

ST. ARMANDS KEY LUTHERAN CHURCH
Sarasota, Florida
A CONVERSATION ON MALACHI
Session Plan #2

OPENING PRAYER

MUTUAL SHARING OF GOD'S PEACE

A QUICK REVIEW:

A) THE WORLD SETTING –

1. **536 B.C.E. – Zerubbabel** led a group of approximately 50,000 Jews from Babylon (*where they had been enslaved in captivity since the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E.*) back to the holy city, after being freed by virtue of a decree made by Cyrus, Medo-Persian king, in the first year of his reign. He was a governor of the Persian Province of Judah (Haggai 1:1) and the grandson of Jehoiachin (598-597 B.C.E.), penultimate king of Judah. Zerubbabel also laid the foundation of the Second Temple in Jerusalem soon after. In accounts in the Hebrew Bible that mention Zerubbabel, he is always associated with the high priest who returned with him, Joshua (Jeshua) son of Jozadak (Jehozadak). Together, these two men led the first wave of Jewish returnees from exile and began to rebuild the Temple.

2. **520-516 B.C.E. –**
 - a) Prophetic works of **Haggai** and **Zechariah** encouraged the people to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem
 - b) Temple is known to have been completed and dedicated in 516 B.C.E.

3. **458 B.C.E. – Ezra** led 2,000+ exiled Jews back to Jerusalem (Ezra 8:1-34). This second group returned 79 years after the first group.

4. **445 B.C.E. – Nehemiah** returned with the third group of exiled Jews (Nehemiah 2) {prior notes about Nehemiah are found in “B1b” above.}

B) THE IMPORTANCE OF NEHEMIAH in UNDERSTANDING THE MALACHI'S PROPHECY

1. ***Nehemiah*** - the **cup-bearer to King Artaxerxes, King of Persia**
2. Examination of the Book of Nehemiah (chp. 13) reveals the “sins” which were denounced by Malachi
 - Laxity & Corruption among priests
 - Mixed Marriages
 - Tithes neglected

C) THE PROPHET -

1. **MALACHI** – means “**Messenger of Jehovah**” or “**my messenger.**”
2. **Date: 445-432 B.C.E.**

D) THE RELIGIOUS SETTING –

1. **Indifference** (religiously and morally)
2. Nehemiah soon found he desperately **needed the support of a prophet**, namely MALACHI, to assist him in this time of general crises!
3. The **“Phenomenon of the Third Generation, and the Question of Identity”** – modern day biblical scholars, historians and sociologists have observed an interesting trend that occurs within groups of people, or even families. Namely, there is a deterioration of community that commonly tends to climax in the 3rd generation of that group.
 - a) **1st Generation marked by dynamic growth and activity – materially, socially, intellectually, spiritually** – usually stimulated by a strong leader or significant events in the life of the community; there are new ideas; there is a dynamic to living; an excitement because new things are happening!
 - b) **2nd Generation is marked by entrenchment.** The **inheritors** of good times/prosperity; but they are lacking in the **“drive”** to accomplish, to create new ideas, to grow. Usually content to preserve and consolidate the gains of the 1st Generation; little motivation to put forth genuine effort.
 - c) **3rd Generation is marked by decline.** Persons who have only heard about the dynamics and vitality of the 1st Generation, second hand. They have not seen that kind of vitality; they have only seen the process of entrenchment and preservation. They have heard stories of the past, but those stories are far away and unreal to them. **They have no compelling reason to be driven by the vision that drove their grandparents!**

Biblical Examples:

- The Exodus and Settlement in the Promised Land
- King David and His Family (Solomon, Rehoboam)
- Nehemiah and post-exile Jews who had returned to Jerusalem

BREAK POINT FOR DISCUSSION -

TODAY’S MAJOR FOCUS

A) THE PURPOSE OF MALACHI’S BOOK -

1. Addressed to a 3rd Generation audience: designed to set before Israel a picture of her ingratitude in the manner in which she was living as a nation
2. To show Jews how they had robbed God not only in tithes and offering, but how they also had withheld from Him their loyalty and their love. If these people gave to God what rightfully belonged to Him, abundant blessings should follow...
3. A suggestion that God’s acceptance of human offerings and service is conditioned upon the sincerity and purity of the life of those who make them
4. An intent is to encourage true repentance, zeal and enthusiasm for God in the hearts of the Jews
5. A call to understand once again the value of serving the Lord faithfully
6. MALACHI connects the O.T. with the N.T. in its prophecies of John the Baptist and Christ

B) STYLE OF WRITING –

1. Malachi is often referred to as the “**Hebrew Socrates.**”

- a) He used a distinct writing style much different from that of other prophets
- b) His literary form was that of the scribes; delivering confrontational messages: after each charge, he backed it up with evidence
- c) He often used a rhetorical speech form that contains 4 components
 - Assertion
 - Questioning
 - Response
 - implication
- d) The form shows us that the world in which Malachi lived and worked was no longer patient of prophetic preachers; it no longer accepted without question what the “religious” representatives of God said; people wanted to have recourse to religious arguments.

2. Called the “**DIDACTIC-DIALECTIC**” Form:

- a) This method over time became increasingly popular; it was the universal style of teaching in Jewish schools and synagogues; it is still used in some quarters today
- b) This form of writing using rhetoric is sometimes also known as: “**Prophetic Dispute**”
- c) An O.T. biblical example of this form is found at Isaiah 40:12-17 –{CEB}

¹² ***Who has measured the waters in the palm of a hand
or gauged the heavens with a ruler
or scooped the earth’s dust up in a measuring cup
or weighed the mountains on a scale
and the hills in a balance?***

¹³ ***Who directed the LORD’s spirit
and acted as God’s advisor?***

¹⁴ ***Whom did he consult for enlightenment?
Who taught him the path of justice and knowledge
and explained to him the way of understanding?***

¹⁵ ***Look, the nations are like a drop in a bucket,
and valued as dust on a scale.
Look, God weighs the islands like fine dust.***

¹⁶ ***Lebanon doesn’t have enough fuel;
its animals aren’t enough for an entirely burned offering.***

¹⁷ ***All the nations are like nothing before God.
They are viewed as less than nothing and emptiness.***

- d) In the time of Jesus, the rabbis and scribes used the form frequently, as, also, did our Lord, seen at Matthew 12:26-27 -

²⁶ ***If Satan throws out Satan, he is at war with himself. How then can his kingdom endure?*** ²⁷ ***And if I throw out demons by the authority of Beelzebul, then by whose authority do your followers throw them out? Therefore, they will be your judges.***

- e) the Apostle Paul uses it in several passages; see this example at **Romans 4:1-3** -
So what are we going to say? Are we going to find that Abraham is our ancestor on the basis of genealogy? ² Because if Abraham was made righteous because of his actions, he would have had a reason to brag, but not in front of God. ³ What does the scripture say? Abraham had faith in God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.
- f) There are 7 distinct examples of this method that will be “unwrapped” in this study of Malachi

**THE FIRST OF MALACHI’S MULTIPLE CHARGES:
 THE PEOPLE DISHONOR THE LORD IN THEIR RELIGIOUS PRACTICES**

1. Evidently the Jews were questioning God’s Love for them
 - a) After years spent in captivity, one might understand why they felt this way
 - b) Their return from captivity in Babylon was not without considerable difficulty
2. **God’s assurance of Love for Israel and His specific choice of them to be His People** (Malachi 1:1-5); note below the Didactic-Dialectic style:

¹ *A pronouncement. The LORD’s word to Israel through Malachi.*

a) ² *I have loved you, says the LORD;*

b) *but you say, “How have you loved us?”*

c) *Wasn’t Esau Jacob’s brother? Says the Lord, I loved Jacob, ³but I rejected Esau.*

3. God is speaking of Jacob and Esau as the representatives of their descendant nations; God did not hate Esau personally; but He did hate what Edom, as a nation, had become.
4. The Prophet goes on to illustrate what he means
 - a) Edom (*the descendants of Esau*) had become desolate; despite their claims to the country, it would remain desolate (Malachi 1:3-4)

*I turned Esau’s mountains into desolation,
 his inheritance into a wilderness for jackals.*

⁴ *Edom may say, “We are beaten down, but we will rebuild the ruins”;
 but the LORD of heavenly forces proclaims:
 They may build, but I will tear them down.
 They will call themselves a wicked territory,
 the people against whom the LORD rages forever.*

- b) But, Israel would one day see the Lord magnified beyond its border (Malachi 1:5)

⁵ *Your eyes will see it and you will say,*

“May the LORD be great beyond the borders of Israel.”

- c) This passage is referenced by the Apostle Paul: (cf. Romans 9 - ¹³ *As it is written, I loved Jacob, but I hated Esau.*) For the complete stories about Jacob and Esau, I suggest that you read Genesis 25-27 and Genesis 32-36; Deuteronomy 2:4-29.

[THE PROPHET'S DESIRED INTERPRETATION: – If the people only observed how Israel was being restored while Edom remained desolate, they would know that God still loved them as a nation!]

5. How were the Jews dishonoring God's Name? By offering blemished sacrifices (Malachi 1:6-11)

**⁶ A son honors a father,
and a servant honors his master.
But if I'm a father, where is my honor?
Or if I'm a master, where is my respect?
says the LORD of heavenly forces
to you priests who despise my name.
So you say, "How have we despised your name?"
⁷ By approaching my altar with polluted food.
But you say, "How have we polluted it?"
When you say, "The table of the LORD can be despised."
⁸ If you bring a blind animal to sacrifice, isn't that evil?
If you bring a lame or sick one, isn't that evil?
Would you bring it to your governor?
Would he be pleased with it or accept you?
says the LORD of heavenly forces.**

**⁹ So now ask God to be gracious to us.
After what you have done, will he accept you?
says the LORD of heavenly forces.**

**¹⁰ Who among you will shut the doors of the temple
so that you don't burn something on my altar in vain?
I take no delight in you,
says the LORD of heavenly forces.
I won't accept a grain offering from your hand.**

**¹¹ Nevertheless, from sunrise to sunset,
my name will be great among the nations.
Incense and a pure grain offering will be offered everywhere in my name,
because my name is great among the nations,
says the LORD of heavenly forces.**

- a) Sons honor their fathers, and servants their masters; but they were despising God.
- b) When asked in what way, they are told of their defiled sacrifices.
- c) They were offering to God what they would be embarrassed to offer to other men.
- d) The Lord would even wish that someone shut the doors so they could not sacrifice.
- e) Despite their dishonor, one day God's name would be great even among the Gentiles.

6. What is the Attitude concerning the Altar and its Offerings? (cf. Malachi 1:12-13)

¹² ***But you make my name impure when you say,***

“The table of the LORD is polluted.

Its fruit, its food, is despised.”

¹³ ***But you say, “How tedious!”***

and you groan about it,

says the LORD of heavenly forces.

You permit what is stolen, lame, or sick to be brought for a sacrifice,

and you bring the grain offering.

Should I accept such from your hands?

says the LORD.

7. Then, the Lord pronounces a curse on the priests and rebukes them in the assembly: (cf. Malachi 2:1-9)

But now, this command is for you, priests:

² ***If you don’t listen,***

or don’t intend to glorify my name,

says the LORD of heavenly forces,

then I will send a curse among you.

I will curse your blessings,

and I mean really curse them,

because none of you intend to do it.

³ ***I am about to denounce your offspring;***

I will scatter feces on your faces,

the feces of your festivals.

Then I will lift you up to me,

⁴ ***and you will know that I have sent this command to you***

so that my covenant with Levi can continue to exist,

says the LORD of heavenly forces.

⁵ ***My covenant with him involved life and peace, which I gave him,***

and also fear so that he honored me.

He was in awe of my name.

⁶ ***True Instruction was in his mouth;***

injustice wasn’t found on his lips.

He walked with me in peace and did the right thing;

he made many turn from iniquity.

⁷ ***The lips of the priest should guard knowledge;***

everyone should seek Instruction from his mouth,

for he is the messenger from the LORD of heavenly forces.

⁸ ***But you have turned from the path.***

You have caused many to stumble by your instruction.

You have corrupted the covenant of Levi,

says the LORD of heavenly forces.

⁹ ***Moreover, I have made you despised and humiliated in the view of all the people,***

since none of you keep my ways

or show respect for Instruction.

BREAK POINT FOR DISCUSSION -

1. Why does God require holiness and loyalty of His people?
2. What does it tell you when people become careless in their religious practices?
3. Bringing a defiled gift to God's altar was a real insult. But, Why? Does this still happen today?
4. How did the priests react to the news that they had despised the Lord's name?
5. What should they have been doing when they learned of these sins?
6. How do you think the curse on the priests was received? Would it be different today?
7. What does it say to others when people wear the "name" of God, but refuse to follow His "ways?"
8. Why does God put so much emphasis on the teaching of the Law?

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