

Old Testament Sign Off

Malachi Overview

(preached Pine Grove 2/14/15; Sunday PM)

Introduction

When I was a kid, television stations often signed off at night...

At 1 or 2 am, the channel would become something that looked like what you see on the screen behind me...

And nothing would air on the station until the next morning when the station began broadcasting again...

You couldn't just watch TV all night in my day; there was a time when all the channels signed off the air...

As we get to the final book of the OT tonight, which is the book of Malachi, this is a sign off of sorts in the history of Israel..

We talked about this a little last week, but the nation of Israel has had continuous contact with God ever since their founding by Abraham..

Whether God spoke to them through Moses or Joseph or through the kings and priests and prophets of Israel, the TV has always been on so to speak...

When it came to hearing from God.

And although the communication was not always good, it was constant for most of their history as a nation...

We have studied the prophets for some months now, and their ministry was to preach to Israel even in their disobedience..

But after God sends Malachi to them, Israel will experience the silent treatment for over 400 years..

There will be no prophets coming to them.

There will be no priests speaking God's Word to them...

For 400 years, they will be in silence.

But the question is this....

What did God have to say to them before he signed off?

What was his last instruction for His people?

What would you say in a situation like this?

IF you were taking one of your children or grandchildren to a ship that sail around the world and you wouldnt speak to them for 6 months...

What would you leave them with?

Would you just simply say I love you and put them on the boat...

Would you lay out the rules for them one more time before they sailed away?

Would you tell them that you are looking forward to seeing them soon?

What would you say?

Well, God said a little bit of all of all that in the book of Malachi...

He assured Israel that He loved them...

He reminded Israel of what He expected of them and where they had failed Him...

And He promised Israel that they would hear from Him again...

And those 3 topics are essentially going to be our outline for tonight in this final book of the OT...

In Malachi 1:1-5...

God will remind Israel of his love and His compassion for them as a nation..

In Malachi 1:6 - 3:15...

God will remind Israel of their sin and His complaints against them...

Then in the final section of this book from Malachi 3:16 - 4:6...

We will see see that God will promise His comfort and His consolation to them in the future....

I. God's Compassion for Israel (1:1-1:5)

II. God's Complaints Against Israel (1:6-3:15)

III. God's Consolation of Israel (3:16-4:6)

Let's begin in Malachi 1:1 as we set the stage for Malachi's prophecy to Israel...

I. God's Compassion for Israel (1:1-1:5)

1 The [a]oracle of the word of the Lord to Israel through [b]Malachi.

For the third week in a row, I can offer you very little information about the prophet Malachi...

In fact, this is the only mention of that name in the entire OT...

We know nothing of his parents or his occupation or where he lived...

His name simply means messenger of the Lord...

Some have claimed that this was anonymous prophecy and that Malachi was a general term for someone who would deliver this message...

However, since all the other prophets use proper names in the opening of their prophecies, it is safe to assume that Malachi was a real person...

Who happened to have a name that reflected his job...

Kinda like a man named Taylor who is a taylor...

Or a guy named Speedy who is a race car driver...

Malachi seems to be his name and his job as he serves as God's messenger...

We do know when Malachi delivered his prophecy judging by some of the subjects that he talked about in his preaching...

Most likely, Malachi delivered his message in 425 - 420 BC.

Now, let's take a journey back to the last two weeks...

If you remember, Haggai and Zechariah were prophets that God sent to the small group of Jews that had come back out of exile in Babylon...

Here a map and a short history lesson review...

Israel fell in 586 BC to the Babylonians, who carried the Jews away from their homeland and settled them in the Babylonian empire...

Where the Jews stayed for 70 years...

When the Babylonians fell to the Persians, the Persian king allowed the Jews to return to their homeland if they desired...

And the first group headed back to Israelites headed back to Jerusalem in 538 BC, where they got back to work rebuilding the temple and their lives...

The work on the temple lasted 2 years until all work was stopped in 536 BC....

And so the temple sat unfinished for 16 years until God sent Haggai in the early fall of 520 BC followed by Zechariah two months later..

Haggai and Zechariah had a simple job...

Encourage the people to get back to work rebuilding the temple, and that is exactly what they preached to the people in their two messages..

Their messages were successful as God moves the hearts of the people to get back to work, which they did.

The temple was finished in 516 BC, and the Jewish sacrifices were restored and the priests were again ministering in the temple...

Israel was back in its place and they were back to worshipping the Lord as HE desired them to do...

Well, there is a great tragedy about this world and the nations and the people who live in them...

Times of obedience and prosperity don't last long...

And the generation who came back and rebuilt the temple and were so zealous for God eventually died out and were replaced by their children...

And the shame is this...

The children were not quite as excited about the things that their parents were excited about...

They enjoyed the labors of their parents, but they didn't do their parts to keep their relationship with the Lord healthy and vibrant...

In short, they got lazy in their spiritual walk with God..

And guess what?

The problem only gets worse with the next generation...

They tend to rest more on their parents' prosperity and they get more lazy and less interested in the things of the Lord....

And you have a snowball effect with each generation...

That is the sad reality of the world....

Here is a picture of what is called the Tytler cycle of history...

A man names Alexander Tytler developed this in the 18th century...

Tytler says that every nation comes out of bondage due to their great faith...

And because of their faith, they show great courage and then experience liberty followed by abundance and prosperity...

But then there is a turn in a nation when it doesn't thank God for it's abundance...

Because abundance eventually becomes selfishness followed by complacency and then a "dont care" attitude of apathy...

Then the a nation ignores God and doesn't care about God, they become dependent on themselves which eventually puts them back in bondage...

Though I don't know if Tytler was a Christian, I do think that this is a great representation of biblical truth...

This is the cycle that Israel often found itself in...

Their lack of concern for God had lead them into captivity and bondage in Babylon....

Yet when God set them free to return home, they were filled with faith and courage and eventually rebuilt the temple...

God blessed them for their efforts...

He told them in the book of Haggai that he would increase their crops because of their obedience and send rain on their fields...

And that is what happened for a while after their return...

However, the next generation fell into selfishness...

One of God's major complaints about them is that they don't honor Hi with their money..

And that selfishness led to other problems....

I say all that to say this....

Malachi was coming a generation of Israelites that were at the end of this cycle...

Even though their grandparents or great grandparents had worked hard to rebuild the temple only 80-90 years earlier....

Malachi is sent to a group of people who are deep in apathy and on the brink of dependence and bondage...

Now think about that for a minute....

In 536 BC, the first group of Israelites left the bondage of Babylon and came home with great faith and courage to rebuild their lives around their God...

Now, it is probably a 100 years later, that faith is long gone and they are on the verge of being in bondage again....

That shows us all how quickly our lives will go back to sin if left unattended...

That shows how quickly a nation will go back into bondage if left unattended and unappreciative of their God...

If nothing else, the lesson of Malachi is don't fall down on the job even for one day...

Every day is a challenge for you to live for the Lord's glory and every day is a challenge for you to teach the next generation to live for the Lord's glory...

There are no commercial breaks in life, where you can lay on the couch and take a break...

Diligence to your walk with the Lord is the daily challenge...

And your failure to do it and model it for your children is the downfall of a family and even a nation...

So, in verse 1, Malachi comes to a nation that was less than a century removed from walking closely with the Lord...

And so where do you start when you are trying to call people back to obedience..

What do you say to disobedient children?

Malachi started this way in verses 2-5....

2 “I have loved you,” says the Lord. But you say, “How have You loved us?” “Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” declares the Lord. “Yet I have loved Jacob; 3 but I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness.” 4 Though Edom says, “We have been beaten down, but we will [c]return and build up the ruins”; thus says the Lord of hosts, “They may build, but I will tear down; and men will call them

the [d]wicked territory, and the people [e]toward whom the Lord is indignant forever.” 5 Your eyes will see this and you will say, “The Lord [f]be magnified beyond the [g]border of Israel!”

How does God start his message to a disobedient and complacent group of people?

He starts by reminding them of his unconditional love for them....

The nation of Israel was made up of the descendants of Jacob...

Jacob had a brother named Esau, who because the father of the Edomites...

However, God had always shown unconditional love for Jacob’s descendants...

On the other hand, the Edomites were never prosperous...

They had made their home in the rocks...

They were people that made a living by scraping by...

On the other hand, Jacob’s descendants that made up the nation of Israel could do no wrong...

They always seemed to prosper in whatever they did...

And God was simply reminding this group that He loved them like He had loved their parents and their ancestors for all those years they had been a nation...

Let me make a quick application to our own hearts in how God starts this message to his people...

Anytime, you have to correct a behavior in a friend or a coworker or an employee or a child...

It is often a good idea to remind that person of your love for them first...

Sometimes, we go on the attack before we affirm our love for the person first...

It is love that drives us to correct others or it should be love and not anger that drives us to correct others...

And people need to be reminded of that before you go on the rampage against them...

If you are correcting people in love (which should be the motivation for all correction), they need to hear that you love them first...

And that is exactly how Malachi starts out his message to Israel...

God has loved you and continues to love you with a love that He promised to you many years ago...

However, that love compels him to point out your sinful behavior....

And let me say this here as well...

It is not loving to not tell people the truth...

I hear folks complain about all the time about Christians who are too harsh in their judgments of others...

Now I am sure that is the case in a lot of situations....

But let me be clear....

Telling people the biblical truth about themselves is the most loving thing you can do for them...

Withholding the truth from people is the most unloving thing you can do for them...

Love causes us to speak the truth graciously and kindly to others..

When we don't tell others the truth, we only show others that we don't care about them...

And so the message of Malachi moves from God's confirming his love for Israel to God condemning them for their sins against him...

II. God's Complaints Against Israel (1:6-3:16)

God's first complaints about Israel are addressed to the priests in Israel...

These are the men who should be the spiritual leaders of Israel...

But they had become complacent like the rest of the people...

Let's just look at the first few verses of God's complaints against the priests...

Malachi 1:6-8....

6 "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My [h]respect?" says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests who despise My name. But you say, 'How have we despised Your name?' 7 You are presenting defiled [i]food upon My altar. But you say, 'How have we defiled You?' In that you say, 'The table of the Lord is to be despised.' 8 But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame and sick, is it not evil? [j]Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Or would he receive you kindly?" says the Lord of hosts.

Please take note of how offers his complaints against the priest and the people...

He does it in a question and answer format...

Look at verse 6...

God asks where is the honor and respect that is due to Him from the people and especially from His priests...

He then offers their response for them....

“How have we not respected you God?”

God then tells them exactly how they are disrespecting him...

They are offering the wrong sacrifices to him...

Then he mocks how the priests would answer that charge...

But how are we offering the wrong sacrifices?

God then answers in verse 8...

They were offering blind animals on the altar....

They were offering lame animals on the altar....

If you were here this morning, what kind of animal sacrifices did God want?

He wanted perfect animals, not ones with broken legs or blind ones...

And then God uses a little bit of sarcasm and even humor...

Why not offer these to your governor?

And then God asks, "Would your governor receive these kind of sacrifices kindly?"

Here's the point...

The people would bend over backwards to please their government officials in Israel, but they would give God their leftovers....

The same is true today....

If Nikki Haley invited someone over to have dinner with her and the family at the governor's mansion, he wouldn't think of turning them down...

He would buy a new suit or dress, get a haircut and put on the best cologne and be 15 minutes early...

But let someone invite them to church, and they will have every excuse why they can't be here...

That is how misguided people are...

They owe nothing to Nikki Haley yet they would jump at the invitation...

They owe everything to God but you couldn't pull them out of bed on time to get to a church....

The same was true in Israel...

God was getting the leftovers from the people, but the priests were accepting their leftovers and not saying a word...

The priests needed to repent if there was anyone hope of the people repenting...

God then rebukes the priests in chapter 2 for honoring the Lord's glory in the temple...

Followed by a rebuke for not teaching his law to the people as well..

Once God is done with the priests, he moves to the sins of the people in Malachi 2:10...

The first complaint against the people is that they had ignored God's command not to marry unbelievers...

While Israel was gone from the land and living in Babylon, others had come and settled in Israel...

When they returned to the land, their children began marrying the children of these pagan people...

Ever since Israel was a nation, God had warned of the practice of marrying people who weren't believers in Israel's God...

Yet, the people had ignored God and intermarried among the pagans..

And God was not pleased...

Unfortunately, it is always necessary to remind people that this is not a command against marrying someone with a different skin color...

As some have preached incorrectly over the years...

The color of the king is not the issue with God and never has been....

The condition of the heart is what God cares about...

And this command even carries forward to our day....

Christians are forbidden from marrying non-Christians...

And the reason is this...

Unbelievers pull you away from the Lord more than you pull them to the Lord...

And that was what was happening in Israel and that was the cause of much of their indifference...

And apathy toward God...

When your spouse doesn't want to worship the Lord, it is much easier for you to not do it as well...

When your spouse doesn't want to give financially to the Lord, it is much easier for you not to do it as well...

And Israel was in the sad shape it was in because of the fact that believers in the Lord were marrying unbelievers...

So, God rebuked that practice in Malachi 2:10-12...

The second complaint against the people was that divorce has become commonplace among the people...

And God reminded them in Malachi 2:16 that HE hated divorce...

And that divorce only existed for extreme cases due to the hardness of man's heart...

From there, God moves to the beginning of chapter 3 where he talks about coming judgment for the people....

And interestingly enough, he speaks of the coming Messiah in the context of judgment..

We don't often think of Jesus' first coming as a judgment upon Israel but it was...

Because they rejected Him...

Do you know why some people are unable to believe upon the Lord?

They are under God's judgment because of their sin...

Sin blinds our eyes; it doesn't open them...

Sin clogs our ears; it doesn't unclog them...

The generation that Malachi is addressing didn't change their ways...

They got worse.

And the sending of their Messiah to them wasn't a blessing...

It was judgment upon them because they were unable to embrace Jesus...

They had walked so far away from God that they were unable to see the beauty of their long awaited Messiah....

If you read Malachi 3:1-5 closely, you will see that Jesus came as judgment on the unbelieving people..

They were unable to see their Savior, so they crucified Him.

Then in Malachi 3:8-15, God closes out his complaints against the people by pointing out their refusal to honor God with their money and with their words...

God said that they were robbing him and slandering him...

The final section of Malachi begins in verse 16 as God shows concern for those in Israel who continued to honor him...

III. God's Consolation of Israel (3:17-4:6)

What you need to remember when you read the prophets is this...

Their rebukes are not at every single person in Israel....

God always has had and even today continues to have a remnant of people who are truly loyal and obedient to Him...

The same is true in the church....

Though there are wolves and false prophets and unbelievers who come to church, true believers are also here as well...

People who are faithful to the Lord even in the midst of perverse and crooked generations..

In the context of Malachi, this simply meant that not every single Jew was robbing God...

Not every single person was disobeying God...

Not every single Israelite was divorcing or marrying unbelievers...

Though that may have been true for the majority of the nation, there was still group of people, -however small, - that God was protecting and blessing...

Listen to his words in Malachi 3:16...

16 Then those who [t]feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord gave attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who [u]fear the Lord and who esteem His name. 17 “They will be Mine,” says the Lord of hosts, “on the day that I [v]prepare My [w]own possession, and I will [x]spare them as a man [y]spares his own son who serves him.” 18 So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him.

Two thing I would say real quickly about this verse to us today...

#1 - You live among a perverse generation..

Not only this nation but the nation of the world who live in rebellion to God are overwhelming...

Find comfort in the fact that God preserves a remnant of true believers in every age who truly love and serve him...

And though the world may fall down around his remnant, they will always find protection and blessing in the Lord...

And that lead to a second point that must be said....

#2 - Make sure you are a part of this remnant...

Don't just give lip service to God; honor him with your lives...

Malachi then ends with a few verses in chapter 4 that talk about the blessing for the righteous and the curses for the wicked...

And with those 6 verses, the OT comes to an end...

And God goes silent for 400 years before Joh the Baptist breaks that silence as the last OT prophet that prepared the way for the coming of the Lord..

Conclusion

Let me conclude the book of Malachi and the OT by saying this....

The people didn't listen to the word of God that came to them from Malachi...

They continued in their ways for 400 more years...

And their continued disobedience to God led them to create a false religion that we find the new read the gospels of the New Testament...

And if we go back to our cycle of nations chart, we find that bondage is the result of continued apathy and indifference...

And guess what the defining characteristic of that false religion was?

It was a religion of bondage...

The people were in bondage to their own system of man made laws and regulations trying to please God with their works...

That is why it is no coincidence that when Jesus came to Israel in the NT...

He told them that his way was easy and his yoke was light...

And he told them that the truth would set them free...

That is why sin is bondage...

People may think they are free, but they are only free to choose how to sin against God the next time...

True freedom is found in the release from the bondage of sin that comes through the forgiveness of sin....

And that forgiveness only comes through Christ...

Israel has yet to figure that out.

I pray that you have figured that out...

To be freed fro the bondage of sin is to be free indeed !!

Let us pray...