

The Message of Malachi

Our daily readings (according to the Bible Companion reading plan) bring us towards the end of the Old Testament, and the message of Malachi. The name “Malachi” literally means “*my messenger*”, and the prophecy is primarily concerned with the priests, who had fallen away from the true temple worship. The priests themselves should have been messengers, for it is written of them that: “the priests should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: **for he is the messenger of Yahweh of armies**” (Mal. 2:7). But the priests failed in their duty, and so the Word of Yahweh came to the people through the work of another messenger instead: Malachi (my messenger) the prophet.

The opening chapter of Malachi deals with the contrasting issues of love and hate:

“I have loved you, sayeth Yahweh. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob’s brother? Saith Yahweh: **Yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau**, and laid his mountains and his heritage for the dragons of the wilderness” (Mal. 1:2-3).

There are those who teach that God loves everybody, and that it is our responsibility to show that love to everyone around us. But these sentiments are not in accordance with the holy writ: Yahweh states that “I hated Esau”, as well as loving Jacob. It logically follows that our Father loves his children, but hates those who are abandoned to disobedience, and who are lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of Truth and Righteousness. And it is part of our love towards God, that we should hate those things that he hates: “I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies” is the position of the Psalmist (Psa. 139:22). We must hate those who He hates, and count as our enemies, those who are enemies to the Truth. Indeed, it is written that: the fear of Yahweh **is to hate evil**: pride, and arrogance, and the evil way, and the forward mouth, **do I hate**” (Prov. 8:13). By definition, we cannot truly love Truth, unless at the same time, we hate that which is in opposition to Truth.

POLLUTED SACRIFICES

Chapter two of Malachi focuses upon the work of the priests, demonstrating their contempt for the holy things of God:

“ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar; and ye say, Wherein have we polluted thee? In that ye say, The table of Yahweh is contemptible. And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And if ye offer the lame and the sick, is it not evil ...?”

The priests offered “polluted bread” upon the altar, in that they offered sacrifices which were defective before the Almighty, who requires the best that we can offer. Interestingly, the altar is described as: “the table of Yahweh”, which indicates that the offerings were part of a fellowship meal, with Yahweh being served upon the table first, with the choicest portion. Elsewhere in the Mosaic Law, this idea of a fellowship meal was expressed in the peace offerings, which was the only altar offering that the offeror himself could eat. Similarly, Yahweh was served first, seen in the way in which certain parts of the animal were placed, and burned upon the Altar, before the offeror and the priests could take their portion.

But in reality, none of us are perfect: none of us can truly bring a perfect offering to fellowship with the Almighty. We all have blemishes –yet through the grace of God, and the sacrifice of Christ, we can draw nigh to the throne of grace, for “truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 Jno. 1:13). God will fellowship with us, despite our imperfections. This was taught under the sacrificial code under the Law. The sacrifice of praise, one of the peace offerings, was the only sacrifice which did not have to be perfect in a particular circumstance: “either a bullock or a lamb that hath **anything superfluous or lacking in his parts, that mayest thou offer** for a freewill offering; but for a vow it shall not be accepted” (Lev. 22:23).

Under the Law then, for a freewill offering (a type of the sacrifice of praise), a person could offer an animal that had a deformity, whether lacking in some way, or having something “superfluous”. Blemishes in the form of physical deformities were allowed.

This reflects our situation before God: He will accept our sacrifices of praise, despite the fact that they are not without blemish. Our physical nature is “sinful flesh” before Him, and as a consequence, we cannot

render a perfect sacrifice. But the priests to whom Malachi spoke misused this merciful provision. They not only offered that which had physical deformities, but also those that were blind, lame and sick. Keeping the best for themselves, they sacrificed those things that were of little use to them. The provision under the law it would seem, was that if the very best animal a man had to offer was deformed, because they were giving their best, it would still be accepted. But the priests missed the point entirely. They assumed that because Yahweh was Gracious they could continue offering imperfections, and that His Grace would continue to abound. In some ways, this is similar to the charge held against Paul by some: so he asked “shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?” (Rom. 6:1). The attitude of mind is similar, and there is a danger that we can unwittingly do the same thing. We might think that we can continue in sin, because we know that God can forgive us, rather than striving to offer the very best service we can before our Father.

We too come before the Lord’s table (1 Cor. 10:21) each Sunday, upon which is placed the emblems of Messiah’s sacrifice. At that time, a man must “examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup” (1 Cor. 11:28). Here is the real spirit of the peace offering and fellowship, partaking of the emblems of true sacrifice, and examining our own standing before God. We must therefore seek to identify ourselves with the sacrifice of Christ, desiring to offer the very best that we have before the Almighty.

SERVING GOD FOR NOUGHT

Malachi 1:10 brings to our attention another aspect of the priest’s failure to uphold the righteousness of God: they would not engage in their reasonable service (Cp. Rom. 12:1-2), unless they saw a personal benefit from their work:

“who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? Neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith Yahweh of armies, neither will I accept an offering at your hand” (Mal. 1:10).

Again, the prophet Micah identified the same failing:

“the heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money ...” (Mic. 3:11).

Seeking temporal advantage, the priests were more interested in their own affairs, rather than the benefit of the flock of God. By contrast, Peter exhorted the elders of the ecclesia: “feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; ***not for filthy lucre***, but of a ready mind” (1 Pet. 5:2).

This is the difference between the true shepherd and a hireling. The true shepherd will lay down his life for the sheep, whereas the hireling will forsake the flock when he thinks he is in personal danger:- “he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep.” (Jno. 10:12-13). Seeking only his self interest, the one who is a shepherd for the glories of this life, will run and forsake the flock when danger comes: which contrasts, of course, with our Master who is the true shepherd, who lay down his life for the flock.

THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWLEDGE

Another of the priestly responsibilities was to teach the knowledge of God – yet the priests who taught for hire neglected in this duty also:

“the priest’s lips ***should keep*** knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of Yahweh of armies. But ye are departed out of the way: ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith Yahweh of armies” (Mal. 2:7-8).

Having “corrupted the covenant of Levi,” the priests no longer taught the Truth, or the righteousness of the Law, and so the people could not longer go to them to learn the Word of God. Instead, they were caused to stumble and fall. The consequence of this, was as Yahweh spake by Hosea: “my people ***are destroyed for***

lack of knowledge: because thou hast *rejected knowledge*, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me ..." (Hos. 4:6).

There are those of our day, who disparage Bible Study, claiming that it is what the heart is like, and not our "doctrinal correctness" that matters. But this misses the point that Israel were "destroyed" for their "lack of knowledge". Lacking knowledge, they would not know what the Will of God was in particular circumstances, and so did not do that Will. Another point that is missed is that the condition of our hearts is a direct consequence of how we fill ourselves with the principles of the Word. So the Apostle spoke of true believers: "that their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the **full assurance of understanding** of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ ..." (Col. 2:2). "the full assurance of understanding" then, is important for the unity of true believers: a common hope and zeal for the things of the spirit of God.

YAHWEH AS WITNESS

Another failing, is that the people divorced their wives in order to marry women from the nations around them. But the iniquities of the priests did not go unnoticed: God will not be mocked, and He witnessed to their sins, though his Prophet: "**Yahweh hath been witness** between thee and the wife of youth against whom thou hast dealt treacherously: yet is she thy companion, and the wife of thy covenant" (Mal. 2:14).

The fact that Yahweh sees all of our circumstances, and the things that we do, can have two effects. It can motivate us to do better: the knowledge that our Father sees everything is something which encourages us not to do those things that we know are wrong in His Sight. But another aspect is that we can have peace of mind in adverse circumstances: because Yahweh knows our afflictions, we have the confidence that he will watch over us for our ultimate good. Speaking of this, the sweet Psalmist of Israel sang:

"If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: If I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me." (Psa. 139:8-10).

Again, the Apostle wrote concerning both aspects:

"the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil" (1 Pet. 3:12).

MY MESSENGER

We saw earlier that the name "Malachi" signifies "My Messenger", and as such, the prophet foreshadowed another "messenger" that would come:

"behold, **I will send my messenger**, and he shall prepare the way before me" (Mal. 3:1).

This, of course, had a preliminary fulfillment in John the Baptist, and is assigned as a future work of Elijah the prophet. But this verse goes on to describe another messenger again: the Lord Jesus Christ as the "messenger of the covenant":

"the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even **the messenger of the covenant**, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith Yahweh of armies" (Mal. 3:1)

The Lord Jesus is the one through whom the New Covenant came, and that fact is something that gives added responsibility for men to heed the message:

"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by Angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; **How shall we escape**, if we neglect so great salvation, which **at the first began to be spoken by the Lord**, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him ..." (Heb. 2:1-3).

The message of the Lord Jesus then, involves principles that we must earnestly give heed to; else we will not escape condemnation in his sight. He shall come again as a judge as well as a messenger, to purge the priesthood of Levi:

“and he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto Yahweh an offering in righteousness” (Mal. 3:3).

DO WE DELIGHT IN HIM?

The priest were said to “delight in him,” that is, the Messenger of the covenant who was to come. But though they professed to be looking for, and waiting for him, he would come to judge them, and purge them as gold and silver. They said “where is the God of judgment” (Mal. 2:17), assuming that he would plead their cause – but instead he would purge them. There were also those in Amos’ day who thought likewise:

“woe unto you that desire the day of Yahweh! To what end is it for you? The day of Yahweh is darkness and not light” (Amos 5:18).

We, who form the body of Christ in the latter days, look forward to the coming day of Yahweh – but on what terms? Messiah taught: “seek ye first the kingdom of God, ***and his righteousness***” (Mat. 6:33). Notice, there are two aspects to seek after, not one. Whilst we look towards, and yearn for the kingdom to come, we should also be seeking the Righteousness of the Almighty. The kingdom is not going to be established in order to solve our problems, or even to solve the world’s problems. It is to be established in order that the Will of our Father shall be done on earth even as it is done in heaven – and in order to be part of that time to come, we need to uphold the righteousness of God in this generation. And the blessings that follow will be a consequence of that righteousness being established in all the earth.

The day of Yahweh to come will be a day of darkness and gloominess to those who do not allow their light to shine, and who not bring oil with their lamps when they go out to meet him (Mat. 25:3). But to those who apply the word received, shall not only shine as lights in an otherwise darkened world, they shall become part of the luminance of the Age to Come: “Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Mat. 13:43). Or as Daniel has it, “they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever” (Dan. 12:3).

This latter phase is described in Malachi chapter 4, again with this twofold aspect of that Great Day: destruction and healing:

“behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith Yahweh of armies, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. But unto you that fear my name *shall the Sun of Righteousness arise* with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall” (Mal. 4:1-2).

We saw earlier that due to the nature of the physical makeup that we each share, we cannot render to our Master a perfect sacrifice. But when our Master comes, he shall heal us from our mortal weakness, like the healing rays of the sun.

Our readings (following the Bible Companion reading planner) bring us to the end of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments. We look forward to a new year, trusting in the power of God to keep us until the new day will break, and every shadow and work of darkness shall be dispelled by the shining of the Sun of Righteousness. As we come to the end of the year, we look forward to a new year, with new trials, new challenges, and new ways to serve our Master, the coming King. Let us therefore, lift up our heads, knowing that our redemption draweth near. Let us walk forward without fear of what the future will hold, earnestly desiring above all things that this kingdom shall indeed be established, with the Will of our Father being done on earth, even as it is in heaven.

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