

Roy's sermons in the book of Malachi

Part 2 Malachi 1:4-9 'We May Say; But It's What God Says That Matters!'

Last time we looked at this book we saw one simple yet profound truth: God is the Sovereign Ruler over all of the universe and that He alone is the chooser of every one of His people! Yes, He chooses some and does not choose (or rejects) others. We may think God unfair; we may not be prepared to accept this truth; we may even vehemently oppose and reject it, and yet Romans 9:19-20 says "One of you will say to me: then why does God still blame us? For who resists His will? But who are you O man to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to Him who formed it why did you make me like this?"

In this modern western world in which we live we are taught from an early age to assert our rights. So it is particularly hard to accept the eternal reality that the only birthright given to those who have rebelled against God and rejected Him is the right to be justly cast into hell!

So when God says "I have loved you" as we saw last time, this is an all-encompassing love. This means that even before the world came into being He laid His eternal hand upon us through His Sovereign choice, His Predestining Hand!

He explained this to Israel through his Prophet Malachi by saying "Jacob's brother was Esau yet I chose Jacob." Not because he was better than Esau, not because God knew what kind of man Jacob would become. It was simply because it *pleased* God to do so. So those of us who claim Christ as our Lord and Saviour do so, not out of any good thing in us, or anything which we have done or may do. It is by one way alone: that cross upon which Jesus suffered and died and rose again. "I have loved you says the Lord."

As God continues He responds on behalf of His rebellious people, His ungrateful people: "but you ask how have you loved us?." So *there* is the ingratitude, *there* is the contempt which Israel had shown toward God since He took them by the hand as His chosen adopted children. You've loved us they say: well *prove* it. And again, as we saw last time God's proof, is that He chose Israel out of the whole world of people as His own treasured possession!

This is where we pick up the text this morning. Malachi 1:4-9 which I have entitled 'We May Say; But It's What God Says That Matters!'

In verse 4: "Edom may say, 'though we have been crushed we will rebuild the ruins'." Friends, can you see the fist being shaken at God here? Isn't this man's classic response to Him and His Truth? We feel that no matter what He says or does, we as men and women can overturn those things because we ourselves are the masters of our own destiny!

Now where did this all begin? In the garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. But perhaps the clearest example of this fist shaking is at the tower of Babel. God had told mankind in Genesis 1:28 "Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it." Or in other words 'go in to all the corners of the world and be its keeper and its caretaker, I give you all authority over all of those things.' But let's listen to what men did say: Genesis 11:1-4 "Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, 'come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly'. They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. Then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.'"

So in effect they have, and know, the command which God gave them. But they say 'no, we are not going to do that'. So they turn their noses up at His Word. They, in effect, shake their fists in His face and say 'we know what we are supposed to do, we know what your command is, but you cannot make us!' Yet brothers and sisters, we may be able to get away with those kinds of words and actions with the school yard bully, but not with God. Though we try, we will never have the last word with God!

As we continue in Genesis 11 verses 5-9: "but the Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. The Lord said, "If they as one people speaking the same language have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so that they will not be able to understand each other. So the Lord scattered them from there over the whole earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth."

The descendants of Esau (the Edomites), who are much of the Middle Eastern Muslim world today, as a people, continue to be rejected by God. And those places continue to rage with war, turmoil, and destruction. And as they continue to build their towers of Babel, the Hand of God and His Wrath and Destruction is perpetually upon them, and so it shall be until judgement day. Yes, we may say throughout our lives that we will do such and such, but it's what *God says* that really matters.

As the Malachi text continues "they will be called the wicked land, a people always under the wrath of the Lord. You will see it with your own eyes and say great is the Lord, even beyond the borders of Israel." Can you see, that through Malachi God is getting Israel to expand their puny view of His Power, Glory and Authority; that He does not merely act over Israel, He is the God of the whole world, even indeed of the whole universe! "You will see it with your own eyes" He says.

Brothers and sisters, we do need our view of God expanded at times don't we? What do you think the floods, the droughts, the hurricanes, the cyclones, the tsunamis, the title waves, the earthquakes, the forest fires, the coronavirus are all about? They are God saying 'You have forgotten Me. Do you not remember who I Am?'

Romans 1:19-20 "Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse." Yes we need to be reminded that God is in control of all of the goings on in the world, though it seems like chaos at times. Can you see, if the earth were viewed as an enormous jigsaw puzzle, under the Watch and Rule of God, there is no piece missing. "You will see it with your own eyes and say 'great is the Lord even beyond the borders of Israel'."

Friends, have we not seen it with our own eyes? Have we not seen the mighty structures of men's imaginations around the world crumble before His breath? Those amazing images of the great storms of the world destroying all that stands before them. Are these not the hand of God? Of course they are. Mankind is asleep. 'Wake up!' God is saying. Zechariah 1:3 "Therefore tell the people: This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Return to me,' declares the LORD Almighty, 'and I will return to you,' says the LORD Almighty. Yes this was Israel's problem. They had fallen into that deep sleep of complacency and apathy. Into that sickly state of being lukewarm as we saw last week. It is a false form of religion, which is *no* worship of God at all.

Look now at how God describes this runaway and resentful child which Israel was at that time, and in truth, had always been. Verse 6 "a son honours his father and a servant his master." This of course

is the natural God given order of things. He takes it as a given that of course “a son honours his father and a servant his master.” And we might put it this way today ‘a son honours his father and an employee his employer’. Now when we put it this way it's very confronting isn't it. We need to be people who are always going to work hard and honestly; not merely when the boss is there but always as though he *were* there. And our reason for doing so is simple: because we are seeking to honour God with our labour and indeed our whole lives! So it doesn't matter who is there or who is not there when we work because God is *always* there. And the Bible tells us that no matter what we do, we do it for the glory of God. Yes without question this is how it should be.

But of course, very often this is not how it is. Because very often children do not honour their parents. And workers: well, they may feel they should get as much as possible for doing as little as possible. (At least that is what the world says today) And yet that is not what the Bible teaches: that we should honour God with the whole of our lives. Surely that is the point which He is making here. ‘You profess to be My People and yet in reality you don't know me at all.’ “If I am a father where is the honour due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?” ‘I am short changed, I am robbed by you on all accounts’, God is saying. ‘You pay me no honour. You give me no respect. As though I were not a father and not a master to you. If I were but an earthly father or an employer surely you would give me these things. And yet I am eternally so much more. But contempt and lip service are all that you pay me!’

So I guess beloved, we must ask ourselves ‘what do I bring to God? Yes what do I offer within my body and soul as my signs of devotion? As my signs of devotion to this God that I claim to worship? Do I honour God with my lips but not with my substance? Yes, do I offer up my words but not my time and my finances? When life is crashing down around me and I'm lost, to whom do I run? Where do I turn?’ You see the answers to these questions are all indicative of whether or not we can feel the words of the old hymn: “God is my strength and my refuge my ever present help in trouble. Therefore I will not fear, though the earth should change.”

Again, can you see what God is doing here in our Malachi passage? He is confronting the Israelites, and you and I as well, with the question; ‘Where is the evidence of your devotion? You receive all of your good things from My Hand, and yet with *what*, and indeed *how* do you repay Me?’ And now He strikes (as Jesus would do many times), at the religious elite. Or perhaps we might say today, the religiously privileged. This is very important for us to understand in Australia today, because although we might not be priests in the Old Testament sacrificial sense, we certainly are in this country people of tremendous religious privilege and freedom. And indeed we are called “a kingdom of Priests” We have such abundant access to the Word of God. Yes, we are the religiously privileged so to speak. There are bibles everywhere on offer if we would but pick them up and read them. “It is you oh priests who show contempt for my name.” So those who should have been leaders, who should have been the examples to lead others in the ways of God, *were* leaders, but they were the leaders of wickedness and lip service.

And yet again as God answers for them they deny their actions. “But you ask ‘how have we shown content for your name?’” And He continues “you place defiled food on my altar.” Now we need to remind ourselves what the sacrificial system was all about. When the Old Testament people of God transgressed (or broke his laws) as set out in the book of Leviticus, there were set requirements spelled out for each and every sin which was committed, whatever they may be. So bread, wine, grain, birds or animals were to be offered up as sacrifices, to make payment or restitution for those trespasses or breakages of God's Law. And when it came to the animals with regard to sin, (and this is very important for us to understand), every animal had to be in perfect health. Not sick, not diseased, not blind, not three legged, not of mixed colours. Or in other words, these animals had to

be pure! Now not that an animal can be impure, it can't sin: it's an animal. But to look at it with regards to health and colour it must be perfect. And for very good reason. These things all pointed to Jesus, that spotless Lamb of God! 1 Peter 1:17-19 "Since you call on a father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."

Brothers and sisters: never, and I repeat never, could any animal ever pay for any human sin, no matter how insignificant we may think it to be. And remember, one sin (without Christ), will cast us into hell! Romans 3:12 "for all have turned away; they have together become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one." And also Romans 3:23 "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." So for those priests then, with full knowledge of the significance of those sacrifices (although they didn't know as we do that those things pointed to Jesus), to treat the table of the Lord in such a manner and with such contempt, was to, in effect, spit into the very face of God! Remember, this was the means by which they made atonement for sin, as God had prescribed.

So two things become very clear here. If they had such contempt for those sacrifices which had been painstakingly prescribed by Him, they obviously had contempt for God Himself. And if those sacrifices meant nothing to them, then neither did their sin!

"You place defiled food on my altar but you ask, 'how have we defiled you?'. By saying that the Lord's table is contemptible." And this had been a problem for the Israelites for over 1000 years. Numbers 11:4-6 "The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, 'If only we had meat to eat. We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost; also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite, we never see anything but this manna.'" So it is no wonder that they had such contempt for God's sacrifices, when the very bread which He sent down from heaven to sustain them in the wilderness they had so despised. And of course, that is also what they would do with Jesus, who was the True Bread who came down from heaven. Yes the Real Bread to which all of those other sacrifices pointed!

John 6:44 -51 "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, they will all be taught by God. Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from Him comes to me. No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God, only he has seen the Father. I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the Manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven, if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world."

So again I say that those religiously privileged ones, those 'so called' teachers, those grand poobahs of their day, had contempt, not only for God's table and sacrifices, but ultimately they had contempt for God Himself! Look at what He says in verse 8: "when you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrificed crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor, would he be pleased with you?" says the Lord Almighty."

I've already mentioned more than once why such things were so wrong in the sight of God: because they placed such a foul stain upon the cross of Jesus. But secondly, something which is also of tremendous importance to us, (and I say this respectfully Lord) is that those things were a clear indication and reflection upon the heart of the giver. In this case (Malachi chapter 1) those priests

who were the administrators of God's Justice at His Altar and Table!! "Is that not wrong?" "Is that not wrong?" God says. So they are confronted with the truth of their actions. Do they actually think that such things have been hidden from God? How clear it is that, as a whole, they have nothing of God in their hearts. These priests have become nothing but glorified butchers. And the significance of all that they were doing (supposedly in the name of God), was nothing but a distant memory to them. Were it presented to their governor, God's own appointed servant, they would not dare to be so lacking in their duties. Yet to God himself, a 'who cares' attitude? 'He doesn't really know what's going on down here anyway.'

But how wrong they were! Even a small bird does not fall to the ground anywhere in the world without Him knowing and authorising it. Brothers and sisters, we can be like that can't we? We can call ourselves Christians and yet live our lives as though God is way out in the universe, and not impacting or relevant to our lives at all. We can talk about heaven and yet live in a manner as though it isn't real at all. Even as though it was some kind of fairy story.

But here is the question for us this morning: Romans 12:1-2 says "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, His good, pleasing and perfect will." In light of this then what am I actually offering up to God within my soul, my life, my body and my substance, upon that spiritual altar on which Jesus suffered and died for me? Am I offering up my all to Him? This One whom I call my Saviour and my God? Am I seeking to honour Him with my substance as well as my lips? Praying, 'here I am Lord, do with me as you see fit. Use all of me for your glory Lord. Everything I am and have is yours.' Or is my life full of metaphorical blind and diseased animals? Does my life consist of a lukewarm sickly nothingness, that I called Christianity? Yes, am I dead spiritually? Is there nothing, yes are there no marks which distinguish me and my life from the rest of the world, who don't even know Jesus?

Beloved these are the questions: is my faith in God, His Son, and His Spirit real or not? For these priests it was simply a way of making a living, it was a good career move. Because it was better than digging ditches, hauling rocks, or begging for a living. Life was easy, life was comfortable and warm and cosy, and that was their problem. And Beloved, for us that is the danger in this modern western world in which we live!

Again, Romans 12:1 "therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship."

Let's pray.