
 THOSE WEIRD LITTLE OLD TESTAMENT BOOKS - MALACHI

Malachi is the last of the minor prophets, and fits in a similar time frame as Haggai and Zechariah - after the people have returned from exile. The book is well known for a few verses 2:16, 3:6, 3:10. After Malachi we have approx. 400 years of silence, until the events of the New Testament with the coming of John the Baptist and then Jesus. The book can be split into 3; God's heart, God's concerns, God's promise.

1:1-5 God's heart I have always loved you. This is the starting point of the book. God declares his love for his people. They reply is hurtful. The God of the universe states that he has always loved them. That is remarkable given their history of continually being unfaithful to God. Why do they say this? Because life was not as they expected. God had not acted as they thought he should.

God's reply is a bit hard to understand because he reminds them of Jacob and Esau. If read the story of Jacob and Esau it is hard to see why God chose Jacob to be the line through which he would fulfil his promises. Jacob was hardly a model character. But by God's grace, Jacob was blessed and became the father of the nation of Israel. Esau became the father of the nation of Edom who did not follow God. (This leads to lots of arguments about election and predestination) But the point is that it was God's grace that had led to Israel being God's chosen people. It was not something they had earned or deserved.

If this sounds familiar, it is because we do exactly the same thing. Things don't go so well for us and so we question the love of God. If God really loved me, then I would not be going through this hard time. But we have one irrefutable thing that the people of that time did not have. We have Jesus Christ. How do we know God loved us. Because God came down to earth and suffered and died for us. When God opened himself to a relationship of love then he opened himself up to the possibility of hurt. One writer said this "God is love. That is why he suffers. The tears of God are the meaning of history."

No matter what is happening in your life at the moment, the bottom line is that God loves you and has always loved you. That is by his grace. Not because you are good.

1:6 to 3:15 God's concerns The main portion of the book is God pointing out their apathy and half heartedness towards him. Some would say the opposite of love is not hate but apathy. The book has a dialogue in it between God and the people. The people are unaware that they are deeply loved by God. They don't see how their actions are showing contempt for him. They don't see how they have cheated God. Or how God is deeply upset by their actions.

Before we get into the specifics we need to understand how this has come about. The people had been in exile for 70 years. They had settled down with family, job connections. They were not in slavery. So to move back was a risky move. They knew the promises of Deut 30 but having made this move, they were not seeing the blessings they

expected. Basically they were disillusioned with God. That disillusionment led them to 3 areas of sin.

They were still offering sacrifices for their sin, but they were bringing the bare minimum they thought they could get away with. Sick lambs, stolen lambs. There was no sense of grief over their sin, that required a costly sacrifice.

We can do this as well. We can turn up to church service but it is just ritual. We are not truly worshipping. We are not serving with any sense of joy but we do it out of duty or obligation. We give God two hours on Sunday but we are not willing to give him more than that. We can give God the minimum we think we can get away with. We can try to squeeze in time with God but give him the left over time.

The men started to divorce their wives so they could marry others who were not Jews. This is not because God is anti inter racial marriages. It was that God knew if they married outside of Israel, they would be led astray to worship their gods. If you are in a marriage relationship with someone who does not believe in God, it is very hard to not be influenced by that. This is why marrying someone who is not a Christian is never a good idea. See 2 Corinthians 6:14-16.

Lots of debate around the words "I hate divorce." But taking this translation, the divorce would overwhelm the wife with cruelty. She would be widowed, with no means of support.

God hates divorce because of the impact it has on people and children. This is not a blanket declaration that divorce should never happen. Both in the NT and the OT there is a recognition that marriages do break down. This passage or any other should never be used as a weapon of shame or coercion to keep someone in a violent relationship. If you are in violent or abusive relationship, you should remove yourself from the situation as soon as you can. God does not expect you to stay. God can heal an abusive relationship or a marriage where there has been an affair. With lots of hard work and counselling and prayer it is possible.

We live in a culture where marriage is no longer honoured. More and more people live together rather than commit to a life long covenant. More and more people are not being faithful to their marriage vows because they don't see them as sacred vows before God. Instead they are conditional promises that basically say I love you now and if you love me as I expect, then I will stay. But if things change and I find I don't love you or you have not kept your end of the bargain by loving me as I need, then I am free to leave. Now no one actually says that in their vows, but that is what is meant.

This is a reminder for us of how seriously God takes marriage.

So guard your heart, do not be unfaithful to your wife. How do we guard our heart? By the actions we take. Avoiding porn. Avoiding putting ourselves in vulnerable positions. By being honest with ourselves - that at times we might feel attracted to others, and so we need to acknowledge this and act appropriately. The attraction is not the issue. It is



how we respond that is the issue. Invest more time with your spouse or deal with the issues that are making you vulnerable

If you are divorced, please know that God does not hate you. Yes, you need to own your part in the breakdown of your marriage. You might need the help of a counsellor to work through areas of brokenness in your life. You might need to confess and ask forgiveness for what you did wrong. But you need to know that your sin is covered by the blood of Jesus on the cross. You are loved by God. You are not a second class citizen in the church.

The third area God is unhappy with the Israelites is around their giving. The tithe (10%) paid for the priests and the system of gov't they had. There is debate if there was one tithe or two or even 3. ie 30% But they were disillusioned with God and so they were not bring the tithe to the temple.

There is always a direct link between our love for God and the generosity of our giving. Now despite what some would say, there is no New Testament command to tithe. We don't live under the law. In the New Testament we are instructed to give as we are able, to give generously, to support those who teach in the church, and to support those in need. God is interested in our heart attitude as much as the amount.

We can give 10% because we feel obligated but do it begrudgingly. We can give 10% but in fact be earning heaps more than we need, and so the 10% is not generous at all but stingy compared to what we have been given. This was the point Jesus made with the widows mite. Mark 12:42 She gave a very tiny amount, but compared to what she had it was huge and sacrificial. We can be giving 10% because that is what our church demands but then going to the foodbank because we can't feed our family. That does not honour God.

As we have been given by God, we are to give, freely, and generously. We are not under the Old Testament covenant, so there are no promises attached to our giving. But Jesus says as we live generously, (note the context of love, forgiveness, as much as money) we will be blessed. Note, it is not a promise of wealth.

It is spiritually abusive for a pastor to manipulate Scripture to say give to us, and God will bless you with more wealth. This promise is part of the OT covenant, not the new. God does promise as we put him first, he will give us what we need. (not want)

One way we can do that with our money, is to decide how much we are going to give to God and give to him first. By doing that, we are trusting God will provide for our needs in the future. If we do it the other way around, and give God what is left, we find that often we don't have anything left. There is always something else that we really "need."

3:16-4:6 **God's promise**

We can read Malachi and get the message well we just have to try harder. I don't say this to minimize the sin of the people. We need to understand God's attitude towards sin. But can we ever live up to God's expectations. In some ways our response to God is always half hearted. How can

we ever receive God's blessings that are promised at the end of this book

But God says to the people that he is going to send a messenger and he himself is going to sort things out. He will refine the sons of Levi so that perfect offerings will be bought. He will ensure that the people are God's treasured possession a people for himself. There will be healing as the Sun of Righteousness comes. God's people will leap with joy like calves let out into pasture. The Old Covenant required perfect obedience and even those who were faithful and feared God knew they could not live up to this. This would have been to understand. All they could do is wait for God.

We have much more clarity on this. God did send the prophet Elijah in the form of John the Baptist who did prepare the way for Jesus. John 4:6 is quoted in Luke 1:17 by the angel tell Zechariah about the son that he was to have.

We know that Jesus came to fulfil all the laws of the Old Covenant. He perfectly fulfilled the Law and he has given that to us. He has taken our punishment for our rebellion. The goodness of God has been given to us.

But there is also warning in these last chapters. There is this promise of blessing but we also see judgement. 3:16. Its like God is saying. I know you can never respond as you should. And I am coming to give you a way forward. To give you a new heart and a new spirit. But there is still a day of accountability coming. And that should be really sobering. Because if we do not know Jesus Christ, if we have not turned our hearts to God and reached out for the free gift he offers, then there is no blessing only heart ache. There is a day of accountability. And that should motivate us to share the grace the good news that we have.

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REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

- Have there been times in your life when you have questioned or doubted God's love for you? What are some ways we can fully grasp the depth of this love for us. (see Ephesians 3:18-19)
- How does apathy towards God manifest in the church today?
- What might be the equivalent today of bringing sick lambs to the altar?
- Compare Malachi 2:13-14 with 1 Peter 3:7. What does this tell us about God, prayer, marriage?
- How do you decide how much money to give to God? What factors should we take into account?
- Discuss the tension between the coming day of judgment and the amazing future we have promised to us. How should it impact us?



CENTRAL BAPTIST

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