

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:
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Malachi 1:1-14 “Giving God the Leftovers”

Intro. Malachi brings down the curtain on the Old Testament. He is the last in a long succession of prophets who foretold the coming of the Messiah. “Malachi” means “my messenger.” We know very little about him, but that is OK. After all, God’s message is far more important than the messenger. When the Western Union boy rings your doorbell with an important message for you, he doesn’t tell you all about himself and his family. The fact of the matter is that you don’t even get his name. The important thing is the message that he brings. This message that Malachi brought to his people is called in v.1, “The burden of the word of the LORD...” God’s Word was a message that had to be told.

Malachi was the prophet at the time of Nehemiah. They have been back in the land for over one hundred years. The Captivity is now in the background, and things are more prosperous in the land. They’ve become just a little self-sufficient. They have a temple now, and the worship rituals have been restored. Yet, they actually are far from God. Did you realize that you can be in church, and yet far from God at the same time? They were far from God because they were largely indifferent about the things of God. There was a moral breakdown in many ways.

The present position of Christendom is vividly portrayed in Malachi. I differentiate most carefully between Christendom and the true Church. Christendom is that great mixed multitude of people calling themselves Christians because they have an external relationship to the Church. The vast bulk of Christendom has become characterized by ritual rather than by life, by form without power. Remember that the Apostle Paul described the men in the last days as “having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof...” (2 Tim. 3:5). We should recognize God’s rebuke here as a red light for us. This is a message for folk who go to church - they may even be very orthodox. They may know the language but their hearts are far from God. We need the message of Malachi today.

So let’s look into our text beginning with:

I. THE FOUNDATION OF GOD’S REBUKE

A. God’s Love is Declared (v. 2a) - Malachi’s message starts out in a very marvelous, wonderful way: “I have loved you, saith the Lord.” Isn’t that a wonderful way to begin? And isn’t that a great message for God to give as He concludes the Old Testament? The force of the declaration is “I have loved you and I still love you” (perfect tense). In Jer. 31:3 God says, “I have loved you with an everlasting love.”

If we really understand how much God loves us, it will affect the way we live. In our text we see that this simple declaration of His love placed the Jews under obligation to love Him in return and to keep His commandments. This verse forms the introduction and foundation of the whole book. The love that God has shown to Israel ought to form the motive and model for the conduct of Israel towards their God.

B. His Love is Denied (v. 2b) - Now how do you think that these people are going to respond to that? Remember that they have returned to the land, and by the time of Nehemiah,

although they are discouraged about the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, there is some return to prosperity. They are going through the form of worship in the rebuilt temple. "In what way have You loved us?" Such an attitude of mind in Judah had resulted from the people's sufferings and repeated disappointments. The lot of Judah was one of hardship and oppression. They had returned from the exile with fond hope of the early coming of the Messianic kingdom. But the Messiah still delayed His coming. So the conditions round about and their own state of mind had led them to the conclusion that the Lord did not love them; otherwise things would be different.

Can you believe that these people would have the audacity to speak to God like that? Only hearts of stone could have been oblivious to the countless evidences of God's love and concern for His covenant people. I believe there are a great many today in the church that would raise that same question and say, "Look at the things that are happening to us today. How can you say that God loves us?" Or you may say, "How can God love me, when He allowed my parents to divorce," or "lose my job," or "have that accident."

C. His Love is Demonstrated (vv. 2b-5) - The prophet proves the love of Jehovah towards Israel, from the attitude of God towards Israel and towards Edom. Jacob and Esau were twin brothers. Both were grandsons of Abraham. It would therefore have been supposed that the posterity of both the Israelites and the Edomites would be treated alike by God. But this is not the case. God said in vv. 2b-3a, "Yet Jacob I have loved; But Esau I have hated...."

Now there are 3 ways of looking at this statement here:

1. Love in Terms of Election - Love clearly means election-love, and "hate" is its opposite (not an immoral hatred.) Even before their birth Jacob was the chosen one (Gen. 25:23, cf. Rom. 9:10-13). If a man is interested in 2 young ladies, and he ends up choosing one over the other, then the one not chosen may say, "Oh, he hates me." No, it really means he loved one more, and chose her over the other.

2. Love & Hate Demonstrated through Restoration vs. Continued Judgment - God never said this until Jacob and Esau had become two great nations that had long histories. Paul wrote of "the goodness and severity of God." The histories of the nation of Israel and the nation of Edom are altogether different. Esau never demonstrated any godly inclinations, and evidently the nation that came from him was ungodly as well. Jacob had a desire for Him and Esau did not have a desire for Him at all. God says that because of the evil which was inherent in this man and which worked itself out into the nation of Edom, He is justified in making this statement.

In v.3 we see that the complete desolation of the Edomitish territory is quoted as a proof of this hatred. Whereas Jacob had recovered, in consequence of the love of Jehovah, from the blow that had fallen upon it, Esau's territory was still lying in ruins from the same blow. The expulsion of the Edomites from their ancient territory of Mount Seir, southeast of the Dead Sea by the Nabataen Arabs, was viewed as an act of divine vengeance for their inhumane and unbrotherly acts. The prophets' appeal to the disaster that had befallen Edom, was certain to gain rapt attention of his listeners.

It is entirely possible, that the people objected that the overthrow of Edom was not final, but only temporary. Therefore, the prophet is concerned to make it plain that Edom's plight was permanent. In vv. 4-5 we see that after God judged Edom, they would never make a comeback.

History has verified the prophecy. After the Nabataeans drove them out, then they were conquered by the Maccabees, and finally the Romans drove them into the eastern desert. Their land was made an eternal desert. Even though the Jews are still a distinct people, when was the last time you saw an Edomite? So in the sense just described, it is true, "Jacob I have loved; But Esau I

have hated....”

Your position in relationship to God determines whether you become an object of His wrath or are blessed by His love. A certain man demonstrated electricity to an audience. He was touching thousands of volts of electricity, but it was not harming him. Why? Because he was not grounded. The difference was not in the electricity, but his position in relationship to the electricity. Do you want to be the object of God’s wrath against sin, or do you want to be blessed in the love of God? Which one it will be is determined by your relationship to God through Jesus Christ.

But the human element cannot fully explain this statement. Israel & Judah were not much more righteous than the Edomites. Furthermore, even though our sin explains the judgment of God, how do we explain the love of God? A student came to the late Dr. Griffith Thomas, “Why does God say that he hated Esau?” “Well I have a problem with that verse too,” Dr. Thomas replied. “But my problem is why God said that He loved Jacob. That’s the real problem.”

3. Comparative Love - In the common usage of the Hebrew language, loved means “favored” and hated means “less favored, disregarded, neglected.” Gen. 29:30 says that Jacob “loved Rachel more than Leah....” In fact, in v.33 of that chapter Leah said that her husband didn’t love her. In comparison to God’s love for Jacob, his favor to Esau seemed as if it were not love but hate. For example, Luke 14:26 says, “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.” I believe an interpretation of this same statement is found in Matthew 10:37, “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.”

Why did God begin this message with an affirmation of His love? Now if we understand the love of God for us, and if we love Him in return, everything else will fall into place. We will not have much of a problem with giving to God, serving God, and obeying God. Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”

II. THE ITEMIZATION OF GOD’S REBUKE

The people in Malachi’s day gave an outward show of being very religious. But in many ways it was all show, and not substance. God presents 3 main charges against the people of Israel:

A. Failing to Honor Him -

1. You Give More Honor to Others (v.6a) - The modern way is not to honor your parents. But back in that day they did, and so God uses that as the illustration. Malachi simply lays it down as a truth that no one will call in question. If honor and respect on the part of sons and servants for their fathers and masters was accepted among them as a fundamental of society, where then was their honor and fear of Jehovah? Jehovah is the Father and Lord of Israel. God called the whole nation His son. The same thing is true of us who believe in Jesus Christ. If you have been born again, you are a child of God. Do you honor God and respect Him?

2. Instead, God’s Name is Despised (v.6b) - The priests, who of all men should have held Yahweh in honor, are charged with holding His name in contempt. A name with the Hebrew people was more than a mere appellation. To despise His name, therefore, was to despise Yahweh himself. They did something to despise the Lord.

In the last of v.6 they ask, “In what way have we despised Your name?” How could they despise His name when they were going to the temple so regularly? The people dismiss the charge

with an indifferent nod of the head and a pretended ignorance. They act as if God doesn't know what he is talking about. Well, the particular way they despised the name of God is given in the 2nd indictment:

B. Failure in Service -

1. Their Attitude Toward the Lord's Service (v.7b, 12-13a) - Their actions spoke louder than any words, for the priests regarded the Temple service as a miserable job, to be performed with contempt. Instead of their worship being one of joy growing out of gratitude for the Lord's having chosen them to such an exalted honor, they found their work a boresome chore. They are saying, "Oh, this is so boring"!! Verse 13 caricatures the professionalism of the priest who finds his routine duties tedious. In effect, they were saying, "It makes us tired to go to church, to go through all of these things. Oh, what a weariness!" They were complaining and groaning about God's work. My friend, when the heart is not in the thing, it becomes weariness. The worst thing in the world that I can think of is to be doing a job you hate to do. It makes the hours long, and there is no joy in it whatsoever. In contrast, the great preacher Dwight L. Moody said, "I get tired in the work, but I never get tired of the work"!

Way back in the stern days of the Puritans, they would sit on log benches and listen to a sermon for two hours. Today there are people who will sit on bleachers for three hours out in the hot sun to watch a baseball game. There are folks who will sit out in the cold to watch a football game. My friend, why are you weary when your preacher speaks for more than 30 minutes? Many churches feel that they have to bring in entertainment to overcome this problem that Malachi speaks of. Listen, if you are bored and weary of church, it may be the fault of the church. But then again, it may be because of the deadness of your own heart. Jesus is someone to be excited about! The Word of God is something that is most interesting to the child of God who is growing, and walking with the Lord. If you are filled with the Holy Spirit, you will be joyful and excited!

2. In the Types of Sacrifices They Offered (vv. 7-8a, 13b-14a) - They represent the altar as contemptible not so much in words and speeches, as in their practice. They offered polluted (defiled) bread upon the altar of Jehovah. *Lechem*, bread or food, probably does not refer to the showbread, but is the sacrificial flesh, which is called in Lev. 21:6, 8, 17, the food of God. Such sacrifices were "defiled" because they were offered in disobedience to God's command. The offering they offered was intended by God to be a picture of the Lord Jesus. An imperfect offering was an insult to the Lord. God interprets the law for them in Deut. 15:21, "And if there be any blemish therein, as if it be lame, or blind, or have any ill blemish, thou shalt not sacrifice it unto the Lord thy God" (cf. Lev. 22:20-23). The Israelites in Malachi's day were being very clever. They knew that when they were to worship at the temple they were supposed to bring an offering of a sacrificial animal. So as they looked over their flock, they would pick out the old sick cow or the lamb that had broken its leg, and rush it off to the temple to offer it as a sacrifice to God. Then in v.13 Malachi adds that some even offered a sacrifice that had been stolen! Certainly, He would not accept an offering that had been stolen. Adding to the sin of the situation was the fact that the priests were letting the people by with such offerings. The Israelites were guilty of sacrilege because their offerings really cost them little or nothing. Sacrifice meant offering something to God of cost and value to the offerer, as a symbol of his consecration to God. They take the view that anything will do for God. We sing, "Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small." Is that a gift far too small? It sure is. When we consider that God gave His Son, the spotless Lamb of God for our salvation, can we give only the leftovers or what is worthless?

When you give secondhand clothing to the rescue mission, don't put that down on your

books, thinking you will get credit from God. Don't misunderstand me - the mission can use the second hand clothes, but you're not giving sacrificially to God when you give that sort of thing.

C. Failure to Keep Your Vows - V.14 castigates the layman who gives God the second best when he has promised Him the best. There were people in Israel who were making great protestations, saying, "It looks like we're going to have a bumper crop this year. I am going to give the Lord not only a tenth, but I'm going to give some free will offerings to Him." But when the harvest came in abundance, they decided they would keep it for themselves. "When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; For He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed— Better not to vow than to vow and not pay" (Eccl. 5:4, 5). The person Malachi has in mind may have vowed a male sacrifice, and substituted a female animal. But what was most reprehensible was that instead of offering a faultless animal, he presented a blemished one. The condemnation is for redeeming a vow with less than the vow demanded.

Perhaps there was a time when you said to God that you would become a tither. But somewhere along the line you backed out of that vow. Do you think God will bless such a person? No! God says such a person is cursed (v.14a). What about other vows concerning Bible reading, prayer, witnessing, and so forth?

By now, many in Malachi's audience have been stung with rebuke. Perhaps this is true in my audience tonight. Well, I have some good news. We also see in our text:

III. THE REMEDIES OF GOD'S REBUKE

A. Heed God's Rebukes - The main problem with the people in Malachi's day is that they did not heed the rebukes. For example, the rebuke in v.6 is something that should have gotten to them, but it didn't get to them because they had a hard shell about them. They were a very arrogant and haughty and self-sufficient people. You couldn't tell them anything. Then God said to Israel, "You despise My name." And they act hurt; they act as if they really don't know what He is talking about. So a recurring pattern is seen throughout Malachi consisting of an accusation by the prophet, followed by a reply of injured innocence, which in turn is followed by a more explicit statement of the fault with the people who are charged (1:2, 6-7; 2:17; 3:7, 8, 13). 7 times we read the words "wherein...?" Perhaps in our language they would respond to these charges with "Oh, yea?"

Notice how God responded to their denials with follow-up questions:

1. Would You Offer Such Gifts to Some Important Official? (v.8b) - In order to disclose to them their wrong in the most striking manner, the prophet asks them whether the governor would accept such presents. If the Governor accepted an invitation to speak to our church, and you were the one to invite him home for dinner, what would you give him? Would you give him the leftovers from Wednesday's meal? Of course not. But many people give to God only if they have something leftover after paying bills and buying what *they* want. Do you pay more in taxes than you give to the Lord? Many people pay 20-50 dollars to see a football game or a basketball game, and God says to them, "If you pay that kind of money for that and then come into My house and drop a one-dollar bill into the offering and think you have done something for Me, you are wrong." If you tip your waitress more than you put in the offering plate, something is very wrong. By the way, I'm not saying to tip the waitress less; I'm saying you ought to give God far more than that!

2. Will God Bless Your Prayers? (v.9) - He challenges the people to supplicate the

face of Jehovah, but at the same time he intimates that under the existing circumstances such intercession would be fruitless. If the governor would not accept worthless gifts graciously, how could they expect a gracious answer to their prayers from God when they offered such gifts to Him?

B. Stop Such Pretense of Religion! (v.10) - The question is to be taken as the expression of a wish. God could wish that one of the priests saw the hypocrisy of it and had the courage to close down Temple services altogether. The people were not sincere in their giving and worship. It is better to lock up and stay at home than be guilty of their practices. The doors were those of the inner court where the great altar was located. The fire was that of the altar, where empty sacrifices were offered, which God would not receive.

C. Change Your Ways!

1. Honor Him As He is Worthy (vv.11, 14b) - I believe these words are most likely prophetic as relating to the spread of the kingdom of God among all nations, with which the worship of the true God would commence "in every place." This forms an antithesis to the one place, in the temple at Jerusalem. Jesus said in John 4:21, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father." The "incense" offered are the prayers of the saints (Rev. 5:8) and the "pure offering is the sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips, and the doing of good in a holy life (Heb. 13:15-16). Isn't this a great fulfillment of prophecy? Jesus Christ, and the God of the Jews, is worshiped in just about every nation on earth!

One of the things that has brought God's name into disrepute has been the ministry and those who represent Him here, professing believers. Let's put it on the line today: Do you have religion, or do you have Christ? Are you real, or are you just going through the motions? A great many folks are just playing church. Do you wear Christianity like a garment that you can take off and put aside at any time?

2. Give Him Your Best -

a) In Giving – God demands the first fruits of the harvest.

b) In Service – Give him the best part of your day. Dedicated the first day of the week to Him. Give Him time before secular commitments.

Conclusion: Now if you are not a Christian today, I want you to know that God is not interested in your money, but you. God gave His best for you to be forgiven; shouldn't you give your life to Him?

Sources: T. Miles Bennett, *The Broadman Bible Commentary: Malachi*, Vol. 7 (Nashville: Broadman, 1972); Homer Hailey, *A Commentary on the Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972); C. F. Keil, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes, Minor Prophets, Vol. 10* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena: Thru The Bible Radio, 1982); G. Campbell Morgan, *The Minor Prophets: The Men and their Messages* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1960); John B. Taylor, *Bible Study Books: The Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1970); Dr. Jerry Vines (notes from sermon tape of 10/16/89); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible [CD-ROM]* (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

ABOUT THESE SERMON NOTES

This document has not been transcribed from an audio recording, but is the result of the sermon preparation process. Most outlines are original to the author, but much of the content of the notes are taken from commentaries,

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