

**GOD IS GREAT, GOD IS GOOD,  
AND WE DO NOT HONOR HIM AS WE SHOULD**

**Malachi 1**

**Intro:** When we gather for Sunday dinner today at our house we will ask Fiona and Grady, “Okay kids, which Grace are we using?” And they will respond one of two ways: More than likely they will call out “Appleseed!” and we will sing our grace over our meal with something you may be familiar with:

*“Oh, the Lord’s been good to me.  
And so I thank the Lord  
For giving me the things I need:  
The sun, the rain and the appleseed;  
Oh, the Lord’s been good to me.”*

And then they add “*Johnny Appleseed! Amen.*”

But sometimes they respond with “God is Great” and we will pray another familiar grace:

*“God is Great, God is Good;  
Let us thank Him for our food.  
By His hands we all are fed,  
Give us Lord our Daily Bread.”*

God IS great and God IS good, but how is it that we often neglect to acknowledge that except when we thank him for our meals – and sometimes we even forget that?

This is what God is confronting the people of Israel with in the last book of the Old Testament named Malachi. It’s a hard hitting message and we’re going to look at it in the Sundays (with one Sunday off in the middle when we have a guest speaker) between now and Advent which begins on November 27.

We need to hear the message of Malachi because we are in a society much like the people this prophesy is addressing. The people of God have trickled back to the Holy Land from their Babylonian exile and it seems they have not learned a thing from it. They were religious and gave God lip service, but that was about all. Still, they seemed surprised when God didn’t come through with his end of the bargain. Sound familiar?

Let’s look at Malachi and learn and grow and flourish as his loved and coveted people. That way we can be a light in a dark world. Let’s read chapter 1 and make couple short introductions to the book and then we will unpack it a bit.

**(Read Malachi 1)**

The title of this study is *God’s Words before the Great Silence* and this is because it is the final one of 12 prophesies that came before a 400 year period where there was no revelation from God to his people Israel. As you know, that silence was broken by the cry of a baby who was born in a stable in Bethlehem. That’s why it’s apropos that this study comes as we approach Advent and the Christmas season. In human terms, God spoke until he was blue in his face but his chosen people persisted in ignoring him. Finally, he just turned off the spigot of prophesy and allowed all of humanity stew in their own juices for four hundred years as he waited for the perfect time to bring his perfect plan into action. Thus, The Great Silence.

Malachi is likely not the name of a prophet. Malachi was not a name used for Jewish boys – it just wasn’t. Malachi is actually a noun that means “My messenger”. Regardless of whether it was someone’s name or his assignment it is still a powerful message for the people of God and for us too.

It begins with *The oracle of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi*. Malachi 1:1. The literal meaning of it in the Hebrew is “Burden” and that is because of the weight it carries. This is borne out by this definition I found which is “*any utterance made or received as authoritative, extremely wise, or infallible.*” This is exactly what Malachi was for God’s people. Well, kinda. It was authoritative in that it was coming for the Lord of Hosts, and extremely wise because it came from the omniscient Creator of all there is, and infallible because it is the very word of the perfect and all-knowing God. In other words, these were words to make the people of God stop, listen, absorb and live by.

In a similar fashion to Habakkuk, which we looked at earlier this year, Malachi has question and answer format. However, whereas God is answering Habakkuk’s sincere pleadings, in this format, God is addressing the whining questions he has been hearing from the people of Israel. The first question he addresses is apparently the question of his love for his people as compared to that of the surrounding nations – especially their arch and sibling rivals, the Edomites – the descendants of Esau. This was the same Esau who wanted a bowl of beans much more than his inheritance. Since they were asking, here was . . .

**Proof of God’s Love**

- As if he needed to prove it – but he did. Here’s the interchange: “*I have loved you,*” says the Lord. But you say, “*How have you loved us?*” “*Is not Esau Jacob’s brother?*” declares the Lord. “*Yet I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated.* Malachi 1:2-3a. Does God hate? Nope! So why does he put it this way? Because the love he has for his people of promise, the Children of Jacob (God changed his name to Israel) is so great in comparison to the love he has for the children of Esau who rejected his inheritance for a dish of lentils that it seems like hate.
- The love of God for his people that Jeremiah wrote about when he sang, *The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases* Lamentations 3:22 is the oracle in Malachi’s entire message. The powerful promise is, “I have loved you and still love you.” His love isn’t just a thing of the past, it’s also very present and will be in the future. One commentator says here, “*This simple declaration of his love places them under obligation to love him in return and to keep his commandments. God’s love would also reveal to them the terrible fact that their sin was the most heinous of all sins, namely a sin against the infinite love of*

God.” They were thumbing their noses at the love of God all the while expecting him to come through with that love while they ignored him.

- This is a familiar problem today. People seem to forget about God until they think he’s slighted them – then they have the audacity to get angry with him and doubt his love and his might.
- The truth was in 500 BC and still true today is . . .

#### **He is the Lord of Hosts**

- The prophet points out the word of God that Edom’s sin has been punished. Their rejection will result in his judgement. (vv. 3b-4) but still, he has a plan for all of humanity.
- Yes, this is a message to the people of Israel, he will be the Lord beyond their borders. Peterson says it this way, “*Yes, take a good look. Then you’ll see how faithfully I’ve loved you and you’ll want even more, saying, ‘May God be even greater, beyond the borders of Israel!’*” Malachi 1:5 (The Message). The love he has for Jacob that makes his love for Esau seem like hate in comparison is available for all. This will happen when they know him for what he is the Lord of Hosts.
- But he’s not done with his oracle. He points out that it’s been a problem right from the top.

#### **There are priests who despise his name**

- They’ve been offering polluted sacrifices. They have insulted the table of the Lord with garbage when the best of the best of the best on the altar. It’s pretty obvious the people of God were just giving him the leftovers of their lives. He received what was left after life was done. They were offering blemished sacrifices and worship just to get it done. This isn’t worship – it’s just going through the motions and putting in time. They looked at their wrists at their sundial and realized, “*Oh man! It’s the Sabbath! Let’s go get it over with.*” And they did. And that’s all they did. It meant nothing to them and it meant nothing to God.
- Former ABCer and Bible scholar David Baker writes this about verses 6-14 of our text, “*When vertical religion becomes meaningless rote that has no impact on interpersonal ethics, it is only religion and not worship, so get rid of it.*” He goes on, “*Worship shows an appreciation of the value of the One being worshiped in the eyes of the worshiper. Part of worship is bringing gifts of love, as a token of thanksgiving, but one must also mend the relationship if it has been damaged in any way.*” God was looking for that from his people – that means he’s looking for it from us too. David goes on, “*What God does not want is perfunctory, meaningless, ritual bringing offerings that are neither sacrificial, since they cost little to those who bring them, nor loving.*” God wants all of us all the time and his word to us is what came through in this word from Malachi, *Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand.* Malachi 1:10, or in Peterson’s words, “*Why doesn’t one of you just shut the Temple doors and lock them? Then none of you can get in and play at religion with this silly, empty-headed worship. I am not pleased. The God-of-the-Angel-Armies is not pleased. And I don’t want any more of this so-called worship!*” Malachi 1:10 (The Message). In other words, “If this is all you’re doing then just close the doors of the temple. We could say the same for the church – this is not a game. Eternity rests on it.
- A song that Ron and I thought of using this morning says,  
*Give of your best to the Master;  
Give Him first place in your heart;  
Give Him first place in your service;  
Consecrate every part.  
Give, and to you will be given;  
God His beloved Son gave;  
Gratefully seeking to serve Him,  
Give Him the best that you have.  
Give of your best to the Master;  
Naught else is worthy His love;  
He gave Himself for your ransom,  
Gave up His glory above.  
Laid down His life without murmur,  
You from sin’s ruin to save;  
Give Him your heart’s adoration,  
Give Him the best that you have.*
- As we do and despite the fact that far too often his people have flouted his love, grace, mercy, and most of all, his patience, his words will be ring out all the more, *For I am a great King, says the Lord of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.* Malachi 1:14b.

**Conclusion:** I need to wrap this up even though there is more to be said from chapter 1. I’ll pick that up next week by rolling it into our study of the next chapter. You see, God is not done with this subject. We will look at how the people of God in the days of Malachi and down to the present view God’s authority. And we will look at how the way we wield authority should be a picture of our relationship with God.

In the meantime read though Malachi and soak up the words. As you do you will see that God is Great, and God Is Good, and you will grow in honoring him more as you should. Amen.