

**ST. ARMANDS KEY LUTHERAN CHURCH**  
**Sarasota, Florida**  
**A CONVERSATION ON MALACHI**  
**Final Session Plan #4c**

**OPENING PRAYER:**

**SHARING THE PEACE OF THE LORD:**

**QUICK REVIEW:**

7 Rhetorical Questions in the Book of Malachi

**RHETORICAL QUESTION #1** – ***“How hast Thou loved us?”*** (Malachi 1:2-5)

**RHETORICAL QUESTION #2** – ***“How have we despised your name?”*** (Malachi 1:6 – 2:9)

**RHETORICAL QUESTION #3** – ***“For what reason has Yahweh rejected us?”*** (Malachi 2:10-16)

**RHETORICAL QUESTION #4** – ***“How have we wearied Him?”*** (Malachi 2:17 – 3:5)

**TODAY’S FOCUS:**

**RHETORICAL QUESTION #5** – ***“How shall we return?”*** (Malachi 3:6-7)

<sup>6-7</sup> **“I am GOD—yes, I AM. I haven’t changed. And because I haven’t changed, you, the descendants of Jacob, haven’t been destroyed. You have a long history of ignoring my commands. You haven’t done a thing I’ve told you. Return to me so I can return to you,”** says GOD-of-the-Angel-Armies. **“You ask, ‘But how do we return?’** (MSG)

a) God is here charging Israel with inconsistency

- Unlike God Himself, whose unchanging nature has kept Him from totally consuming Israel
- Yet, their history showed a practice of apostasy (*the abandonment or renunciation of a religious belief*)
- Even when called to return, they ask “In what way shall we return?” (*The verb “RETURN” in Hebrew is often a call for repentance; to turn back from sins*)

➤ No answer is given directly

- Perhaps because the answer is so obvious it does not deserve a response
- Or, the answer is given by the example which follows in Question #6

**RHETORICAL QUESTION #6 – “How have we robbed Thee?”** (Malachi 3:8-12)

<sup>8-11</sup> **“Begin by being honest. Do honest people rob God? But you rob me day after day. “You ask, ‘How have we robbed you?’ “The tithe and the offering—that’s how! And now you’re under a curse—the whole lot of you—because you’re robbing me. Bring your full tithe to the Temple treasury so there will be ample provisions in my Temple. Test me in this and see if I don’t open up heaven itself to you and pour out blessings beyond your wildest dreams. For my part, I will defend you against marauders, protect your wheat fields and vegetable gardens against plunderers.” The Message of God-of-the-Angel-Armies. <sup>12</sup> “You’ll be voted ‘Happiest Nation.’ You’ll experience what it’s like to be a country of grace.” God-of-the-Angel-Armies says so. (MSG)**

a) Their Tithes as a case in point

- They had robbed God by their failure to offer their tithes
- For this reason the whole nation had been accursed
- They are challenged to bring the tithes, and to see the blessings that would follow

b) Tithing under the O.T. system was a costly and complex matter –

- ..an Israelite, living under the Law, first had to bring the “*priest’s due*” (2% or 10%)
- ..then, he brought the basic tithe of 10%
- ..but, he was also required to pay a 2<sup>nd</sup> tithe (another 10%) that was to go to “*Jerusalem*” and its needs; intended to be spent during the 3 annual pilgrimages – if a pilgrimage was not made it was to be sent to the holy city
- ..every other year there was a 3<sup>rd</sup> tithe, which went to the “*poor;*” so, basic tithing – dependent on income – ranged from 22% to 27% per year
- ..this did not count the cost of animals brought to the 3 annual festivals
- ..nor, did this count extra monies to be paid for “*sin*” and “*trespass*” offerings
- ..every 7<sup>th</sup> year was declared a “*Sabbath Year*” and 1/7 of an Israelite’s income over that period was also to be given
- ..moreover, the corners, sides and ends of all agricultural fields were to be left unharvested to allow gleaning by the poor
- “*Thank Offerings*” were in addition to anything noted above
- Estimates are that if someone today wanted to live under the strict Law of ancient Israel in this respect, the amount would exceed 40% of one’s income a year!

**RHETORICAL QUESTION #7—“How have we spoken against Thee?”** (Malachi 3:13-15)

**13 You have spoken harshly about me, says the LORD; but you say, “What have we spoken about you?” 14 You said, “Serving God is useless. What do we gain by keeping his obligation or by walking around as mourners before the LORD of heavenly forces? 15 So now we consider the arrogant fortunate. Moreover, those doing evil are built up; they test God and escape.”** {CEB}

- a) The Israelites were despising God’s service, by saying it was vain to serve God
- Their words against God were very harsh
  - Questioning what profit there was in keeping His ordinances
  - Calling the proud blessed; saying the wicked are raised up; and, that those who tempt God go free!
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**GOOD NEWS! – SOME PEOPLE BEGAN TO HEED MALACHI’S MESSAGE** (Malachi 3:16 – 4:3)

**16 Then those whose lives honored GOD got together and talked it over. GOD saw what they were doing and listened in. A book was opened in God’s presence and minutes were taken of the meeting, with the names of the GOD-fearers written down, all the names of those who honored GOD’s name. 17-18 GOD-of-the-Angel-Armies said, “They’re mine, all mine. They’ll get special treatment when I go into action. I treat them with the same consideration and kindness that parents give the child who honors them. Once more you’ll see the difference it makes between being a person who does the right thing and one who doesn’t, between serving God and not serving him.” 4 1-3 “Count on it: The day is coming, raging like a forest fire. All the arrogant people who do evil things will be burned up like stove wood, burned to a crisp, nothing left but scorched earth and ash— a black day. But for you, sunrise! The sun of righteousness will dawn on those who honor my name, healing radiating from its wings. You will be bursting with energy, like colts frisky and frolicking. And you’ll tromp on the wicked. They’ll be nothing but ashes under your feet on that Day.” GOD-of-the-Angel-Armies says so. (MSG)**

A) Who were these?

- ..those who feared the Lord, as they spoke to one another (vs. 16a)
- ..whom the Lord noticed, and a “book of remembrance” was written (vs. 16b)
- ..whom the Lord promised to make His ‘Jewels’ and spare them (vs. 17)
- ..it will be easy to discern the righteous (vs. 18)
- ..for the day was coming when the wicked will be burned like stubble (4:1)
- ..but those who fear His name will be blessed by the “Sun of Righteousness” (i.e. Jesus) (4:2-3)

B) Until then. . . (see Malachi 4:4-6)

**<sup>4</sup> Remember the Instruction from Moses, my servant,  
to whom I gave Instruction and rules for all Israel at Horeb.**

**<sup>5</sup> Look, I am sending Elijah the prophet to you,  
before the great and terrifying day of the LORD arrives.**

**<sup>6</sup> Turn the hearts of the parents to the children  
and the hearts of the children to their parents.**

**Otherwise, I will come and strike the land with a curse. {CEB}**

- ..the faithful are exhorted to heed the Law of Moses (vs. 4)
- ..and, await the coming of “Elijah the prophet” (i.e. John the Baptist) who will come to prepare people for the coming of the Lord –

C) New Testament fulfillment – in the words of the angel who spoke to Zechariah about the impending birth of his son, John the Baptist.

(c.f. Luke 1:16-17 - **<sup>16</sup> And he will turn back and cause to return many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God, <sup>17</sup> And he will [himself] go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn back the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient and incredulous and unpersuadable to the wisdom of the upright** [which is the knowledge and holy love of the will of God]—**in order to make ready for the Lord a people [perfectly] prepared** [in spirit, adjusted and disposed and placed in the right moral state].

#### [Some Final Thoughts about the Prophecy of Malachi](#)

Malachi had a message for both his day and ours; he chiefly addressed the problem of religious indifference:

An Overview of the entire book from today’s perspective:

1. Religious or spiritual indifference often begins where you would least expect it
2. Spiritual indifference is a sin
3. God tries to prevent “spiritual” indifference

4. God expects his people
  - a) To show respect
  - b) To be loyal
  - c) To be holy
  - d) To be his friends
  - e) To be gentle
  - f) To show pity and sympathy
  
5. What God gives
  - a) Power
  - b) Security
  - c) Peace
  
6. God desires sincere worship
  
7. It is not good to be careless about spiritual things
  - a) To lack confidence in God's sovereignty
  - b) To lack respect for a holy God
  - c) To lack obedience to God's Word
  - d) To lack in sharing with God His love
  
8. Spiritual indifference denies God's sovereignty
  
9. Some people will actually choose to put God "1<sup>st</sup>" in their lives.

For Discussion:

1. The name "**Malachi**" means "**one who brings a message.**" Aside from this identification, we know nothing of the man, Malachi. What kind of man do you think he was? What were his special qualities when he took God's message and proclaimed it?
  
2. The New Testament describes **all believers** as '**priests.**' St. Paul, echoed by others like Luther, taught about the "**priesthood of all believers.**" How can modern Christians be like that, with all the privileges and opportunities we have today?
  
3. There is an inherent danger when we do something repeatedly and regularly. Namely, that we can do it badly or carelessly. And, we can do it without much thought. How can we avoid that danger in our spiritual relationship with God?

4. Ceremonies can become an alternative for sincere love. Just repeating the same words over and over again does not express genuine loyalty. How can we make sure that we do not have a formal religion like that?
5. Can Christians make God tired with their words (Malachi 2:17)? If it is possible, how and when could we do this?
6. **“Religious but not honest.”** This was God’s terrible opinion about some of the people who lived in Malachi’s society (Malachi 3:5). Is that serious judgment still true in our modern world?
7. **“Where is the respect that people should give me?”** Those words are repeatedly spoken in the Book of Malachi. God is near us and He loves us very much. We should be aware of these wonderful truths. But we must always have an attitude of respect and of worship, too. How can we do this best?

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