life.

I've got good news for you: the Book of Malachi does not have three chapters; it has four. And the fourth chapter of Malachi will be the last portion of scripture that God will give the Israelites for 400 years. The next page is blank; that page is 400 years worth of time. So what the Lord gave them, the same mess you're in, said this is why you can have hope. This chapter 4 is the one thing they had to hang their hat on, they had to hold on to because if they didn't hold on to this they would be hopeless. This is what gave them, and should give us, hope. So how is it that in the world of hopelessness we can have hope?

It's very simple: I want to deal with the present, the past and the future. Malachi 4:2. "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings: and you shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall." The Sun of righteousness, S-U-N, that is no less, no more than Jesus Christ Himself. In Matthew 17 He appears as bright as the sun. In Revelation 1 His visibility is as the sun. He is the One with healing in His wings, the story of the Old Testament, coming out on the wings of the eagle. Today, present tense, in the midst of all I have shared with you, let me give you some insight to give you hope: Jesus is still the Savior. Jesus is still healing. Jesus is still restoring. And those who try to find hope in anything but Him are doomed not to find it. Jesus is still the Savior. If you have nothing else to hang your hat on, hang your hat on this: that you came into the world a sinner, you stayed a sinner, but you don't have to leave this world a sinner. You have the availability and the opportunity to be forgiven of your sins, saved, and as Malachi says, to have healing in your wings. You have access today in the present. There's hope in Jesus in a world that is in turmoil.

So in the present tense we have the opportunity, but also we need to look to the past. Look in verse 4. "Remember the law of Moses." Moses comes down from the mountain, he offers what we know as the Ten Commandments; it's very emblematic of all of what we know as the Old Testament. In a world that is so hopeless you can have hope that if the Word of God says it, it is. You can have hope that according to Psalm 27, that if your mother and father forsake you, the Lord will lift you up. You can have hope that Jesus said in Matthew 28, "I will never leave you, I will never forsake you." You can have hope in Romans 10 that whoever calls on the name of the Lord, not might be, but shall be saved. You can have hope that in a world that's gone nuts, you can look at the Word of God and say it still rings true.

Let me give you some hope today from Galatians 6: do not be foolish, God is not mocked. He is not mocked. If you plant sin, you will reap sin. If you plant righteousness, you will reap righteousness. How many times have

you said why do they not reap the consequences of their sin? According to the Bible, God is not mocked; He's just not on your time scale. The Bible says, "Revenge is mine saith the Lord." Our hopelessness of why does this not come together, the past, the record of God's Word from Genesis to yes, Malachi and even further, is when the Lord says it, it takes place.

So we have hope in the present: salvation. Hope in the past: the Word of God. But there is hope in the future. Look at verse 5-6, the last two verses of the Old Testament. "I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse."

If there is one group of people in this world, collectively, that in my opinion, in the flesh that should have no reason for hope it is those we know as the Jewish people. They have been persecuted more than all other groups combined. They have been kicked out, they have been trampled, they have been robbed, and yet they are some of the most hopeful people in all the world. You say how does that happen? Next spring when they celebrate the Passover meal, no matter the size of their family, they will always leave a seat empty, and during the Passover meal they have the youngest who is of age in the room to go open the door just in case Elijah has come back! The hope is, they believe, that as much as they've been through, as horrible as it had been that the Lord will eventually return and redeem.

That is the message of the Book of Revelation; that is the message at the end of the Bible. No matter how bad it gets here, guess what? Jesus is coming back. He will establish His throne. Listen: there is a hopeless world here that will not have hope until Jesus shows back up again. You say how do I have hope? Have hope in Jesus as Savior; have hope in that the Bible is still true and comes to fruition; and have hope that in spite of all that we see eventually the Lord Himself descends, shows up, restores, redeems and heals and fixes some things. That's why we can have hope. That's why you need to read

the Book of Revelation. That's why you need to read the last chapter in the Book of Malachi because if you stopped at chapter 3, you've got a wreck. If you stopped at the Book of Jude, the book before Revelation, you've got a mess. You've got to read them because you know what we discover in the end? In the end God wins! And you watch the news and you read the paper and you say is there any way the Lord can redeem this? Oh yes, He can – because He did it in Malachi's days and He can do it in ours as well.

So now the question becomes this: how do we respond? Knowing that we live in a hopeless world and almost have reason to be hopeless, knowing the Lord has given us a reason for hope, so what do we do? How do we actually live on Monday? How do we actually put this into action? Two simple things. The first thing is this: you've got to go. Jesus commissioned us to be light into darkness. If you're going to be light, you've got to go out into the darkness. He said you are the salt of the earth. If you're going to be salt, you've got to go out into the earth. Let me ask you a question: are you salt or are you stew? I love stew; I really do. I believe that my Mom and Dad fix one of the best pots of stew I've ever had in my life. They're coming into town next week and I fully expect to get some of that. But do you know what I've learned about stew? Carrots, okra, potatoes, meat, whatever you put in it, every bite tastes the same. And that's exactly what you get in this old world of ours. It doesn't matter where they come from, where they say they're going, every bite tastes the same. But when you put salt on anything, it is distinct and it is different.

You realize that we have not been called to go to the cave. We have not been called to hide under a blanket and say oh, the sky is falling. The Lord never changed the message: go ye (by the way, do you know what the word ye means? you and me) into all (do you know what the word all means in Greek? all) the world (do you know what the world means in Greek? the world). "Go ye into all the world." We have been commissioned to go so unless you're going, you're never going to have hope; going to that school, going to that place of employment, going to that foreign country

on a mission trip. If you're not going on mission with the Lord, you will be without hope. It's when we go and pack shoes, it's when we go and deliver jeans, it's when we go on a mission trip or when we go into that QT and share hope with the person behind the counter; that's how you have hope. You never have hope by sitting and watching the news. That won't give you hope, I promise you. That will give you a migraine!

But there's a second thing: we're to go and we are to give. In just a few moments, we're going to have the opportunity as a church body to give specifically to missions as we've advertized strategic mission partners through what we know as the North American Mission Board with the Annie Armstrong Offering, the International Mission Board with the Lottie Moon Offering; over 10,000 mission partners all over the world who right now and 24 hours a day, seven days a week are sharing the message of Jesus Christ. Let me tell you why they need to go: they need to go because the world is getting darker. We need more and more men and women going into wherever with the Gospel of Jesus Christ and they can't go unless we give.

You can't go everywhere. Listen: why I give to missions is because I can't go to all 196 countries. I can't go to every people group, but God has called some who speak a language I can't pronounce to go to people I've never seen. And by my giving sacrificially they are able to go. I can go to a school; I can go to a Chamber of Commerce; I can go to a house, but I don't have the opportunity to go into some of those communities so when we give what we're doing is responding in hope. When you go and serve the Lord you're saying I have hope. When you give, you're giving hope and you're going to receive hope as well.

In just a moment before we have our time of offering, we have our final video testimony. I've been telling some of you for weeks this is caboose Sunday, this is the end, this is the climax of "Be A Loser." And when we talk about missions we talk about countries we can't pronounce, we talk about places that rarely you can even get into even with a passport, but sometimes you find out that the mission field isn't very far in front

of you. It's not far from you because when you share Jesus, when you share the Word of God, what you are sharing is hope. Let's pray.