

## Mid Week • Malachi 1:1-2:9

### INTRODUCTION

The Prophecy of Malachi is unlike most of the other OT prophets in that we find no datable events or persons.

The one clue we have that allows us to date the book is the use of the word for “governor.” (1:8)

The word is used only during the period of the Persian rule, after the exile and return. (Hag 1:1 Neh. 5:14)

Malachi presents a picture of life for the people of God as being relatively normal.

Worship is going on, so we know the temple has been rebuilt.

And the people are living in relative safety with a measure of prosperity, so the walls of Jerusalem have been rebuilt.

No mention is made of their enemies presenting trouble, so Israel has been able to gain some independence and strength.

In light of all we find in Malachi, and the message of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, we can conclude that Malachi prophesied in about 430 BC, some 15 years after Nehemiah had returned to rebuild the walls.

Both Ezra and Nehemiah addressed several of the same issues Malachi deals with.

As governor, Nehemiah had been able to institute reforms to correct the problems.

But once he left office and returned to the Persian court, the people reverted back to the habits of their past.

Malachi comes with a scathing denunciation of the cold hearts of the people toward God.

Malachi structures his book around 7 sarcastic remarks by the people.

Malachi had spoken a prophetic word to them, and instead of the people listening, taking it to heart and repenting, they had thrown it right back at the man of God with the most sneering kind of sarcasm.

The basic question they ask is – “What good is it to worship God? What profit is there in serving Him?”

Or, to put it in strictly modern terms – “What’s God done for me lately?”

Now of course, this is a ridiculously absurd remark – and it shows how far the people had fallen in their understanding of God and their vision of their destiny as His people.

The name Malachi means “*My Messenger*” and that’s really all we know about him.

He gives us no information about his lineage, his background, or anything else.

In fact, he isn’t even mentioned anywhere else in the Bible.

All we have is his message – and while it is a tragic sketch of the coldness of the people of God, the Lord’s tender yet firm response to their sarcasm provides us with some incredibly powerful truths and preaching points.

The book *begins* with a reminder of God’s past blessings, *then moves* to an analysis of where they were, and *ends* with a look into the future at their destiny as the people of God.

## CHAPTER 1

**1 The burden [or oracle] of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi.**

**2 “I have loved you,” says the LORD.**

**“Yet you say, ‘In what way have You loved us?’**

Let’s pause right there . . .

As we read through all 4 chapters, it becomes clear that Malachi is recording his speaking out the message of God, and the people’s sarcastic response.

Then God goes on to reply to their sarcasm and show how they’d lost touch with His holiness and their own identity as His people.

Malachi came to the people with the Word of God and said, “Thus says the LORD, ‘I have loved you.’”

Now think about it – if a man or woman we all recognize as a prophet came into our fellowship and gave us this message,

what would our response be?  
I think we'd all be moved to praise and thanksgiving!  
We'd think back over our lives and see the hand of God moving to demonstrate His love.

The Jews this was spoken to certainly could have done that!  
God had shown His covenant love to them time and again.  
The Exodus, Mt. Sinai, the manna and water in the wilderness,  
their victory in taking Promised Land, their golden age under  
David and Solomon, and in more recent time, their miraculous  
return after the exile, the rebuilt temple and city and their  
present safety and prosperity were all clear evidences of God's  
love.

But like a petulant child, they respond to God's affirmation of His  
love with, "Oh yeah? In what way have You loved us?"  
Can't you just hear the sneering sound of a spoiled little brat in  
that?

What's amazing is that God condescends to *answer* them, even when  
they are being petty and sarcastic.  
He is so patient and longsuffering!

**Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" Says the LORD. "Yet  
Jacob I have loved;**

**3 But Esau I have hated, And laid waste his mountains  
and his heritage for the jackals of the wilderness."**

**4 Even though Edom has said, "We have been  
impoverished, But we will return and build the desolate  
places,"**

**Thus says the LORD of hosts: "They may build, but I will  
throw down; They shall be called the Territory of  
Wickedness, And the people against whom the LORD  
will have indignation forever.**

**5 Your eyes shall see, And you shall say, 'The LORD is  
magnified beyond the border of Israel.'**

Now – this answer to the people's query about how God had loved  
them is a bit puzzling.

How does this reference to Esau and his descendants the

Edomites, *prove* God's love of Israel?

God is turning their attention to what had happened to their neighbors, the Edomites, and linking it back to the origin of both the Edomites and the Israelites.

Jacob and Esau were brothers – in fact, they were twins, but Esau was the firstborn.

So he had the rights of the firstborn.

But as you'll remember, he'd shown his disdain for the things of God and had sold his birthright to his brother Jacob for a bowl of bean stew.

God chose to work through Jacob instead of Esau and bring the promises made to Abraham and Isaac to pass through the younger brother.

The descendants of both Jacob and Esau ended up falling away from the Lord and turning to idol worship.

And God judged both nations – but Edom's destruction was nearly total while Israel had been restored to their land and at the time Malachi gave this prophecy they were prospering once more.

God's promise and covenant with Israel to bless her above all nations was conditioned on her obedience of God.

Disobedience would bring judgment.

God is telling the people that if they want to see the evidence of His love, recognize the mercy and grace he'd shown them by bypassing Esau and his descendants and making them the focus of His election.

Then, if they needed more proof, look over their eastern border at the desolate waste that had been Edom and realize how He'd demonstrated His love by NOT wiping them out when their sin had far exceeded that done by the Edomites!

God said, "I have loved you."

They said, "Who? Us? God has loved us? Since when?"

His reply is - since the beginning, and all throughout your history!

When Edom had been destroyed by the Babylonians, the people of Israel watched and said, "Serves them right! They rejected God!"

But Israel's sins were even more deserving of judgment than Edom's!

This ought to have moved them to recognize God's mercy and

covenant love.

Verse 2 has proven deeply troubling for many people.

How can a God of love say that He hates someone?

Actually, He doesn't – notice carefully the way it's worded . . .

### **Jacob I have loved but Esau I have hated.**

God is NOT expressing the *emotion* of hatred in this passage!

This is a fairly common idiom used in Biblical times to show *contrast*.

Used in the sense of contrast and *personal choice*, love and hate are merely idiomatic for showing *preference*!

We see this in Genesis 29:30-33 between Jacob and his two wives Leah and Rachel.

**30** And he went in also unto Rachel, and he loved also Rachel more than Leah, and served with him yet seven other years.

**31** And when the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb: but Rachel was barren. **32** And Leah conceived, and bare a son, and she called his name Reuben: for she said, Surely the LORD hath looked upon my affliction; now therefore my husband will love me. **33** And she conceived again, and bare a son; and said, Because the LORD hath heard that I was hated, he hath therefore given me this son also: and she called his name Simeon.

Or how about this from Jesus Himself . . . Luke 14:26

**“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.”**

In these passage, hatred as an emotion of despise, loathing, and moral abhorrence is not what's being referred to.

It has to do with order of preference and choice.

When God says, “Jacob I have loved but Esau I have hated,” He saying that His love of Jacob and His descendants has been

revealed in the fact that He *overlooked* the firstborn in favor of the younger and made him the object of His covenant blessings.

---

Do we ever fall into the error the Israelites did here in v. 2?

Do we ever grumble and say in effect, “Hey God, what have you done for me lately?”

Do we ever hear the message that God loves us, and respond with an inner sense of, “Really? How so? It sure doesn’t feel like a lot of love’s going on right now!”

Maybe we need a healthy dose of what we find right here.

God chose the Jews – they are His covenant people.

But He’s turned His redemptive attention from Israel to the Gentiles and opened wide the doors to the Kingdom to all who will enter by faith in Jesus Christ.

What did you do to merit God’s salvation?

The fact is, all we merit, all we deserve is judgment!

But here we are tonight – destined for heaven.

No matter how dark things are now, no matter how dark they may get, this life is as bad as it will ever get for us who believe in Christ.

What God said to ancient Israel through Malachi, the Holy Spirit is saying to us tonight – “I have loved you.”

Look at the Cross!

Look at the day He brought you to your sense and faith in Christ.

Remember the times He’s come through for you!

May the response of our hearts back to Him not be a sarcastic sneer but a peel of holy praise!

**6 “A son honors *his* father, And a servant *his* master.**

**If then I am the Father, Where *is* My honor? And if I *am* a Master, Where *is* My reverence? Says the LORD of hosts To you priests who despise My name.**

**Yet you say, ‘In what way have we despised Your name?’**

The Lord turns from the people to the priests – the religious “*professionals*” – the very ones who were supposed to be directing the people to honor the holiness of God!

But they were going about their business in such a way that they were showing their disdain for Him.

When He confronts them, again, instead of owning their error, they became defensive and said, “Hey – what’s wrong with what we’re doing? How have we been disrespectful?”

He tells them. “Well, how about when . . .

**7 “You offer defiled food on My altar, But say, ‘In what way have we defiled You?’**

**By saying, ‘The table of the LORD is contemptible.’**

**8 And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, *Is it* not evil?**

**And when you offer the lame and sick, *Is it* not evil?**

**Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably?” Says the LORD of hosts.**

When the people brought their sacrifices to the temple, they were supposed to pick out healthy animals that were without blemish. The reason why is obvious.

This was an offering to the Lord, and as an act of worship, they ought to have wanted to offer the *very best* they had, not the least, not the cast off and that which they were willing to throw away.

It was the duty of the people to provision the table of the government officials as part of their tax.

God challenges them with giving to the *governor* what they were offering to God and see if we would accept it.

While it was the *people* who were bringing blemished gifts, it was the *priests* who were accepting them and laying them on the altar.

If the priest would lower the standard, the people would then bring whatever they could get away with.

The people figured that if the men entrusted with safeguarding the holiness of God would accept blemished offerings, then worship wasn’t really all that important and God would be pleased to accept whatever they wanted to bring, whenever they wanted to bring it.

You can see the dangerously slippery slope this leads to.

When we tinker with the holiness of God, the very foundations of

our faith in Him suffer irreparable damage.  
Contrast the practice of the people and priests of Malachi's day to the example of David.

When he went to Araunah to purchase his threshing floor as a place to offer sacrifices to the Lord, Araunah offered to give it to him.

But David refused with these words, "I will not offer to the Lord that which costs me nothing!"

A sacrifice must be just that – something *costly*! Something into which we put a part of ourselves!

Our offering to the Lord is meant to be an expression of our devotion and dedication to Him.

It's a substitute, a stand in, if you will, for ourselves.

If it's just whatever's convenient and what comes easily to hand or what we were planning on throwing away, then it's despicable in the sight of God.

I think what we find here has some clear applications for today – on a couple different levels.

First of all – the chief sacrifice you and I are called to in the New Covenant is Praise!

The expression of our praise ought to be a *sacrifice*, something *costly*!

We ought to come before the Lord and offer Him more than just words.

We ought to reach out, stretch out TO Him to declare His goodness!

This is why we raise our hands, why we encourage people to stand, or sit, or kneel, or come up front and lie prostrate.

When David was leading the procession carrying the ark up to Jerusalem, he went in front and danced before the Lord with all his might.

In fact, he got so worked up, so hot, he had to take off his kingly robes and ended up stripped down to his inner garment.

Now, as king, he was badly underdressed – but he was far more concerned with showing God his joy, of offering himself up as a living sacrifice, to worry himself about what the people of Jerusalem thought.



Later, when his wife rebuked him for his display of emotion and lack of decorum, his reply was, “In my offering praise to God, I will become even more undignified than this!!!!”

Last Sunday’s worship at both services was really special!  
From the moment I sat down I sensed the Lord was going to do a wonderful work among us – and wow, did He!

As sweet and intimate as the praise and worship was Sunday, we have a lot of room to grow!

Many of us need to come to the place David was – where for the sake of God’s glory, we are ready to abandon ourselves to Him and not worry about what others are going to think or say.

Second – This passage teaches us that our attitude toward serving the Lord needs to be *elevated*.

The vast majority of work that’s done in the Church is accomplished by *volunteers*, not professionals or paid staff. From the worship team, to the ushers – it’s mostly volunteers.

The entire children’s ministry is done by volunteers.

The greeters are volunteers.

The elders and deacons are all volunteers in their various ministries.

All the home and small group leaders are volunteers.

Question, if we bring to our ministry the kind of attitude we see reflected in these verses – what kind of ministry will we do? It will be blemished and incomplete – unworthy of the Lord of Glory!

God laid the blame for the faulty and inadequate sacrifices the people were bringing at the *feet of the priests*.

The *professionals* had become so inured and hardened to their role as the representatives of God that they allowed anyone to bring anything they wanted.

Quality was abandoned in favor of quantity.

In order to avoid this being repeated in the Church, the leaders of the church need to ensure they are offering *their* best, and then reminding others that God is holy and *deserves* our best.

It so happens that in many churches, they are so hard up for

volunteers they take *whatever* people are willing to offer.

But really, as we read on, it would be better to do nothing, than to offer the Lord something sloppy and half-hearted.

I rejoice that we have so many here at Calvary who want to give the Lord the best!

If you've made a commitment to ministry – follow through and do your best.

**9 “But now entreat God’s favor, That He may be gracious to us. *While this is being done by your hands,* Will He accept you favorably?” Says the LORD of hosts.**

A window of opportunity remains open to them.

Their sacrifices have been abhorrent to God, but if they will just turn to Him in sincerity and ask for His grace, God will once more shower them with His favor.

**10 “Who *is there even among you who would shut the doors, So that you would not kindle fire on My altar in vain? I have no pleasure in you,*” Says the LORD of hosts, “Nor will I accept an offering from your hands.**

Note that – God says He'd rather one of the priests would listen to Him, wake up from the place of spiritual apathy, and just shut the doors to the temple!

It's better to do *nothing* than to proceed with the travesty they were engaging in.

Think about that!

God is saying that a lot of activity associated with His house is not what's important.

If the activity is an abomination, it would be better to just turn off the lights and go home!

God is not in the place of the beggar who has to take whatever we're willing to offer.

God is the Holy, Righteous God of the Universe and He doesn't NEED our worship.

It is WE who need to worship because it reminds us of who sits on the throne and where the center of our lives lies.

When worship becomes unfocused and distracted, distorted because we no longer see God as He is, then it would be better

left aside.

In the 7 letters to the churches of Asia Minor in Revelation 2 & 3, the last one is sent to the Church of Laodicea.

As we read the description of the church, we are confronted with a wealthy and powerful fellowship – but Jesus is outside!

They were so busy with the forms of religion, the business and activity of church life, they'd not even noticed that Jesus had departed.

I wonder how many churches today are like Laodicea, busy, but spiritually dead.

I wonder how many churches the Spirit of God would say this over . . .

**Who *is there* even among you who would shut the doors,**

Despite the lack of glory God was receiving from those who ought to have been giving it – God now tells them His fame and glory will spread far beyond their borders to those the Jews never would have guessed.

**11 For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name *shall be* great among the Gentiles; In every place incense *shall be* offered to My name, And a pure offering; For My name shall be great among the nations,” Says the LORD of hosts.**

Malachi meant what he says here to startle his audience.

The first word of verse 11 is a Hebrew word that is almost a shout of joy like “Yes, indeed!”

This truth was so unexpected, rising above the paltry service and heartless attitudes of the priesthood, that Malachi breaks out in a shout to awaken people before introducing a radical new idea.

Though Israel's spiritual leaders despised the Lord's great name, that did not mean God was stuck with these worshipers or his cause was at an impasse.

God could, and would, raise up true worshipers to his name from all the nations of the world.

The prophet said the scope of God's praise would rise from “the rising to the setting of the sun.”

When he said that incense and offerings would be offered up “in

every place” it must have shaken those who remembered that only in Jerusalem were they to offer sacrifices and burn incense before God.

The word “pure” was not the same as the word for “without blemish” but refers to one’s moral and physical purity as well as ceremonial purity.

All of this raises the question of how the Gentile nations could offer a pure offering in places *other* than Jerusalem.

In Psalm 141:2 we read . . .

**Let my prayer be set before You as incense, the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.**

In Revelation 8:3 we have this . . .

**Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer *it* with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.**

It was the duty of the priests to offer incense on the golden altar in the Holy Place as symbolic of the prayers and praise of God’s people.

When God here tells the priests and people that His name will be great among the Gentiles and that incense will be offered far and wide to His name, along with a pure offering – He is prophesying of the Gospel being preached to the ends of the earth.

**12 “But you profane it, [meaning God’s Name] In that you say, ‘The table of the LORD is defiled; And its fruit, its food, *is* contemptible.’**

**13 You also say, ‘Oh, what a weariness!’ And you sneer at it,” Says the LORD of hosts.**

**“And you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick; Thus you bring an offering! Should I accept this from your hand?” Says the LORD.**

**14 “But cursed *be* the deceiver Who has in his flock a male, And takes a vow, But sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished—For I *am* a great King,” Says the LORD of**

**hosts, “And My name *is to be feared among the nations.***

The priests, men who were uniquely privileged to attend to the holy things – had become so familiar with them, they had become bored!

Familiarity breeds contempt – and they had become contemptible of the things of God.

As the priests lowered the standard and people had brought the lame and sick, the priests looked at the sacrifices and despised them – after all, the inventory before them was a motley, sick lot.

Their service was dealing with imperfect and worthless specimens and they eventually grew to the place where they hated their job.

They couldn’t help but think of God in terms of what was being offered Him.

How many weak, blemished and sickly sheep do you think a priest would have to offer before he started thinking of God as weak, blemished and sickly?

And how much longer till his service seemed like a waste of time?

God says, “Look, I know what the people have in their flocks. I know the choice sheep that they keep to themselves. I was there when they walked through the herd and looked for the most pathetic to bring to the altar.”

Passages like this move us to wonder if we ought not raise the level of *expectation* about people’s participation in church life.

God knows how much time we have, about how much we have in our wallet or purse.

He’s well aware of how we manage our time and what we give to each commitment.

## **CHAPTER 2**

**1 “And now, O priests, this commandment is for you.**

**2 If you will not hear, And if you will not take *it* to heart, To give glory to My name,” Says the LORD of hosts, “I will send a curse upon you, And I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have cursed them already, Because you do not take *it* to heart.**

It was part of the duty of priest to call down God's blessings on the people.

We see this when Aaron, the first High Priest, said, [Numbers 6:24-26]

**“The LORD bless you and keep you; The LORD make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace.”**

God serves notice on the priests that their special position and privilege of serving Him is about to be taken away from them if they do not repent immediately.

When they pronounce a blessing, God will turn it and them into a curse.

**3 “Behold, I will rebuke your descendants And spread refuse on your faces, The refuse of your solemn feasts; And one will take you away with it.**

This statement would a shocked and scandalized the priests – and it reveals to us just how far gone in their sensibilities they were.

It's bad enough that their being sassy and sarcastic with God, but this reveals the real hardness of their hearts.

God never says something just to be shocking!

He's never provocative for scandals sake.

He always uses whatever means are necessary to awaken us to our peril and urge our repentance.

So when He says, “I will spread refuse on your faces,” it sign of just how coarse and inured to the holiness of God the priests had become.

The refuse mentioned here is the gunk that was left behind after the priest had killed and gutted the animals for sacrifice.

The organs; the heart, liver, kidneys, stomach, and intestines as well as all the blood, and assorted tissue that was left over.

This all went into buckets which were then hauled off and taken away to be disposed of in the dump.

God is saying, that if the priests don't quickly repair their ways, then He is going to smear the refuse on their faces, stick them in the buckets along with the rest and haul them off to the dump.

**4 Then you shall know that I have sent this**

**commandment to you, That My covenant with Levi may continue,” Says the LORD of hosts.**

**5 “My covenant was with him, *one* of life and peace, And I gave them to him *that he might* fear Me; So he feared Me And was reverent before My name.**

**6 The law of truth was in his mouth, And injustice was not found on his lips. He walked with Me in peace and equity, And turned many away from iniquity.**

**7 “For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, And *people* should seek the law from his mouth; For he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.**

God had set the tribe of Levi apart from the other tribes as the ones who would serve as priests.

That priesthood was then instituted during the days of Moses and his brother Aaron.

At first, besides a few stumbles here and there, the tribe of Levi did a good job in their role as the representatives of God.

They were the guardians of the law, and served faithfully in this regard for many generations.

It wasn't till the time of the kings that the priesthood became more interested in power and position than in their duty as the representatives of God.

They got caught up in the people's lust to worship idols and learned to play the religious game.

God then brought judgment upon the nation and the priests in particular, through the Assyrians and the Babylonians and they were carried away from their precious temple and lost their position.

There in Babylon they learned all about idols and determined never to fall with them again.

God used the judgment of the Babylonians as a way to renew His covenant with Levi.

So here they are, back in the land, worshipping at a brand new temple, and while the danger of idolatry is past, the same corruption that had marked their ancestors and eventually led to their apostasy is recurring.

**8 But you have departed from the way; You have caused many to stumble at the law. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi,” Says the LORD of hosts.**

How had they corrupted the covenant? By lowering the standard and refusing to honor God as holy!

**9 “Therefore I also have made you contemptible and base Before all the people, Because you have not kept My ways But have shown partiality in the law.”**

The priests, who longed to be esteemed and held in respect by the people, had fallen into disrepute.

They were seen as shams, fakes, and frauds.

That’s what happens when people who are supposed to represent God seek instead to cater to the desire of man.

By seeking to curry public favor & make worship “easier” for the people by allowing less than perfect sacrifices, they were digging the grave of their own reputation.

You see, the people *knew* what God’s word said – they knew they were supposed to bring the best.

When the priests bent the rules, they knew the problem was the priests, not the law and that they were just twisting the law in order to gain friends.

A failure to live by the standard they were supposed to be appointed to, the very thing that made them special – they came off as hypocrites and losers.

So – by seeking favor with man, they gained the scorn of both God and man.

## **CONCLUSION**

Let that be a lesson to us as the followers of Christ.

While most non-believers have little knowledge about the Bible or the content of the Christian faith, they at least know those who claim to be Christian are supposed to be different from the world.

They may misunderstand a lot about what we believe, but they at least know we’re called to holiness.

We don’t gain an ear for the gospel by lowering ourselves to sin.

If in our attempt to be liked we end up compromising with the world, all it will do is earn us the label of hypocrite.



It is far better to be a person of integrity and maintain a reputation of someone whose solid.

It may take a while, but eventually, when the lost are in need, it is the steadfast and proven they will go to for help.