

Exploring Malachi

Rediscovering Passion for God

Malachi 1:6-14, 2:9

Introduction

Imagine for a moment that you have been brought up as an ancient Greek and taught that Zeus is the chief god. Or perhaps it was Babylon and your god is Marduk. What are the ways that you approach or worship your god?

- sacrifice
- appeasement
- mystery
- fear

Can you imagine sitting with an ancient Greek citizen and telling him that Zeus loved him personally with a deep and eternal love? That he or she should respond by loving Zeus back and seeking to have a personal relationship with him? The very idea is ridiculous.

Thus we can see by comparison one of the great distinctives that Yahweh had with his people. He was (and remains) a deeply personal God. But not just personally interested. The relationship is to be defined on both sides by love (last weeks session) and it is to be a living and passionate relationship.

This week the lesson from Malachi is one that is particularly applicable to a comfortable and affluent western Church. The sort of culture where it can be respectable to go to Church. Respectable but often lifeless.

This common attitude that we have all encountered is one that God has some very harsh words to describe in both the Old and New Testaments.
Rev. 3:15 ¶ “I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. 16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17 For you say, ‘I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing.’ You do not realize that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

The incredible thing is that God seems to be saying here its better to be an active atheist (cold) than a respectable but passionless Church attender.

Background

In Malachi’s day the people and the priests (Levis) were apparently doing all the right things in public, but their level of commitment to God was dropping dangerously low, as was evidenced by the casual way they approached the things they did for him.

Malachi, as we discussed last week, was a prophet with the task of confronting the people with their need to return to what God required. Change is never easy

and people never want to be told they must. Malachi was a preaching prophet with a style that is absolutely unique in Scripture. He did not simply announce what must be done or what was required. Instead he asked questions that he then proceeded to answer. In fact he would begin with a statement from God and then summarise their response with a question in reply. God would then speak through him to answer the peoples question.

Mal. 1:2 ¶ I have loved you, says the LORD. But you say, “How have you loved us?” Is not Esau Jacob’s brother? says the LORD.

Mal. 1:6 ¶ A son honors his father, and servants their master. If then I am a father, where is the honor due me? And if I am a master, where is the respect due me? says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. You say, “How have we despised your name?” ¶ By offering polluted food on my altar.

Mal. 2:17 ¶ You have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet you say, “How have we wearied him?” By saying, “All who do evil are good in the sight of the LORD, and he delights in them.” Or by asking, “Where is the God of justice?”

Mal. 3:8 ¶ Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, “How are we robbing you?” In your tithes and offerings

Mal. 3:13 ¶ You have spoken harsh words against me, says the LORD. Yet you say, “How have we spoken against you?”

This would have made him very direct and confronting to listen to. Imagine a preacher using this style in your Church next Sunday. You can see Prophets were not a popular occupation. You had to have the courage of your convictions.

Issues in Malachi 1:6-14

The trouble with us is that we don’t have a good enough imagination. When we read Scripture we often fail to think ourselves into the situation. This sermon from Malachi in these verses was so incendiary that I’m surprised he lived to tell the tale.

So imagine your a worshipper at temple. Its next Sabbath day. All have turned up in their Sabbath best clothes, sung the hymns beautifully, prayed erudite prayers, and then you get up to preach. Your sermon covers the following points:-

Mal. 1:10 Oh, that someone among you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not kindle fire on my altar in vain!

I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts,

you sniff at me, says the LORD of hosts.

You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick

Mal. 1:14 Cursed be the cheat

We seriously need to read this as a living document. As we hear Malachi preach we can picture the red faces and spluttering anger in response. But as we get carried away in the fun of it all we also need to remember that this is still God's word to your local Church.

The difference of course is cultural and historical. We no longer worship God at the temple with sacrifices of what are supposed to be our best livestock. Yet we can imagine the temptation for a competent farmer to bring something other than his most prized breeding stock for sacrifice.

It is however, almost impossible to exhaust the list of modern applications for what Malachi here speaks of.

- Our tithes and offerings
- Our time spent in service for others
- The honesty with which we pay our taxes
- The integrity with which we speak
- The genuine motive with which we serve God.

Can we picture the Governor-General or a royal representative coming to our place for afternoon tea and we decide to put out the everyday cups because we don't want the good ones broken?

V14 for I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts. Malachi calls us back to that and the casual way we often behave in the presence of the great King.

How can we this week behave in a way that brings honour to the greatness of God?