

God's Message to Us in Malachi

Halifax, NS

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Introduction

Today in our sermon series through all the books of the Bible we have come to the last book in the Old Testament... Malachi.

- Malachi is the last of the 12 minor prophets.
- This prophecy was probably written in 442 BC or thereabouts.
- This was almost 80 years after Haggai and Zechariah who both wrote in 520 BC when the temple was being rebuilt.
 - Whether that is the exact date or not, it is clear that Malachi's ministry was parallel with the ministry of Nehemiah.

Perhaps you will remember that Ezra went to Jerusalem first, in 458 BC, about 60 years after the temple was rebuilt—to beautify the temple and bring worship into proper order.

- And then Nehemiah came a few years later to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, and again a second time, probably in 442,
 - to deal with everything from Sabbath breaking to marriage with unbelievers to the corruption of worship.
 - These are, as you would expect, the same thing that Malachi addresses.
 - Nehemiah, Ezra, and Malachi worked together for reformation, Nehemiah as a governor enforcing the law, Ezra as a priest reforming worship, and Malachi as a prophet calling for repentance.

In particular, Malachi addresses spiritual insensibility.

- The people were simply not aware of the living Lord.
- They did their religious exercises, such as they were, but they were not mindful of the living God whom they were supposed to be worshipping.

This is a huge problem in our day as well—I suppose in every age.

- It is so easy to do religious stuff without ever really being sensible of God—without truly connecting with Him as God or walking with Him.
- You can even feel that you have had a good day at church, talking to people, enjoying a sermon, singing, and so on even without hardly noticing God.
 - It is the epitome of taking God's name in vain—acting as if God Himself, whose name is to be praised, is irrelevant and of little importance even at worship.

In looking at the problem of spiritual insensibility,

- We shall begin by looking at the root of the problem...
- Then at five ways it shows up in the lives of God's covenant people...
- And finally at those who truly do fear God and are sensible of Him.

Let's begin, shall we?

I. The root of the problem of spiritual insensibility is insensibility to God's love.

A. Look at verse 2.

1. The LORD makes an assertion here—a marvellous assertion.
 - He says, "**I have loved you.**"
 - This is the thing that distinguishes God's chosen people from all others!

- God has come to them, ruined as they are by sin and the fall, and has taken them to be His own people.
 - He has loved them when they were unworthy of His love and He has committed Himself to them to save them from their sins...
 - both from their guilt that condemns them...
 - and from their rebellion that keeps them away from God.
2. But look at how the LORD describes the response of His covenant people.
- **“I have loved you,” says the LORD, “Yet you say, in what way have you loved us.”**
 - What incredible blindness this is!
 - What insensibility.
 - How could anyone in the church possibly fail to see the special love of God for His people?
- B. He goes on to explain the contrast which is summed up in these words: **“Jacob I have loved, But Esau I have hated.”**
1. Even though they were the twin sons of Isaac,
 - It was Jacob and his descendants that God attached Himself to in love.
 - It was to Jacob and his descendants that God sent His promises of salvation.
 - It was to them and not to Esau that God gave a land where He dwelt among them, sending them prophets to speak to them, to call them to repentance, to testify of His saving mercy...
 - It was among them that He established His house with its priesthood and ordinances that testified of His holiness and forgiveness by the blood of the covenant.
 - It was Jacob and his seed that God disciplined over the years to keep them in His way... punishing and yet always restoring them.
 2. It was true that God had sent Babylon against His people just as He had against Esau and his people (also called Edom).
 - But the difference was that God cut Edom off forever.
 - Verse 4 says (in the last part of the verse) that they are: **“the people against whom the LORD will have indignation forever.”**
 - For Israel, Babylon was one of the LORD’s many ways of correcting them so that He could continue His purpose of bringing salvation to them.
 - For Edom, Babylon was tool to wipe them out as a people.
 3. The great difference is not seen in how we get on in the world in terms of worldly prosperity...
 - The difference lies in the fact that we know God as our God—we know Him as our LORD and Saviour who redeems us from our sins.
 - We know Him as the One who preserves us in our faith.
 - This is the love of God for His elect people.
 - Instead of being cut off forever like Esau, we are kept by the power of God through faith forever.
- C. To be among God’s people, a part of His church, whether in the Old Testament or the New Testament, and to fail to see His special love, is a mark of unbelief.

- If you are insensible of His unique love for His people, it shows that you do not know the LORD in a saving way.
 - Perhaps you even feel that He has wronged you.
 - You feel that many unbelievers have been better treated than you.
- The only way you can think that way is because you are not mindful of God's eternal love in His covenant of salvation.
 - All you know is this world that you can see and touch and taste.
 - You have no real awareness of your Creator and of His redemptive grace.
 - His promises of forgiveness and sanctification are of little consequence to you.
- This is spiritual blindness, damnable spiritual insensibility.
 - You are not mindful of the things of God.
 - This is all the more true for us now than it was for the people in Malachi's day, for now we have seen what God did in Christ to redeem us!
 - His great love is seen more than ever in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us...
 - Once you know Him by faith, you cannot say, "How have You loved us?" when the LORD says, "I have loved you."
 - A believer may have times when he is somewhat insensible of God's love, but only an unregenerate person can completely deny it altogether.
 - The believer will know how wrong such thoughts are, and he will repent of such thoughts when they show up in his heart...he knows the truth and always comes back to it...
 - but the unregenerate person simply does not see God's love in Christ.

TRANS> Insensibility to God's love bears much fruit—all of it very wretched.

II. Malachi shows us five more ways that spiritual insensibility manifests itself among God's people—

- Let's look at them.
- A. Spiritual insensibility is seen in a failure on their part to recognise irreverence for God in worship.
1. You can see in Mal 1:6 how Malachi uses the same formula...
 - The LORD makes an assertion and then exposes their insensibility by attributing to them a question which shows that they don't see what He is talking about.
 - It is not that they actually said this, but it describes what they thought.
 - This is the formula that Malachi uses throughout...
 - Here, the assertion is: **"A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honor? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence?" says the LORD of hosts to you priests who despise My name.**
 - And then He says: **"Yet you say, 'In what way have we despised Your name?'"**
 - "Who? Us?"
 - It is a bad thing when we can no longer be convicted of our sin...when His word comes to us and it has no effect on us—no convicting power.

2. The LORD tells them one of the ways they have despised His name...in their worship.
 - In verse 7-8 He points out that they have been offering sacrifices that are blind and lame and sick...
 - Such things as they would not dare to offer to their governor...
 - And yet, God is much greater than any governor!
 - His name (as verse 11 says) will be great among all nations at the end!
 - Just because many people do not regard Him now does not mean that you, His people, should not regard Him!
3. There is a gracious call to repentance here...
 - Verse 9 says, **“But now entreat God’s favor, that He may be gracious to us. while this is being done by your hands, will He accept you favorably?” says the LORD of hosts.**
 - But no...they go on profaning God’s name in worship (as it says vs 12-14)...acting like He does not deserve their best...seeing worship as a wearisome thing...a tiresome thing...
 - Oh, I hope it is not so with you...
 - They looked at the sacrifices as a profane thing—a common rather than a holy thing before God...
 - For us, the sacrifice is Christ—we look at His blood as a common thing... not as a special holy atonement for our sins.
 - We yawn when we sing our praises, we do not prepare for worship, we come in late, we grow weary, we are half-hearted, we stay away for the slightest reason—even because we went to bed too late.
4. In chapter 2, God reminds the priests what they ought to be doing!
 - They are supposed to lead the people in what it means to be holy, but how can they do this when they are defiled?
 - They have caused the people to stumble.
 - They have allowed them to offer profane sacrifices... for us in the New Testament, to come to God without a true profession of faith in Christ.
 - To treat His death as a common death, a mere example—rather than a holy sacrifice of God the Son for wretched sinners.
 - The LORD tells them that if they do not repent, He will put a curse on them and spread the refuse of their sacrifices on their faces.
 - If they defile His holy worship by treating it as a common ordinary thing, then He will defile them before all the people.

TRANS> And you see, the worst part is that even when God pointed this problem of profaning His name out to the people, they still did not see it.

- This takes us back to the root problem—when you do not see the love of God for you in Christ, you don’t have much regard for Christ and His sacrifice and it shows in your lax attitude about your worship.

B. Spiritual insensibility is also seen in another way... by a failure to recognise God’s displeasure with treachery in marriage.

- This problem is addressed in Mal 2:10-16.

1. They were so insensible of God that they were coming to worship Him as if nothing was wrong when they had married pagan wives.
 - If any of you marry an unbeliever (or shack up with one) in this church, you will be put out of the church unless you repent.
 - Look at what it says in 2:11 & 12 about this:
 - **Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem, for Judah has profaned the LORD'S holy *institution* which He loves: he has married the daughter of a foreign god.**
 - Marriage is God's holy institution that He loves!
 - He appointed it for a man to represent God's covenant love and for a woman to represent the church's response to that love.
 - He appointed it to bring forth godly children—not just children, but children who love Him.
 - How could a believer possibly marry an unbeliever?
 - It perverts God's true purpose in marriage.
 - What could such a marriage be about?
 - Certainly not for the glory of God!
 - And so verse 12 says what God wants for those who do this...
 - **12 May the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob the man who does this, being awake and aware, yet who brings an offering to the LORD of hosts!**
2. But what made all this even worse is that instead of cutting them off—they were continuing to bring their offerings to God as if nothing was wrong!
 - a. And they were complaining that God was not answering their prayers!
 - Verse 13 explains how they would come weeping before God to be heard in their prayers and then complain that He did not regard them.
 - And in verse 14 these blockheads say, **“For what reason?”**
 - b. God answers them...v. 14 continued...**“Because the LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant.”**
 - I tell you, if you do not keep your marriage covenant, that is treachery before God—it is a covenant.
 - God does not answer the prayers of those who mistreat their wives or their husbands.
 - It is bad enough if you don't love your brother—but it is even worse if you don't love your wife!
 - c. The LORD goes on to say in verse 15 that He seeks godly offspring from marriage, but that does not happen when husbands and wives break the marriage covenant.
 - God says, in verse 16, that He hates divorce and He warns you not to deal treacherously with your wife... not if you want God's favour.
 - Away with all your excuses! Start laying down your life for her as the Lord has commanded. Treat her the way the LORD treats His people.
 - Back to the root problem—you don't see how much He has loved you. You are not sensible of His love. That is the root problem.

- C. Spiritual insensibility is further seen in a failure to recognise that when Christ comes, it will not go well for you unless you repent.
1. In Mal 2:17, the LORD makes another assertion with their typical reply...
 - **You have wearied the LORD with your words; yet you say, “In what way have we wearied *Him*?” In that you say, “Everyone who does evil *is* good in the sight of the LORD, and He delights in them,” or, “Where is the God of justice?”**
 - This relates to what we just saw—how they were wondering why God did not regard them when they were worshipping Him.
 - And you see what the LORD says—it is because they were assuming that those who did evil were good in the sight of the LORD.
 - “We go to church. We say our prayers. We talk about God. We are His people.”
 2. And in saying, “Where is the God of justice?” they were indicating that they expect the Messiah to come for them and deal with their enemies.
 - Messianic expectations were strong at this time, and they wanted Him to come and deal with their pagan neighbours.
 - And the LORD tells them that the Messiah will come...John the messenger will come to prepare His way, and then the Lord Himself will come.
 - Look at 3:1: **“Behold, I send My messenger (that’s John), and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek [that’s the Messiah], will suddenly come to His temple [note that it is His temple], even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” says the LORD of hosts.**
 - This is wonderful—excellent—except for one thing.
 - Many of them would be rejected and cut off by Him if He came!
 - That is actually what happened when He did come, was it not?
 - Most of the Jews were cut off.
 - They did not realise what they were asking for when they desired the Messiah and sought for Him.
 - Look at verse 2: **But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like launderer’s soap.**
 - He will burn away the chaff. It will not go well for those who are unbelievers.
 - Verse 4 explains that Jesus will make the offspring of Judah and Jerusalem pleasant to the LORD, for He will atone for our sins and He will be our righteousness... that is good...
 - But verse 5 explains that for those who continue in their sin without repentance, there will judgment, not salvation...
 - **Mal 3:5: “And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness against sorcerers, against adulterers, against perjurers, against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, and against those who turn away an alien—because they do not fear Me,” says the LORD of hosts.**

- Paul said this to the Corinthians in 1 Cor 6:9-10: **Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homo-sexuals, nor sodomites, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.**
 - It did not go well for such persons in the Old Testament church when He came the first time and it will not go well for such persons in the New Testament church when He comes at the end of this age... despite their talk about wanting Him to come.
 - God is weary of talk about Jesus from those who refuse to turn to Him for cleansing from their sins.
3. Yet, a warm invitation goes out to us all in verse 6-7: **“For I *am* the LORD, I do not change; therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob. ⁷ Yet from the days of your fathers You have gone away from My ordinances and have not kept *them*. Return to Me, and I will return to you,”** says the LORD of hosts.
- So great a promise—but so lousy a response...
 - Look at their response to his in the rest of verse 7—**“But you said, ‘In what way shall we return?’ ”**
 - Insensible people! “Us? Repent? What do you mean? We have not departed. We are Abraham’s seed. We are Christians. We go to church.”
 - They do not see that they need to repent—they are still saying that those who do evil are good in the sight of the LORD and that He delights in them.

TRANS> So the LORD will show them yet more...a fourth way their insensibility shows.

D. Those who are spiritually insensible rob God and do not even realise it.

1. He uses the assertion and alleged response technique again to show how out of touch they are regarding robbing God.
 - Look at Mal 3:8: **“Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings.”**
 - He explains in verse 9-10 that they have not been bringing the whole tithe into the storehouse.
 - **⁹ “You are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed Me, *even* this whole nation. ¹⁰ Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house.”**
 - God needs food in His house... not for Him, but for His servants.
 - By not tithing, they were not supplying God’s servants—the priests who offered the sacrifices... or for us, the preachers or preach the gospel, nor was there money for ministry to the sick and the needy.
 - God calls this robbing Him.
 - This is very typical—covenant people do not bring a whole tithe.
 - They console themselves that they are giving regularly and that this is a tithe, but a tithe is 10% of your income—not what you have leftover, but an actual 10% of your income.
 - They were giving less than that and the work of God was suffering.

- If some of you are not tithing, we can't support missionaries and we can't do some of the things that we would otherwise do.
 - God holds you responsible as a thief... stealing from Him!
 - Don't deny it. Return to the LORD.
2. He promises that He will look after you if you will do this.
- From the middle of verse 10, He actually invites you to test Him: **“And try Me now in this,” says the LORD of hosts, “If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.”**
 - You will say, “But I thought we were not supposed to test the LORD?”
 - That is true... you are not to set up a test on your terms... but if He invites you to test Him, it is rebellion if you don't.
 - King Ahaz was rejected for refusing to ask for a sign when God commanded him to.
 - I am often amazed at the blindness of Christians who feel like they cannot tithe because they are already in a financial mess.
 - It never occurs to them that they are in a financial mess because they are robbing God.
 - God sends the devourer (as He calls it in verse 11) to eat up what you have—He has His ways.

TRANS> People who are spiritually insensible do not realize that they are robbing God.

- They feel that God owes them more than He has given them because they do not see His great love to them in Christ.
 - And that brings us to the last way that Malachi shows us that spiritual insensibility is manifested in God's covenant people.
 - Not those outside the church, but those within...

E. Spiritual insensibility is seen in a failure to see how offensive their accusations against God are to Him.

1. Here once again is the assertion and the alleged response in Mal 3:13: **“Your words have been harsh against Me,” says the LORD, “Yet you say, ‘What have we spoken against You?’ ”**
- Sometimes we like to think that the LORD is sort of detached and would not say that we had robbed Him or that He was troubled by our harsh words...
 - but we are getting a rude awakening in Malachi, aren't we?
 - He is a personal God and He cares very much about such things.
 - He is not some detached deity that does not notice.
 - Okay, so what *had* they said? What have *we* said?
 - He accuses us of saying the very same kind of thing that the people said when they were brought out of Egypt and said that it would have been better to have stayed there than to be God's people...
 - Look at verse 14-15: **“You have said, ‘It is useless to serve God; what profit is it that we have kept His ordinance, and that we have walked as mourners before the LORD of hosts? ¹⁵ So now we call the proud blessed,**

for those who do wickedness are raised up; they even tempt God and go free.’ ”

- Do you see what they are saying?
 - That there is no real benefit in serving God.
 - The proud people of the world who do wicked things have it better than we do.
- 2. This is back to where Malachi started—what I called the root of the matter.
 - These people are so blind that they do not see the love of the LORD in Christ... in the promise of the gospel... in the gift of eternal life...
 - They see the wicked prospering in this world and they figure that the wicked are therefore better off—even though they are not reconciled to God... even though they do not know Him.
 - This is the epitome of wicked unbelief.
 - Moses had faith and counted it far better to suffer affliction with God’s people in the wilderness than to live in the palace of Pharaoh in Egypt.
 - Jesus Christ asked what profit you will have if you gain the whole world and lose your own soul?
 - Do you know God? Do you love God? Is God even real to you?
 - He is *not* real to you if think those who prosper in this world without Him are better off than you are!
 - You need to repent and come to Him at once.

III. The LORD tells us at the end of Malachi... at the end of the Old Testament... of a people that truly do know Him.

- He always has people like this in His church... people who truly believe...
- A. Who are they?
 1. They are the ones among the covenant people who fear the LORD.
 - Look at chapter 3 verse 16: **Then those who feared the LORD spoke to one another, and the LORD listened and heard *them*; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the LORD and who meditate on His name.**
 - a. What does it mean when it says that they “fear the LORD.”
 - It means that they actually know Him as the true and living God and recognise that He actually rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked.
 - They have faith, which, as Hebrews 11:6 puts it, believes **that God is and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.**
 - This is not works salvation, but this is an awareness that God is not just a feeling or a projection of our minds, or collective consciousness—or a being that has little concern about us...
 - He truly is that God with whom we have to do.
 - By Him, we will either be blessed or cursed.
 - It means that we realise that He matters most—that there is no ultimate happiness apart from Him and that there is ultimate destruction for all who ignore Him or reject Him as God.
 - b. You see what those who fear God are said to do in verse 16.

- 1) At the end of the verse, they are described as those who **fear the LORD and who meditate on His name.**
 - They think about Him.
 - They don't worship without thinking about who He is.
 - They don't live without thinking about Him.
 - They take comfort in His promises, fear His warnings, and obey His commandments and ordinances.
 - To them, He is near and not far off, and it matters!
 - They can't just walk away from what He says.
- 2) At the beginning of the verse, it says that they talk to one another.
 - When they hear God's word—the things that Malachi has spoken, they take them to heart and they talk to each other about it—they encourage each other to follow the LORD.
 - They do this because they believe that the promises and the warnings are all real—that they matter more than anything.

➤ That is what those fear God do... and look... a second thing about them in v. 16:

2. God notices them.

- a. It says that when they were talking, He listened to them and heard them.
 - He knows who they are that fear Him.
 - He knows those who are His and regards them.
- b. It says that He writes a book of remembrance about them.
 - This alludes to the practice of Persian kings who kept records of good deeds that were done by their subjects.
 - You might remember how King Ahasuerus was reading from such a book when he could not sleep in the book of Esther.
 - Of course this does not suggest that God needs a book to remember.
 - It is just a way of pointing out that He knows them that are His.
 - He knows the people that are sensible of Him and the ones that are not.

B. Malachi says that God will deal very differently with them that fear Him.

1. He says that those who fear Him will be His forever.
 - Look at verse 17: **“They shall be Mine,” says the LORD of hosts, “On the day that I make them My jewels. And I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.”**
 - They are the ones who believe Him when He says that we are sinners who cannot save ourselves.
 - They are the ones who believe the promises that God alone is able to save us through Jesus Christ.
 - They trust in Him as their Saviour and when He makes up His kingdom, He receives them as His jewels and as His sons.
2. In verse 18, He says that everyone will again be able to discern between the righteous and the wicked.
 - This refers back to what we saw at the start—the root problem of spiritual insensibility...
 - they do not see that God has loved His people in any distinctive way.

- That is what those who do not believe among the covenant people think... that they are no different than Edom.
 - They do not see a difference because God's promises are not real to them.
 - The exile was real, the destruction of Jerusalem was real, but God's promise of a city that He is preparing for them and reconciliation with Him and the declaration of His forgiveness and acceptance is of little concern.
3. That day is coming when the LORD will make His distinguishing love for His people clear even to those who do not have faith.
- The coming contrast is made in Malachi 4:1-3:
 - Look at 4:1: **“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,”** says the LORD of hosts, **“That will leave them neither root nor branch.”**
 - They will understand that. They will be sensible of God on that day.
 - It will be quite different for those who fear Him.
 - Look at 4:2: **“But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves.”**
 - Surely the *Sun of Righteousness* is Christ who will bring them salvation.
 - When He came, those who feared the LORD saw what He did for them... how He died on the cross to atone for their sins... how He won acceptance with the Father for them...how he would deal with their enemies.
 - **Vs 3: “You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do *this*,”** says the LORD of hosts.
 - Christ came preaching peace, but He also preached judgment—and prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem because of Israel's rejection.
 - Those who feared the LORD believed and received righteousness from Christ, but those who did not believe were cut off from His church.
 - The final judgment is yet to come... at the last day...then all will be sensible of the living God and that He matters.
- C. Malachi concludes with an exhortation for the people to receive the revelation that God has already given them until Christ comes.
1. In 4:4-6, He says: **“remember the Law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments.”**
 - Those rituals were given to them by Moses to show them that God is holy and that He alone can atone for the sins of His people
 - They were simply to believe God—that all this is for real.
 - They were to continue in them as if they really came from God...with all the love and hope that faith engenders.
 2. They are also exhorted to believe God's promise that before Christ comes, Elijah will come to prepare the way...to restore all things...

- This is the promise of John the Baptist who came to prepare the way by restoring the people to God the way Elijah did... calling them to repentance.
 - 5 **“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. 6 And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.”**
 - Those who fear God will repent and believe in Christ... for them His coming will be a blessing instead of a curse... but for the rest it will be like a burning oven and they will be the stubble.
3. And now that Christ has come... in our day...believe what God has revealed concerning Him.
- If you believe that God is real, you will receive the revelation of God that is given concerning Him—that He alone is able to save us from our sins and that no one can come to the Father but by Him.
 - If you are insensible of God, you will go on with your empty superficial profession that does not take the true and living God into account and when He returns you will perish with the wicked, just like so many people in the church did when He came the first time.
 - I hope that this will not be the case with any of you.