**January 17 – Malachi 1**

Today we begin four days in the book of Malachi. This is a small book with big implications. questions and answers:

1. **Why Malachi now?**

The book of Hebrews walked us through the bulk of the Old Testament. Abraham, Moses, the law, the sacrifices, the priesthood, etc. Now we are moving into Malachi in order to be reminded how the Old Testament concludes. It is not with the success of Israel. After returning from exile in Babylon, the people of Israel returned to ‘worshiping’ God in a way that was not pleasing. It was God’s final call for the people to turn and repent before He allowed the people to experience 400 years of silence. During that time, God did not send a single prophet to the people. Malachi stands as God’s final word before the coming of Christ.

1. **What is the structure of this book?**

Malachi contains six different miniature decrees that God speaks through the prophet. After each decree, God preemptively informs the people how He knows the they will respond. This is most often seen by the phrase, “But you say.” After God uncovers their heart response, He then repeats His point with more emphasis, thereby making it clear that Israel’s objections are inaccurate. In today’s chapter we see the first decree (vs. 2-5) and the beginning of the second decree (1:6 – 2:9)

1. **Why does God choose Jacob and not Esau?**

In the first part of Malachi 1, we see that God has chosen to set His affection on one nation. Israel comes from Jacob’s family tree, Edom comes from Esau’s family tree. So, God is making the point that He has chosen one nation rather than the other. In this book, God is speaking of His relationship to entire nations. Later, in Romans 9, Paul reveals that this is also true on the individual level. God is sovereign in Salvation and Has the right and authority to show mercy to whomever He will. Romans 9:10-13 says, “And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, **11**though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— **12**she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” **13**As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” In other words, God did not choose Jacob because of his works. It was impossible, the choice occurred before he was even born. God choses His people in order that His purpose in election might stand.

1. **What is the main point in verses 6-14?**

In Hebrews we saw how important it is for us to have a priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses, but also who is without sin. The end of chapter 1 is all about how wicked and disingenuous the priesthood had become. They were outwardly obeying the ritualistic commands, but inwardly they were not truly worshiping the Lord.

**For further reflection:** Are you genuinely living a life of worship? Or are you just going through the motions?

**January 18 – Malachi 2**

**Dung in the Face**

Sometimes in the prophets (especially the 12 minor prophets) we find God using extreme metaphors to get His point across. In this chapter we see God using intense and descriptive language to express just how angry He is about the defiled forms of worship that was being practiced. Verse 3 reads, “Behold, I will rebuke your offspring, and spread dung on your faces, the dung of your offerings, and you shall be taken away with it.”

Priests were no strangers to animal dung. They dealt with sheep, goats, bulls, and other livestock on a regular basis, which meant that they were often cleaning up messes. And the main reason that God promises to judge them so harshly is due to the way they had led the masses of Israel away from genuine worship. Vs 7-8, “For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.But you have turned aside from the way. You have caused many to stumble by your instruction.” As we considered on Sunday, God cares deeply about the leadership of His people. And He has high standards that are to be upheld by them.

**Divorce and Adultery**

The third accusation that God makes against the people is the way that they had divorced or “put away” their wives in order to marry pagan wives. God makes it clear that He does not care about the tears they cry at the altar because they are unwilling to repent of their sin.

Husbands, love your wives. As this text says, “She is your companion and your wife by covenant.” Wives, love your husbands. By being married, you have sworn before God to cleave to one another and remain exclusively for one another until death parts you. Jesus is the great example of this truth. He refers to the church as His bride, and He promises that He will never leave us or forsake us.

[Starting at verse 17, God begins His fourth denouncement of Israel. Since most of that shows up in chapter 3, we will focus more on that tomorrow.]

For further study regarding a covenant perspective of marriage: You can either watch the video or read the transcript.

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/staying-married-is-not-about-staying-in-love>

**January 19 – Malachi 3**

**God is Just**

The fourth (of six) accusations God makes through Malachi is centered on God’s justice. There were many people who accused God of not carrying out judgment in a manner that they perceived to be timely and acceptable. God says that He had become weary of their complaining. He quotes them as saying, “Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them.” And, “Where is the God of justice?” (Malachi 2:17) They are literally so warped in their understanding of God that they are accusing Him of approving and maybe even applauding evil. They are so disillusioned by God’s delayed judgment that they actually claim that God “delights” in the wicked. This is obviously contrary to everything Scripture teaches of God. For example, Psalm 5:4 says, “For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you.” God promises that there is a great and mighty day coming when His wrath will be poured out “swiftly.” (3:5) His coming will be “sudden.” (3:1) And nobody who is under His wrath will be able to endure. (3:2) Praise God that we, who deserve to be under that wrath, have been protected by the blood of Christ, our Savior. “For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God,and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.” 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10

**Giving and Blessing**

Back in chapters 1-2 we heard God going after the priests for their polluted sacrifices. But, they are not the only one’s to blame. Malachi 3:6-15 turns the attention on the citizens of Israel who brought offerings that were unpleasing to the Lord. God actually says that the people are “robbing” Him. Here we come to one of the more abused verses in the Bible. “You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.” (3:9-10)

There were various clear and specific laws regarding what was to be given to the Levites in order to ensure that they could continue operating the temple and the sacrifices. The Levites did not receive an inheritance of land or property; therefore, they had no regular form of income or crops or livestock. Instead, they were supported by the other tribes through prescribed offerings. Yet, the people of Israel were operating like Old Testament versions of Ananias and Saphira. They were secretly keeping back for themselves.

Let me be clear about a few simple truths concerning this verse:

1. God does not need your money. (Psalm 24:1)
2. Everything you own actually belongs to God. (Psalm 50:9-12)
3. God does require New Testament believers to give. (2 Cor. 8:1-15 for example)
4. God does not require tithing in the New Testament. 10 percent is probably a good baseline for your giving. But, what is more important is that you give out of a heart of worship, without compulsion. (2 Cor. 9:6-7)
5. This verse does not indicate that if you give to the church, God will bless you with whatever you want. This verse has been used by people who peddle the gospel for personal gain in order to coerce or manipulate people into giving. Do not give so that you can get. Give to be faithful.
6. God wants your heart, soul, mind, and strength. One of the most common idols that we adopt is that of money. You cannot serve both. “No one can serve **two** **masters**, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.” (Matthew 6:24)
7. Give faithfully, give generously, give privately, but most importantly, give worshipfully. Your gifts are between you and the Lord.

For further thought: Generous Giving

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/generous-giving>

**January 20 – Malachi 4**

**God’s Perfect Timing**

On Sunday night I just met with a missionary couple who serve in an Arabic region. They shared stories with me about how they have to be clandestine when speaking to native Christians, because they know there is a high likelihood that if that faith was to be made public, it would likely mean certain death. They also shared with me about a church in a closed country who had 14 native Christians, and within 24 hours every last one of them was turned into the government and executed for their faith.

The sixth and final denouncement of Israel is once again focused on the justice of God. In the end of chapter three, we see that there were some in Israel who genuinely desired to honor and follow the Lord. For those who do trust in the Lord, God provides these indelible promises. “But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts.” (4:2-3)

When you consider those who are being martyred around the world for their faith, your heart may similarly cry out for justice like the righteous remnant of Israel. We hunger for the day when there will be no earthly government or opponent who stands against true worship. As we await that day, God calls us to stand firm, trusting in His timing and His justice.

**The Coming Elijah**

Have you ever seen a Seder (Passover) meal? One aspect of that meal that is so strange to outsiders is that they will leave the door partially open and an empty seat at the table. Why? Because there is a promise right here in Malachi that the prophet Elijah will return. So, they prepare a place for him, just in case he shows up.

It is no small coincidence that the very last thing God says before being silent for 400 years is that a prophet (Elijah) is coming who will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children. And the next time God begins speaking, He says through the angel Gabriel that a child is going to be born and that He would “go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.”

Of course, this is a reference to John the Baptist. Is he Elijah? No, not literally speaking. Rather, he has come with similar boldness and a similar message, to trust Jehovah alone and repent of sin. This is why Jesus says in Matthew 11:13-14, “For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.” Jesus is stating plainly that there is no more reason to leave a place setting at the table for Elijah. John fulfills that prophecy.

**January 21 – Matthew 1**

**Drawing a Straight Line**

The Bible contains dozens of genealogies. I realize that most people do not feel their heart burn within them when reading them. But, all of them are breathed out by God and profitable for us. I have personally come to love them. They ground the Bible in genuine history as we learn of generation after generation of people that God has preserved to carry out His plans. Instead of doing a deep study of the text itself, let me share with you a few of the things that I look for when going through them.

1. Did God make promises to anyone in this list?
2. If so, are those promises being fulfilled or about to be fulfilled in this text?
3. Does this list of names reveal any stories of God’s redeeming grace?
4. Are there names on this list that have connected stories elsewhere in the Bible?
5. If so, do those stories connect with the one about to be told?
6. Are there any people on this list that are surprising (In this chapter, absolutely!)
7. What is the reason that this genealogy is being presented right now?

Let’s actually answer question #7. This book of Matthew is all about presenting Jesus as King. As you are going through the book, do your best to pick out all of the examples of kingly language or metaphors being used. One of the requirements of a king is that they come from the royal line. The Messiah had to come from the tribe of Judah. Joseph, the surrogate father of Jesus, was not only from the tribe of Judah, He was a direct descendant of the kings! So, as a fully adopted son, Jesus legally took on the line of the kings. This is just the first picture of the Messiah King, Jesus.

**Joseph**

Luke focusses mainly on Mary’s story before the birth of Christ. Matthew zooms in on Joseph. There are no quotes attributed to him. He is silent in Scripture. But what we do see is that he, just like Mary, was willing to have his reputation destroyed in order to faithfully carry out God’s plan through Jesus. Why? What was so important about that plan? God tells Joseph clearly that this child will, “save His people from their sins.” (vs 21) Joseph was a poor man who heard God’s command and humbly obeyed. May we likewise hear the good news of salvation and respond with humble obedience.

**Emmanuel**

Few things have filled my heart with joy more than meditating on the foundational truth that Jesus is “God with us.” Our sin necessitates that God be separate from us. Before our salvation, we desired to be far from God. God would have been well within His rights to wipe us out without a care. But, in love, God has chosen to draw near to us. He desires to commune with us. He delights in our praises and prayers. He speaks of us as adopted children. And one day, the words of John’s vision will be finalized. “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.” (Rev. 21:3)

**For your joy**

One of my great regrets from this December is that we were unable to sing so many of the theologically rich Christmas songs that we usually share as we lead up to the 25th. Here is just one song that centers in on that notion of Emmanuel, God with us.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2oRMqrxCXRQ>

**January 22 – Matthew 2**

**Two Kings**

We have already been introduced to King Jesus, but not a new king has entered the scene: King Herod. This wretched and wicked king reveals that He is the exact opposite of Jesus. He is willing to kill the innocent in order to keep His power over the weak and helpless. Jesus, the innocent one, left His throne in order to die for the weak and helpless. The wise men did not pay tribute to Herod, but to Jesus. The star did not stand over Herod’s home, but that of Jesus. Jesus, even as a baby, is being revealed as a greater King than ever seen before.

**Prophecy fulfilled**

One thing that you will find often as we make our way through Matthew is the way he weaves in so many Old Testament prophecies and their fulfillment in Christ. There are three main prophecies we see fulfilled in this chapter.

1. The Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. (Micah 5:2, Matthew 2:6)
2. The Messiah would spend part of His life in Egypt (Hosea 11:1, Matthew 2:15)
3. The descendants of Rachel would be slaughtered as children (Jeremiah 31:15, Matthew 2:18)

**God on the Run**

It seems bizarre and ironic to think of God in this way. Jesus, the God of the universe, came in such a humble way that He had to be secretly smuggled to a different country and hidden away in a small, country village where He could grow up outside of the view of the national rulers.

Was God running or hiding? Absolutely not. The plan of the Father was to preserve Jesus’ life until He would lay it down at the cross. In John 10:18 Jesus said, “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.” There were many occasions before the cross when Jesus’ life was threatened by His enemies. Yet, God’s plan was to perfectly ensure that Jesus would be safe until such a time that He would carry the sins of the world to the cross.

**For further study:**

The wise men worshiped Jesus with precious gifts. I strongly recommend listening to this excellent sermon by our very own Jean Impert who explains the meaning behind them.

<https://www.gatewayli.org/sermons/sermon/2020-12-06/gold-frankincense-myrrh>