

PostExilicProphets 22-07-06a

Welcome to the Wednesday night Bible study at Grace and Truth Bible Church. It is a joy to see your pleasantly arranged faces and to embark upon our final foray in the book of Malachi, the closing portion of our post-exilic prophet study. We're going to basically do a conclusion and summary.

Having looked at in English, the four chapters of this book, what is our takeaway? What will we remember in summary and synthetically about this book? What is the conclusion of the matter? It is the conclusion of the Old Testament. It would be appropriate for us to have some final thoughts and something to remind us of the more detailed study that we have just completed. So we're going to summarize and draw conclusions from this book tonight, but we will finish Malachi tonight.

Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study and we'll begin. Father, it is such a privilege to spend this time together each time we meet to explore the treasures of your word, to be refreshed and renewed and restored in our souls, to be reminded of the temporary nature of our habitation on this earth and the future opportunities that lie in store, all because of the life and the potential that come to us through the Lord Jesus Christ. We thank you for him.

We thank you for his words and his works and the record that helps us to know him and to appreciate him in the pages of scripture. We pray that tonight as we conclude our study of Malachi, which is a wonderful anticipation of his first coming as well as his second coming, that your Holy Spirit will impress these truths on our hearts, help us to understand them and to see their pertinence, their application in our own lives as we seek to redeem the time, knowing that the days are evil. Pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.

My messenger, chapter one, verse one says that this is the oracle of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi. And although it means my messenger, it is generally conceded that this is a proper name, mainly because of the phraseology. If this were just to indicate a generic messenger or an anonymous messenger, you would think that this would be because the Lord is referred to in the third person that you would have this say something along the lines of the oracle of the word of the Lord to Israel by the messenger of the Lord.

But for the Lord to shift from third to first person within the space of a few words is unlikely. So Malachi appears to be a proper name and we generally treat it as such, always keeping in mind its meaning, my messenger. So having now concluded our verse by verse study in this book, what is the overall theme and message? I would suggest that the thrust of this message from Israel's covenant God to the nation emphasizes and contrasts God's view, God's divine viewpoint, if you will, with the faulty, limited, and in some cases, sinful and even evil viewpoint of Israel.

It doesn't contrast with the nations per se. He doesn't come down on the Gentiles. We have other sections in say some of the major prophets where nations are called out for their actions and their attacks on Israel and the people of God.

But this contrasts, don't you think, what God thinks and what Israel thinks. So it begins, I have loved you, says the Lord. This is God's viewpoint.

You are my covenant people. I have a policy of love, which is expressed in covenant, a covenant of blessing. It is a covenant of blessing and it is the avenue, it is the conduit by which God's love is expressed.

I have loved you, says the Lord. That's not the viewpoint that prevails in Israel. There are always wonderful exceptions, but the general thought in Israel says, in what way have you loved us? So the book opens with and continues to address the difference between what God thinks, what God expects, what God is due versus what Israel thinks.

And what Israel chooses to express toward God and the lack thereof. So in our parlance, which we've inherited from long years ago, many of us were schooled in earlier days with the notion of divine viewpoint, God's perspective versus human viewpoint, our perspective. And I think this is a good way to summarize and distill the book of Malachi.

So we know that there are specific areas that are addressed in this book where God has one thought and one perspective, Israel has quite another. And it turns out that there are seven of these. So our goal tonight is to look at these seven contrasting views that God delivers in this final Old Testament message to his people, the last of the prophets until John the Baptist, and to see how it translates in terms of observe, interpret and apply for us.

Do we err in the same areas? Do we fall short? Do we have a faulty view? Do we fail to share God's viewpoint in these seven specific areas that are detailed by God in this book? So the first one, obviously beginning in verse two addresses the love of God. What is the nature of God's love? And of course, there is this wonderful song, the love of God that talks about if all of the oceans were filled with ink and every stock was a quill, it would be impossible to write the love of God because it is so great and deep that there's not enough ink and not enough parchment where the sky of parchment made, you remember that? By the way, there's a very interesting story. I was researching that particular hymn because it is attributed to a gentleman who wrote three stanzas of it about 120 odd years ago.

The hymn is titled the love of God. You can look up the author in a hymnal and it has three stanzas. However, the aforementioned stanza, which I just paraphrased, where the ocean's full of ink, where the sky of parchment made, where every stock a quill, it would be impossible to write the love of God.

That particular verse is far older. And if you trace it out, and it is difficult, but I managed it early last week. It turns out that this is from a famous Jewish rabbi who expressed that thought in

Aramaic about a thousand years ago, circa 1026.

This was expressed in Aramaic. It is a part of what is read and or sung during the Feast of Tabernacles, the Feast of Booths. And having been translated into English, that verse came down and the author of the love of God hymn incorporated it in this third stanza.

But the sentiment, which is a beautiful one, is 10 centuries old. Having said that, that is the subject of this first address. I have loved you, says the Lord, yet you say.

This is what I am. This is what I do. This is what I think.

This is the divine perspective, but you say something different. Contrast between divine viewpoint and human viewpoint. And there is the questioning of God's love.

I question whether you love us because I don't see the kinds of expression of love that I would like to see. If you loved me, how many sentences have begun with that phrase? If you loved me, think of little children. If you loved me, I could have that sugar whip at the county fair, cotton candy.

If you loved me, you would buy me my desired toy. If you loved me, you would express your love in ways that suit me instead of ways that suit you. And God's reply here is quite interesting.

And what we're gonna do, this is point one, by the way. So the first subject is the love of God. But each of these constitutes a pretty broad category.

And God chooses one salient feature, one facet, one angle. Again, referring to the love of God. If you were gonna start talking about the love of God, it is so manifold and so burgeoning of a topic that you would start it and never finish it.

So God chooses one aspect of his love to address Israel here. I have loved you. You say, how have you loved us? And God chooses a contrast, which is look at those I do not love.

So God is going to illustrate his love in its lack or in its non-expression to Esau slash Edom. Very interesting way to begin this book. And we are shaken out of our expectations because we would expect God to say, haven't I granted your desires? Haven't I listened to your prayers? Haven't I taken you to a land flowing with milk and honey? And didn't I meet your expectations? God says, you question my love? Take a look at those whom I do not love.

And there is a specific aspect even of that. So the illustration of God's love is, look at those who do not have the privilege of God's love. This is Edom.

But in the lack of God's love, what is the facet? What is the salient feature in that illustration? Esau, I have hated, verse three, I have laid waste his heritage and the jackals of the wilderness possess what he hoped to keep in perpetuity. This is looking to the future, looking to the long-term. The long-term prospects for Edom, where is Edom today? Where are the descendants of Esau today? Esau was the older brother, born within minutes of his twin Jacob.

And yet the descendants of Jacob are identifiable today and have been for manifold centuries. Something on the order of 3,500 years. We've had the descendants of Jacob always in some sense, cohesive, always identifiable.

Where is Edom today? The jackals have his inheritance. And anytime he tries to build a future or secure a future for himself, God says, they build, but I will tear down, verse four. They are the territory of wickedness, the people against whom the Lord will have indignation forever.

They will never prosper. They will never secure a heritage or a foothold or have a long standing hope in the future. So the specific aspect of God's love that he singles out in opening this letter, you question my love? You're still here.

Those whom I do not love have no future, have no heritage. And if they try to build one for themselves, it is going to be destroyed. What is the application for us for number one of these seven emphases in the gospel of Malachi? Anytime we begin to question God's love for us, God's attention to us, God's covenant promises to us because we are in a covenant relationship with God.

What is our covenant? The Lord Jesus declared it in the upper room. This is the new covenant in my blood. We are related to God through Christ and our future is secure.

We will never be Edom. We will never be without hope. We will never be without prospects.

We will never be without life and a future, a heritage that will never pertain to us. Useful to remember when we begin to doubt the love of God, the attention of God. There's just so many people.

There've been so many generations. The earth is so big. How can God be paying attention to me? Haven't I fallen through the cracks? No.

And you remember the mirror of this, the symmetry in the book of remembrance. Remember the symmetry in Malachi, the book of remembrance that records those who meditate on God's name and fear him and give him the reverence and the honor that he is due. Never to be forgotten.

Never to be discarded and set aside. Never to have your heritage declared the possession of the jackals. Take this promise to heart.

There is a New Testament reflection of this Old Testament truth for Israel. If Israel has it, we have it in a double portion. The love of God for us is secure because we are in Christ and it is the father's love for his son, that secures us in him we have.

You remember the menorah in Ephesians chapter one, in him, in him, in him. Anytime we begin to wonder if God's love for us is really real and tangible and is being expressed, look at what we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. Ephesians chapter one is your go-to here.

And those whom God loves, here is the principle. This is the takeaway. You question the love of God, God's love is expressed toward those objects.

They are remembered and they are restored to blessing. There may be a time of hardship. There may be a time of trouble.

There may be a time of separation. There may be a time of corporate judgment in which faithful people are set back, may suffer. You look at what the economy is doing and people of wonderful integrity and spiritual faithfulness are suffering in some cases significantly along with the rest of the nation.

But those whom God loves are remembered and restored to blessing. The contrast is Esau slash Edom. There is no restoration.

There is no remembrance. So when you think of the love of God in this particular context, the love of God is expressed in remembrance and restoration to blessing. This is part of the triad of Christian virtues called hope.

So that is number one. Number two of these seven that God raises as issues in the book of Malachi is the lack of reverence for God among his people. From God's perspective, there is a lack of reverence.

Our first point of course, was chapter one, verses two through five. This second one begins in chapter one, verse six and extends through verse 14. A lack of reverence for God among his people.

A son honors his father and a servant honors his master. If then I am the father, where is my honor? If I am a master, where is my reverence? I am your father. I am your master.

I am receiving from you nothing that comports with those truths. And when you get down to verse 14, I am a great King says the Lord of hosts. You seem to have forgotten this.

From the human perspective, they don't revere God as the father of their nation. They don't revere God as the master to whom they owe their honor, their reverence, their obeisance, their obedience, their fealty. You say, in what way have we despised your name? The human viewpoint is, but we've got all of these shallow, superficial rituals going on.

We're going to the temple. We're making sacrifices. We claim your name.

We talk about you. We say, praise the Lord. We've got the trappings and the externalities.

So from our perspective, we're honoring you. We choose to overlook our lack of attention to detail and our lack of genuine expression of appreciation. We think that what we're doing is enough.

The human viewpoint says, I'm fine. Human viewpoint says, I'm a child of God. I am one of

God's people.

I am following laws that other people don't follow. Unlike the nations, I bring sacrifices down to the temple. I'll even go down to the altar and weep tears.

We'll see that a bit later. We've got the temple. We've rebuilt the temple.

Remember this prophecy comes down somewhere in the vicinity of the days of Nehemiah, in the closing days of the prophetic age. So they've rebuilt the temple, but remember the lack of enthusiasm where they had to be flogged and goaded by Haggai and Zechariah to get it done? Their heart wasn't in it and their heart is still not in it. The heart that refused to build the temple and let it lay fallow for 18 odd years is the heart that when they do operate the temple and perform the rituals and sacrifices, their heart is not really in it.

What is the modern Christian equivalent of this? Well, I go to church. I put money in the plate. I've got a shelf with Christian books.

I've got some verses on the wall. I've got a fish on my car. I'm an overt Christian.

I identify as a Christian. I've got a cross on a chain. I talk about God.

We pray before meals. I've got this superficial identification. I'm willing to identify with God and with Christ, but there isn't the drive, the fire in the boiler that creates the steam that says, I want to know more.

I want to do better. I want to leave behind the every weight and the sin that so easily besets me. I want to run with patience the race that is set before me.

I want to climb that upward path. I want to find a narrow road. I want to enter through the straight gate.

It's a wonderful thing. I'm so glad to have been exposed to the Navy and to ships in the days where steam boilers were the subject of our study and of my intense experience of being next to one and cleaning the little sprayer plates that atomized, it's kind of a carburation type of thing, the fuel that would create the steam. And when you want to talk about fire in the boiler, if you've been down where the boiler lives, you know the intensity of that expression.

Is not my word like a fire set the Lord and like a hammer that breaks the rocks in pieces. If we don't feel the fire, if we don't occasionally get that hammer smashing things in our lives, what are we? We are these people. If I'm a father, where's my honor? If I'm a master, where's my reverence? Says the Lord of hosts to you priests who belittle, who take lightly my name, who despise my name.

Don't take it seriously. It's not really a factor. This is number two, a lack of reverence for God among his people.

One, six through 14. The salient feature is, and when you look down through the expression of it, in what way have we defiled you? The table of the Lord is contemptible in verse seven. You offer defiled food on my altar.

Food, food is fellowship. The altar is a place of meeting. It is a place of reconciliation.

It is a place of restoration for that relationship, that communication. I come to God and remember the sacrifices on the altar were not primarily, oh, I've sinned. Let me run down there and offer a sacrifice.

We've been through Leviticus chapter one, chapter two, chapter three, chapter four, chapter five, chapter six, and the instructions to the priests on how to operate those. And there is no prescribed offering for personal sin. It isn't, oh, I wronged my neighbor and now I'm feeling guilty.

Let me go down and offer a sacrifice. These sacrifices were not a palliative for personal sin. The whole burnt offering of Leviticus chapter one was a dedication, a fellowship, a coming before God, and an expression of full loyalty.

I dedicate my entire self like this animal that is wholly consumed on the altar. I want to be wholly consumed in the service of God. The appreciation offerings, the thanksgiving offerings, the wave and the heave, the grain offerings, these were food offerings.

And it was designed for fellowship to acknowledge God's blessing on crops and on herds and on the flocks, it's fellowship. So what is really at issue here in this lack of reverence? It is a failure to appreciate the privilege of fellowship that Israel uniquely enjoyed. Only Israel had a tabernacle and later a temple where they could come before God.

Only Israel had the privilege of coming to the creator God of the universe and eating a meal in his presence and offering him a portion of that meal to be ascending upward in the smoke. Only Israel had the unique opportunity to express their appreciation and their gratitude and their loyalty and the honor and the reverence that was due God as their father, as their master. They didn't appreciate it.

They took it lightly. It wasn't meaningful. I can't think of a greater grief than to be unappreciated by those that you love and that you have put yourself out for, that you have sacrificed for, that you want the best for, and they're blind to it.

They're deaf to it. They take it for granted. They don't see the level of dedication and the sacrificial love that has been expressed.

It's just water off a duck's back. And the heartache that that engenders in someone, you think about parents who do everything for their children and their children don't appreciate it, don't understand it, haven't really thought about it. And it is an expectation.

They have a sense of entitlement. Well, of course, I should have allowance. Of course, I should have expensive gifts.

Of course, you should pay for my college where I'm gonna go and join a sorority or a fraternity and party down and take it all for granted. Of course, you should give me a car when I graduate. Of course, I should be given a big boost out into life from you who worked hard and saved and scrimped and sacrificed.

And that idea is familiar in the human world, but we don't often remember that God can feel the same way when he has done so much for us and we have so little appreciation and gratitude and desire to be worthy of his love and his provision and his sacrificial offering of his own son on our behalf. And that's what six through 14 is about, failure to appreciate the unique opportunity. You think about those who do appreciate the sacrifice that is made on their behalf and the close bond of love and fellowship and appreciation between family members who acknowledge and recognize what their parents have done.

This is why we have Father's Day and we have Mother's Day and we have these times of appreciation for veterans and for others who have given their all on behalf of others. We used to greatly value that kind of self-sacrifice. Well, God is worthy exponentially more so than any human being of this kind of gratitude and honor and reverence.

And as goes the nation of Israel in their failure, so goes the modern day Christian individual who goes to church for an experience, who wants an uplift, who wants an emotional kick, who wants friends, who wants social life, who wants activities. They've got a great youth group. I want my kids to be entertained.

I want them to have a fellowship where they don't end up at the tattoo parlor or the crack den, or I want them to have a safe place where they can go and have fun instead of the inculcation of resources that will equip them for life with its challenges, its hardships, its opportunities, its need for character and for reflecting the light of the glory of God in an ever darkening world so that others will see their good works and glorify their father who is in heaven. Forgetting our mission, forgetting our identity as Christians as body of Christ. He's gone, we're here in his place and in his stead, motivated, empowered, enabled, guided by the same spirit that motivated, enabled and empowered him.

We are the body filled with that same spirit that enabled the Lord Jesus to accomplish his mission, all of which was dedicated to his father. He spent hours in communion and prayer with his father. Do we do that? He spent hours in reflection and meditation on the word of his father already revealed in the Old Testament scriptures.

Do we do that? Well, that's what we're endeavoring to do tonight. But this second issue that God takes with his people lack of reverence boils down to a lack of appreciation for the opportunity afforded by this unique relationship, this unique fellowship, this unique meeting place at the altar to share a meal. You see the food mentioned in verse seven.

You go over to verse 12. You profane the offering in that you say the table of the Lord is defiled and its fruit, its food is contemptible. Food and the table in the ancient Near East, even in the modern Middle East is a place to honor someone, to reverence them, to respect them, to express hospitality and generosity toward them.

And God said, you've messed that up. The fellowship I desire to have with you, my people, you have no appreciation for it at all. You put terrible food out because you're not interested in honoring and reverencing and in that intimacy that the table and the sharing of food ought to represent.

And it's shameful. So what does God say? God takes no pleasure in them in verse 10. And I will not accept the offerings from your hands.

You don't respect me. Why should I respect you when you make these token expressions? God's name is going to be great among the Gentiles. He's going to find his honor elsewhere.

My name, verse 14, will be feared among the nations. If you don't appreciate it, I'll go somewhere where it is appreciated. Verse six, you have despised my name.

Verse 14, you sacrifice what is blemished. I am a great king, says the Lord of hosts. And my name is to be feared among the nations.

Well, we'll pick this up when we come back. Paul had something to say about this in an address that he gave in Antioch of Pisidia. And it is the turning point in his ministry.

It is a reflection of this very same concept. My name will be great among the nations because my name is not great among you. What about us? Is God's name great? I think in our fellowship, and I know each of you personally, this is something that we all strive for.

I don't think there is any length we can go to that is too great to incorporate appreciation of God into every different aspect of our lives. And if there is defiled food, if there is something that is corrupting God's table and our ability to love God and to appreciate God, that is something to weed out. If we've got blemished and defective animals in our flock, the last thing we should do is bring them in as an offering, bring them in as a part of our fellowship with God.

That is something to be excised, to be removed, whatever it takes. Come out from among them and be ye separate. Touch not the unclean thing.

To the extent that we defile ourselves, we disqualify ourselves for this intimate fellowship with a God of righteousness, justice. Those two attributes together comprise God's holiness. Holiness is righteousness and justice.

Well, we have five more of these to cover and we will see the remainder of them when we come back from our break.