

God's Amazing Love (Part 1 of 2)

Malachi 1:1-5

Intro

First in our summer series, Ancient Truths for Modern Times – Malachi

Obscure little book; packs a big punch

Covers poor leadership, divorce, giving, half-hearted worship, God's amazing love

2 weeks in first 5 verses

Read Mal 1:1-5

Ever have some bad news to tell someone that you can't avoid?

Something that weighs heavy on you, and you have to get off your chest?

But that you agonize over because of the implications for those receiving it?

Particular battle in WWII where the Allied forces were heavily entrenched on one side of a river, and the Germans on the other

Orders given to cross the river and capture some German POW's

So under the cover of darkness one night they did

Fighting was fierce; Sustained many casualties; Only 2 POW's to show for it

But the general was so pleased, he gave new orders to do it again that night

And the CO wrestled and struggled all day with those orders – he didn't want to tell them

Knew the impact on their morale, and the additional loss of life it meant; implications

And the longer he waited, the heavier the burden was

Background and Overview:

That's exactly the kind of weight that Malachi felt in conveying this message from God

It was a burden that he had to get off his chest

That's what an oracle is – a burdensome message

A pronouncement of utmost importance that you have to proclaim

It was a burden placed on Malachi by God himself (*Word of the Lord*), concerning judgment for wrong-doing

We should feel same burden/weight as recipients of Mal's message, just like the people of Israel in his day

To Israel, by Malachi

We don't know much about Malachi except that his name means "my messenger"

But Israel is another story

In order to adequately understand the book, we have to know the historical background

Mal refers to temple worship, Jacob and Esau, Elijah, the priesthood, and the requirements of the law, none of which makes sense unless you know the historical background

Start with Abraham – 2100 BC; God tells him to leave his land and go to Canaan where

he will make of him a great nation and bless the families of the earth through him

Eventually Isaac is born to carry on that promise of a chosen people

To Isaac is born two twin sons – *Esau* and *Jacob* – and Jacob is chosen over Esau to carry on God's promise and blessing of a great nation (Gen 25-27)

Has 12 sons, settle in Egypt due to a famine in Canaan, and multiplied greatly in Egypt

New Egyptian king arose and forced them into slavery out of fear – lasted 400 years

Until the Exodus in 1450 BC – God released them from slavery under leadership of Moses

Journeyed through the Sinai desert where God gave them the *Law*

Included how to worship God and relate to each other

Instructions for *priests* starting with Aaron, the brother of Moses

40 years later entered the promised land of Canaan under Joshua's leadership

For next 325 years, various judges (leaders) led Israel

Eventually Saul anointed as the first king in 1050 BC, followed by David and Solomon

Solomon built a magnificent temple for worship – glory days

Nation is divided in 930 BC when the people rebelled under harsh rule

10 northern tribes called Israel; 2 Southern tribes, Judah

Elijah is called by God to prophesy to Ahab, a king in Israel (N. tribes)

722 BC Israel (n tribes) is conquered and scattered, never to return

586 BC Judah fell to Babylon, temple demolished, people taken into captivity for 70 years

Persia overthrows Babylon and Cyrus allows the Israelites to return to begin rebuilding the temple; completed in 516 BC

Wasn't until Nehemiah showed up in 445 that the walls were restored

Shortly thereafter that Malachi began to preach and prophesy around 435 BC

The last prophet of God until John the Baptist showed up around time of Christ, both of whom Malachi foretells

Israel – remnant of God's people who had returned and were now living in Judah

Hope you see that Mal and all of the OT was written to real people at a real time

And that their history as the people of God, is your history as a child of God

In order to correctly interpret the message, we have to consider the type of writing

- Mal is poetic prophecy

Most prophecy is; rarely is it written like a science textbook

It's more like literature that is rich in imagery

Example – they will use graphic word pictures to assault our minds and emotions with the awfulness or the greatness of the message

Like V3b – [God] *left his [Esau's] heritage to jackals of the desert*

Does that mean God gave Esau's possessions to dog-like jackals when he died?

No – "jackals of the desert" is an expression used in the Bible to denote the effect of God's judgment

It means that Esau's people, as a nation, ceased to exist

All that they had, including their life, was either destroyed or fell into the hands of people who are likened to jackals – ravaging scavengers

So to correctly interpret the message, we have to consider that it is poetic in form, and understand the imagery as best we can

- Prophecy addresses common moral problems

We normally think of prophecy as foretelling the future (National Inquirer)

While some prophecy does that . . .

Vast majority of the time the prophets speak about everyday matters

Focusing on sin, punishment, and restoration

About 90% of OT prophecy deals with moral problems we still face today . . .

While only 10% predicts the future, and many of those have already happened

So it's best to read prophecy NOT with an eye toward the future so much, but with an eye on your *heart*, as God warns his people, then and now, against sin

- Prophecy urges us to see things we miss

Prophets characterized by two attributes

They could “see” things others couldn’t or missed (Heb ro’eh meaning seer)

They had an urgent message that they couldn’t contain (Heb nabi’ to bubble forth)

We need to sense that urgency to see the things they are addressing in our own lives

In order to correctly interpret the message of Mal, we have to consider the type of writing

In order to fully apply the truths, we have to appreciate the original circumstances

- The people had unmet expectations

The temple had been completed and the walls finished, but . . .

The glory of their nation/worship had not been restored – that’s what they expected

Expected the prophecies of restoration to happen as soon as temple/walls finished

Amos 9:14 – *I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.*

Is 62: 3 – *You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God*

But that hadn’t happened; not even close

Many of their cities weren’t even rebuilt, yet alone inhabited

The land wasn’t plentiful with luxuries of life like wine and gardens

And beautiful was about the last adjective to describe them

- The people became cynical and complacent towards God

Because their expectations of what life should be like were unmet . . .

They lost heart; Didn’t trust God any more

They lost their sense of who they were – God’s treasured possession set apart for his use

They no longer relied on God to provide for them

They became complacent and even cynical towards God and his ways

Anytime your expectations don’t match God’s, you’re at risk of cynicism

A restored Jerusalem and rebuilt temple were not God’s ultimate goal for their lives

Meant little if the people failed to serve, love, and honor him in all they did

Just like a good life, happy family, lack of suffering, abundance of things, big church–

Mean nothing if we fail to love and serve and honor God in all we do

God wanted then, and still wants now, a people for his own possession, jealous for his glory, and eager to show it

It’s in that context that Mal received the oracle/burden of the word of the Lord to Israel

God begins at the core issue, addressing their cynicism/doubts as to his love for them

Does so via a rhetorical conversation between God and his people

God plays both parts of the conversation – We do this in our minds

Starts by saying . . .

I have loved you, says the Lord . . .

The first ancient truth for modern times that we see in v2-3 is that . . .

Ancient Truth #1 – God is sovereign (v2-3a)

Sovereign – self-governed, independent, ruler over all, in complete control

When God says, *I have loved you . . .*

He’s saying – despite the fact that you think I’ve forgotten you and no longer love you just because your situation is not to your liking –

Rest assured – I still love you

I’ve loved you in the past; I love you now (Heb allows for both a past/present tense)

Nothing has changed – I’m still here; I’m still in control; I’m still sovereign over all

Have you forgotten so quickly that I chose you as my people and blessed you and cared for you and provided for you for ever a thousand years now?

Have you forgotten how many promises of blessing you’ve already received?

I made a covenant to love you and be your God, and it’s still good

What I’ve promised in the past I *will* bring about

Just because you don’t like your present circumstances

Just because I’m not acting on your time table

Just because you’re suffering more than you’d like

Doesn’t mean I’m any less in control now, than when I was this time last year!

You’re going to see that, despite man’s best efforts otherwise (v5)

That’s no less true today

Heb 13:8 – *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*

God is still sovereign, still in control – Nothing happens except as he allows or causes

Some object – What about the bad things that happen to me?

If God causes/allows bad things to happen to *me*, I don’t want to have anything to do with him!

5 *principles* that are crucial to keep in mind when it comes to the sovereignty of God

1. God is good

Ps 34:8 – *Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!*

Ps 86:5 – *For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you*

Ps 119:68 – *You are good and do good*

2. God is wise

Rom 11:33 – *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable [impenetrable] his ways!*

Ps 18:30 – *This God – his way is perfect*

Is 55:9 – *For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

3. God does what he wants

Ps 115:3 – *Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.*

4. God is sovereign over all nations and people

Ps 33:10-11 – *The LORD brings the counsel [intent] of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples. The counsel [will] of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations.*

Prov 19:21 – *Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand [prevail].*

5. God is sovereign over all situations

Eccl 7:4 – *In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other*

Is 45:7 – *I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the LORD, who does all these things.*

While God disciplines us for our good that we may share in his holiness (Heb 12:10)

He certainly doesn't cause *all* suffering and hardship

Much suffering/hardship is caused by the sinful acts of people he chooses not to restrain

Or the work of Satan who tries to frustrate his purposes

Or the fallen nature of the world in which we live

Bottom line:

Apart from the clear teaching of Scripture, we can't know this side of heaven which

sufferings and hardships he *allows*, and which ones he *causes*

Either way, we can be absolutely sure he is sovereign, good, wise, and he abounds in amazing steadfast love for us . . .

Using it all to accomplish his purposes for his glory

Final thoughts