#### **A Few Last Words**

Malachi 1:1-4:5

#### Introduction

Dog: Tonight we finish the Minor Prophets. We've through books like Obadiah and Zephaniah (it's gonna be way less awkward when you run into them in heaven).

- Tonight we turn to the last Minor Prophet, the last book of the OT in most English Bibles (though not the last in most Hebrew Bibles... that's a fascinating conversation for another day that I'd *love* to talk with you about. We have the same books just in a slightly different arrangement).
- **Malachi**. The name "Malachi" might not even be a name, simply a title (*mal'aki*) meaning "my messenger."<sup>1</sup>

**Minor Prophets:** We've tried to make clear that the Minor Prophets are not "minor" because they're less important but because they're shorter. In fact, some of the most significant prophecies about Jesus occur in these twelve books (or this collection of books we call the "Twelve").

- In some ways, they pack a stronger punch because they say more directly and succinctly what needs to be said (e.g., the three good chapter theory of every book; every book is at least 25% too long; you probably feel the same way about my sermons).
- Malachi is a succinct and fitting summary of the message of the Minor Prophets.
   We find in Malachi a few last words from the Minor prophets. And, just like the Minor Prophets, I think you'll find its message surprisingly pertinent to our day and age.

### 1. The Unstoppable Love of God (vv. 1:1-5)

<sup>1</sup> The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi. <sup>2</sup> "I have loved you," says the LORD. But you say, "How have you loved us?" "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the LORD. "Yet I have loved Jacob <sup>3</sup> but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert." <sup>4</sup> If Edom says, "We are shattered but we will rebuild the ruins," the LORD of hosts says, "They may build, but I will tear down, and they will be called 'the wicked country,' and 'the people with whom the LORD is angry forever.'" <sup>5</sup> Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, "Great is the LORD beyond the border of Israel!"

Love of God: The story of God's people, the story of God's creation starts with God's love. We exist because God wants us to exist. He created us because he loved us. "He has loved us into existence."

• The sovereign love of God (here displayed in the story of Esau and Jacob) is a powerful reminder of the terms of our covenant with God. God did not choose us because we were the oldest or best? He didn't love us because we deserved it or earned it? He chose us out of unearned love for us.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Malachi, my dog.

• This is the gospel. There is nothing we can do to make God love us more and nothing we can do to make him love us less. *Which means*, we have no right to question God's plan or purpose and no fear that we will mess it up either.

Message: The problem, however, is that the Israelites doubt, spurn, and rebel against God's love. They disobey the commands of God. The run from the rule of God. Powerfully summarized: <sup>7</sup> From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. But you say, 'How shall we return? (Mal 3:7).

- 150 years since exile (Babylon). Returned to their country. The promise was that the
  temple would be rebuilt (better than the first time). They had experienced a sort of
  national revival under Ezra and Nehemiah but now that generation had passed. The
  enthusiasm wore off. The temple was less impressive.
- The pattern of religion remained but their hearts had wandered (e.g., camp high, honeymoon, etc.). The heart moved away from God but the habits stayed.
  - D. A. Carson calls this the "assumed gospel." "It only takes one generation for a church to die" (Taylor). One generation believes the gospel, the next generation assumes the gospel, and the following generation denies the gospel.
- God loved Israel but they failed to love him in return. Jesus said it this way: <sup>15</sup> "If you love me, you will keep my commandments (Jn 14:15).
  - Loving Jesus is not merely a feeling or performing a few religious obligations; it is an active, abiding, ongoing relationship of following and obeying him. "We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands" (1 Jn 2:3).
  - Your obedience is evidence of your love. If I look at your life, and you
    consistently, joyfully, and without conviction *disobey* the commands of God, then I
    don't believe you if you say you love him.
  - Love goes beyond feelings, or bumper stickers, or even church membership. It involves your affections but is not limited to them. Having a generally positive opinion of Jesus is not the same as loving him: I read were a woman said it was not a custom among married people in her culture to always say, "I love you." To which it was asked, "How do you know someone loves you?" She laughed and said, "You know by how they treat you."

God is bringing a series of charges against his people through the prophet. He's trying to get their attention. This warning is for us too: **our sin will destroy us but God's love will save us**. But we can't have both. You can't love your sin and love God at the same time.

• The love of God will not be denied. His love brooks no rivals. All who run from God will be destroyed but all who turn to him will be saved.

### 2. The Persistent Failure of God's People (vv. 1:6-3:15)

Sin Blinds Us to Sin: One problem we encounter is that sin often blinds us to recognizing our sin. We are so sinful that we won't even believe we are sinful when we're told

- "I have loved you," says the LORD. But you say, "How have you loved us? (1:2)
- But you say, 'How have we despised your name?' (1:6)

- You have wearied the LORD with your words. But you say, "How have we wearied him?"
   (2:17)
- "Your words have been hard against me, says the LORD. But you say, 'How have we spoken against you?' (3:13)
  - God is saying, "Wake up, pay attention, you are running from me, sinning, rejecting my commands" and we respond, "Me? You must be mistaken. I'm good. You've got the wrong guy." It is God's grace that let's you see and admit your sin.

**Symptoms vs. Causes:** God brings charges against these religiously active people showing how they look religious on the outside but their hearts are cold toward him.

- As we look through the specific sins they are accused of we should be personally convicted if it applies to us, but we should also look more deeply at the cause of the sin.
- **Surface idols vs. root idols**; symptom vs. disease. We are not trying to simply change behavior, we are trying to diagnose and cure the idols of the heart.
  - o Root idol of comfort might show up in spending or promiscuity or laziness.
  - Root idol of approval might show up as a curated social media image, people-pleasing, or worry about what people think.
- If the behavior shifts but the heart remains unchanged then the problem remains unsolved.

## A. Half-Hearted Worshipers (1:6-14)

<sup>6</sup> "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. But you say, 'How have we despised your name?' <sup>7</sup> By offering polluted food upon my altar. But you say, 'How have we polluted you?' By saying that the LORD's table may be despised. 8 When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the LORD of hosts. 9 And now entreat the favor of God, that he may be gracious to us. With such a gift from your hand, will he show favor to any of you? says the LORD of hosts. <sup>10</sup> Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand. 11 For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts. 12 But you profane it when you say that the Lord's table is polluted, and its fruit, that is, its food may be despised. 13 But you say, 'What a weariness this is,' and you snort at it, says the LORD of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the LORD. 14 Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.

**Leftover Sacrifices:** What did we do wrong? We are sacrificing (e.g., we posted a Bible verse on Instagram, we played with some kids on a mission trip, we attend church *sometimes*).

- 13 And the Lord said: "Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me (Isa 29:13).
- ¹ But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. ² For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, ⁴ treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people (2 Tim 3:1-5).

They have religious affiliation without the fruit that comes from loving God.

- When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil?
  - Hand-me-down discipleship. We follow God with leftovers (e.g., youth group couches; if its not good enough for you, why would it be good enough for them?).
- They gave god animals they were happy to go without. It wasn't a sacrifice, it was a
  contribution (Regarding breakfast, the chicken made a contribution, the pig made a
  sacrifice).
  - Sacrifice should cost you something. If following Jesus costs you nothing, there's a good chance you're just following yourself.
  - Do you share your faith only when someone else brings it up or when it might cost your reputation? Do you read your Bible before you watch TV or only if you have time at the end of the day? Do you prioritize the gathering of believers, or only show up if you have nothing else on the calendar?

**Deficient View of God:** Their response to God was not in proportion to what he deserves. <sup>11</sup> For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts.

You wouldn't treat a human authority like this: Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? Why do you treat God like this? How magnificent your view of God and how desperate you are for the presence of God will show itself in how much you are willing to sacrifice for him and how much you are willing to forego to know him. It will show up in how seriously you take your sin and how desperately you pursue him in prayer.<sup>2</sup>

## B. Self-Seeking Spouses (2:10-16)

<sup>10</sup> Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers? <sup>11</sup> Judah has been faithless, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the LORD, which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god. <sup>12</sup> May the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob any descendant of the man who does this, who brings an offering to the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> For time's sake, will have to forego the problem of bad leadership and sinful priests as a theme in Malachi.

LORD of hosts! <sup>13</sup> And this second thing you do. You cover the LORD's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. <sup>14</sup> But you say, "Why does he not?" Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. <sup>15</sup> Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. <sup>16</sup> "For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless."

Foreign Wives: Married unbelievers. It's not saying their ethnicity is problematic (e.g., Ruth, Rahab, Zipporah, etc.). It's the foreignness of their false gods (daughter of a foreign god). In so doing, these men have not only married unbelieving women they have been faithless to the wife of your youth.

- (1) They have violated the covenant they have made with their wives, (2) they have torn apart what God has put together, (3) and they have spurned God's plan to produce Godly offspring through godly families.
- Every divorce is a breaking, tearing apart what God put together <sup>15</sup> Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? Even if divorce is wisest in a situation it is never applaudable. It means something fell apart, there is some loss (e.g., foster care and adoption). Necessary because of our broken world is not the same thing as celebrated.
- 4 He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, 5 and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? 6 So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matt 19:4-6).

**Translation Problem:** "The Hebrew text of [Malachi 2:16] is one of the most difficult passages in the OT to translate, with the result that the two main alternative translations proposed for this verse are strongly disputed.

- (1) Is God hating divorce? Focusing on God's hatred of this sin? "For I hate divorce," says the LORD, the God of Israel, "and him who covers his garment with wrong," says the LORD of hosts. "So take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously" (NASB, KJV, NKJV)
- (2) Is a man hating his wife by divorcing her? Ifor the man who does not love (i.e., hates) his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless" (ESV, CSB, NIV).
  - These men in Malachi were trading in the old model for a new one, they were not loving their wives but, rather, using them until they were tired of them. They were doing what brought them the most pleasure, what they "felt" like doing (some of your desires don't need to be satisfied, they need to be crucified).

- Their marriages were self-seeking, not God-honoring, committed, and sacrificial.
   A good sign of your understanding of the gospel is your love and commitment to your spouse (even if that spouse is in the future).
- Do you love them or are you using them? If you'll throw them away when you get bored or they aren't giving you what you want then you don't love them you love yourself!

**Selfishness:** The problem at the root is self-directed affection instead God-submitted affection. The gospel helps us surrender ourselves so we can love God and love others. The symptom is marriage and divorce, but the root is selfishness.

- There are ways to be selfishly married and selfishly single.
- Some *delay* marriage because they can't imagine sharing their time and affections with others.
  - Spouses are expensive. Children are expensive. If you can't get over yourself, you'll never be able to love someone else. I heard one friend jokingly refer to his kids as Hawaii Vacation and Corvette Collection (but I know he didn't regret his choice).
- Some pursue marriage not to give love but to take from others. They want someone to complete them, to keep them company, to give them status, etc. They don't want a spouse, they just want an accessory.

Marriage is not the goal, God is the goal. **Avoiding marriage to do what you want or idolizing marriage to get what you want are both wrong**.

- Don't want to idolize marriage (single is good).
- Don't want to minimize marriage (marriage is good).
- Don't want to encourage divorce (divorce is bad); if we celebrate divorce we undermine marriage.
- Don't want to demonize divorce (divorce happens in a sinful world); love divorced people and extend grace.

Let's Talk About Divorce: We have varying experiences with divorce and marriage. Some are single. Some are married. Some have been divorced. Some have been children affected by divorce.

- Regardless of the reality of divorce in a fallen world, we know that many in our culture are not just getting divorces out of reluctance but out of convenience. Further, we know that Christian marriage has fallen out of favor.
- Divorce is more common than not in our country. Almost half of all marriages in the US end in divorce or separation.
- Marriage is undervalued. 40% of children are born to unwed parents nationally (56% in Philly).
  - If this is you, know that our church loves and support you. We want ti be your spiritual family to stand in the gap We are not interested in judging, condemning, or guilting you. God's grace is sufficient.

- We also want to uphold God's vision for a healthy marriage and healthy communities that starts with godly families. We stand in the gap but we don't ignore the standard.
- If God blesses you with marriage in the future, we want it to be built on his promises and plan.
- It becomes harder to uphold marriage and fight divorce in society that sees lifelong, covenant faithfulness as unrealistic, that sees marriage as a matter of convenience rather than a promise, a culture that celebrates divorce rather than marriage.
- And let's be clear, this is often more a dad problem than a mom problem. Moms are four times more likely to be single parents than dads. They're holding up their end of the bargain.

**So What?:** Divorce is and will always be a reality as long as sinful people inhabit a broken world. Which means, if our church is reaching real people in the real world then we'll have to deal with it.

- (1) We want divorce to be rare among believers. It harms couples, it harms children, it weakens communities, and it obscures a vision of the gospel.<sup>3</sup> We don't want marriages to merely exist. We want our marriages to live up to their God-designed purpose. We don't need more marriages, we need more healthy, spirit-filled, missional marriages.
- (2) We recognize the reality of divorce. In our fallen world, sometimes divorce is the right course of action. When a believer is pursuing divorce, after a painful period of prayer, whether because of abandonment, adultery, abuse, or the like, the church has a responsibility to walk alongside. We recognize that biblically permissible divorce is a sad end to a painful season not a quick fix to a trivial problem.
- (3) We extend gospel grace to those who've been divorced. If you've walked through divorce for less than godly reasons, *God's grace is sufficient*. Maybe before you were a believer or in sinful immaturity you called it quits rather than pushing through, we are unwilling to celebrate your sin but we also refuse to condemn you.

If you're contemplating divorce, don't just do it because you know God will forgive you (Rom 6). But if you've been divorced, don't live in shame because there is "no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8). The same God that created marriage for his glory can redeem a marriage wrecked by adultery. The same gospel that calls us to redemption can redeem a life marred by divorce.

- Whether you're divorced, widowed, single, or married, I sincerely hope you'll find at Redemption Heights a faith family that is loving and supportive, ready and able to walk with you through any trial. Eager to stand in the gap with you and witness God redeem that which sin has broken.
- For those called to marriage, I will pray with and for you to find a Christ-honoring spouse.

(Religion, relationships, and now money. All the hot-button issues).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Data shows "nominal" Christians divorce at the same rate as non-Christians; however, a couple "actively involved in their church" are 35% less likely to divorce; those who call themselves Christians but do not actively engage in the faith are 20% more likely than the general population to get divorced.

### C. Stingy Givers (vv. 3:6-12)

<sup>6</sup> "For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. <sup>7</sup> From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. But you say, 'How shall we return?' <sup>8</sup> Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions. <sup>9</sup> You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. <sup>10</sup> Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. <sup>11</sup> I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the LORD of hosts. <sup>12</sup> Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the LORD of hosts.

Misunderstanding the Tithe: There's a lot of misinformation around tithing. First, there are lots of tithes in the OT (Levitical tithe, festival tithe for the poor, etc.). If you add them all up they are not 10% but closer to 23% (...).

- The specifics of tithing do not apply to New Testament giving. Your pastors are not priests. This building is not the temple. There is no baseline number to give to God (he actually has the rights to all of your money). There is NT precedent for funding the ministries of the church and paying pastors, etc. If you don't give, ministry doesn't happen.
- There are some principle overlaps between the OT and NT (as you would expect). The
  NT makes clear that you are called to give regularly, cheerfully, sacrificially, and
  generously.

**Tithe to Your Heart's Content:** The Israelites have been disobeying God. They've been giving God *some* of their offerings but not *all* of their offerings ( "I Surrender *Some*").

- Everybody "tithes" (gives) to something. Something gets your first and best.
  - Wife: Let me check my schedule and see if I can fit you in. You can have two days a week!
- They are holding back. They can't **trust** God with their money. They need a backup plan.
  - Charles Blondin tightrope story. We'll cheer God from the sidelines but as soon as he wants my money, I'm not getting in the wheelbarrow.
- I'm not asking for your money (I don't get paid more if you give more; we're not passing the offering plate). God doesn't need your money! But the reason Jesus talks more about our money than almost anything else is because he wants to keep your money from getting you. Money (or the love of money) is an idol that keeps us from enjoying God (you can be poor and idolize money; daydream; fix my problems).
  - Giving is not an obligation to make God love you more but an invitation to trust God with all of your life (including your stuff). God is inviting you to experience and commune with him (because you can't love your money and love him at the same time).

- "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt 6:21). You can't treasure your stuff and treasure Christ at the same time.
  - So when you rob God, by refusing to give him everything, you are actually robbing yourself of the joy of fully surrendering to him.

### 3. The Refiner's Fire (3:1-5; 3:16-4:5)

<sup>1</sup> "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. 2 But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. 3 He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD. 4 Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years. 5 "Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts (3:1-5) 16 Then those who feared the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the LORD and esteemed his name. 17 "They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. 18 Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him. <sup>1</sup> "For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. <sup>2</sup> But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. <sup>3</sup> And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet, on the day when I act, says the LORD of hosts. 4 "Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. 5 "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. 6 And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction" (3:16-4:5).

**Messenger Telling of a Messenger:** Malachi is a messenger pointing to a future messenger (an Elijah) who will prepare the way for the Lord himself to come. The NT shows us that messenger is John the Baptist and he is preparing the way for the Lord himself to come (i.e., Jesus Christ).

• All the Law (i.e., Moses, 4:4) and the Prophets (i.e., Elijah, 4:5) are pointing to the coming of Jesus (cf. Mount of Transfiguration).

**Dividing Line:** The way has been prepared and Jesus has come and he will come again to complete the process described here as "purification." "Jesus is the Lord who comes to his temple" (Piper). **He is a refiner's fire**.

- In the refinement process, only what is pure will remain and what is impure will be burned away.
- (1) In his coming, Christ has made those who place their faith in him righteous. We cannot stand on our own, only in him.
  - Purifying may hurt but it is the path to joy. He burns up everything that would keep us from finding our joy in him. "Every sin you forsake out of love to Christ is replaced with a deeper and purer joy." "If you lose your wallet on the way to collect a million dollars, you don't get angry" (Dennis Smith).
  - In him, you will be a dancing cow (4:2). Good name for our praise dancer ministry.
- (2) But if your righteousness is not found in him, it will all be burned up. "For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble. The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch" (4:1).
  - Maybe you hear a message of perfection and think, "I'm not perfect." To be clear, God's law demands perfection. But grace reminds us that such perfection was fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus.
- There is no refuge *from* God, only refuge *in* him. Your options aren't ignore God or trust him. They are deny and get destroyed or return and be saved. It's either rebellion to your destruction or repentance to your purification.

# Where is your refuge? Who are you trusting?

- Yourself? Your money? Skills? Hustle? Good behavior? Hard work? Charm? Family upbringing? Relationships? Religious performance?
- None of it is enough. Your only hope is in Jesus. Turn to him for life, now and forever. Eternal life and a life really worth living.