

Place: Lurgan Baptist 8:1:2012

MALACHI'S MIGHTY MINISTRY

Reading: Malachi 1:1-5

1. SETTING THE SCENE

A church member scolded her pastor for preaching a series of sermons on the “ *Sins of the Saints.* ” “ *After all,* ” she argued, “ *the sins of Christians are different from the sins of other people.* ” “ *Yes,* ” agreed her pastor, “ *they are worse.* ” They are worse for when believers sin, they not only break the law of God, they break the heart of God. You see, when a Christian deliberately sins, it isn't just the disobedience of a servant to a master, the rebellion of a subject against a king, it's the offense of a child against his loving father. The sins we cherish and think we get away with bring grief to the heart of God. Malachi was called to perform a difficult and dangerous task. It was his duty to rebuke the people for the sins they were committing against God and against one another and to call them to return to the Lord. *Now the book of Malachi is a small book with a big message. The prophet Malachi is a minor prophet with a major message.* Now by way of introduction let me say some things about the Book of Malachi.

1. It is a Closing Book: It is the last book of the Old Testament. It is the 39th book of the Bible, but the last of the Old Testament. It is the last book of the Old Testament

era and it's the beginning of a four hundred period in which God gave no fresh revelation.

2. It is a Connecting Book: The Book not only concludes the Old Testament but also connects the Old to the New. The book tells us of the messenger that would prepare the way of the Lord and in the New Testament we see that messenger, John the Baptist.

3. It is a Coexistent Book: The prophecy of Malachi sits side by side with the history of Nehemiah. The book of Ezra is all about the rebuilding of the Temple, the book of Nehemiah is all about the rebuilding of the walls. Things progressed rapidly under Nehemiah. The walls of Jerusalem were rebuilt and spiritual renewal took place. But Nehemiah was called back to Persia on business and was absent from Jerusalem from 432-425 BC (Neh 2:6 5:14 13:6) And it's probable that Malachi conducted his ministry during those years.

So the burden of Malachi and the building of Nehemiah should be considered side by side. Nehemiah sought to rebuild a city and Malachi sought to recall a people. Nehemiah focuses upon the condition of a place, whereas, Malachi focuses upon the condition of a people.

4. It is a Contemporary Book: A prophet preaching to people who lived 2400 years ago surely has no meaning or value for us, but it does. Yes, Malachi's message is dated, but it is not out of date. While times have changed many things have not. Are we living in a day when vibrant faith is rare ? So it was in Malachi's day. Are we living in

an age of crippling doubt ? So it was in Malachi's day. Are we living in a time when God's people are careless and casual about the commands of the Lord ? So it was in Malachi's day. This message may have been first delivered by an O.T. prophet, but it still needs delivering by a N.T. preacher. For it is as contemporary as the day it was given.

5. It is a Challenging Book: You see, the voice of the prophet was only heard in Israel in times of national apostasy. The prophets were sometimes foretellers who give glimpses of things to come. Always they were forthtellers inspired by the Lord to denounce prevalent sins and call God's people to repentance. Malachi is called for God's people to examine the realness of their spiritual life and the sinfulness of their personal life. Malachi predicts a returning Lord and a ready people. Now understanding this lets us try and set the scene.

(1) THE BURDEN OF GOD'S SERVANT

Let's try and acquaint ourselves with Malachi and learn some things about the man and his burden. Notice this man was carrying,

(a) ***THE BURDEN OF ACCOUNTABILITY:***

The word of the Lord was coming to Israel through Malachi. The name means "*My messenger,*" or "*the messenger of God.*" I mean we know nothing about his family. We know nothing about his personality. All we know is that he was a man submitted to God and sent by

God. God had called and he had yielded. He was the "*messenger of God,*" and as such he was accountable to God. Do you recall that it was this sense of accountability that was ever before the apostle Paul ? I mean every step Paul took, every act Paul performed, every ministry Paul exercised he did anticipating a day of accountability at the judgment seat of Christ. (2 Cor 5:10) My do you realise that the Lord is going to hold you accountable for that ministry He has entrusted to you ? Now Malachi reminds us that God is not looking for people with impressive resumes', or a long list of credentials or recommendations, but one who is yielded to His will. James A. Stewart in his book "***Heaven's Throne Gift,***" has a chapter entitled "***Four Fundamental Facts.***" In the chapter he gives 4 great principles that we all need to listen to very carefully. He says,

- . What God claims, I yield.
- . What I yield, God accepts.
- . What God accepts, He fills.
- . What God fills, He uses.

You see, there is not one believer that cannot be used of God if these 4 laws were observed and obeyed. As it has often been said, "*God is not looking for ability, but availability and also a sense of accountability.*" (a)

(b) ***THE BURDEN OF MINISTRY:***

Of Philip Brooks the famous U.S.A. preacher a biographer has told that immediately before going into the pulpit "*he appeared like one burdened with a message*

from God,” which he was in travail to discharge. Is this not the proper prelude to preaching ? You see, without no burden there can be no blessing. “ *The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by the hand of Malachi,*” as it is in the margin. You see, his message was called a “ *burden.*” The word that is used was used to speak of an animal carrying a heavy burden for its master. The word indicates that the message Malachi delivered was heavy on his heart. Moreover, it was “ *the word of the Lord.*” It was not Malachi’s message. Malachi was but the delivery boy. It was God’s message. My Malachi did not begin his message by saying, “ *I have been thinking about some things and would like to share them with you,*” He did not say, “ *It seems to me*,” No his message was laid upon him by the Lord and it was pressing upon him. It lay upon him like a weight and the only way he could get relief from the pressure was to declare it faithfully.

It is really thrilling to notice that these Old Testament prophets whether we take the major or minor, whether we take the post or the pre-exilic prophets wherever they were giving a word of judgment to the people they were always distressed and burdened about it. *You see, there is no fun in giving heavy tidings to the people.* Malachi’s message was not sent to comfort but to convict. It was not a message of commendation, it was a message of condemnation. It was not a message that delighted the people but discomforted the people. Malachi’s message was a direct word to a defiled walk. There’s a message here for every preacher. My we need to feel the burden of what we say. Sadly, many of us do not give the appearance of feeling the weight of truth. Who would ever

guess that we have been charged to stand before an eternity bound people on behalf of the eternal God with the express purpose of preparing the former to meet the later ? As a preacher, as a Sunday School teacher, as a Good News Club leader do you feel the burden of what you say ? I am sure that General Booth was perfectly right when asked on one occasion, “ *How would you train officers and captains for the army if you had your way ?*” Without waiting at all to think he said, “ *I would send every Salvation Army Officer and Captain to hell for three months.*” Do you know something ? I wouldn’t give you a penny for a preacher that won’t tell it like it is. I would not attend a church where everything is right and nothing is wrong. My we not only want to be blessed by the Word we want to be broken by the Word. (a) (b)

(c) ***THE BURDEN OF IDENTITY:***

For it was “ *the burden of the word of the Lord to Israel,*” (1:1) Do you recall that after the death of Solomon, that name applied only to the ten tribes that made up the northern kingdom, with the two tribes of the Southern Kingdom being called Judah. But after the captivity ended, the nation, no longer divided was called Israel once again. It is obvious that the tribes of Israel didn’t really get lost. Although they seem to be “ *lost,*” to some people today, they never were lost. This message is “ *to Israel,*” to all twelve of the tribes. And Malachi was identifying himself with them. You see, this man was not only carrying the burden of Scripture he was carrying the burden of souls. Let’s be honest do we know anything about the burden of souls ? Leaders this do you know

what it is to carry the burden of saints ? I'm not talking about rattling off a few names at a prayer meeting. I am talking about the burden that Malachi had that Paul had. Do you recall what he said to the elders at Ephesus ?

“ Watch and remember that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. ”

(Acts 20:31) Elders, does the burden of the assembly ever weigh heavily upon you ? Do you know what it is to carry the burden of sinners ? (Rom 9:1) Of John Welch its is told that he would spend long hours on his knees by his bedside, even on winter nights praying and weeping in the darkness, with only his plaid flung about his shoulders to protect him from the cold and that his wife would plead with him to return to rest only to receive the reply,

“ Woman, I have the souls of three thousand to answer for and I know not how it is with many of them. ”

Do you know why you are never at the prayer meeting ? You are not worried about souls going to hell. I wonder does the Laodicean church describe us this ? Lukewarm, indifferent, careless, unconcerned, going through the religious ritual but our hearts are not really in it. (1)

(2) THE BLESSING OF GOD'S LOVE

Do you see how Malachi begins his little book ? *“ I have loved you saith the Lord. ”* (1:2) Oh, here they were. They had come back from Babylon and with blood, sweat, and tears rebuilt the temple, Jerusalem and other cities. They had turned their backs on centuries of idolatry and reinstated the worship of God. But had God rewarded

them ? No. Had He restored the kingdom ? Had He fulfilled the glorious promises of many a prophet ? No Had He sent the Messiah whose coming had been prophesied by Isaiah and Zechariah ? No. Then how could it be said that God loved them. You see, they doubted God's love and so the Lord points to three phases of His love for them. Notice,

(a) GOD'S LOVE IN THE PAST:

Look if you will at (1:2-3) That statement has troubled some people. Paul quotes this in (Rom 9:10-13) to prove God's electing grace for both Israel and all who trust Christ for salvation. But the verb *“ hate, ”* must not be defined as a positive expression of the wrath of God. You see, God's love for Jacob was so great, that in comparison His actions toward Esau looked like hatred. Do you remember that Jacob loved Rachel so much that his relationship to Leah seemed like hatred ? (Gen 29:20, 30-31 Deut 21:15-17) Do you recall what Christ said to would be disciples ? *“ If any man come to me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also he cannot be my disciple. ”* (Lk 14:26 Matt 10:37) Christ was using the word *“ hate, ”* in a similar way. You see, our love for Christ may move us to do things that appear like hatred to those we love. Someone said to Dr. Arno C. Gaebelein, the gifted Hebrew Christian leader of a generation ago. *“ I have a serious problem with Malachi 1:3 where God says, Esau have I hated. ”* Dr. Gaebelein replied, *“ I have a greater problem with Malachi 1:2 where God says, Jacob have I loved. ”* My centuries have come and gone since

the Lord spoke to Israel through Malachi, but God says to us the church today, “ *I have loved you.* ” The words are in the perfect tense meaning that God had loved them in the past and He loved them in the present. Are you questioning God’s love for you ? Are your circumstances such that you wonder if God truly loves you ? Is the devil telling you that He does not ? My will you think hard and long about the “ **I,** ” and the “ *you,* ” ? I mean the “ **I,** ” is none other than the all powerful, all knowing, all present God. And the “ **you,** ” refers to people who are undeserving, unclean and unworthy. Will you listen to it again and marvel, “ *I have loved you.* ” How ? By choosing us in Christ before the world began. (Eph 1:4) But we cannot peer into the councils of eternity to see the everlasting love of God so where do we look ? To the cross of the Lord Jesus. And as we look there, we must exclaim, God loved me so much that He nailed His Son to the cross to bear the penalty for my sins. “ *Amazing love how can it be that thou my God shouldst die for me.* ” (a)

(b) GOD’S LOVE IN THE PRESENT:

You see, both the descendants of Jacob, that is Israel and the descendants of Esau that is Edom had experienced tough times. God had delivered both Edom and Judah into the hands of the Babylonians. The Jews he brought back and blessed. As for Edom God had laid “ *his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness.* ” Still Edom showed pride and self will, “ *Edom saith, we are impoverished but we will return and build the desolate places.* ” The result was God’s curse “ *They shall build built I will throw down.* ” You see, while God in love for

Israel was in the process of enabling Israel to rebuild the nation, He was doing no such thing for Edom or Idumea. I mean the Lord loved Israel in the past for they were His covenant people, but He also loved them in the present. God says, “ *You doubt my love. Look at how I have cared for you, protected you, established you, destroyed your enemies.* ” You see, God’s Word not only shows His love for us. God’s Works show His love for us. I mean do you not experience the tokens of His love every day ? The truths of His Word, the fellowship of His people, the wonder of His worship, the guidance of His hands, the provision of His strength, are these not simply expressions of His ongoing love ? (a) (b)

(c) GOD’S LOVE IN THE FUTURE:

For look if you will at (1:5) Israel was God’s chosen instrument by means of which He intended to be magnified in the sight of all mankind. No doubt there is a hint here of millennial glory when the Lord will receive pure worship throughout the world and His name will be honoured everywhere. (1:11 Is 2:24 Micah 4:1-3) What love. He loved us in the past, He loves us in the present but He never will cease from loving us. He will love us throughout the unending cycles of eternity. My do you think I should ever stand up and say “ *Wherein hast thou loved me ?* ” I’m one of the folk chosen by the Lord in Christ before the foundation of the world. Why did God choose a thing like me ? Because He loved me. And He sent His Son from heaven to the cross of shame to bear my sins because He loved me. And He came through His Word by His Spirit and met me on the road of life and

saved me because He loved me. “ *He loves me so, He loves me so, He died because He loves me so.* ” Ole and Olga lived on a farm in Iowa. Olga was living on a starvation diet of affection. You wives know what that means. Ole never showed any signs of love and Olga’s need to be appreciated went unfulfilled. At her wits end Olga blurted out, “ *Ole why don’t you ever tell me that you love me ?* ” Ole stoically responded, “ *Olga when we were married, I told you that I loved you, and if I ever change my mind you will be the first to know.* ” Do you know something ? God will never change His mind.

(3) THE BEHAVIOUR OF GOD’S PEOPLE

We get a hint of that in (1:2) “ *Yet ye say, wherein hast thou loved us.* ” You know by the time Malachi appeared on the scene the captivity had been over for more than an hundred years. You would think that its lessons would never be forgotten. But do we not forget so easily ? So here we see a nation disregarding her special relationship with God (1:1-5) as both priests and people (1:6-2:9) plunged into sinful behaviour. You see,

(a) THE PEOPLE WERE CALLOUS:

Insensible to the very love of God. They just looked God in the face and said, now where did you love us ? If you go through the chapters quickly you will find that about 7 times this word “ *wherein,* ” occurs. No matter what God says these people question it. Malachi, God’s messenger, fearlessly catalogs the sins of God’s people. Have a look at them.

In,

<u>Ch. 1:2</u>	God's LOVE has been DENIED
<u>Ch. 1:6</u>	God's NAME has been DESPISED
<u>Ch. 1:7</u>	God's TABLE has been DEFILED
<u>Ch. 2:17</u>	God's PROVIDENCE has been DECRIED
<u>Ch. 3:7</u>	God's INVITATION has been DECLINED
<u>Ch. 3:8</u>	God's TREASURY has been DEFRAUDED
<u>Ch. 3:13</u>	God's JUSTICE has been DEFAMED

The words “ *What have we spoken*,” are the same as “ *Wherein.* ” Their answers said in effect, “ *What do you mean ? We are not guilty of these things.* ” Do you see the dullness of their hearing ? Do you see the hardness of their heart ? I mean the temple was rebuilt, the sacrifices were being offered, the feasts were observed. They had all the outward form and ritual but their heart was far from God. It just as Isaiah described, “ *Wherefore the Lord said forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart from me.* ” (Is 29:13) Is that you ? Do you claim to be close to the Lord but in reality you are nowhere near close to the Lord ? My are you just going through the routine, the ritual, the round of spiritual duties ? But you are callous, cold, clinical, insensible, indifferent to His great love for you ? (a)

(b) THE PRIESTS WERE CORRUPT:

I mean how did this people get into such a condition ? The answer was in their spiritual leadership. The priests were the messengers of God in Israel. Not only were they to

represent the people to God but they were to represent God to the people by teaching the law of Moses to the nation. (Lev 10:9-11 Deut 33:10 Ezra 7:10 Hosea 4:6) But do you see what happened ? (1:6 2:1 2:7-8) As has been often been said, “ **Everything rises and falls on leadership.**” Good leadership lifts people. Bad leadership lowers people. Is the leadership in this church,

1. A GROWING LEADERSHIP:

“ *For the priest’s lips should keep knowledge,*” (2:7) In this case it’s a knowledge of God’s Word. Are we growing in our knowledge of God’s Word ?

2. A GUIDING LEADERSHIP:

“ *And they should seek the law at his mouth,*” “ *They,*” refers to the people. The people were to seek God’s Word and the priests were the ones that the people came to for spiritual advice. My are we guiding the flock aright ?

3. A GODLY LEADERSHIP:

For the priests were called “ *messengers of the Lord of Hosts,*” (2:7) Brethren, do we reflect the God we serve ?

Setting the Scene ! Isn’t this an amazing fact. That though this people were careless, cold, cynical, indifferent, insensible to the love of God, though they were spiritually drifting the very first from God is “ *I have loved you, saith the Lord.*” (1:2) The Scottish preacher, George Matheson, was one of the most poetic and eloquent

preachers of his time. It was at the age of 19 while he was studying for the ministry that he lost his eyesight. His heart was broken when his fiancée broke their engagement, returned his ring, and said to him, “ *I cannot see my way clear to go through life bound by the chains of marriage to a blind man.*” Matheson never married, but in 1882, at the age of 40, when one of his sisters married, her wedding brought back memories of his heartbreak and personal tragedy. From the depths of despair he reached out in faith and laid hold of the unchanging love of God. In that dark hour of his heart he penned the words of the great hymn.

**O Love that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee;
I give Thee back the life I owe,
That in thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.**

The Lord says to you this “ *I have loved you.*” How will you respond ?

