

The Minor Prophets #31

Malachi

by: Ronald L. Dart

It seems like it's very hard for the servants of God to keep their act together. The worst thing that can happen to us is good times. For the Israelites who returned from exile to Jerusalem, well the times had indeed been very hard for awhile, they had started rebuilding the temple then they had to stop because of political pressure then under the prompting of the prophets and with God's protection and blessing they set to work again and finished the temple. Two men played a major role in all of this, Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the governor, they were good men and they wanted to get the job done, they had prophets along that were stirring everybody up and the work got done.

There is a danger all of us face when God has blessed us, we assume we have his approval in more areas than are really justified. In other words, we built the temple we got it done we are really good people but there is another danger when any long term goal is finally realized. After all this striving is past, once you have arrived at your goal, you can find yourself at loose ends. You may think, well I have accomplished this I deserve a break and maybe you do but it's a serious mistake to presume on that.

In the years when I use to work as dean of students at a college it was interesting to see how many student who had worked so hard they had prepared they had applied they had tried to get in and they finally achieved their goal of arriving at this college. Then when they got there their goal was finished, accomplished and they didn't really have much of a feeling of where they were going from there and of course when you graduate from college you face that same thing again. I have worked like a dog for four years and I got this degree in my hands, now what on earth am I going to do next. There are just little places we encounter from time to time that are like that.

So here's the picture for the Israelites, the second temple has been finished, many aspects of their lives were now much better, the ongoing service of God in the temple was continuing on a day by day basis and everything was going on like it was suppose to. Another generation though has entered the priesthood and public life and there is the inevitable let down that take place. The loss of focus, the loss of awareness, and that's the picture that prevails when a prophet name Malachi (mal-a-ki) comes on the scene with a message from God. We don't know much about Malachi, we have his book and that's about it, we know the priesthood was functioning and we know the temple was finished. Scholars

think he may have been close to Nehemiah's time because of wording of some of the stuff he was doing is quite similar.

Oddly his name in Hebrew is Malachi (Ma-loc-key) which means my messenger. I've talked about this elsewhere but the word for angel in the Old Testament is maloc the reason we say angel is because in Greek the word for messenger is angelos from which we get the word angel. It's really unfortunate frankly that the translator of the Bible didn't just take both those words, that is the Greek and the Hebrew and translate the word messenger every where they show up. We have created in our minds this image of an angel this great being with wings on its back and a halo on its head or whatever else and a lot of the messengers of God who would have the title of angel or maloc are nothing like that. For all intensive purposes if they were aside you on the street walking along, you would not know they were anything other than another person so we have this confusion that comes up.

Some Jewish teachers actually believe because of his name, Malachi was an angel, I don't think so. There is no precedent for that anywhere in the Bible, God chose to work through human instruments and while a maloc a messenger would show up to speak to a prophet, they didn't prophecies themselves. They didn't convey these messages directly to the people concerned they called upon those individuals God had called out set aside and as it were ordained to this purpose. So this we need to understand going in, and it isn't really a necessary conclusion for understanding the prophecy, in a way it doesn't matter who wrote it.

The fact of the matter is we have it in our hands and it speaks to us down through the generations regardless whose pen was on the paper. Another element that helps us date this book is the implication that Edom has suffered a crushing defeat and many people think it was the defeat by the Nabatean an Arab tribe that came out of the southeastern desert that just about wiped Edom off the map. The book of Malachi is made up of six disputations passages and two appendices the disputes follow in regular form, first, the prophet states a premise, two, the people who hear the prophecy challenge the statement, and then 3, that God and the prophet present the supporting evidence. And this is the pattern that will repeat again and again in Malachi.

Malachi 1: The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi. I have loved you, saith the LORD. Yet you say wherein have you loved us?

You know this is painful to think about but it's a very human reaction. I think there probably occurs in the life of nearly everybody when there are times when we feel that nobody loves us. We feel kind of alone, kind of lost neglected abandon, and to say that God doesn't love us any longer you know it's almost more than any person can bare. And so they came back to God with this and I gather things weren't going as well as they thought they should go, and God replies.

Was not Esau Jacob's brother? Saith the LORD: yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness. Whereas Edom saith, We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places; thus saith the LORD of hosts, They will build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom the LORD has indignation forever. And your eyes shall see, and you shall say, The LORD will be magnified from the border of Israel.

You know this is really kind of shocking in a way, it seems so unlike God to boldly proclaim the hatred of an individual and one wonders what lies at the root of it, it's hard to grasp why he would feel this way about someone. Paul mentioned this incident writing in Romans.

Romans Chapter 9 verse 9: For this is the word of promise, at this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son. And not only that; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; (For the children being not yet born, having done neither good nor evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calls;) It was said to her, the elder shall serve the younger.

This goes way back in the book of Genesis when these boys when Jacob and Esau were being born. This is what Malachi is citing to us where God says, I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau.

You folks think you have it rough can't you look across the border, can't you look across Jordan, can't you look down south towards Petra and consider what I have done to Esau and what's happen to them, they had nearly been wiped out as a people by the Nabatean when they came in and invaded their land. The Nabateans were an Arabian tribe who moved into this area and forced all the Edomites across the riff valley there into southern Judea into the desert where there was for all practical purposes nothing except sand and dirt. So you think you have it rough and in a lot of ways I guess that's what God's message to us is, we're just sitting around and hanging our lower lip out and saying, I don't think God loves me, look what's happen to me. Well take a look around the world, look at the heartache, and look at the poverty, look at the suffering, and look at the people who have no meaningful life at all. Keep this in mind when you're sitting around and feeling sorry for yourself. You know it seems so boldly unlike God for him to proclaim hatred of an individual, what lies at the root of it. It goes all the way back to the beginnings of this when Paul says in Romans.

Romans 9 Verse 15: For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it is not of him that wills it's not of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy.

God decides who he is going to or who he's not. How this came to be goes all the way back to the 25th Chapter of the book of Genesis, Isaac's wife Rebekah was barren she had no

children and there were all kinds of children being born and she was the one he loved, so he beseeched God and God listened and Rebekah his wife conceived and the children struggled together on the inside of her and she had twins. And she said why it is this way.

And she went to enquire of the LORD. And the LORD said to her, two nations are in thy womb, and two manners of people shall be separated from your bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.

Now elder and younger there's not much very much in it when they're twins right and that is a fact but the older of the twins the one that came out first was Esau. And these two boys when they were born were about as different as two men could be, Esau was red and ruddy and hairy all over, Jacob was a smooth child and came to be a smooth man very, very different personality. And as is often times the case the father liked one child better than the other, it was only natural in the way for Isaac for Esau was the first born would be his favorite. There also seems to be a personality thing between them, for example Esau was a hunter and I suspect that this appealed to Isaac. I know one thing for sure he loved the savory venison he made for him and it was so as their lives went on Isaac favored Esau and Jacob was favored by his mother.

There came a day when Esau had been out hunting a lot and had not had any food and came in practically starving to death of hunger and he asked Jacob who was in the process of creating a bowl of soup and he said give me some of your soup I pray, I'm about to starve to death and Jacob said, well sell me your birthright and so Esau said what's my birthright to me if I can't make it to tomorrow, yea I'll sell you my birthright give me some of the portage you making there. So he did and Esau sold his birthright and in fact the Genesis accounts that he despised his birthright.

I guess I understand that because it wasn't as though Isaac had owned a great ranch with borders recorded down at the county court house with a big house on it and all this kind of stuff. They were nomads, they lived in tents and they moved about from place to place on land that was not even theirs. And Esau looked at all this and said what's the point who cares, I'm going to be on my own anyway one of these days, sure I'll sell you my birthright and it when on from there. This seems to have been the turning point, as he despised his father's birthright, so God seems to have looked upon him with great disfavor. Time went by and the time came when Isaac wanted to bless his first born son, so he called Esau in and said tell you what to do boy go out there and get some fresh venison and bring it in here and make some of that savory venison that I like so much and I will bless you. Well Rebekah was standing off to one side and she heard this and she said.

Ah Oh I've got to get Jacob and get him out and get him ready because this birthright this blessing needs to come to him. So while Esau was gone she worked out a subterfuge with Jacob, Jacob went in impersonating his brother and Isaac gave him the blessing too. Now you can feel how Esau felt when he came back and how Isaac felt when he found out

about the deception and the breach between these two men carried on from this day forward. There was war between Israel and Esau down through every generation, now back to Malachi.

Chapter 1 Verse 6: A son honors his father and a servant his master: if then I'm a father where's my honor? And if I'm a master where is my fear? Saith the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests that despise my name. And you say, well how have we despised your name?

Now you need to understand something here, this isn't just a matter of pronouncing God's name the wrong way, not just a matter of using God's name let's say a curse word or something of this nature. What we're talking about here is something very different.

Let me explain it to you this way. Many years ago I was dating a girl named Alie Driver we dated for three years out of high school, and we got married and when we got married she took my name and became Allie Dart.

This is what God is talking about when he talks about those who carry his name despise his name and so forth, we're talking about the covenant relationship that he had with them and whenever we carry God's name certain responsibilities fall on our shoulders and they said well we don't see how we despised your name, and God said.

Verse 7: You offer polluted bread upon my altar; and you say, well how have we polluted you? Well you done it when you say, the table of the LORD is contemptible. Well now this is a little hard to follow immediately but listen to how God explains it, he said. And if you offer the blind for sacrifice, isn't it bad? And if you offer the lame and the sick, isn't it bad? Offer it now to your governor; do you think he will be pleased with you, or accept your person? When you bring in this kind of offering to him. Saith the LORD of hosts.

Now you have to understand when the time comes to make an offering to God it should be your best. If you have flocks and herds out there and you're going to bring that offering, you go out there and find one of the best animals you got and you bring it in and offer it to God. It's certainly what you're going to do if you're going to offer it to some really important person. When you bring in a gift of a handful of animals and say here these are a gift from my house to your house are you going to put blind ones and lame ones and sick ones in there? Of course you won't so well why on earth do you think you can pull that off with God, is it because God is out of sight and you think he doesn't see, you think because I don't see him so he doesn't see what I'm doing. You have to wonder about this why in the world a person even bother to offer anything to God if he's not going to offer him the best.

God was not impressed with what they were doing. Now if you carry the analogy into marriage again, is a wife to bring to her husband something less than the best that she can do

for him, is a man to bring to his wife and give to his wife the best he can give or the worse, as we are in covenant with one another we owe each other our very best?

Verse 9: And now, I pray you, beseech God that he will be gracious unto us: this has been by your means: will he regard your persons? Saith the LORD of hosts.

Is it because of who you are this is going to happen?

Who is it among you that would shut the doors for nothing? Neither do you kindle a fire on my altar for nothing. I have no pleasure in you, saith the LORD of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand.

Now we have a stark different here between the King James Version in how it treats this section and The New International Version and in fact most of the newer versions of the Bible in this place they basically say, just shut the doors there is no point in kindling a fire for my altar it's all pointless I'm not going to accept an offering at your hands. The King James Version almost implies you're not in here doing this as a gift you're doing it for the return that comes to you. Either way I guess the result is the same. Then God says something that is really quite shocking, listen very carefully to what he says and see if you can grasp what it is that is so shocking.

Malachi 1 verse 11: For from the rising of the sun even to the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered to my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the LORD of hosts.

I can't think of anything more shocking than he would have said to the Jews in that day than that. It's something the Jewish scribes never seem to have tumbled to, what he is saying is folks the Gentiles would do a better job at worshipping me than you're doing. You don't have the brain to bring a blind offering for a sacrifice to me no Gentiles would ever make that mistake.

But you have profaned my name, in that you say, the table of the LORD is polluted; and the fruit thereof, even his meat, is contemptible.

Well they kind of made it that way by what they did.

Behold what weariness is it! And you have snuffed at it, saith the LORD of hosts; and you brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; and you brought this as an offering: should I accept this of your hand? Saith the LORD.

I don't know what kind of lesson you might take for yourself from this but there is one in there somewhere as we go charging off through this life. You know in thinking that

we can give God second best or give him nothing at all, and he will bless us and we will be just fine.

But cursed be the deceiver, which has in his flock a male, and vows and sacrifices to the Lord a corrupt thing: for I am a great King, saith the LORD of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen.

Well this is something the Jews of that era and of later eras had a very, very difficult time in grasping.

Chapter 2 verse 1: **And now, O you priests, this commandment is for you. If you will not hear, and if you will not lay it to heart, to give glory to my name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: in fact, I have cursed them already, because you do not lay it to heart.**

Now understand what he means about bringing glory to his name, he's not talking about the word Yahweh he is talking about the covenant relationship they had. They were suppose to bare God's name and so honor him in everything that they did, honor him in their sacrifices, honor him in the way they treated one another. This is what you're supposed to do, you're actually supposed to live your life as Christ lived his, being kind, being generous, caring for the poor and caring for the sick.

Verse 3: **Behold, I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts; and one shall take you away with it.**

Now I don't know exactly how to take that, I do know from time to time in Israel's history there were other festivals other than the ones God had given them. Back in Leviticus they had entered into their way of doing things, I don't know if that's what he's talking about, yet here as he says the dung of your solemn feasts. I can kind of see as they themselves turned them into dung by the way they conducted them, by offering polluted offerings, offering lame animals and by offering blind critters as a sacrifice to God giving him second best all over the place they turned the feasts of God into worthless feast.

And you will know that I have sent this commandment to you, that my covenant might be with Levi, saith the LORD of hosts. My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name. The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity.

You know it's kind of hard when you look back at Biblical history to find out how far God had to go back to find Levites who actually walked in that covenant with him in this way, but now he talks about what the priest are suppose to do.

For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. But you are departed out of the way; you have caused many to stumble at the law; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the LORD of hosts. Therefore have I made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as you have not kept my ways, but have been partial in the law.

What a condemnation and it's hard to imagine how you're a priest serving in the temple and a prophet of God who you respect comes in and tells you something like this. You should have kept knowledge, people should come to you asking about my law and you should give them a faithful answer out of it but you haven't done it. You have actually given them your own rules you've done it your own way you have changed my eternal law and replaced it with your own traditions and the commandments of men. You do realize this is one of the major conflicts that Jesus had with the Pharisees and the sages of his own day. There's more I'll see you next time.

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Transcribed by: tl

Ronald L. Dart is an evangelist and is heard daily and weekly
on his Born to Win radio program.

You can contact Ronald L. Dart at Christian Educational Ministries
P.O. Box 560 Whitehouse, Texas 75791
Phone: (903) 839-9300 — 1-888-BIBLE-44

www.borntowin.net