



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

7643 Huron River Drive

Dexter, MI 48130

734-426-8480

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### *MAJORING IN THE MINORS: MALACHI* *WITH HEALING IN HIS WINGS*

Malachi 4:1-6 [excerpts from various translations]

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by Steve Bringardner

#### INTRODUCTION

We come to MALACHI, the last book in the Old Testament. . .and the last in our series on the Minor Prophets. Although these books are “lesser known” than the Major Prophets (that’s not why they’re called “minor”, you remember), each one of them has contained some verse or idea that is generally familiar.

Let me ask you: When you hear MALACHI, what comes to mind? What are some of the phrases you’ve heard or themes you know are dealt with in this book?

1. Couple times he uses the love/hate combo  
[**ch. 1:2-3** – *“I have loved Jacob. . .but Esau I have hated”*]  
[**ch. 2:16** – *“I hate divorce”*] While God hates divorce, He loves those who are divorced.
2. When He comes *“he will be like a refiner’s fire”* [**ch. 3:2**]. That’s a base solo we hear every Christmas when we listen to *The Messiah*.
3. Verses on tithing [**ch. 3:8** – *“Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. How? In tithes and offerings.”*]
4. Couple great verses in **ch. 4** (today):  
[**v. 2** – *“the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in his wings”*. In the original, S & R are capitalized = reference to Jesus Christ. Remember that Jesus said *“I am the light of the world”*.]  
[**v. 6**, the very last verse of the O.T. – *“He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers.”* What a way to end!]

Let me tell you a little about MALACHI. . .

We are nearly a century beyond where we were the last couple weeks (with HAGGAI & ZECHARIAH). About 90 years prior, Haggai & Zechariah had stirred up the people to complete the Temple of the Lord. They did finish the Temple AND they did get the rituals of worship re-established. Now years have passed: The Messiah Haggai & Zechariah spoke of has not come. The shaking of the nations those prophets promised has not happened. After all the years of waiting, they have settled down into a dull routine. All the excitement and enthusiasm have waned. Boredom and apathy have set in. Even the worship of God now seems an empty chore.

So, MALACHI (ca. 430 B.C.) is addressing a community of faith that has become lukewarm. . .a people who have cooled off in their passion & zeal for the Lord. They have lost the “edge” in their walk. The “gusto” and “fervor” just aren’t there anymore.

Ever been there? Ever been on a spiritual high, a mountaintop—then come down to the dull routine of everyday life. We’re starting a new school year, and there’s always excitement and anticipation. But can we maintain it

(along about November or February)? Can we keep carrying the ball through times when it is not so exciting and He seems absent?

Ever go through a period of waiting (for God to do something)? Will things get better? Will the job come through? Will I finish the degree? Will marriage come? Will we ever find a house? We begin to doubt His presence, His involvement.

Right now, in the life of our church, we're going through an exciting time. *Can* we sustain the momentum? *Will* we?

To avoid drifting. . .to avoid becoming lukewarm. . .to stay faithful even when heaven seems silent & still (and it will from time to time; it had for 100 years and it would be for another 400 years after Malachi)—for all of these reasons, we need to read this book.

It's built around a series of questions (8 total) which if answered honestly will reveal our attitude (i.e.: just how much of a priority serving God is to us). **[See the Study Guide]**

It is a direct call to get back to an intimate relationship with God. I say "direct" because in 47 out of 55 verses (nearly 90%) God is speaking with first person directness to his people.

What are the MESSAGES OF MALACHI for us today? I want to draw out THREE. . . . .

## I. GOD LOVES US NO MATTER WHAT.

The book begins with an affirmation by God of love for his people [1:1]:

*"I have loved you", says the Lord.*

It is love that binds God to his own; it is love that God seeks from his own.

But then he says [1:2-3]: *"Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated."*

Oh boy, glad I'm not Esau! ☐ But can that be? Can God, who is love, hate somebody?

You need to understand that love & hate, in this context, are *comparative* terms:

- To LOVE == to select, to prefer
- To HATE == to reject, to pass over

These words are hyperboles; they exaggerate, they overstate the case. For instance, I might say "I love vanilla; I hate chocolate". In today's language, I would probably just say, "I prefer vanilla over chocolate."

God was saying that He had (s)elected or chosen Jacob, not his brother Esau, to be the one through whom the nation of Israel and the Messiah would come.

When he says a little bit later [2:16a]: *"I hate divorce. . .and, I hate a man's covering himself with violence"* [which could also be translated *"I hate a man's covering his wife with violence"*], he may be referring to domestic violence.

In other words, don't do violence to the wife of your youth. . .and don't violate yourself or your vows by being unfaithful to her. *"Guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith"* [v. 16b].

Of course, he hates divorce. Hates that it had gotten so easy, so common. It has in our day too. Don't we all?! Marriage is supposed to last forever! We hate what it does to couples, to families, to children. We prefer it never to happen. But that does NOT mean if you have gone through a divorce you are cut off from your Heavenly Father.

God is a God of love and of grace. And He always provides *a way back* and *a way through*.

He hates sin too! Yet the Bible says in **I John 2:1**:

*“My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But, if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins (i.e.: He is the one who turns aside God’s wrath and takes away our sins)—not only ours but also the sins of the whole world.”*

Even though there are a lot of messes God prefers we not get ourselves in, He still loves us and has provided for our redemption & salvation & healing (as we’ll see later).

## II> THERE’S A CONNECTION BETWEEN WHAT’S GOING ON IN OUR FAITH LIFE AND WHAT’S GOING ON IN THE REST OF OUR LIFE (ESPECIALLY OUR FAMILY LIFE).

MALACHI shows us you can’t compartmentalize your spiritual life. We might say, *“I’ll go to church on Sunday, and that’s that.”* Or show up once in awhile, put in a token dollar or two in the offering plate and say, *“There, I’ve take care of my ‘duty’ to God.”*

The people of Israel had cooled in their love of the Lord. It had become a burden to go to worship. They were offering God “leftovers”.

That brings us to the part about tithing [**ch. 3**]. The failure of the people to bring dedicated tithes to the temple for the support of the priests and the temple sacrifices demonstrates that they no longer valued or regarded God as #1 in their lives. He was not as significant as He once was to their lives. They had left their first love.

One thing led to another. The people began to intermarry with pagans from nations around them. That in turn led to easy divorces, and hence to his statement, *“I hate divorce”* [remember **ch. 2:16**].

Do you see how all these things are interconnected? Neglect of love & devotion to God leads to neglect of vital worship, which in turn leads to neglect of relationships. A negative spiral downward!

When people become unfaithful in their relationship to God, breakdown of relationships with one another will inevitably follow.

What priority do you give to your relationship with the Lord? Do you (*really*) put God first in your life?

As we begin a new “school year”, I would invite you to assess where you’re at spiritually. Where is God in your life?

- Does He occupy just a corner in your heart? [To gage that, you only have to look at *your wallet & your calendar*.]
- Is He the panic button you push when trouble arises?
- Is He someone you feel beholden to because you’re supposed to be?

I urge you to make your relationship with Him first priority! Evaluate the depth of your commitment, the sincerity of your worship, the direction of your life. Is He really in charge of your life? [Check out the Thursday & Friday sections of the Study Guide.]

## III> RELATIONSHIPS CAN BE SHATTERED...AND RESTORED.

Relationships (including a relationship with God) can be shattered.

But relationships (especially a relationship with God) can be restored, rekindled.

That brings us to our Scripture text today—**Malachi, Ch. 4** (excerpts from various translations):

<sup>1</sup> Surely the day is coming. . . <sup>2</sup> for you who revere my name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in his wings. And you will be bursting with energy, like colts frisky and frolicking. <sup>3</sup> Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things," says the LORD Almighty.

<sup>4</sup> Don't ever forget the laws and teachings I gave my servant Moses on Mount Sinai.

<sup>5</sup> "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. <sup>6</sup> He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; so that when I come, I won't bring doom to the land.

That's how the Book of Malachi ends. . .and how the Old Testament closes.

- **v. 1:** "Surely the day is coming! It will burn like a furnace." Then this incredible promise—one of my favorites in all of Scripture. . .
- **v. 2:** "For those who revere my name, the Sun of Righteousness [JESUS] will rise with healing in his wings. And you will leap like calves released from the stall" [NIV]. Hard to imagine!
- **v. 3:** You'll be successful over all the evil of the world, all the stuff life throws at you.
- **v. 4:** But you've got to remember the law of the Lord, given to Moses (at Horeb = Mt. Sinai). It was for all Israel. . .and for all who follow God, not just a select few saints.
- **v. 5:** Here's the bridge to the New Testament. He promises to send *the prophet Elijah* [JOHN THE BAPTIST]. He will come *before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes* (I would call it *wonderful*; a better translation would be "awesome").
- **v. 6:** Then relationships will be repaired. . .and healing will come.

Let me ask you: Do you think a relationship (with God or with another person) can be completely shattered? Like a vase, brushed by a careless elbow? Like a toy, pushed beyond its limits by young fingers? Like a piece of fabric that rips when pulled by strong and angry hands?

Unfaithfulness. . .lies. . .hateful words. . .forsaken vows tear delicate personal bonds and inflict wounds not easily healed. People who suffer abuse are often unable to form healthy relationships. Most tragic, however, is a broken relationship with God.

#### ILLUSTRATION OF VAL L.:

A young girl (age 16) began attending Mankato Church I pastored back in the 70's. She was a deeply committed Christian. She carried her Bible to school. . .was a fearless witness to her friends. . .and a faithful witness at home, too. The rest of family were not believers.

About a year after she started attending, a "preacher" came to town, who began holding meetings, and teaching false doctrine. Through the influence of a teacher at school (also a committed Christian.), Val got involved. One of the things this guy (whose name was RAMA) taught was if your parents didn't profess Christ, you're under no obligation to honor or obey them. Eventually Val moved out of her home, and joined a whole bunch of others who were becoming members of this cult. For comic relief, we usually referred to it as "*Rama trauma*". ☹ They isolated themselves from everything and everyone they knew, and worked to bring in money to support—guess who?—Rama.

When Val's family had had it up to here, her dad literally "kidnapped" her and took her to a de-programming center in Minneapolis. Four weeks later, Val was successfully "de-programmed" alright—washed clean of NOT only

*Rama Trauma* BUT everything pertaining to her previous spiritual life. To this day, as far as I know, Val has never reclaimed Christ in her life. She is what I would call “spiritually dead”.

How could this happen? God loves perfectly and completely. He is altogether faithful and true to His promises to us. But to those who consistently spurn a loving God, break the covenant, follow the gods of this world, and live for themselves—the relationship can be destroyed eventually.

Maybe you’re here this morning and have that feeling. Maybe you think you could never have a relationship with God because too much has happened.

The breach is not irreparable. All hope is not lost. God can heal. . .in fact, stands ready to heal. God can mend and re-weave the fabric of your spirit. Forgiveness is available. No matter how deep the stain of sin & transgression have gone, the cleansing power of His shed blood reaches deeper still.

He sends healing on the wings of the Holy Spirit. It’s like an AIRPLANE (in the aftermath of a hurricane), coming with supplies and help after days of being stranded on a rooftop and thinking all was for loss.

And yes, there were SNIPERS who took potshots at Him—just as they did the helicopters this past week. But He’s alive! NO, He didn’t dodge the bullets. He took a fatal hit. But on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day He arose; and everyday since has been sitting at the right hand of God the Father making intercession for us.

Many of you have experienced His life-changing healing (spiritually / emotionally / relationally / physically). Others are just beginning to experience it. There may be some who have yet to reach out and grasp it.

We’re about to celebrate the most stunning event in all human history. We call it *Holy Communion*. It depicts the coming of Christ with healing in His wings. So, when you come through that line and eat the bread & drink the juice, grab hold of all that He has for you in this hour. Let Him rescue you and give you life. . .new life in Him.

There’s healing in his wings for you!!!