

Malachi 3; Rom. 9:1-13; The Final Messenger I. Israel's Stubborn Iniquity II. The LORD'S Relentless Character  
 Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, before you travel on a long journey, what do you say to your family? I  
 imagine that a husband before leaving on a trip would say something like this to his wife- I love you, don't  
 worry, I will be home soon! I will be back before you know it! Well, this evening we come to the final,  
 parting words of God in the OT. These are the last words of God before the 400-year silence- the famine  
 from the Word of the LORD. In this book the LORD reflects on the past and points to the future. The name-  
 Malachi- means the messenger of the LORD. So Malachi is sent with a message from the LORD. Now that the  
 temple had been built- the temple service has been restored- are things going better? Not at all- things are  
 not going well at all! Israel is still committing the same old sins- she is still corrupt- proving the need for a  
 savior once again! In Malachi we find the last words of God- which come in the form of a dispute- even a  
 rebuke- followed by a call to repent and to be prepared because the true Messenger of the LORD was  
 coming. We consider this theme: the true Messenger of the Covenant calls His chosen people to live holy  
 and obedient lives!

### **I. Israel's Stubborn Iniquity**

In our first point we find that Israel is still ensnared in stubborn rebellion- she has a tendency towards iniquity  
 that still remains. Although she had been brought back after exile- although the wall around Jerusalem was  
 rebuilt- the temple and its ceremonies restored- and even after the leadership of godly men like Joshua the  
 HP, Zechariah the governor and the prophets we have considered. After all of this- we find that the people  
 are doing the same things they had done before the exile- the same sins which brought God's judgement on  
 them are being repeated again! Malachi opens with the LORD reaffirming His love in 1:2 as we will see in our  
 next point, but the people have responded to this love with disdain, ignorance and apathy. 1:6- the priests  
 have despised my name- the people do not fear me. The first sin found is that the people do not honor God  
 as they ought! They had no fear, reverence and respect for the Holy One of Israel! God had become  
 common, insignificant and despised. They thought little of Him- and this evidenced itself in how they

worshipped Him! The offered polluted gifts- the animals they brought to the temple to be sacrificed were sick, lame and blind as 1:8 says. Blemished and unacceptable even to an earthly king. They would even go so far as to steal and take by force these animals from others- thinking that God would somehow be pleased with a stolen sacrifice. It would be like a child giving his parents a half-eaten candy bar that had been stolen from the store! Not an acceptable gift! They viewed worship as something to get over- to be done with- going through the motions and even giving less than required. They even robbed God as 3:8 states.

Commanded to bring in their tithes and offering, they offered the least and the worst. Instead of bringing in the 10% as commanded, they gave a few dollars here and there. Sacrificial and cheerful giving were non-existent! Their worship as a whole was corrupt- they were not grateful for all that God had done- instead they refused to respond in thanksgiving as they held back their contributions and refused to support the temple and those who worked there. God saw this refusal to bring in the tithe as not only an attack on worship- but in fact robbery of God! Not only does everything belong to Him- how we use the gifts we have receives the condition of our heart! So the worship at the temple had already fallen into disrepair- only a few short years after the temple was rebuilt it was already despised. The people did not view God or His temple rightly- worship was nothing more than vain repetition. They did not fear and honor the LORD- rather they entertained false and blasphemous ideas about Him. God does not see- they said- God does not care! It is a vain thing to worship God- 3:14- evildoers prosper- the wicked test God and escape- so why should we worship God? If the wicked are not judged- and we are no better off- why go through the trouble? The spirit of hypocrisy- turning religion into a formality- had gripped the hearts of the people. It is always a danger for God's people to think wrong thoughts- to allow wrong ideas about God and worship to remain in the heart unaddressed! Ideas have consequences! If we do not preserve a right attitude towards God and His worship- if we do not fear the LORD and seek to worship Him rightly- then we will begin to think as these Israelites did. As Cain said all those years ago- God will be happy with a half-hearted gift! So we hear today- Why go to church- why bring in my tithes and offering- why seek to worship God rightly- why all this reverence in worship? I don't get anything out of it- my needs are not being met? Is the church any better off than the

nations? They do whatever they want and they live happy and healthy lives- so man thinks! But let the warning of 3:18 stand- the distinction between the righteous and the wicked will one day be seen! The division between the one who serves God and who does not serve Him will one day be evident when the sheep are separated from the goats! A Day of Judgement is coming! Let us not fall into the false thinking- or be lulled into the believe that God does not care about worship or that God does not care if His name is hallowed!

Moving on, we see that this stubborn iniquity is seen not only in worship but it is also seen in the family- in the home life! One of the unique aspects of Malachi is his focus on the marks of a godly marriage. Just as it did not take long for true worship to be polluted after the fall as seen in Cain's offering, so also it did not take long for the marriage and family to be polluted as seen in the line of Lamech and his 2 wives- or when the sons of God took the daughter of men as wives because they were attractive in Genesis 6. Not only did Judah profane the sanctuary of God in their wicked adulteration of worship- as 2:11 continues- they have polluted the sanctuary by breaking covenant in their marriage. They had performed a 2-fold rebellion- first they had married the daughter of a foreign god- which is to take an unbeliever to be your spouse. And secondly, they were divorcing their godly spouse and breaking their covenant of marriage they were already in as 2:14 says. So they were choosing to break a good union- by divorcing their fellow Israelite spouse- and they were choosing people to marry who did not know nor serve the LORD. Today we would call this being unequally yoked as Paul says in II Cor. 6. If you want to be married, you need to marry someone in the LORD as I Cor. 7 states. The fact remains, corrupt teaching leads to a corrupt life. Idolatry in the heart leads to adultery with the body. This truth is an abiding truth- God commands His people- if you want to get married you must get married to a fellow believer. And if you are married, you are not to break that marriage! Husbands and wives must live together until death parts them- that is why you need to be very careful when choosing a spouse! Why- because God is holy and His people must be holy! Added to this fact, God uses Godly marriages to be the context in which to bring for godly children. As 2:15 says- God is seeking Godly offspring.

One of the principle reasons that you are to marry a fellow believer is because Christian husbands and wives are called by God to raise up the next generation of His people. As I Cor. 7 says- the children of believers are holy- they belong to and are dedicated to the LORD as we saw this morning. But if you forsake your spouse- if you run after the world and become united to an unbeliever- you are showing that your heart does not take the calling to be a holy people- a kingdom of priests seriously. Even Solomon was led astray by his many ungodly and worldly wives. So the people of Israel during Malachi's day were neglecting their calling- and polluting not only their marriage but also worship. A sign of the times could be a disregard for true worship and the family. In all of this we pause to look back- what was happening in Malachi's day is just a continuation of what started in Gen. 3. As Malachi 3:5 summarises- sorcery, adultery, false witness, oppression and lack of mercy! After the many generations of the Israelites have come and gone- after the first Exodus out of Egypt we have progressed some 2000 years- but the Law is still not written on the hearts of the people! With violence and murder- the breaking of families and idolatry- the Law of the LORD was still being broken! Man is still polluted- the stubborn sin and iniquity that clings still remains! As a messenger, Malachi reminds us that we- all mankind- needs a savior who will deliver us from the pollution and bondage to sin! Last week we read about justification- that a change in identity and standing would be secured by Jesus. But we also read of cleansing water- that by the Spirit our hearts and lives would also be renewed! This is possible and promised to us because of who our God is!

## **II. The LORD'S Relentless Character**

As we move into our second point, we find that this little book also displays the character of our God as He reveals Himself and His work for us! In this we not only hear echoes of the past- but we catch glimpses of the future! Who is this God of Israel- how had He revealed Himself? He is the God of Israel- the Holy One- powerful and righteous- Merciful and just! But of all the attributes that God could have begun with- the way in which the LORD reveals Himself in this book is that He is a God of Love! I have loved you 1:2- I have chosen you! I am the loving, electing God that set you apart and called you to be my own! I have selected you out of

the nations- I have given you a preference over and above even your brother Esau! Jacob- your forefather have I loved! I have proved my Love to you in my calling of you and making you my own- my treasured people- the apple of my eye! Or as Dt. 7 states- I have set my love on you and I chose you. I have set my seal, name and affection on you- bringing you back here to this place as I promised! This concept is built upon in Rom. 9:12- I have mercy on you not because of anything you have done but because of my free grace- Jacob I loved but Esau I hated. Your identity and salvation are not dependant on your work or ability- but rather salvation depends on my grace and sovereign mercy! If you are looking for a reason to worship- if your heart needs a cue to praise and adoration- let it be found here! The God of love chose you to be His own! His sovereign choice and electing love must move His church to joyful praise! Added to this fact, He is also the God who makes and keeps His covenant- as 3:6 says- I the LORD do not change and therefor you are not consumed! I made a promise- a covenant- and I will keep that promise! If I chose you- I will not let you go! God had made a covenant with Abraham- I will be your God and You will be my people. The covenant was cut- verified by the smoking fire pot and blazing torch in Gen. 15 meaning that God Himself makes and keep the covenant! He does not forget- nor does His word and promise fall to the ground. He is the same- He always will be the faithful God of the promise! As Heb. 13:8 says- Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. Or James 1:17- every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. So He is the steadfast and faithful God- steady and sure as a rock and foundation. His is a patient and steadfast loving God! But being the God who does not change does not mean that He cannot be known- rather He is also the God who speaks! He has sent messengers as who reveal the truth to His people- He calls to us. He is the known God- the speaking God! It is a considerate love that speaks tenderly- acknowledging our ignorance and dispelling our darkness. As ch. 3 opens, Behold, I will send my messenger. Now remember, that the name "Malachi" means an angel or messenger of the LORD. Now in the book written by a messenger- we find a messenger being sent. This messenger of 3:1 will prepare the way before Me- or prepare the way before the coming of the Lord. Now we know that, as quoted in Mt. 11:10, this messenger was John the Baptist who prepared the way- baptizing in the Jordan River as he called

all people to repent- because the Kingdom of God was at hand. He is the Elijah of 4:5- the prophet who will come before the great and awesome day; who turns the hearts of the fathers to their children and the children back to their fathers. There will be covenantal reformation that will begin with this ministry of the one calling in the desert- make straight the way before the coming of the Lord. But who then is this second messenger back in 3:1- the messenger of the covenant? How will the Lord come to his temple? The answer to that question is found in the ministry of Jesus Christ- our Lord- the Father's anointed representative of the Covenant. Or the one who will bring in a new covenant by the shedding of His blood. John the Baptist did prepare the way- and after John was killed Jesus the messenger of God did come to the temple- and as you remember He was not happy with what He saw. In Mt. 21:12, Jesus saw the pollution and crime- that the house of prayer had become a den of robbers- and He cleansed the temple- He was as 3:2 continues- a refiner's fire and washer's soap- purifying the house of the LORD. He drove out the thieves and restored purity for a time- but He continues to purify to this day. As John 1 says- the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all our sins. It is this Jesus who is the Sun of Righteousness who rises with healing in His wings- 4:2 says- bringing joy to the afflicted and healing to the nations! He is the chosen, perfect and last messenger of God- who speaks to us by His Son in these last days as Heb. 1 affirms. Just as Malachi was in our reading- it is Jesus who will be the LORD'S last messenger of truth!

There is so much more that could be said, but we have to bring these thoughts to conclusion. Now Malachi does end with application- 4:4- remember the Law and listen to God's messenger. Do not harden your hearts- but fear the LORD and obey His commands! Come before Him with reverence and awe- and obey His word with joy and thanksgiving! As our theme states: the true Messenger of the Covenant calls His chosen people to live holy and obedient lives! These are the last words that God spoke before the famine from His Word- so they impressed upon God's people the need for faith, repentance and obedience! Let us do as some did in Malachi 3:16- fear the LORD, remember and pay attention to His Word- esteem His name and worship Him with reverence and awe!