

Malachi 1:1-14

“Rightly Responding To The Love Of God”

Outside of the 1st Vs, there's very little known about this particular prophet. In Vs 1 he answers “*from whom*” (the Lord), “*to whom*” (Israel) & “*through whom*”, (Malachi”).

We really don't know anything else about him. Truth be told (however), of greater importance than the man, is the message that he brings. & It seems to me that Malachi was much more concerned w/being *faithful* than he was being *famous*. It doesn't really matter where he lived, which family or tribe he came from, if he had previously been serving as a priest... Those things we may find interesting, but they're not at all essential. What's important is, “What does God have to say?” Amen? The name “Malachi” actually means, “my Messenger” & it's quite a message he brings indeed.

What we *do* know is that Malachi ministered either contemporary with or directly following the days of Nehemiah (certainly the same generation)... **We know that based on the fact that he was ministering to a time whereby the temple had been rebuilt, the sacrifices had resumed, they had a governor (Nehemiah was the last civil ruler over Jerusalem). Malachi addresses the same issues Nehemiah was dealing with, (the priesthood was defiled, marriages were corrupt & there was great neglect of the tithes & offerings).**

So he was ministering to the exiles who'd returned from the bondage of Babylon, but it was some 100 yrs after their initial return (well after the days of Zechariah & the prophet Haggai).

& The stage sets something like this. The temple is rebuilt, sacrifices & feast days have resumed, yet God had made dramatic promises of restoration, the coming Messiah & the reign of His righteousness through these prophets that were still very far from fulfillment (& some of which are to be fulfilled even still in the millennial kingdom).

But as we've noted in previous studies, it's not at all uncommon for God to reveal to us *what* He's going to do, but we rarely know *when* He's going to do it. Most of us assume once we know “what” - “when” is right around the corner & certainly they were no different. So as you might imagine, these (thus far) unfulfilled promises, kind of left the nation of Israel *languishing* in the disappointment of unfulfilled hopes...

It led to a sense of disillusionment, of doubt & more or less lulled them into a careless, negligent kind of walk w/God, a low regard for God & His goodness *toward* them, His love *for* them (& *His holiness*, how worthy of our very best He truly is).

At this point Israel needed 2 things. #1 An assurance of God's love for them. & #2 A wake up call. A challenge to examine their own disobedient hearts, that they might repent & return to God in truth.

Vs 1-2a

Couple things we want to take note of here as we launch out into our study of the book of Malachi. #1 (In Vs 1) we read, “The *burden* of the word of the LORD”. You’ll note the word “LORD” is in all caps, meaning it’s the Hebrew “Yahweh” or the covenant name of God toward Israel. So instantly/immediately there’s a recalling of the covenant that’s brought back to mind as God begins to address the nation.

Well over a millennium earlier, God had called their forefather Ab out of a pagan land, had made an everlasting covenant w/him. He had been faithful to uphold it from that day forward & had no intentions of abandoning it now. One of the things we stress around here over & over again is the unyielding, unrelenting faithfulness of the word of God. God is here reminding them of that fact. What that means is that if there’s a problem in the nations walk/relationship w/God, it’s *not* on God’s side (He’s faithful). That only leaves one alternative doesn’t it? It’s on *their side*.

& By way of a quick application here, allow me to say that the same holds true for you & me today... If you find yourself in a lull, disappointed, disillusioned or disheartened in your walk w/God. You find yourself drifting in & out of godly standards, things just aren’t what they used to be between you & God. Friend, I just want to boldly (lovingly) tell you, that’s *not* on God’s end! He is the same yesterday, today & forever! **The same God who saved you, made all things new for you, gave life & zeal for the ways/word of God to you is still right there desiring to cultivate a deeper relationship with you. God’s not the One who waived in the relationship. He made a covenant w/you (in Christ) & He always remains true to His word... That only leaves 1 alternative... you’ve slipped, you’ve stumbled, you need to repent & you need to return to God...**

But Vs 1 speaks of the “burden” of the word of the Lord. Another way to understand that is that Malachi has a word from God for them, & it’s “heavy”. They’re going to feel the “weight” of it. He’s not saying that it’s burden to him in the sense that it’s just a draining, cumbersome affliction. But that it’s impactful, powerful, challenging & they need to allow it to sink it & take root that it might bear fruit to the glory of God.

Again; so to w/you & me. Why does God challenge our hearts w/His word? Because He wants to *change* our hearts. He wants to draw us near, help us grow in holiness & true godliness.

“I have loved you,’ says the LORD.” Listen, there’s much correction to come, specific correction. But before He *corrects* them, God assures them of His *love* for them.

I trust that if you've known the Lord for more than a few weeks, you've sensed the convicting, correcting hand of God upon your life. You should know that nothing but the deep & passionate *love* of God inspires the *correcting hand* of God.

& This is the fundamental element that lays the foundation for their right response (& might I say, *our* right response) to God. The reason we love God is because He 1st loved us. But Jesus said it clearly in Jn 14:15, **"If you love Me, keep My commandments."**¹ What that tells us is that our love for God is more than an ethereal, ooie gooie emotion toward God, but that it's more accurately an appropriate response (as seen in practical actions) to His word. True love doesn't express itself in noun form, but verb form, rightly responding to the word of God.

& Just so you know, I don't want you to get caught up in what's been translated in the past tense in the statement, "I *have* loved you, says the Lord." (As though He doesn't anymore). The Hebrew verb is actually expressed in the "perfect tense" which represents more of a completed state rather than a past state. In other words God is saying, "I love you fully, completely, eternally". We might say, "I have loved you, I do love you, I will love you, says the Lord." There's an "entirety" about the word, "You're always completely enveloped in My love" says the Lord.

Vs 2-5

Herein lies the audacity of the children of God. God's love for His people is so great that to stop & think it through would seem to leave no doubt, no question. But they did question it. "Yet you say, 'In what way have You loved us?'" It's the kind of question that is rarely spoken but all too commonly resides in the hearts of the people of God...

We look beyond countless blessings to find our focus on one (or perhaps a few) areas of struggle or difficulty, & on the basis of that we dare to doubt the love of God. "God, if You truly love me, then why ___?" Fill in the blank... But let me just state this & then we'll spend a minute developing this. It may come as a shock to us, but ultimately, eternally, God is not working to make us happy, but to make us *holy*. He's not developing our comfort, but our *consecration*.

"In what way have You loved us?" The book of Malachi revolves around 7 questions asked by the people of God, all of which reveal doubting, discouraged & sinful hearts. **"In what way have You loved us?"** (Ch 1:2). **"In what way have we despised Your name?"** (Ch 1:6).

¹ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Jn 14:15). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

“In what way have we defiled You?” (Ch 1:7) “In what way have we wearied Him?” (Ch 2:17) “In what way shall we return?” (Ch 3:7) “In what way have we robbed You?” (Ch 3:8) & “In what way have we spoken against You?” (Ch 3:13)

Each of these questions hold something in common. Innocence on Israel’s end & an indictment against God. In other words, they’ve justified themselves & criminalized God. “We don’t see a problem on our end God, but we certainly feel that *You’ve* let *us* down.” They seem blinded to the fact that they’re the ones who’ve betrayed trusting in God, they no longer stand on the firm foundation of His word, they consider *Him* unfaithful to them, when in reality just the opposite is true...

But such is the deceptive nature of sin, isn’t it? It sees good as evil & evil as good. Sin excuses me & accuses you & that’s essentially what is happening between Israel & God in the book of Malachi. “Well, God You said this, we don’t see it, so I guess we just can’t truly trust in Your word.” But the truth is that it’s not God’s faithfulness that needs examined or called into question, it’s our sin of unbelief, *therein* lies the problem.

But family, God is so gracious. He condescends, He stoops down to entertain & answer the question in their hearts... Here’s the bottom line of His answer. “The fact that I have chosen you, should remove all doubt & prove to you that I love you.” Think it through, for God to choose Israel, He had to reject *everyone else!*

God is saying, “What more do you want from Me? I have chosen you *exclusively*, established an everlasting covenant w/you to do *for* you & *through* you things that I will *never* do through any other nation on earth throughout all time & eternity!” Family, that’s pretty compelling evidence!

& Can I say to you, the fact that God has *chosen* you, should dispel all doubt & constantly assure & remind you of His love *for* you!

He says, “Esau was Jacob’s brother, yet Jacob I have loved & Esau I have hated, laid waste to his mountains & his heritage. They’ll try to rebuild but I will throw down. His will be known as a wicked land (Israel is called “the Holy Land”).”

He’s saying, “By all rights, Esau was born 1st & according to that order *he* could’ve inherited the covenant.” (Ab had Isaac, but Isaac had twin boys, Esau [who came out 1st] & Jacob [whose name God changed to Israel]). “Yet I promised the rights/privilege of the covenant to Jacob (the younger) before either of them were ever born. I preserved Jacob, yet punished Esau.”

Now; I’m going to touch on this & then we need to keep moving.

Because this idea of God “hating” Esau troubles us in some respect. But again, context is everything. God is speaking in direct regard to the covenant relationship He established w/Israel. If you read the Genesis account, you’ll discover that Esau (the man) was very blessed indeed... But as a *nation*, as it pertains to the covenant *relations* (not eternal destination) God *accepted* Jacob, He *rejected* Esau.

God nowhere says that individual Edomites could never be saved... He’s not speaking of the predestination of one & the reprobation/condemnation of the other in terms of the opportunity for individual salvation. Let’s not divorce the totality of the counsel of the word of God. It states plainly in the law, “*You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother.*”² Study the scripture, both Edom (Esau) & Israel were punished by God (being driven into captivity) because of sin/disobedience. But as to where God promised to preserve Israel, He allowed the continued dispersion & ultimate annihilation of Edom. When’s the last time you ran into an Edomite? But you’re likely to run into an Israelite (a Jew) just about anywhere. God has been faithful to His word.

So, election is a strong, compelling proof of God’s love. That said, we should realize that God chose Jacob before they were born, before they’d done anything good or evil. What that says is that the reasons for God’s choosing don’t reside in us (as though we’re so great, study Jacob’s life, he had some issues), they reside in Him, because He’s so great.

But there’s even a more compelling proof of God’s love that Paul points out in the book of Romans. Election is powerful, but more so is the fact that, “*God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*”³ God’s love for us isn’t demonstrated in peachy/plush circumstance, but in the cross of J.C. who has loved us & demonstrated it by giving Himself for us.

Now; one might think, “Well, I don’t believe in Jesus; so I must not be chosen.” That can all change, believe on the Lord J.C. & you’ll discover you’re chosen as well. But let’s not blame God for the fact that *you’re* not willing to believe on Him. If you won’t choose Him, then don’t be upset that He doesn’t choose you...

Vs 6-8

Let’s remember God is speaking to a patriarchal society. You might be 70 & your dad may be 90, you’re still going to honor him as your father, what he says, goes. Yet God says He’s not receiving even *that* level of honor from *His* sons, *His* servants, the priests.

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Dt 23:7). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ro 5:8). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

He says, “You despise My name, you defile Me...” Wow... & Again, rather than receiving the admonition, they act offended, as if they don’t know what God’s talking about. Listen to me. The bible is clear, **“man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”**⁴ Outwardly they refer to God as their Father, as their Master, but inwardly they’re despising/defiling Him rather than reverencing Him & honoring Him.

In Isaiah He said it this way, **“...these people draw near with their mouths And honor Me with their lips, But have removed their hearts far from Me,”**⁵ Everything seemed good on the surface, but underneath it all their hearts had drifted into mechanical indifference.

They’d fallen into offering sacrifices that were blind & lame... Things clearly prohibited by the law. The sacrifices were to be perfect. W/out fault, w/out blemish, Why? Because those sacrifices were pointing ultimately to the perfect sacrifice of J.C. Who would take away the sins of the world! To offer anything less than their best would be to insult the sacrifice of God through His Son J.C.

Listen, God wanted them to *think about* their service/sacrifice to Him. & Guess what. He doesn’t want you & me to fall into mechanical indifference either, but that we think about our sacrifice, our service to Him! That we offer Him our very best, from the heart! If we’re not, there’s a real sense in which we dishonor Him. You see, it’s not only *what* we do, but *why* we do it!

They were offering “defiled” unfit food. God forbid that pastors/preachers today offer “defiled” food on the altar of service & sacrifice to Him. Sermons filled w/funny jokes, clever anecdotes, emotional stories lacking in God’s word... Unstudied, unprepared, unsound, wrongly dividing the truth... defiled food upon the altar.

They showed contempt for God’s table (God’s altar) by what they sacrificed upon it. Allow me to place this directly on your plate (in your world). Do you ever stop to really think about what you sacrifice & why you sacrifice it to the Lord & if you’re truly honoring Him w/your very best? & I’m just going to be bold here. I’m talking about the sacrifice of your time, your talents & your treasure.

How much time do you offer to the Lord? What about your gifts, your talents (abilities), how have you dedicated them to advancing God’s kingdom? Not for your gain, but for His glory? & Let’s talk money... Do you give more for your food after church than you sacrifice to God *in church*? I’m just trying to keep it real family...

⁴ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (1 Sa 16:7). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁵ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Is 29:13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Or is your giving... dare I say... “Lame”. “Blind” to the fact that this is my *worship*, my *sacrifice*, my *honor* to God? & I’m just gonna be honest, what you give really isn’t any of my business. I’m just telling you what the Lord is saying... It’s right here in black/white for us all! Mark Ch 12:41-44. You might be interested to know that Jesus watched how people gave to the temple treasury. & I’m just gonna tell you, He still pays attention to it. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Some people who will pay hundreds of dollars for sporting events, or sit out in the heat all day to watch a baseball game, feel good about themselves if they pop \$10-\$20 in the plate & gripe if church goes over an hour... Why? Their heart’s not in it, they’re not truly *thinking* about their sacrifice/service to God. & Family, I’m not throwing out condemnation, more for your consideration. It’s between you & God...

People have all kinds of time to do all kinds of things, but Sunday is “Family day, we stay home”. No time for God, won’t serve God. I may see what’s left at the end of a pay period before I consider giving to God. Guys, He doesn’t want the leftovers, He wants the 1st fruits, He’s worthy of the best, not what’s left.

It’s common that people will give to God (time, talents, treasure) so long as it really doesn’t cost them anything... King David had a completely different attitude. (2 Sam 24:24) He *refused* to offer to God that which cost him nothing.

“Offer it to your governor!” Imagine you’re having your boss, or the governor over for dinner. Are you going to set leftovers in front of them? Maybe you got them a gift, some old ratty shoes you’ve worn out. You gonna do that? No way! But people want to give the church (give to God) stuff that otherwise they’d just throw away! & To stay true to the text, it’s a “lame” sacrifice. God doesn’t honor it, best to just throw it away. God is worthy of the very best we can offer! Here’s the point. Our offerings to God are indicative of what’s in our heart, there’s just no getting around it... We’re to give God our best & He’ll bless the rest.

Vs 9-11

Vs 9. “Entreat God’s favor, that He may be gracious to us, while *this* is being done by your hands?” In other words, you think that by just going through some motions you’re rubbing the Djinni’s bottle & God is going to honor it?

If we’re not going to honor God (from the heart) then what makes us think He’s going to honor us? So if our prayer lives are lacking in results, perhaps rather than pointing the finger at God, the 1st thing we should do is examine our own lives... are we honoring the ways/word of God? (Is 59:1-3)

Of course God's not expecting sinless perfection. Again, it's a question of the truth of the position of our heart... Are we leading teachable, repentant lives that truly want to honor the Lord? Or playing games & hoping God doesn't notice? ... He knows.

Vs 10. God says, "It would be better to lock the doors of the church rather than fill it w/insincere lip service & a lack of true worship." No worship is better than irreverent, heartless or mechanical worship...

Vs 11 is being partially fulfilled today. But the fullness of its fulfillment will be realized in the millennial kingdom.

Vs 12-14

People complaining as if it's some huge burden to serve the Lord. "Oh the weariness..." Listen, we all get tired *in* the work, we should never grow weary *of* the work. If we're growing tired *of* the work, we need revival!

& Let's not fall into the sin of Ananias & Saphira, pretending to bring God our best when we're really offering less. "Cursed be the deceiver..." Shallow, insincere worship doesn't honor God, it offends Him.

Our God is a Great King & is worthy of nothing less than our very best. Let's pray & ask God to turn our hearts in truth toward Him.

Prayer Points:

God, truly You are a Great King. Forgive us for failing (so often) to recognize that & honor You accordingly. Forgive us for insincere, ½ hearted worship, mechanical indifference & losing sight of Your love. Father we look to the cross & surrender to Your love once more. Have Your way & be glorified in our lives. Give us repentant, refocused hearts...

"I have loved you, says the Lord." & God demonstrated that love in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. You can leave here today a new creation, forgiven & free through faith in J.C. Turn from your sin, trust in Him & you'll be saved!