

**Major Messages from the Minor Prophets**  
**Returning to Normal**  
**The Book of Malachi**

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**Text Introduction:** This fall we have studied through the Minor Prophets. We are coming to the end now. The Prophets of the Old Testament are divided by scholars into the Major Prophets and the Minor Prophets. More precisely, we call Isaiah, along with Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel, Major Prophets. The terms major and minor refer to the size of these books, not the degree of their importance.<sup>1</sup>

Today, we are studying the Book of Malachi.

The last three prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi all prophesied after the exile was complete. The other prophets warned of the exile unless there was repentance. In 722 B.C. the northern tribes of Israel were occupied and many were sent into exile. In 587 B.C. the southern tribes were occupied and many were sent into exile. Eventually, the Medes and Persians became the dominating world power and the books of Ezra and Nehemiah speak of the return of the Jews to the land of Israel under Cyrus's reign. Cyrus' reign gives way to Darius' reign. Haggai and Zechariah are prophets in the day of the rebuilding of the temple. Malachi is the last prophet of the Old Testament era.

**Text:** "For indeed, the day is coming, burning like a furnace, when all the arrogant and everyone who commits wickedness will become stubble. The coming day will consume them," says the LORD of Hosts, "not leaving them root or branches."<sup>2</sup> But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings, and you will go out and playfully jump like calves from the stall.<sup>3</sup> You will trample the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day I am preparing," says the LORD of Hosts.

<sup>4</sup> "Remember the instruction of Moses My servant, the statutes and ordinances I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel.<sup>5</sup> Look, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome Day of the LORD comes.<sup>6</sup> And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers. Otherwise, I will come and strike the land with a curse."

**Introduction:** I remember reading an article by Joe McKeever not long after Katrina. Joe is a friend of many in our church. He has spoken here on a variety of occasions. He was pastor of FBC, Kenner, LA, for 14 years, and was the Director of Missions for Baptist work in the Greater New Orleans area when Katrina made her dreaded appearance. In his article, Joe told how someone had asked him, "When do you think things will get back to normal?" His answer was classic. "Never, I hope."

It was the same response that author/pastor Max Lucado gave in the days after 9/11 when he wrote, "Perhaps the best response we can give to this tragedy is to refuse to go back to normal."

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<sup>1</sup> Lamentations is considered with these books as a major prophet because it is written by Jeremiah.

Malachi's setting is a time of economic recession as well as moral recession. The historical setting for Malachi's prophecy is the return of the exiles. Though not completely free, they were free to rebuild their lives, the Temple, and worship in the Temple.

If normal was the way that Israel lived before the exile, the people of Malachi's day should have had a firm resolve to never return to normal.

### **Malachi's Message is Driven by Questions.**

The text of Malachi moves along outlined around seven distinct statements of indictment from God followed by perceived questions from the people of Israel. Now let's get one thing straight right off the bat. Here is the epitome of arrogance and rebellion. Anytime that we question God's Word to us or question His motives, we are on pretty shaky ground. (Regardless of what the question is!)

Let's see these 7 questions.

- 1:1 How have you loved us?
- 1:6 How have we despised your name?
- 2:14 "For what reason?" (does the Lord reject their offerings)
- 2:17 How have we wearied Him?
- 3:7 How can we return? (Beggars the issue that they do not think they need to return.)
- 3:8 How do we rob you?
- 3:13 What have we spoken against You?

The message: The people returning from exile just did not get it.

The tone of all of these questions indicates an argumentative, rebellious, complacent, and hardened relationship with God. They are so out of touch in their relationship with God that they believe they have done no wrong.

Each of the seven questions has a contemporary application to us. The bottom line in our walk with Christ is not what we think about ourselves, but what God thinks about us.

### **Malachi's Message is Driven by a Burden.**

Here's Malachi's burden for his nation.

Nothing had changed!

The problem is that that nothing has changed in the behavior of the people. The same sin that led to the exile was already rampant post the exile. In short, they had not learned anything. They had not been humbled by the exile. In fact, if anything, they had grown more arrogant, argumentative, complacent, flippant, and rebellious toward God. In that context, God raised up another prophet with a "burden" (oracle of verse 1 means burden) for Godliness.

Does this sometimes happen to us. We are convicted about our sin, but nothing changes. We make a new commitment, but nothing changes.

## So What?

Take advantage of His grace; Don't take advantage of His grace!

The issue of Malachi, after the exile, is the same issue as the prophets, before the exile. **Repentance!**

Repentance is absolutely essential for salvation. "Everyone must repent."

Repentance is the heart of John the Baptist's message—Mark 1:15

Repentance is the heart of Jesus' message= Repent or perish—Luke 13:5

Repentance is the message of the resurrection—Acts 2:38, 3:19

Repentance is the message of Paul—Acts 26:20, 17:30 on Mars Hill "God is now declaring that all men everywhere should repent."

Repentance is the consistent message of the Bible. Repentance is absolutely essential for salvation. Some might say that this sounds contradictory to grace. No, it is consistent with grace because only by God's grace can we be delivered from sin, which is at the very heart of repentance. Remember the definition—change!

Repentance is absolutely obvious in the life of one who has been saved.

Acts 26:20 says that when a person repents that person ought to "show deeds appropriate to repentance."

It's in this statement that we begin to see what repentance really is.

- (1) Repentance is not the same as feeling sorry about your sin.
- (2) Repentance is not the same as penance "I'll make it up."
- (3) Repentance is not the same as reformation. "I'll try to do better."

So, what is repentance?

Repentance is being convicted by Christ about sin in your life, confessing that sin as wrong, and living a changed life as the result of the conviction and the confession.

And a changed life is obvious. Somebody might say that they love you and you don't really know. They might say that they are sorry and you don't really know. But, when a person says that they repent, just observe for a little while and you will know.

Repentance is the ongoing activity of our relationship with God.

Just like confession, repentance is going to happen over and over again. Sure, there is a starting point, but then we repent continually as God shows us sin.

Now is the window of opportunity for repentance.

In his book, *In the Heavens*, Dr. Harry Ironside tells the story of an attempted assassination of Queen Elizabeth I. The woman who sought to do so dressed as a male page and secreted herself in the queen's chamber awaiting the convenient moment to stab the queen to death. She did not realize that the queen's attendants would be very careful to search the rooms before Her Majesty was permitted to retire. They found the woman hidden among the gowns and brought her into the presence of the queen. She realized that humanly speaking, her case was hopeless. She threw herself down on her knees and pleaded and begged the queen as a woman to have compassion on her, a woman, and to show her grace. Queen Elizabeth looked at her coldly and quietly said, "If I show you grace, what promise will you make for the future?" The woman looked up and said, "Grace that hath conditions, grace that is fettered by precautions, is not grace at all." Queen Elizabeth caught it in a moment and said, "You are right. I pardon you out of my grace." And they led her away, a free woman. It is said that from that moment Queen Elizabeth had no more faithful, devoted servant than that woman who had intended to take her life.

That is exactly the way the grace of God works in the life of an individual--he or she becomes a faithful servant of God.