

Kings and Prophets 18-02-08

This is Thursday the 8th of February 2018 and we're continuing our study of Kings and Prophets. We began over five years ago looking at the Kingdom of Solomon and watched it divide with Jeroboam and Rehoboam. And we've reviewed the history of the divided kingdom, the northern kingdom of Israel, the southern kingdom of Judah.

And as we have followed that narrative in the books of Kings and the books of Chronicles, we've fit in the major and minor prophets in that context to try to understand better why they said what they said, to whom they said it, in what historical context, why God sent that particular message at that particular time. And we saw the northern kingdom go out in 721 BC with the Assyrians. We saw the kingdom of Judah take a note from their northern sister and have a series of revivals but they seem to be spiraling ever downward.

And finally in 586 BC Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians came and took them into captivity. Seventy years later they began to trickle back to the land. It was not a triumphant entry in the land such as they experienced with Joshua.

When they rebuilt the temple the glory of God did not fill it as it did in the days of Solomon. It was a very low-key, gradual return. And yet God continued to send His messengers, the prophets, to encourage and to instruct His people in that post-exilic time.

We have come through several of the post-exilic prophets such as Haggai and Zechariah. And we've now come to the end of the Old Testament, the last prophet, Malachi, my messenger. We began looking at it in the last few weeks and we're going to continue and conclude our look at Malachi tonight.

You know we managed to do Nehemiah and the whole book in one evening. And Malachi is a wonderful concluding segment of the Old Testament in many ways. And so we're going to take a look at its structure, its content, and why we should pay attention to it, what it means to us tonight.

Let's begin as we always do by taking a moment to go to the Lord in prayer, ask His blessing on our fellowship and on our study, seek the ministry of His Holy Spirit to teach us and help us see what is important in this portion of God's Word for us. Shall we pray? Father, how grateful we are for the presence of Your Holy Spirit and the gift of Your Word to shine light on our path, to tell us who we are and why we're here. We pray that as we look at this portion of Your Word tonight that Your Holy Spirit will be our teacher, that each one will be blessed and encouraged and motivated by the things that we see, that the Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior, will be glorified in our lives as we seek to be more closely conformed to His example of faithfulness and obedience as we await the day of His return where we have the opportunity to be brought before Your throne, blameless and spotless and ready to serve in the ages that are to come, the kingdoms that are to come.

We pray that this study will contribute toward that goal and we ask it all in Jesus' name. Amen. Remember that this book is connected to its predecessor, Zachariah.

Structurally, the last two sections of Zachariah begin with that word burden, the burden of the word of the Lord. And this one, so much so that people have tried to decide that some editor arbitrarily divided this material between the two books. The structural marker is so close.

But it is its own book. This is the Burden of the Word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi. One of the interesting features that you find in the book of Ezekiel and in many of the post-exilic prophets is, remember all of this time we've been looking at the divided kingdom.

We had the northern kingdom with Ahab and Jezebel and Elijah and Elisha famously ministering up there. And you had the southern kingdom with kings like Josiah and Jeremiah, the weeping prophet ministering down there. So we were very careful to distinguish all through Kings and Chronicles.

This is Israel in the north. This is Judah down in the south with the capital of Jerusalem. And it was mainly just the tribe of Judah and Benjamin, mostly down there.

And the other ten tribes were up in the north, often called Ephraim, but generally referred to as Israel. But with the capture and destruction of Jerusalem and the kingdom of Judah, and their leaving to go to Babylon in the days of Ezekiel for those 70 plus years, and it's been many more years since then. It's been nearly double that now in the days that we're looking at.

Judah, as they return to the land, they have decided, and rightfully so, well, we are Israel. We're all that's left and we represent all 12 tribes now because we're the remnants. Some of the ones who were up in Samaria and may have intermarried and whatnot, but their ancient ancestors centuries earlier were the ten tribes.

But Judah says, we're all that's left. So they begin to refer to themselves and be referred to in Scripture as Israel. Hence, even though technically this is the return of the tribe of Judah, the people of Judah to that region, here is an example of where they are called Israel.

And we've seen this elsewhere in some of these prophets. To Israel, by the hand of, and they kind of left that out of your text there, but it's by the hand of, byad in Hebrew, Malachi, my messenger. Now, we took a look at some of this in detail, and we specifically wanted to illuminate what we saw in Ezra and Nehemiah with the marriages issue.

And this idea that because some of the people had intermarried with other nations, that this was a terrible thing and they wanted to divorce and dissolve those marriages and drive those women and any children from those marriages out of the land. So we took a look at what Malachi has to say about that last time. But any conclusion that you draw is going to be a little bit troubled for this reason.

The section that pertains to that in the middle of the book of Ezekiel is in the middle of chapter

2. And it begins really in verse 13. And let's just read this section real quickly by way of review. The second thing that you do, these are some of the charges that God is bringing against the people.

You would think, well, they've been released from captivity, they're back in the land, they should be strong in faith, they've rebuilt the temple, everything ought to be gaining in momentum, and there ought to be economic success, and there ought to be spiritual success, and everybody ought to be on an upward turn. But in Malachi chapter 2, God says, here are the things that you are doing wrong. This is what you still haven't figured out despite the judgment of the captivity.

Here's the second thing you do. You cover the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and crying, so much so that He does not regard your offering anymore, nor receive it with goodwill from your hands. You think, well, if someone is tearful and comes before God with an offering, why would God not honor it? They're coming seemingly sincerely, they are weeping, they're very emotional about this offering that they bring, and yet God says, I'm not receiving it.

Well, this is a sobering thought. You would think, well, but if I come before God with sincerity, won't He surely hear me? I'm so committed and invested in this issue that I'm bringing before His throne, I'm in tears. And yet God says, I'm not listening.

So it would be helpful to find out why that is. And the reason is disobedience. Remember we saw one of our memory verses, your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He will not hear.

And it doesn't matter how important it is to us, or how invested we are in it, if we have a sinful pattern in our lives, God can't hear or respond to those requests. We have to be sure that we enter, as it says in Hebrews 10, with our hearts having been sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies, our lifestyle, having been washed with pure water. We can't go rushing in to God's throne room in prayer, defiled, and expect our request to be heard.

You think about these British kings, they've got a lot of these historical dramas on TV now, with Victoria and Elizabeth and all the others. You think about how touchy some of these kings and queens were about protocol, and did you bow or bow deep enough, and did you address me by the right title, and did you speak before you were spoken to, and we see echoes of this in human monarchy. Well, imagine the Lord God of creation, and us rushing in unprepared and unqualified, and not having availed ourselves of the cleansing grace that is in Christ.

And we've ignored Christ, and we've ignored His work, and we've ignored the application of it to ourselves, and we want to go rushing in and try to get God to do something for us, or to resolve a problem for us. This is sort of a prototype of that situation in the Old Testament day with Israel. So, they come in covering the altar with tears, and God says, I'm not listening.

And you say, for what reason in verse 14? And in Malachi 2.14, God says, So, of course, the big

question here is, well, is this a reference to Ezra and Nehemiah, and these wives from foreign extraction, that are from different countries, and you remember the Israelites who were sort of pure bloods, so to speak. This reminds me of various Native American tribes. You know, in the Cherokee tribe, if you've got one 1,024th, because you've got a six great grandmother that was a Cherokee, they'll take you into the tribe and welcome you as their own, and you can become chief.

But in other tribes, you have to have a quantum. You've got to be half or full. In some of them, you have to be full blood.

And if you've got any taint at all of anything other than the tribe, you're not qualified. So, this is kind of the case in Ezra and Nehemiah's day, when they came back and they said, well, these people you've intermarried with aren't qualified to be in our fellowship, and you've got to drive them out. So, the question here is, is Malachi condoning or condemning? Is he saying, you should have stuck with your Israelite wife and not married somebody from the land? Or is he saying, because of what has happened in the Ezra and Nehemiah days, and you've created widows and orphans for no good reason.

These ladies and children are not worshipping Baal. They are not going up to the high places and doing all of these other things. It's just what we would say today, it's their race.

It's their ethnicity. And it's a bigoted response. And you're driving them out because of their ancestors, which they had no control over.

But there is no hint in the post-exilic day of any idolatry anywhere. Nobody sets up idolatrous temples. Nobody sacrifices to any foreign gods.

There are no high places. It's never mentioned again. The exile in Babylon cured Israel of that.

And it never rears its head again, ever. But there is actually a third option. We ask ourselves, well, is this talking about treachery against the Israelite wife of your youth? Is it treachery against the foreign wife of your youth that you've now driven out? And pretty much any foul dealing with a marriage covenant is covered by this.

You could say, yes, it's either or both. Remember in Jesus' day, the Pharisees were taking advantage of loopholes in the law. Somebody would burn the toast in the morning and they'd be divorced by afternoon.

You don't please me. The way I read the law, be gone. But actually there is a third option here.

And what we're going to see tonight is that these things are metaphorical for deeper truths. And by the way, verse 15, He did not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit. And why one? He seeks godly offspring.

Therefore take heed to your spirit and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth.

That is one of the most confusing verses in the whole Bible when you read it in English. And guess what? This is one of the most confused verses in the Bible when you read it in Hebrew.

When you go to the commentaries and the Hebrew scholars, this is a troubled text. It has not been preserved very well. Now, as we have seen before in the book of Samuel and other places, God, for reasons of His own, has allowed the Hebrew text to get messed up, to not be well preserved in places.

And for some of us, you know, this could potentially cause deep problems. Well, you mean I can't trust my Bible? What if they translated it wrong? What if they got it wrong? Well, what that tells me here, if God has allowed this to become a troubled text, the answer is not with a magnifying glass or a microscope on the text. The answer is to step back.

You know how when you have a picture and you look at it up close and it's got flaws and cracks, and you start looking at that and saying, well, I can't see if this person has attached earlobes or detached earlobes, or I can't see the color of their eyes. You know, it's been corrupted. What's the best thing to do? Stand back so that those flaws disappear and you can see what you need to see in the big picture.

That's what we need to do here. So, what I want to point out tonight is what the book of Malachi means, both to the people who received it in that post-exilic day, just a few centuries before the appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ, and what it means to us. So, first of all, stepping back and looking at it in the big picture, Malachi has three messages.

So, if you're taking notes, I'll give you the sections of the book that comprise these three messages. You have the introduction right there in chapter 1, the burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi. And then it begins.

And in chapter 1, verse 2, you have the first message. And it is a complete and connected message all by itself. It starts in chapter 1, verse 2, and it goes through chapter 2, verse 9. Chapter 2, verse 9. That's the first message.

And the title of that message, you could say, is Honor the Lord. This is the Honor the Lord message. God is going to charge the people of Israel, which is the returned people of Judah, with not honoring Him.

He is going to explain what the consequences of that are and what it means to honor Him. So, it's all about the honor of the Lord. The first message, Honor the Lord.

The second message talks about, and its theme is, faithfulness. Faithfulness. What is it to be faithful? God is going to charge them with not being faithful.

What are the consequences of that? And if you think about it, that's a different question than whether or not you honor God. You can be patriotic. You can fly the flag every time it's supposed to be flown.

You can bring it down to half height when the governor declares it or the president declares it. You can do all of those things. But if you're a disobedient and lawless citizen, that's a different question than whether or not you honor the country or honor its fallen veterans.

That's one area of life. A different area is, are you a benefit to the community? Do you follow its laws? Do you support its ideals? One is an attitude and the other is in the realm of actions. So, honoring the Lord, the first message, has to do with attitude, which gets into our motivation.

And if our attitude doesn't motivate us, we're really not honoring the Lord. The second message has to do with faithfulness. Does our recognition of who God is and what he has done for us turn us into obedient and faithful people? And that message begins, as you might expect, in chapter 2, verse 10, and it's going to extend to chapter 3, verse 6. 2.10 to 3.6. That is the center of the book, the heart of the book, and it centers on faithfulness, on obedience that is properly motivated.

Remember, God sent them back and said, rebuild the temple. And they were all gung-ho to do it and they honored the spirit and the idea of the project, but it all fell flat and it went fallow and it was an incomplete construction project for like 18 years. And God had to send Haggai and Zechariah and say, hey, put your actions where your attitude is.

If you really have come back to the land and you want to be the people of God and you want God to be in your presence, be faithful. Finish the project. Let your actions reflect.

James has a whole letter in the New Testament about this. You can have faith, but does it manifest itself in what you do? Faithfulness is a different thing than faith. I can believe all kinds of things about Jesus and about God, but does that belief and that faith, recognition of truth, work itself out in this is what I do? So faith and faithfulness are two different things.

Honoring God and faithfulness. So that extends, as I say, from chapter 2 verse 10 to chapter 3 verse 6. Then the third and final message begins in chapter 3 verse 7 and extends to the end of the book, chapter 4 verse 6. And the title of that one might be Return and Remember. Return and Remember.

Now, each of these messages is beautifully constructed. Each of them has five parts. And if I had time, I would give you the verse divisions and give you A, B, C, B, A because they are chiasms.

We love a chiasm where there's a central element that's the most important thing and then there's a sandwich around that that corresponds, the upper and lower piece of bread. And then if it's a hero sandwich, there might be another piece of bread above and below that. Well, that's what each of these three messages are.

There is an A, B, C, B, A structure to each of these messages. And if you dig around, you can find that. All I'm interested in is those layers.

You just watch for the central one. We know that in a chiasm, what's at the center is the most important. And God uses this throughout His Word.

So let's take a quick look now at the first message. Remember, this is honor the Lord. God is going to charge them and say, where is my honor? How come you're not? A lot of you don't even have the attitude, much less the actions.

So there is the recognition of God's love. He says, I have loved you. Look at what I did not do for Edom that I have done for you.

I judged Edom, and they're never coming back. I judged you, but you are coming back because I love you. They say, we don't think you've loved us.

In what way have you loved us? And so on. But the central portion there is in chapter 1, verse 10. And just look at the last part of that verse.

Because of them not honoring God, because of bringing these poor sacrifices, He says, I have no pleasure in you, nor will I accept an offering from your hand. So there are two consequences of dishonoring the Lord, not giving Him the honor that He is due. Because they do not value Him, they do not recognize Him, either in their attitude or in their actions.

God says, my attitude toward you is going to be reciprocal. You don't honor me, I will not honor you. So no pleasure, I take no pleasure in you, that's an attitude.

God's not going to listen when they pray. He's not going to look out for their interests and bless their crops and provide for their needs because they're not interested in Him. They have a bad attitude toward Him.

God says, I take no pleasure in you. Secondly, and the whole second message is going to be on their faithlessness, their actions don't comport with what their covenant responsibility is. God says, I will not accept.

This is an action on God's part. I'm not going to accept your sacrifices. Now, what is the nature of their sacrifices? In the Old Testament day, it was animal sacrifices.

They had to bring a tithe. The tithe was designed to support the priestly guys. All of the infrastructure that made the temple go.

It was almost like income tax. They didn't really have a civil government that got paid, but they had to support the priests because the priests were given no land and had no inheritance. And so the tithe essentially supported the temple and supported the priestly workers there, both formal priests and the other sons of Aaron that worked there.

So they're not honoring God. They're not motivated to ensure that that form of worship is supported. And God says, well, when you do come down there, you can cry all you want.

I'm not going to accept your sacrifice. It's not a proper sacrifice and most of all, it is not properly motivated. You're bringing it in your own interest.

You're taking the lamest and blindest and worst looking animals out of your flock, the ones you think you can spare. You're bringing them down to me, hoping that I'm going to be somehow impressed. He says, your governor wouldn't be impressed.

Why should I be impressed? So their attitude doesn't reflect honor and their actions reflect that bad attitude. And God says, okay, then my attitude toward you is going to be bad and my actions toward you is going to be negative. So it's reciprocal.

That's the first message in a nutshell. The second message we said was about faithfulness versus faithlessness, right? And that begins in chapter 2 and verse 10. Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously with each other by profaning the covenant of the fathers? Judah has dealt treacherously.

An abomination has been committed. Judah has profaned the Lord's holy. And you notice institution is in italics there.

It's the Lord's holiness, really. Anything that is holy to the Lord, they are disrespecting and profaning. They're defiling it.

They're besmirching it. Again, not only are they treating God with no honor and no respect, and they're just going through the motions. It's hollow.

It's inadequate. It's poor quality. It reflects disregard.

And the things pertaining to God are being treated that way as well. So God personally and the things dedicated to God, the holy, is similarly. In the modern day, you might think, well, not only would someone not bother to learn about God or pray to God or try to live in a way that is pleasing to God, but others who belong to God get short shrift.

This is the other half of love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself. The holy, in our fellowship, is each other. You are God's building.

You are God's temple. Remember Jesus, and later Paul, will talk about what it is to be the temple of God. Jesus referred to himself in allusion to the temple.

Tear this temple down and I'll rebuild it in three days. He was talking about the body of his flesh. And Paul talks about, you are the temple of God.

So you are the holy. I am the holy. And to disrespect God inevitably is going to be to disrespect God's people as well.

Remember Jesus said, if they've hated me, they're going to hate you. So that's the big idea. And we don't have to understand every single Hebrew word in here, or parse out the meaning of

every single phrase.

The big idea is, in the first message, God says, you have a bad attitude and bad actions toward me. In the second message, you have a bad attitude and bad actions toward what is holy to God. In their day, it was the temple.

It was the sacrifices. It was the worship system. In our day, it is each other.

We are the body of Christ. And to disrespect Christ, inevitably you're going to disrespect his body, his church, his people. And of course, we're going to see that in our Corinthian study, when we get to Paul talking about what they do when they get together to eat a meal, and how they're elbowing each other out of the way and not being sensitive to the needs of those who are less fortunate.

They're just elbowing in, and they're drinking and eating and oblivious to each other. And they're roundly condemned for that. This is an Old Testament reflection of that same idea.

So, in the center of this, remember in the center of the first one, we saw God's response. No pleasure, no acceptance. In the center of this message, it's in chapter 2, verses 15 and 16.

This is in the middle of this five-layer sandwich of this message. And what does he say? We don't really totally understand the remnant of the Spirit, and why one in the first case. They can't figure out if it's the subject or the object of the verb.

And it's a very tangled... If you read technical commentaries on Malachi, they will tell you that chapter 2, verse 15, it defeats them. Nobody can figure out what it says or what it means. They've been arguing about it for decades and centuries, and nobody can figure out what it means.

Well, here's my suggestion to you. We back up and look at the big picture. What is the word you keep seeing over and over again? God says, you can cover the altar with tears.

I'm not going to accept it. Why? Verse 14, the Lord has been witness looking at you and the wife of your youth. Now, let's just think.

Let's take big picture here. What is a marriage? What do you do when you walk down the aisle and stand in front of the minister? What do you do? I plight thee my troth. You make promises.

You enter into a covenant. Before God and the assembled witnesses, I promise to have and to hold till death do us part. It's a covenant.

Covenant is the big idea here. And these marriages, this isn't so much talking about, is it guys that married Israelites and then married with women of the land later? Is it guys that married the women of the land and then drove them away? You can take those individual cases and easily decide if it's right or wrong based on what is the result. Have you orphaned and widowed women? Have you driven them out with no sustenance? That's wrong.

Look at everything God says about widows and orphans. He never says, go out and make widows and orphans and leave them destitute. He says, care for them.

Leave the corners of the fields ungleaned. Look out for them. Make sure they are provided for.

He doesn't say, well, get a decree of divorce and scoot them out of the land with nothing. So that would be wrong in any case. But what is this talking about? He's talking to Israel, right? That's at the very beginning, this is to Israel.

So you is the whole nation. Who is the wife? What is the covenant of Israel's youth? What covenant did they make in their youth as a nation? It's Mount Sinai. It's Moses bringing down the law.

All the Lord has said we will do, right? And God is essentially telling them, you have dealt treacherously against the covenant you made in your youth. And He uses this picture of marriage. It could have been concrete examples, but the larger picture here is breaking covenant.

God is never happy with His people breaking their covenant. Even the Gibeonites who entered into a covenant by deceit and making out like they were from far away with the old sandals and the moldy bread. Once Joshua entered into that covenant, God said, you do not break that covenant.

You've made a promise. You keep it. Now, they can be hewers of wood and haulers of water, but you will not break that promise.

You made an oath. You keep it. So He says here, and look at the word that keeps, if you don't mind marking your Bible, look at verse 14.

You have dealt treacherously, yet there is a covenant, right? The word treacherously occurs there. Look at the next verse, verse 15. Look down at the end.

Let none deal treacherously against that covenant. Treacherously. The Lord God of Israel says, He hates divorce.

He covers one's garment with violence. Therefore, take heed to your spirit that you do not deal treacherously. That's the third time now we've seen that word treacherously.

Covenant and breaking of covenant. Treachery is breaking a promise. God says do not be promise breakers.

Be promise keepers, right? Be faithful to your word. Let your yea be yea and your nay be nay. But if you say yea or you say nay, you stick to it.

Do not prevaricate. Do not rationalize. Do not be unpredictable.

Remember this second section, this second message is all about faithfulness. Be faithful to God. Be faithful to one another.

If you make a commitment, keep it. You're there for the long term, just like a marriage, right? That's the big idea. So the first big idea was your attitude and your actions toward God and the things of God are going to be reflected in God's attitude and actions back to us.

Jesus said, if you confess me before men, I will confess you before my Father who is in heaven. And that's not just a speech and that's not just a testimony. It's not just witnessing.

That is representing the Lord Jesus Christ before men. It is the way we live. It is being faithful.

It is being obedient. It is letting our light shine before men so they see our good works and glorify our Father. If you are identifiably a Christian, Jesus is going to bring you identifiably before his Father.

That's the promise. That was the first message. The second message is that should then carry down to the way you treat each other.

Don't forget the covenant you made in your youth with God and with each other. That law that Moses brought down from Sinai tells them how to be fair to each other, how to be trustworthy and faithful with and to each other. It covers marriage.

It covers contracts. It covers if somebody indentures himself. It covers returning things in the Jubilee year.

It's all about covenant faithfulness with God and with each other. That's the second message in a nutshell. The third message begins in chapter 3, verse 7. Remember I said this is return and remember.

Look at chapter 3, verse 7. From the days of your fathers, you have gone away from the ordinances and have not kept them. Return to me and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. Now, there's some schools of theological thought that are uncomfortable with the idea that God waits to see what we do and then responds.

But what does your Bible say right here? God doesn't say, I've returned to you, therefore you are going to return to me. It's the other way around. God says, look, if you choose to return to me, I will choose to return to you.

God, as it were, is waiting to see what his people choose. Return to me and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you say, well, what do you mean return? We've already come to the land.

We rebuilt the temple. We're bringing sacrifices. Granted, they're kind of smarmy.

They're kind of flea bitten and low quality. But we have returned. What do you mean return?

Well, a man robbed God, yet you have robbed me.

But you say, in what way have we robbed you? In tithes and offerings. Now, once again, everything we've seen up to this point has literal references, marriages, sacrifices. But what it really speaks of is spiritual realities.

So what were the spiritual realities? We know what the tithes did in Israel. This was recognizing and valuing that God's presence was in their midst. And we want that to continue.

So we want the priests to eat. We want the temple to stay standing. We bring these things in because we recognize this is our contribution to the presence of God in our midst.

And they, in the literal realm, brought money and animals and grain to support the worship life of Israel. And if they weren't doing that, this is another reflection of bad attitude and bad actions, right? They're not motivated. And they don't even admit that it's a problem.

In what way have we done this? God says, bring the tithes into the storehouse that there may be food in my house. Why does there need to be food in God's house? Is God hungry? This isn't really on the literal level, is it? Why should there be food in God's house? The law of Moses, Leviticus, doesn't talk about animal sacrifices as being God's food. He smells the aroma.

And we know that the smoke ascending from the altar is a picture of prayer in Revelation. And it is the positive expression of people's love and appreciation for God that is symbolized and represented in the sacrifice. God doesn't need the blood of goats and bulls.

What does He need? People who are willing to do what God asks, even when they don't fully understand it. And it's counterintuitive. Bringing the best of the flock, the best of the herd, that's counterintuitive.

Why wouldn't I keep the best and bring the lame ones? Survival of the fittest, I'll have a stronger... And God says, if you love me, you'll do what I ask, even when it doesn't always make perfect sense. And those who come to God trusting that God will bless them, even though they're doing something that doesn't always make sense, pleases God. He says, bring those tithes, bring those sacrifices.

You say, well, but I won't have enough for my family. God says, trust me. If you have a heart and an attitude, and if your actions reflect that heart and attitude, positive toward God, God will take care of you.

This has been somewhat literalized in our modern day, give offering to the church and God will bless you. It's not really the idea here. The idea is looking past the immediate and past the material and looking at God.

The widow with the two mites was indistinguishable in the budget, the annual budget of the temple. But Jesus said, that woman has put in more than all of these guys dropping in big bags.

Why? The Lord looks at the heart.

And it is the heart attitude. So what are the tithes and offerings that we can bring? We're going to look at that in just a minute. Here, this is at the literal level, that there may be food in my house.

Try me now in this. If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out you such a blessing, there will not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer.

When you bring these, that which is slowing down the growth of your crops, that which is eating your lambs and your calves, I will take away. What you think is going to be a burden and what you think is going to be a shortfall is going to be just the opposite. The vine will not fail to bear fruit for you in the field, says the Lord of hosts.

And all nations will call you blessed. Notice this is at the national level. The nations are not going to look at some individual and say, well, old Uriah there is really blessed.

They're going to look at Israel. They're going to look at the restored Judah. You will be a delightful land, says the Lord of hosts.

This is a group idea. This is an ethos and an attitude and a prevailing obedience and faithfulness. Well, at the center of this third message, we know that's the most important part when you have these layered sandwich structures.

God puts that out there as an opportunity and a potential, but what is the reply? This is at the center. The center of message number three, the most important part, is verses 13 through 15. Your words have been harsh against me, says the Lord.

You say, what have we spoken against you? You have said it is useless to serve God. What profit is it that we keep His ordinance and that we walk in His ways mourning all the way? So we call the proud blessed. For those who do wickedness are the ones who succeed.

They're the ones that are raised up. They are the ones on top. They even tempt God and go free.

Notice this is a quote of these people. So what is the response when God says, if you'll have the right attitude and you'll trust me and do the right thing, I will open the windows of heaven. Your fields will be abundant.

Your animals will thrive. Your vines will bear. Everything will be fine.

And they say, no, sorry. There's no profit in serving God. That's not the way to get ahead.

It's profitless. There is no profit in obedience. That's what a great number of them say.

But there is a small number. There is a remnant. There's a tiny percentage who hear the

message of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah who are now hearing the prophet Malachi.

And their response is different. They are a small number. So small that they can easily be written down in a book of remembrance.

Look at verse 16. Those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord listened and heard. So a book of remembrance was written before him for those who fear the Lord and who meditate on his name.

Notice it doesn't say for those who pay their tithe and bring their sacrifices. What is he actually looking for? These are largely symbolic and metaphorical for attitude. Attitude of heart.

Love for God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. It's not the specifics that count. Who is God going to write in his book? Those who fear him and who reflect on, think about his name.

They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, on the day that I make them my jewels. My jewels. My precious stones.

What do people do when they've got the real thing? I watch Antiques Roadshow. Somebody will bring in a thing they think is costume jewelry from grandma's. They found it inside a sock in her dresser or something, and they take it out and they say, well, there's five and a half carats of rubies, and there's seven carats of diamonds, and they're all set in platinum, and this is the real deal.

They say, insurance value on this is \$50,000. Oh my gosh, I let my child wear it to Halloween, trick or treating. I thought it was costume jewelry.

What do you do when you recognize the value of a thing? You treasure it. You take care of it. You don't let anything happen to it.

You ensure its safety and its preservation. God says, these people that have this attitude toward me, they are my jewels. It's one thing for a human being to have precious items and to want to keep them and preserve them, but can you imagine the God of the universe looking at you, looking at me, and saying, that's one of my rubies.

That's one of my diamonds set in platinum right there. Nothing's going to happen to that. It's an astonishing thought, but this is what God promises to those who fear Him and think about His name, who have that right attitude and manifest it in the way they live.

Honoring God, being identifiably Christian, trusting God, having a hope that causes people to say, why are you so hopeful? And you get the opportunity to give a reason to those who ask you why you have that hope. I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him. Then you shall again discern between righteous and the wicked, because right now you're not.

You think, well, righteousness is getting ahead. Righteousness is coming out on top.

Righteousness is being rich or well off or secure or making your way in the world.

You will distinguish between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him. Right now they are blind and they can't tell. So, that's our third message.

We have three big emphases there. God's attitude and actions are going to reflect our attitude and actions. That's number one.

Number two, if you say there is no profit in obedience, you have missed it. Those who fear and honor God's name are going to be preserved. They are going to be God's jewels.

So, by way of application, we have three messages and I have four points to offer you, four quick points on each message. Message number one raises the question for us. We are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We're not in Israel. We don't have this standing temple. We don't deal with animal sacrifices and tithes to support the priests.

So, what does it mean to us? The first message, the one about honoring God, raises the question, do we recognize God's love that is expressed toward us? Are we really aware and sensitive to the expressions of God's love? We tend to think, well, if God loved me, he'd make me rich. If God loved me, he'd make me healthy. If God loved me, I would have blossoming personal relationships all over the place.

I would have this and I would have that and I would have the other. This is what Israel did, Judah did, when they came back from the land. They put criteria on what was and was not God's love.

And they said, well, we don't have a king like we used to have and we don't have a prosperous economy like we had in the days of Solomon. We don't have suzerainty and independence and all of the things that pertained in the days of David and Solomon. This temple is a mere shadow of the old one.

God doesn't love us. And God said, you're looking in the wrong place for the expressions of my love. So, we ask ourselves the question, do we recognize how God does express his love toward us? Are we constantly finding the glass half empty? Or are we looking to the extent that things are true and pure and lovely and honorable and of good report? Think on these things and the peace of God will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

So, if we are recognizing God's love toward us, there are four things that will happen. Number one, and these are things that were not happening in Israel. Number one, we will honor and reverence God.

This is Matthew 22, 37. If you confess me before man, Jesus says, I will confess you before my father. Number two, there will be pleasure and acceptance on God's part toward us.

God will be pleased with us. God will accept our sacrifices. Now, what is our sacrifice? Romans 12, 1 and 2, I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, by the love of God expressed.

Mercy is expressed love, right? I beseech you by God's expressed love that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable. It's not money in a plate. It's not contributions to charity.

It is the giving of ourselves. We are the sacrifice, and it ought not to be lame. It ought not to be blind.

It ought not to be flawed or defiled. We should be holy and acceptable. This is our reasonable service.

Romans 12, 1 and 2, we will bring that sacrifice. God will be pleased and God will accept it. What else is there in life for God to be pleased with us and accept us? Do you think when we come before His throne with a prayer, God is going to listen? We don't have to weep.

Weeping and tears and sincerity isn't the way to impress God with our prayers. It is coming before Him qualified, understanding what His will and purpose is and praying in that light. He will be pleased and He will accept us.

Number three, we will appreciate whatever provision God makes for us, and we will see it as a reflection of the glory of God. This is what they were not doing. God had preserved them unlike what He let happen to eat them, and they didn't appreciate it.

He brought them back to the land. He brought them back to their capital city. He gave them provision.

He let them grow crops. They didn't appreciate any of it. And there will be no need for discipline or judgment.

If we judged ourselves, 1 Corinthians 11, 31, we would not be judged. God has to bring discipline and judgment on Israel because they are not paying attention. Message number two, thinking about that idea of faithfulness, rendering honor to God should produce that faithfulness.

Do we think of God as our Father and our Creator? And do we act accordingly? Remember He said, you don't honor me as your Father. You don't honor me as the God of creation. If we do that, here are four things that will happen.

Number one, recognizing God's position in our life as our Heavenly Father, our Creator, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we will keep covenant faithfulness. Our word will be good. Our commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ and through Him to God the Father will be good.

We will not be turning elsewhere for those things that come from our Heavenly Father.

Remember Jesus said, look at the lilies, they toil not, neither do they spin. Yet Solomon in all of his glory wasn't arrayed as one of these.

Take no thought for what you will eat or what you will wear. Your Heavenly Father knows you have need of these things. Well, if He knows we have need and yet we end up in need, what's the problem? Sometimes it is that we have not honored God.

We've not meditated on His name. We've not recognized the expressions of His love and He is calling our attention to that. And if we're not accepted and if He's not taking pleasure in us, He's going to draw our attention to it and there will be loss of provision.

So if we give God His proper place in our attitude and in our actions, we will also be motivated to be faithful, keep our promises, keep our commitments, whatever they may be. When sin is found, God points out to these people that they are falling down on the job, just like Haggai and Zachariah did. What did a lot of the people do at the point that it was pointed out? They changed.

They turned. They fixed it. They heeded the rebuke.

The Word of God is alive and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword. It exposes us to the very marrow, the thoughts and intents. All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for what? For doctrine, for reproof, for correction and for instruction in righteousness.

So as we listen to the Word of God, we will look for those areas that need correction, that need rebuke. We will take heed and turn. Thirdly, we will sharpen our discernment of what is truly good.

Remember, these people couldn't tell. They thought the good people were the ones that were rising to the top. And they said, there's no profit in obedience.

What they should have been looking at was the poor and the meek, who Jesus said, are going to inherit the earth and are going to see God. Remember the Sermon on the Mount? Blessed are the poor. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness.

They will be filled. Blessed are the poor in spirit, the meek, the humble, all of those. So we will sharpen our discernment of what really counts.

Fourthly, we will be ready for the final judgment. We will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Well, that doesn't necessarily need to be something we dread.

It can be something we look forward to. It says in Hebrews, God is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith, your labor of love, and your patience of hope. He writes it in a book of remembrance.

The third message, if we are rendering to God what is due to Him, which in this age and in the church is ourselves, the sacrifice of praise, the sacrifice of prayer, the sacrifice of our life,

presenting ourselves a living sacrifice, if we do that, we will experience blessing from heaven and the curse will be lifted. Remember God said, I will take away the devourer. I will take away that which hinders and slows down and reduces your provision and your protection.

We will experience blessings from heaven and our discipline, reminder discipline many times, a wake-up call, will be removed. Secondly, we will remember the prophet in obedience and not be deceived by false alternatives. Well, I need to work myself.

I need to rely on myself. I need to find some people. I need to rely on those people.

God says, I am your father. I am your creator. I am the source of your daily supply.

Jesus said, pray to the father, give us this day our daily bread. He didn't say, point me to somebody who can give me my daily bread. God is the source.

Thirdly, we will be remembered in eternity. God's jewels. God's precious ones.

Valued by God, spared, and confessed before him. Again, Jesus in Matthew 10, 32. You confess me before men, I will confess you before my father.

And finally, we will be remembering two things. Look at the very end of Malachi here, our closing thought. He says in verse 4 of chapter 4, Remember the law of Moses my servant, which I commanded him in Horeb, for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments.

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. Now that's two different kinds of revelation. Those who are honoring God, are repenting and returning to him, are going to look both at what they already know, what's already revealed in scripture, and new things that God is teaching.

Remember Jesus said a good teacher in Israel, will bring out of his storehouse things both old and new. We build on the foundation that we've already learned, and we learn new things. Elijah the prophet is going to say some things when he comes, about the day of the Lord, that aren't in the law of Moses.

So he says, Remember the law of Moses, and watch for Elijah the prophet, Elijah the teacher, Elijah the revealer of new things. That hope will motivate us on a daily basis. 1st Corinthians 13.13 The three things that abide are faith, hope, and love.

But the greatest of these is love. Why? Because it expresses itself in action. That's that agape that we've heard so much about.

Agape as opposed to philo or eros, or some of the other Greek words for love. It is love that is both an attitude and actions. God so loved agape, the world, that he sent his son.

John 3.16 Galatians 5.6 Faith expressing itself in love is all that matters. Look it up. Galatians 5.6 What matters, Paul says, is faith expressing itself in love.

Attitude expressing itself in action, whether it's toward God or toward each other. And finally, that book of remembrance, God's precious jewels. 1st Thessalonians 1.3 God is not unrighteous to forget your work of faith, your labor of love, and your patience of hope.

It may seem insignificant. It may seem invisible. It may seem like, well, but I'm not doing anything.

I'm not making an impact. I'm not making a difference. These things are intangibles, aren't they? The work of faith, the labor of love, and the patience of hope, these are in our immediate periphery.

These are the small things we do every day, reflecting our love for God, our recognition of his honor and his place. Presenting ourselves a living sacrifice in whatever opportunities present us to express love, to be faithful, and to show forth our optimistic hope, believing these promises. Paul says, that's what it is.

It's faith working itself out in love. That's the big idea. Well, looky there.

We cover the whole book of Malachi in one night. And I hope we didn't go too fast. Just remember three messages.

Look in the middle of each message. That's the important idea. And it has great meaning and pertinence for us.

Let's close here in a word of prayer. And we're going to have a one concluding lesson that sums up our entire five-year trek through kings and prophets. And then we will begin our new study in the book of Ruth.

Our Old Testament study in the book of Ruth. That is such a great book. I may not be able to contain myself.

I might start Ruth next week. I may just have to say, you know what? That was kings and prophets. Go be warned, be fed.

We're doing Ruth next week. We'll see. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you for the wonderful revelation that has such power to do what we cannot do for ourselves, to cleanse us, to purify us, to give us clear vision of where we are, where we need to go, what we can do, enabled and empowered by your Holy Spirit. We thank you for the Lord Jesus for everything that he has done on our behalf and the opportunity that we have to follow his example and to reflect his glory. We pray that our fellowship tonight will move us all toward that goal and that each one will be blessed by it.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.