

ARE YOU BORED WITH GOD? (THE MESSAGE OF MALACHI)

Church of Christ / 9301 Sheldon Road

Plymouth, Michigan 48170

Royce Dickinson, Jr. / 09.06.1992

Disappointment, disillusionment, and maybe even desperation. No, I am not describing the times in which you and I live, nor am I referring to the upcoming presidential election. I am talking about the Jewish people in 435 B.C.

In 536 B.C., Sheshbazzar led a group of about 50,000 Jews out of Babylonian captivity and back to Jerusalem. Seventy-nine years later, Ezra led back a second group of about 2,000 people. In 445 B.C., thirteen years later, Nehemiah returned with a third group. Nehemiah made at least two trips to Jerusalem and served as its governor. And during the time of Nehemiah, around 435 B.C., there was a prophet named Malachi.

Malachi prophesied during an unusual time. Unlike most of the other prophets who lived and preached in times of change and political upheaval, Malachi found himself living in a time when nothing seemed to be happening. It was a time when God seemed to have forgotten His people, a people who were suffering from poverty and foreign domination in the little province of Judah.

The Jews had returned from their exile in Babylon with high hopes. Inspired by Haggai and Zechariah, they had rebuilt the Temple. But Zerubbabel and Joshua, the two chosen men for the new age, had died. And even though the Temple had been completed, nothing stupendous or remarkable had occurred to indicate that God's presence had returned to fill the Temple with glory, as Ezekiel had said would happen. The day of miracles had passed with Elijah and Elisha. Nothing seemed to be happening. Israel had lost hope. The promised prosperity had not come. The "golden age" had not dawned. Life was hard. They were surrounded by enemies and afflicted with drought and famine. They began to doubt the love of God and to question His justice. Where was the God of their fathers? Did it really matter whether or not one served God?

I believe that Malachi's prophecy is especially relevant to the many times in human history and to the many times in our own lives when nothing seems to be happening. At least, nothing seems to be happening in the *right* direction. It is the times of waiting that eat away at our faith and breed cynicism in our hearts. It is during the times of waiting that, if we are not terribly careful, God becomes useless and a nuisance. Oh yes, we may still go to church and perform all the right religious rituals; but to do so is tiring and downright boring. Listen to the words of the LORD God

to the Jewish people of Malachi's day. (To find the Book of Malachi, go to the New Testament and then turn left.)

[1:10] "Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on My altar! I am not pleased with you," says the LORD Almighty, "and I will accept no offering from your hands." . . .

[12] "But you profane My Name by saying of the Lord's table, 'It is defiled,' and of its food, 'It is contemptible.' And you say, 'What a burden!' ['What a bore!'] and you sniff at it contemptuously." . . .

The Jews had lost hope in God and so they despised Him. They still went through all the religious motions, but their worship was nothing more than a boring routine of hypocrisy. Through Malachi, His spokesman, God challenges the priests:

[1:8] "When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?"

There is a very important lesson here for us today: *God cannot be manipulated*. Israel was serving God for what she could get. When the LORD didn't pay up, Israel gave up! Listen to what they were saying.

[3:14] "You have said, 'It is futile to serve God. What did we gain by carrying out His requirements and going about like mourners before the LORD Almighty?'"

In other words, the Jews in the time of Malachi were guilty of approaching God with a mercenary spirit. In essence they said to Him, "God, we will worship You if You will bless us." But unlike Job, they lost faith when God did not smother them with blessings. They needed to learn, as did Job, that God is not served because of what He gives, but because of who He is.

We Americans, and I am speaking in general terms, are also guilty of a serving-God-because-it-pays mentality. We are just arrogant enough to believe that we can negotiate terms to God, just superficial enough to believe that we are His special people, and just fickle-minded enough to call it quits when God doesn't do exactly what we think He ought to do. Please do not misunderstand me. I thank God that He has so richly blessed this nation. But I do not for one minute believe that we have been so blessed because we have been so good. Furthermore, if blessings are based upon righteous, then we are in for some hellish times in this country.

Allow me to approach this point from another angle. Not too long ago at the dinner table one of my sons wanted a second brownie. I had every intention of letting him have another brownie. But when he crammed the first one into his mouth, nearly smashing it into his face, because he was afraid that his two brothers or his dad would gobble up all the remaining brownies, I lost all desire to be generous. Why? Was it because I wanted all the brownies? No. Was it because I did not want my son to have two brownies? No. It was because my son was acting like a selfish slob. Have you ever intended to give your child some special toy, but when you took him or her to the toy store they moaned and groaned over all the toys they could not have so much that not only

did you want to withdraw your offer, you even wanted to give away all the toys they already had? Well now—maybe you know how God feels sometimes. During the days of Malachi, Israel was behaving like an impatient and selfish child, moaning and groaning over all the goodies that God had not given to them. What the Jewish people could not see was that it was precisely because of their moaning and groaning that God could not bless them as He desired.

If you or I serve God only because of what we can get, we will never realize what we have already got. And when we are unable to see what we have already got, we will forget God. When we can no longer see that God loves us, we will no longer see any reason to love Him. Perhaps this was the fundamental and fatal flaw of Israel. Notice with me the opening words of the Book of Malachi.

[1:1] An oracle: The word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi.

[2] “I have loved you,” says the LORD.

“But you ask, ‘How have You loved us?’”

Malachi proceeds, then, not only to proclaim God’s love for Israel but to prove it. “Look at your own history,” says Malachi, “God has protected and preserved you.” But all that Israel can think of is that she wants “another brownie.”

Malachi’s message to his people is not a pleasant one. In short, he tells them, “It’s your own fault that you are in the situation that you are in. Your sins have delayed your salvation.” This reminds me of a cute, but wise, saying: “When you make a fool of yourself, just remember who did it.” The heart of Malachi’s message is this: *A living relationship with the LORD God is utterly essential if Israel’s covenant destiny is to be fulfilled.* For those of us living in the 20th century, I would rephrase Malachi’s message with these words: *We can never be all that we were intended to be without God.* And remember, God does not belong to us; we belong to Him. But that is the message of another prophet—Jonah.

There is a second very important lesson here for us today. Israel, having failed to love God, failed also to love her neighbor. A broken relationship with God led on to and resulted in broken relationships in human society. Listen to these painfully relevant words:

[2:13] Another thing you do: You flood the LORD’s altar with tears. You weep and wail because He no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. [14] You ask, “Why?” It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.

[15] Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are His. And why one? Because He was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.

[16] “I hate divorce,” says the LORD God of Israel, “and I hate a man’s covering himself with violence as well as with his garment,” says the LORD Almighty. . . .

Israel had broken covenant with God by inter-marrying with the surrounding nations who worshipped foreign gods (2:11). And having been unfaithful to God, it seemed only a matter of

time until they were unfaithful to the wives that they had married. Allow me to put this tragic situation into my own words: *When we forget God, people get hurt.* In America, our money may say, “In God We Trust,” but the condition of our society says, “We Trust In Ourselves.” Malachi tells us that family relationships illustrate love and loyalty and help us to understand God. Divorce, on the other hand, typifies broken commitments and severed relationships.

We live in a country of broken people. The pursuit of the American dream has become, for many, a nightmare of brokenness: broken hopes, broken promises, broken hearts, broken marriages, and broken children. Yes indeed, when we break God’s heart we hurt people. Shattered lives result when the love of God is not practiced.

So, what are we to do?

1. *Remember that God loves us.* We cannot afford to repeat Israel’s mistake. We must remember that God loves us, and we must allow that love to transform our lives. In Malachi 3:1-5 and 4:5-6, the prophet speaks of the coming of both John the Baptist and Jesus the Christ. The coming of Jesus was the love of God manifested in flesh and blood. “For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

2. *Repent of our failure to love God.* If there is no other point you gain from this sermon, please hear this lesson loud and clear: *You and I can never be all that we were intended to be without a living relationship with the God who made us and who loves us.* There will never be peace in our world, there will never be peace in our cities, there will never be peace in our churches, and there will never be peace in our homes until there is first and foremost peace with God. God says, “Return to Me, and I will return to you” (Malachi 3:7). Through faith in, confession of, and baptism into Jesus, the Son of God, we have peace with God the Father. “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God” (Romans 5:1-2).

3. *Reflect God’s love to others.* As the people of God, we—like the God we serve—must be covenant-keeping people. We must be people of integrity and commitment. We must be people whose relationships with others are characterized by the love of God. In other words, since we are loved, we must strive to be lovely and loving. We must seek to heal rather than hurt.

Perhaps you need God to put back together the pieces of your life. A relationship with Him can provide the foundation you so desperately desire for your relationships with others. Perhaps you need to revive your spiritual life. Maybe you have become bored with God. But one thing is for certain: He is not bored with you. He loves you, and like the Jews of Malachi’s day, you must decide whether or not to believe in and then to accept that love. What are you going to do?