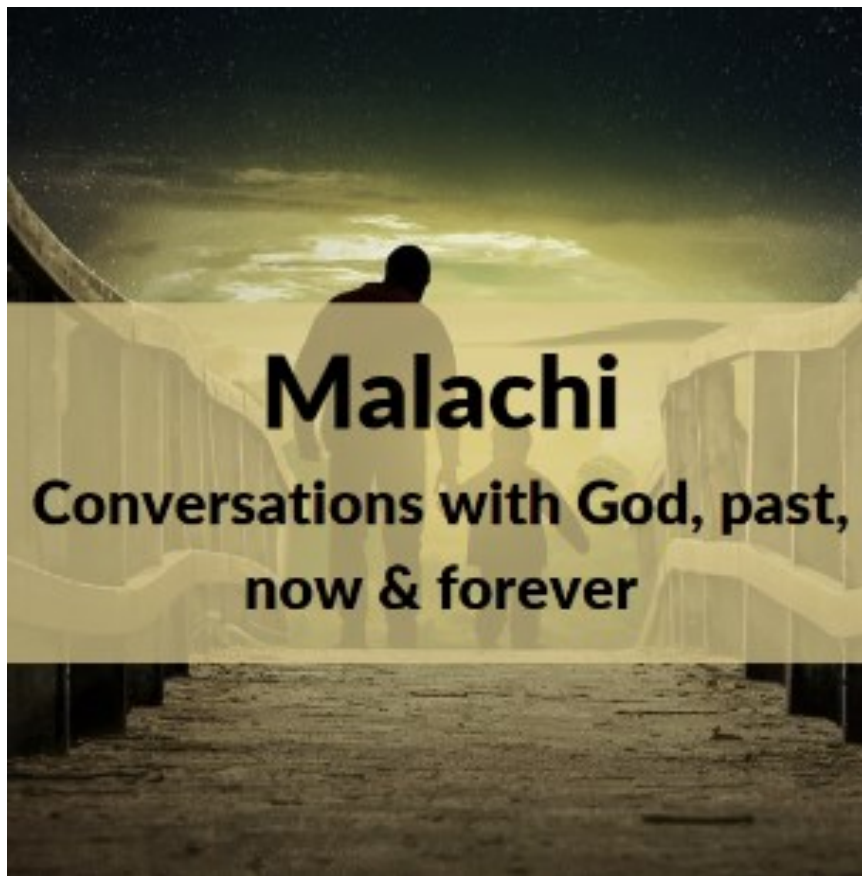


Handouts

Notes & Questions



Malachi

Conversations with God, past, now & forever

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Your Notes

The book of Malachi begins...

- ***“I have always loved you,” says the Lord. But you retort, “Really? How have you loved us?”*** Malachi 1:2
- In some ways these brief statements sum up the entire history of the Old Testament.
- God again and again both shows and declares His love for His people.
- And His people again and again, don’t believe Him, go their own ways, reap the punishment from it, repent, God loves and forgives them, and they do it all over again.
- In this lesson, we’ll first look at the history of God’s love for His people, His challenging conversation with them in the book of Malachi, and applications for us.

In began in Genesis

- God created a perfect, beautiful and wonderful garden for humanity.
- But then the enemy, Satan, came in and though he didn’t attack God directly, he insinuated that God didn’t really love them by his words—
- ***“Did God really say?.....”*** and with that the implication that God was withholding something from them.
- Sadly, they believed the lie and suffered the consequences.
- Sin and death entered the world for them and all who followed, though even in their judgment, God promised a coming Redeemer.

The pattern repeated

- After calling Abraham from all the peoples, God created family that grew to a nation in Egypt.
- When that protection and provision turned to slavery, God rescued them from Egypt and promised He would take them to a land filled with abundance.
- The people literally heard the voice of God at Mt. Sinai; Moses received the laws on how they were supposed to live.
- Most importantly at that time **THEY AGREED** to the COVENANT with God to be His people and obey all He required of them and in this way, they would be His representatives to the world.

They didn’t keep their word

- The remainder of the Old Testament we’ve read through in the previous months is one continuous story of—
- How the people sinned; God uses His prophets to remind them of the covenant they made with God and the consequences.
- After centuries of warnings, the Northern Kingdom of Israel is conquered, deported, and never restored.
- The Southern Kingdom of Judah, conquered, deported, restored miraculously—and then.....

Good news and bad news in how they responded

- From the *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Characters*
- The good news is that: *Though the exiles had been chastened and thoroughly purged of any inclination to idolatry,*
- The bad news is that: ***their leaders and they themselves came back to the homeland largely unreformed in other respects....***

The burden of the book of Malachi was the glaring incongruity between the identity of the Jewish community as the people of God and the living out of all that this required of them.

- And the challenge to us today: *Theirs was not the problem of rebuilding the Temple and holy city, . . . rather, it was the issue of holy living and holy service in the aftermath of all the external accomplishments. Malachi, though dead, yet speaks to the modern world about the need to bring performance into line with profession.*

How Malachi challenges the people

- To bring their performance into line with their identity as the people of God.
- This is another book that is structured in the form of a conversation similar to the ending of Job and the book of Habakkuk.
- Unlike them, it is not a positive conversation, with an ending of reconciliation for the nation as a whole.
- It is a series of challenges and confrontations and a very positive promise for some.
- Let's take them one by one—with first a quote of the challenge and then what they were doing and the application to us.

Challenging Conversation #1

- **Mal. 1: 6** The Lord of Heaven's Armies says to the priests: "A son honors his father, and a servant respects his master. If I am your father and master, where are the honor and respect I deserve? You have shown contempt for my name!"
- "But you ask, 'How have we ever shown contempt for your name?'"
- **7** "You have shown contempt by offering defiled sacrifices on my altar."
- "Then you ask, 'How have we defiled the sacrifices?'"
- . . . **8** "When you give blind animals as sacrifices, isn't that wrong. . . . But when you bring that kind of offering, why should he show you any favor at all?" asks the Lord of Heaven's Armies.
- **12** "But ***you dishonor my name with your actions.***

Dishonoring God's name by our actions

- They were going through the motions of worship, but doing it in a shoddy, insincere way.
- That is what it truly means to take God's name in vain.
- If we identify as a Christian, as one who belongs to Christ, who belongs to Jesus, do we act like it?
- Both in our worship and in our private lives.
- ***"You are writing a gospel, a chapter each day, by the things that you do and the words that you say. People read what you write, distorted or true, what is the gospel according to you?"***
- Take that very seriously in all you do.

Challenging Conversation #2

- **Mal. 2** ***"Listen, you priests—this command is for you!"***
- **5** *"The purpose of my covenant with the Levites was to bring life and peace, and that is what I gave them. This required reverence from them, and they greatly revered me and stood in awe of my name. 6 They passed on to the people the truth of the instructions they received from me. They did not lie or cheat; they walked with me, living good and righteous lives, and they turned many from lives of sin."*
- **7** *"The words of a priest's lips should preserve knowledge of God, and people should go to him for instruction, for the priest is the messenger of the Lord of Heaven's Armies. 8 But you priests have left God's paths."*

Your instructions have caused many to stumble into sin. You have corrupted the covenant I made with the Levites," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. ⁹ "So I have made you despised and humiliated in the eyes of all the people. For you have not obeyed me but have shown favoritism in the way you carry out my instructions."

So terribly serious and frightening

- Spiritual leaders should be ones of "righteousness and peace"—those who turn people from sin.
- And this doesn't mean only pastors—you are a leader wherever you are in any position of leadership, parenting, teaching in any way.
- The focus should be on "true instruction" not simply wanting to make people feel good.
- Keep the integrity of the Gospel message—don't water it down.
- We can be kind and understanding, but don't lose connection with the truth.
- If you don't challenge those you love, who will?

Confrontation #3

- *Malachi 2: ¹¹ Judah has been unfaithful, and a detestable thing has been done in Israel and in Jerusalem. The men of Judah have defiled the Lord's beloved sanctuary by marrying women who worship idols. ¹² May the Lord cut off from the nation of Israel every last man who has done this and yet brings an offering to the Lord of Heaven's Armies.*
- *¹³ Here is another thing you do. You cover the Lord's altar with tears, weeping and groaning because he pays no attention to your offerings and doesn't accept them with pleasure. ¹⁴ You cry out, "Why doesn't the Lord accept my worship?" I'll tell you why! Because the Lord witnessed the vows you and your wife made when you were young. But you have been unfaithful to her, though she remained your faithful partner, the wife of your marriage vows.*
- *¹⁵ Didn't the Lord make you one with your wife? In body and spirit you are his. And what does he want? Godly children from your union. So guard your heart; remain loyal to the wife of your youth. ¹⁶ "For I hate divorce!" says the Lord, the God of Israel. "To divorce your wife is to overwhelm her with cruelty," says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. "So guard your heart; do not be unfaithful to your wife."*

Additional thoughts on divorce

- ***God hates divorce and so does anyone who has gone through it—not the unforgiveable sin and not even listed in sins God hates, or that characterizes those outside the faith.***
- And even more interesting to consider.....
 - From several blogs on <https://redeeminggod.com/god-is-divorced/>
 - *God Himself is a divorced person. In Jeremiah 3:8, God says this:*
 - ***Then I saw that for all the causes for which backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a certificate of divorce...***
 - *One could argue that God was not exactly married to Israel the same way that a man is married to a woman, but against this it could also be argued that the covenant relationship God has with Israel is far stronger and far more binding than the relationship shared between a husband and wife.*
- And yet God divorced Israel—and in Hosea and many other passages talks about the incredible pain of it—He does not want His people to go

through it but loves and forgives the victims of that sin as He does the victims of any and all others who come to Him for forgiveness.

Challenging conversation #4

- *Malachi 2:17 You have wearied the Lord with your words.*
- Can you imagine God being tired of listening to you—how horribly sad and tragic!
- *“How have we wearied him?” you ask.*
- *By saying, “All who do evil are good in the eyes of the Lord, and he is pleased with them” or “Where is the God of justice?”*
-
- *Mal. 3:5 “So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me,” says the Lord Almighty.”*
- *Two issues here*

The two issues are

- 1) Those who distort truth
- 2) And those who oppress employees, widows, orphans, foreigners***THIS IS NOTHING NEW—again, and again, and again throughout the Old Testament, God has said that to follow HIM means to be people of transparent truth and to care for the least of these.

1) Those who distort truth

- Those who distort truth come in many forms.
- The most important thing is that you MUST KNOW GOD’S WORD WELL to be able to discern what is true and what isn’t.
- And we do well to remember these words from Isaiah during a time of war and political unrest:
- *Isaiah 8: ¹¹ This is what the Lord says to me with his strong hand upon me, warning me not to follow the way of this people: ¹² “Do not call conspiracy everything this people calls a conspiracy; do not fear what they fear, and do not dread it.*
- *¹³ The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy, he is the one you are to fear, he is the one you are to dread.*
- **A reminder—NO political comments or commentary in Bible class—that is not what we are about.**

2) And those who oppress employees, widows, orphans, foreigners

- Oppression can be caused by what you DON’T do, as much as what you do. Of course, you shouldn’t be intentionally mean, but think through as a disciple of Jesus what you can do to be truly kind.
- You can so often truly tell what someone is like with how they treat people they consider less important than they are—waiters, store clerks, service persons.
- Examples—be nice to support techs—it is the middle of the night where many of them work—if a lengthy conversation, ask their name, their real name—end by saying thank you.
- When visiting a hotel, tidy up, strip the sheets and towels, clean up your mess; when eating out, stack up dishes, tip well.
- In retail situations, tell cashiers you appreciate them. Express gratitude to managers.

Confrontation #5

- *Mal. 3:8* “Should people cheat God? Yet you have cheated me!
- “But you ask, ‘What do you mean? When did we ever cheat you?’
- “You have cheated me of the tithes and offerings due to me. ⁹ You are under a curse, for your whole nation has been cheating me. ¹⁰ Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do,” says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies, “I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won’t have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test! ¹¹ Your crops will be abundant, for I will guard them from insects and disease. Your grapes will not fall from the vine before they are ripe,” says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies. ¹² “Then all nations will call you blessed, for your land will be such a delight,” says the Lord of Heaven’s Armies.

CLARIFICATIONS needed to properly understand and apply this challenge

- 1) What is the tithe and the purposes of the tithe?
- 2) What is the storehouse?
- 3) How should we then apply this today?

1) What is the Tithe—clearly spelled out in Deuteronomy and what it was to be used for

- *Deut. 14: 22* **Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year. ²³ Eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and olive oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the Lord your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name, so that you may learn to revere the Lord your God always. ²⁴ But if that place is too distant and you have been blessed by the Lord your God and cannot carry your tithe (because the place where the Lord will choose to put his Name is so far away), ²⁵ then exchange your tithe for silver, and take the silver with you and go to the place the Lord your God will choose. ²⁶ Use the silver to buy whatever you like: cattle, sheep, wine or other fermented drink, or anything you wish. Then you and your household shall eat there in the presence of the Lord your God and rejoice.**
- ²⁷ **And do not neglect the Levites living in your towns, for they have no allotment or inheritance of their own.**
- ²⁸ **At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year’s produce and store it in your towns, ²⁹ so that the Levites (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.**

3 Things to be done with the Tithe in order of how they are given and suggested applications

- **#1 Celebrate!**—the whole first part of this passage—have a party in thankfulness for what God has given you!
- C.S. Lewis said, “Joy is the serious business of heaven.”
- **#2 Support those in Ministry**—do not neglect the Levites—as shown previously, those who correctly teach God’s Word.
- **#3 Support foreigners, the fatherless, and widows**

2) What is the storehouse?

- **“The Storehouse” is NOT the local church**— In that day it was the place responsible in that day for all teaching, worship, sacrifices **AND the social welfare of the time, more on that in a minute.**
- PLEASE do not misunderstand me—I am not saying we aren’t supposed

to support our local church—that obviously falls under the previous category of supporting those who teach, but our responsibilities don't stop there.

- That command is clearly repeated in the New Testament, that those who teach the Word are normally to receive support from it—1 Corinthians 9:14, Gal. 6:6 though the Apostle Paul frequently worked as a tentmaker because he was compelled to preach to those who were not part of the Old Testament communities.
- For centuries there was literally no local church to give to. What they did do however from the earliest days was provide for the less fortunate in their communities.

In fact, this care and giving to the less fortunate

- Was one of the defining characteristics of the early Christians.
- The Emperor Julian bemoaned how he couldn't get people to return to paganism in part because the Christians not only took care of their own needy, but needy pagan neighbors.
- They picked up cast off babies from the trash heaps.
- That they “spread their board for all, but not their beds,” was a defining characteristic of the early church. (from the *Letter to Diogenitus*)

The most important thing to give and a final thought on giving

- ***Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies (every part of you) as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. (Romans 12:1, NIV).... Giving all of yourself is much more important than just giving money.***
- Good advice from C.S. Lewis on giving: *“I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure (and I would add TIME) on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditure (and I would say work for the Kingdom) excludes them.”*
— **C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity***
- Have a conversation with God about your giving, to who, when, how much—and remember many ways to give more than money—give of yourself first in life and love, in time and passion, in hobbies and health, in spare time and service—have a conversation with the Lord on what it would mean for you to be a living sacrifice.
- Are you “pinched” at all? That is a good question to ask yourself.

One more confrontation, #6

- *Mal. 3¹³ “You have said terrible things about me,” says the Lord.*
- *“But you say, ‘What do you mean? What have we said against you?’*
- *14 “You have said, ‘What’s the use of serving God? What have we gained by obeying his commands or by trying to show the Lord of Heaven’s Armies that we are sorry for our sins? 15 From now on we will call the arrogant blessed. For those who do evil get rich, and those who dare God to punish them suffer no harm.’”*
- Back to the earliest book in the Bible, Job where Satan accused Job, “Does Job serve God for nothing?”
- Take everything away and see if Job will still serve you.”
- God did, Job still trusted—but that test continues....

We can expect the same accusations from the enemy

- Satan will whisper in our ear that God doesn't really love us....
- That He loves others more....
- That He gives them more stuff and less trials—when in reality
- God may be honoring us with the trials, needs, and challenges WE have.
- In faith, we need to keep our eyes on God and trust Him.

Book ends with reminders that this isn't all there is—we ought not to focus primarily on it

- Judgment is coming as Malachi reminds his audience.
- *Mal. 4:1 Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the Lord Almighty. “Not a root or a branch will be left to them.*
- **If you want it all now—now all is what you will get.**
- When Bill Hybels became a believer, Dr. B had him put notes on all his stuff “soon to be burned” a good reminder if we are too attached to anything of this world.
- **While the temporary will burn, God goes on to promise in Malachi 4: 2—**

But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays. And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves.

- *Some day for those who love God—You WILL be healed emotionally, mentally, physically, you WILL be joyful!*
- And also, consider this wonderful passage:

A great way to end this book and study Of the Old Testament

- *Mal. 3:16 Then those who feared the Lord talked with each other, and the Lord listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored his name.*
- **17** *“On the day when I act,” says the Lord Almighty, “they will be my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as a father has compassion and spares his son who serves him.¹⁸ And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.*
- For all of you who have listened and learned, discussed and prayed—

Not only are our conversations with God important, but when we discuss Him with others....

- ***The Lord Almighty is listening. And it has been recorded.***
- Your sins are forgiven and forgotten, and more that your spiritual salvation,
- What you talk about when you talk about the things of the Lord is remembered.
- And one day when all that is evil and sad is melting away in judgment, we will be spared—his treasured possession to walk with our God once again in loving conversation, forever.

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- Podcasts, blogs, and eBooks
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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Malachi, Conversations with God—past, now, and forever

1. How does God start out the book of Malachi? What do you think of when you hear that God loves you? What does that mean to you?
2. God first challenges the people with bringing Him unacceptable offerings—what are some ways people do that today? How can we all do better in what we offer to God?
3. What should we expect from teachers in our lives? Where are you a teacher in what you share about God to others?
4. What did this lesson teach you about giving? What was new to you? How might you apply what you've learned?
5. How would you answer someone who thinks they are serving God for nothing? Does God promise that He will shower us with goodies if we trust Him?
6. APPLICATION— What does that mean to you that God remembers and records the times you talk about Him? What do you want to be remembered for?