



When Disaster Strikes

Reflections on Malachi

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When Misfortune Happens

Introduction to Malachi

Do you sometimes feel discouraged? Maybe bitterly depressed? Maybe someone or something disappointed you. Or are you disillusioned by a respected leader who also has weaknesses or by someone you have always trusted? Maybe you just feel dissatisfied with the price of fuel, the cost of living - just about everything! Or are you perhaps sceptical about what life can offer you?

Then maybe it's now the time to read the book of Malachi, because Malachi was written specifically for people who are disillusioned about things that did not work out for them as they would like. This is especially for people who have become discouraged.

After all, things are not always the way you expect them to be. You sit blissfully in a job

where things are going well for you and you truly have job satisfaction and then the boss comes one day and drops the bomb that the company is sinking and that you have lost your job.

Or maybe one day you find out that your spouse was unfaithful to you and suddenly your whole world around you collapses. Or your children, for whom you had such high expectations, will disappoint you when they get involved with the wrong friends and fall into the clutches of drugs or get involved in crime.

When such things happen, our first question is usually, “How could God have allowed this? Where is God then that He could not have stopped it?”

Then you may feel as if God has disappointed you! You expected more from Him and now it is not happening!

When you feel that way, then you also know how the people felt in the time of Malachi.

They were bitterly disappointed in God and they asked the question, "Where is God then?"

When the rebuilding of the temple began after the exile in 515 BC, there were great expectations among the people. They believed that the Lord would intervene in the world and that this would be the beginning of great things for Judah.

However, none of this happened! All they got were exhausting droughts that caused them one failed harvest after another. And where there was still a bit of a crop, the pests and plagues also devoured it!

The people were discouraged. A great depression descended upon them. Many people began to doubt whether the Lord ever loved them. Is He ever involved with His people?

When was Malachi written? We are not very sure, but it must have been somewhere between 515 AD and 458 AD. Although it is

the last book in the Old Testament, it was by no means the last to be written. Books like Daniel were first written long after Malachi. Malachi wrote this book at a time when the world was dominated by the Persian Empire. The famous (or perhaps infamous?) King Darius and his successor Xerxes, of whom so much has been written, were at the helm of affairs.

What did the social conditions of the people look like? Judah had a population of about 50,000 people after the temple was completed. We must remember that the people no longer had independence and therefore no king. However, a governor was appointed to rule Judah on behalf of the Persians. In the time of Haggai and Zechariah, it was Zerubbabel, a descendant of David. In Malachi's time, however, Judah was ruled by an unknown person. And to put the cherry on the cake, the administrative seat was moved from Jerusalem to Samaria. It was indeed a slap in the face to any racially pure Israelite!

Judah did not sit around the same fire as the Samaritans. They were enemies! And on their south side again were the Edomites, who also gave the Jews a hard time.

On a social level things did not go well with the people of Judah. Divorce was the order of the day, as were marriages to women of pagan descent. People exploited each other just where they could.

In the spiritual realm things went even worse. People became sceptical of God and His promises. As already mentioned, the people expected great things from God after they rebuilt the temple. But when nothing happened, the people began to become very lax on a spiritual and religious level.

The question that each of us should ask today is: what should I do when things are not working out for me? What is the normal reaction when you lose your job or your business goes bankrupt? Or if your spouse or children disappoint you?

The first reaction is usually to turn your back on God and your fellow man. To get angry at God and your friends who are trying to support you spiritually.

People like Paul and Peter are examples of how we should and can handle such things. Over the next few weeks, Malachi also wants to show us what is the right way to approach those lows. I myself have been through some such lows in my life and I personally look forward to what Malachi wants to teach us.

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for a book like Malachi. Holy Spirit, please open my heart and spiritual eyes to recognize Your answers to the questions.

Conversation with God

Malachi 1: 1

Who really wrote the book of Malachi?

"But of course the prophet Malachi!" is our first reaction.

But then we read the first verse in the book: "A prophecy. This is the word of the LORD unto Israel by Malachi."

Let us now again ask the question: "Who is the real author?"

People like Luke and Timothy were in fact the people who wrote Paul's letters. But who was the author of the letters? Undoubtedly Paul and not the people who did the writing.

In the same way we can say that the prophet Malachi did do the physical writing, but in the very first verse he declares that he was only the mouthpiece of the Lord.

What applies to the book of Malachi also applies to the other books of the Bible. God (the Holy Spirit) used several writers to write the Bible. This does not mean that the Lord dictated word for word and the people only had to write what He said. God did put thoughts in the writers' hearts and then they put them in writing as they interpreted or understood the thoughts.

Each writer's background, circumstances, and scholarship influenced the way he wrote. For example, the highly educated Paul's writings were very complicated, so that even a man like Peter sighed that Paul's letters were difficult to understand. On the other hand again, we have a simple farmer like Amos who wrote against the background of his experiences as a farmer.

James wrote against the background of his strict Jewish upbringing and his love for the law and all the Jewish customs with which he grew up, things that were precious to him.

The fact is that God uses people, people with

their own views to convey the message of God to other ordinary people.

Often books are compiled by a whole panel of authors who take a bunch of legends and narratives that have often been passed down from generation to generation over thousands of years. They then put all the narratives together to form a book. Examples of this are Genesis, Samuel, Kings etc. The stories are then sometimes written down on paper for the first time thousands of years after the events. Another example is Isaiah, written over a period of 400 years by various writers, including the prophet Isaiah.

The great miracle, however, is that when we read the Bible as a whole, we are amazed at the unity of it all. How have hundreds of writers with just as many backgrounds managed to bring about such an amazing unity, where the message of God runs like a golden thread through everything, from beginning to end? And on top of that, the writing covers a number of different forms of writing such as stories, history, prophetic

works, poetry, eschatology, education, law books, personal letters and much more.

The answer is simple: The Bible actually has only one Author: the Holy Spirit!

The same is true of Malachi. The true Author is God the Holy Spirit.

We really know nothing about the author, except that the name Malachi means "My Messenger". Was that the author's name? Or was it just an official title he used to say he was God's messenger? We simply do not know.

Man disappears, as it were, behind the message he preaches. But the message is so important that it has become part of the Word of God.

The book is addressed to Israel. But in reality it is, like the other books in the Bible, a timeless writing, which means that it is addressed not only to Israel 2500 years ago, but also to the new Israel today, you and I, the modern Christian -believers.

In this book, God begins a dialogue with the people and all the readers. There is dialogue, in other words, God speaks and the people listen and answer. And then again the people speak, and God listens and answers. Throughout Malachi we find this two-way conversation between God and the people.

The question you and I need to ask ourselves today is whether there is still such a dialogue, a two-way conversation between me and God? Is the Bible just an interesting book when I read it? Or maybe one where I seek messages from God to me? Or do I read with wonder and converse with God when I read?

And when I pray, is it just a wish list that I come to lay at God's feet? Or is it really a dialogue between me and God? Let us reconsider our relationship with God's Word and our prayer life.

Prayer:

Lord, reform my mind when I read Your word

and when I pray. Open my ears to hear Your voice.

God Loves You Dearly!

Malachi 1: 2-5

The first few verses of Malachi shock you because there are contradictions made and uncomfortable things said. In verse 2 God comes with a declaration of love: "I love you very much."

But in the same breath He says that His people ask in unbelief: "But Lord, how do You love us then?" This is therefore not a question in amazement about the Lord's great love for them, but a question with a bitter, acid taste in the mouth.

Today we ask: "Lord, I do not see Your love! Do You really love us? What about all the violence going on in the world? What about the senseless war in Ukraine? What about the innocent people who were just slaughtered in cold blood in Soweto this past weekend? The cruel farm murders and the innocent children who are raped and

murdered almost daily? Where is Your love Lord?"

We often doubt His love: "What about all the pain and misery? What about the terrible poverty in so many countries? What about Covid who cut millions? What about all the abused women and children? And the injustice? Lord, I see so little of Your love! Can you understand why I began to doubt Your love?"

These stressful questions are often asked, not by unbelievers but by Christian believers. God's own people!

Then the Lord answers with a declaration of love. He reassures His people of His great love for them, even if they sometimes doubt and even if they often stumble.

The Lord's love is first and foremost embodied in the contract He has made with us as believers. He drew up this contract early in history and then He made it known to Adam for the first time. He renewed the

contract or covenant numerous times, including with Noah and Abraham. The final form of His contract is manifested in Jesus. God's love for us is therefore not a young love but dates back to the very earliest ancient history. God has loved us for a long time already!

Malachi quotes the history of Jacob to explain something of God's love. Jacob was not an angel. His name refers to the kind of life he would lead: heel grabber, deceiver! He steals his brother's birthright and his blessing. He is unloving towards his wife. He deceives his father.

Despite this, God does not write off Jacob and He never leaves him. He remains loving to Jacob and He confirms the promises He made to his grandfather Abraham.

This sinful life of his must remind the people of their own sinful life. From the earliest times of Israel's existence as a nation, their lives were marked by sin. Moses had hardly lead them out of Egypt when the lamenting and

whining began. Moses was still getting the law from God, when the people were already falling into idolatry when they made a golden calf.

And in spite of this, God never writes off the people. He does not just leave them to their own devices, but He is concerned about them and He tries in many ways (sometimes drastically) to get them on the right path.

When we read this passage in Malachi, there is something that does not immediately make sense. We read that God loved Jacob, but He hated Esau. Now we ask the question: How can we say that God is love if He hates Esau? And what about Joh. 3:16 where He declares that He loves the whole world?

We must remember that the Lord is making a declaration of love here to Israel, Jacob's descendants. So the focus is on Israel. So great is God's love for this people that His relationship with Esau can be described in contrast as hatred. We see His love very clearly in Jacob's life. God carries him

through everything despite the fact that Jacob stumbles so often.

1700 years later, when the new church of Jesus is established, we still see God's love in spite of the weaknesses of the church. And over the next two thousand years, the church grows by leaps and bounds to where it is today in every corner of the globe. Indeed, the church did not always do what God asked of him. Sometimes the church got completely off track. In the Middle Ages, for example, the church killed and exterminated nations in the Name of God during the Crusades. Often the church acted extremely unlovingly.

Despite this, God still loves His people, the church very much. And you and I are part of His church.

We must also remember: God hates Edom, the descendants of Esau. What does it mean? Edom symbolizes the forces that oppose God, in other words those who reject Jesus' love. John 3:16 however, declares

unequivocally that God loves the whole world, so much so that He gave His Son, even to those who are His enemies! So everyone is included in God's immeasurable love! However, there is a condition that they repent and accept God's love in Jesus.

Prayer:

Lord, thank You for Your great love, also towards me with all my shortcomings, Lord, I love You very much too!

A Father-Child Relationship

Malachi 1: 6-14

A boy has respect for his father and of course a slave respects his master! In Malachi's time, that was certainly always the case - it was simply no different! Then God asks the question: "If I am a father, where is the respect that belongs to Me? If I am the Supreme Lord, where is the awe of Me? "

Today the Lord can ask us this question with so much more seriousness, because often the respect for God Almighty disappears completely, even among believers! How often have you not heard someone disrespectfully speak of God as "The Old Man up there". I want to cringe with pain when I hear a believer say such a thing!

But this is really just the tip of the hippo's ears, because this passage in Malachi is actually about a religious practice that has totally lost respect for God.

Let us ask the question, "What does it mean to believe in Jesus?" Is it just to believe that He died for my sins and that I now have eternal life?

We can then unequivocally answer: "Of course not! It will surely go much deeper than that!" Faith in Jesus means that my life has completely changed and that I am now in a relationship with Him. Malachi describes it beautifully as a Father-child relationship and that is exactly how it should be. In a true father-child relationship, the child is totally dependent on his father. But there is also that bond of love between them. A good father will sacrifice his life for his child. But the child will also live out love for his father and treat him with great awe and respect.

If a boy were to say to his father, "Hey Old Man, how about some money for ice cream?" any right-thinking father would be very annoyed with him for such arrogance!

However, when there is a good relationship, the boy will grab his father around neck, hug

him and say, "I love you so much, Daddy!" and when the subject of ice cream comes up, he will ask, "Please Daddy, can I have some ice cream, please?"

Do you see the difference in tone of voice? Do you see the difference in the relationship?

However, Malachi also uses a second image, that of a slave and his master. Indeed, we are not only children of the Father, but we are also His property just as a slave belonged to his owner. However, there is a very big difference, because this "Owner" bought us very expensively, with the life of His Son. We are therefore extremely precious to Him in the first place.

However, he is also very different from the owners of that time. He is not the often unapproachable and cruel owner of Malachi's time, but the Owner who cherishes and cares for His property with great love.

However, it requires this "property" to carry out the instructions of the Owner. A slave

would not have dared to say to his master, "Oh no, I'm not going to do what you ask." It would be disobedient, disrespectful and arrogant and it would certainly have meant great trouble for him!

If you and I are God's property, then why would we refuse to do what He asks of us? And especially if it's an Owner who cares and does as much for us as the Lord does? If He asks a simple thing from us, such as sharing the Gospel message with a colleague or friend, then why are we so slow to obey it?

Yes, often we are obedient to the Lord and carry out the instructions He gives us, but we do it half-heartedly and only the most necessary.

Malachi describes here how the people dealt with sacrifices to the Lord. The people did not bring their best animals as the Lord asked, but those that were worth nothing to them. With that they wanted to say to the Lord: "Behold, we bring sacrifices!" But they were really just trying to please the Lord so that He

would do things for them. And the priests were actually no better, because they also did only the most essential, their work only and nothing more.

The Lord has no pleasure in such sacrifices.

How often have you not felt that when you ask someone to complete a task for you, that the person does it so half-heartedly that you want to say to him: "Oh, please just leave it! I'd rather do it myself!"

The Lord may often feel this way about us. He does not need our half-hearted efforts. "From where the sun rises to where it sets, my name is great among the nations," says the Lord to the people. If they do not honour Him properly, they should know that He is anyway honoured by thousands of other people. Then they should rather leave it!

The Lord asks of you and me all or nothing. Today we need to decide if we really have a Father-child relationship with the Lord and if that relationship might be distorted. If there is

something wrong with my relationship with God, then now is the time for me to remedy it. This means that I regain the necessary respect for the Lord that truly belongs to Him. And that I will fully do what He asks of me.

Prayer:

Lord, I stand deeply guilty before You this morning. Please help me to rectify my relationship with You.

Priests

Malachi 2: 1-9

Do not try to be in the Lord's service unless you are willing to fully accept the responsibility that comes with it.

This pericope is about the priests. What was their main function? Malachi sums it up with the words, "To honour My Name." Priesthood was about bringing glory to God Almighty and their whole task was interwoven around this single commission. However, according to the statements in Malachi, they could by no means succeed in honouring God with their actions.

In the previous section we saw that the sacrifices to the Lord were often made very half-heartedly, only to please the Lord. In fact, it got much worse, because in Malachi 1:12 we see how the altar of God was desecrated and the sacrifices were treated with contempt by the priests. The reverence

and respect for God was completely lacking and there was no longer any real recognition of God as the Lord.

God's holy name was therefore in jeopardy, so the Lord told them that He would bring a curse on them. There would be no descendants for them and the end of their priesthood was inevitable.

And then the Lord says that He would rub the dung of the sacrificial animals in their faces. "Oh no! Yuck!" we want to respond immediately. For these priests, however, it was much worse, because it would mean that their purity would be compromised. Getting confused with the dung of animals made you unclean and so you were no longer fit for service in the temple.

But it goes even further: They will be carried away together with the dung! Because they are now incapable of performing temple service, they are carried outside the sanctuary to the place that is only good enough to dispose of animals' dung. What a

humiliating experience for someone who once enjoyed only the highest respect and prestige of the people.

In the next few verses, the Lord tells the priests what the original requirements were for their office. The relationship between priests and the Lord was such a close one that it was in fact seen as a covenant relationship. This meant that they could have a life filled with the blessing of the Lord and that they could live in harmony and peace with God.

It was expected of a priest to have a great knowledge of God and His will for the people. And then he had to pass this knowledge on to the people and their doctrine of God and His will for the people. A priest was then also called a messenger of the Lord. However, such things could only happen when there was a true living relationship between the priest and the Lord. When all these things were in place, the people could look up to the priest and this would also result in people giving up their sins.

These priests who were addressed by Malachi, however, stood in stark contrast to the ideal image of a priest. Instead of leading the people on the right path, they themselves went astray and caused the people to fall. They totally chose the wrong path! There was no question of that wonderful, genuine relationship that must have existed between the priest and God. Where they were expected to teach the people, they rather led the people over the abyss!

They have violated the precious covenant God made with them! And now the people have lost their respect and regard for the priests. Exactly what they did to the Lord, these priests now experienced themselves!

Is this passage specifically addressed to the pastors today? No, it is addressed to every believer, because just as the priests at that time had the task of communicating the Word of God reliably to the people, so every believer today has the task of bringing the Word to others.

Priests at that time had to bring about reconciliation between God and the people and so it is also the believer's task today to bring about reconciliation between God and his fellow-man.

Exactly the same ideal that applied to the priests also applies to you and me. We must also stand in a close relationship with the Lord and serve Him with reverence and awe. We must have the same authenticity that applied to the priests at that time.

Unfortunately, this is more than often not the case, and most of us (myself included) are guilty before the Lord because of our laxity and even disrespect to God.

I want to challenge you to make a special effort to get your relationship with the Lord in such a way as it will please Him. Let us begin today to work on spreading the Word in every possible way. You can start by distributing these daily passages or sending me addresses or phone numbers of people who have not yet received the daily passages.

Prayer:

Lord, please help me to make my relationship with You a living one and to carry out my priestly duties with enthusiasm and zeal.

Faithful in Marriage

Malachi 2: 10-16

This morning's passage is about a very sensitive matter, one that has brought much pain and sorrow into virtually every believer's life. It's about marriage. No, it is not the marriage that brings pain and sorrow, but when a marriage goes awry that these things happen. Malachi addresses this issue without mincing matters.

The prophet begins with an introduction where he makes the statement that we all have only one Father and that we are all created by one God. And then he asks the question: "Why then are we unfaithful to one another and desecrating the covenant made with our ancestors?"

This question is specifically addressed with marriage in mind.

Malachi mentions marital fidelity / infidelity in

the same breath as fidelity or infidelity to God.

The people's first mistake was that the men married women of a different faith. This is not about the differences between peoples or culture or even race, but about men who have taken wives with a different religion. This meant that husband worshipped God Almighty, while his wife worshiped some idol. In such a marriage, it is totally impossible to have a true unity, because how do you talk about matters that affect your faith? And what about the children? How are they taught who the true God is? The mother is going to teach them one thing and the father something completely different.

But it also made such a man permanently unclean, for he then lived with a heathen, an idolater. He then had to be forbidden to enter the temple and in fact he was strictly speaking not even entitled to come into contact with other Israelites.

Such marriages often still happen today,

where one spouse is a believer and the other is totally indifferent to the Lord or even worships idols. People come crying on my shoulder several times over the bitter pain that such a marriage causes. There is no support on the part of the unbelieving spouse and often she is even mocked and despised for her religious beliefs.

Usually such a marriage also ends in divorce, because reconciliation is totally impossible. I've heard so often that a girl in love says she'll convert the man in her life. She will lead him to other insights. However, this almost never happens and a year or two later the poor woman is bitterly disillusioned.

The great sadness is further that such a relationship can also have a very detrimental effect on your relationship with the Lord. Where there should be a relationship full of joy and gladness and fullness with God, it is now one where you are constantly crying before God. It feels like the Lord is not listening to your plea and not noticing your tears. Your prayer time is taken up by heavy

sighs rather than praise and worship. Eventually you even drift away from God.

The second issue that Malachi touches is one that has become a feature of our lives today: divorce.

Malachi emphasizes the bond with which marriage connects two people. It is a bond forged when the two people solemnly promised allegiance to each other. What makes the bond holy is the fact that the Lord was called as a witness when the bond was forged (verse 14). We dare not underestimate this marriage bond!

One of the main causes of a divorce is infidelity. Just listen to how harshly Malachi states this evil: "Do not be unfaithful to the woman you married when you were young. Because he hates divorce, says the Lord, the God of Israel. Such a person surrounded him by force." (verses 15b & 16)

Wow! These are harsh words! God hates divorce! Divorce is violence! And what

applies to the man, of course, also applies to the woman today.

Divorce and infidelity are, on the transcendent stage, the breaking of the commandment of love, the greatest commandment in the law. In the first place, it is lovelessness against your spouse, the one with whom the love bond should be at its strongest. But it is also lovelessness towards God, because He was called as a witness during your marriage confirmation and now His testimony is being trampled into the ground.

But there are further implications, because the children get badly hurt during a divorce or infidelity and so do the other family and friends. In addition, the church suffers damage because a divorce also has a ripple effect on the immediate society and how the unbelievers see the church when members act unlovingly.

This passage probably speaks the strongest of all in the Bible about divorce. Let's

remember that!

Prayer:

Lord, please help me to keep my marriage pure and full of love and faithfulness.

The Angel of the Covenant Comes

Malachi 2: 17-3: 5

Malachi begins this pericope with a heavy sigh: "You weary the Lord with your words!" We can almost translate it with: "Oh, keep quiet, you are bothering the Lord!"

What a terrible thing to say! But what was it about? They were embittered and they made allegations that the Lord actually prefers the bad people and that they, His people, who are actually the good people, should suffer! It is bitterly unjust of the Lord! Then they ask, "Where is the God who judges then?"

Oh, we hear that same judging question every day! And then there are usually no simple answers at all. We are so quick to blame the Lord when things do not go right. We look at the Lord with very critical eyes, but we keep ourselves blind to the things in our own lives.

Malachi taps the people over the fingers about their arrogant attitude towards God.

But then the Lord makes an announcement: "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he will prepare a way before me." Who is this "messenger"? There are two statements, probably John the Baptist, the "wayfarer". However, it can also point to Jesus.

This was a very famous image at that time and the Israelites knew exactly what it meant. When a king visited a particular city, there was a great commotion to clear the way for him. All the stones had to be removed and great effort was made because the roads were seen as a symbol of the king's power. A whole team of diplomats was sent in advance to ensure that all his accommodation arrangements, his program schedule, protocol arrangements, receptions etc. were planned and prepared in the finest detail.

So this messenger, or the Angel of the Covenant, is then the "delegate" who must go and do the preparatory work for the

coming of the Lord, the Almighty.

It's so interesting when we go to look at exactly how these preparations happened physically, perhaps in a totally different way than one would expect. Just think of the following, for example:

At the time this book was written, Israel was a totally insignificant little nation that did not even have their own government. They spoke a language that was not understood anywhere else in the world.

But then a few things happen: Alexander the Great's rise causes the entire known world to take notice of the Greek language and culture. It is also being forced on Palestine. Eventually, even the Bible (Old Testament) was translated into Greek. And it is this Bible that Paul uses on his missionary journeys. So all the peoples he deals with can understand when he quotes from the Bible and preaches to them. Greek became the common language in which people could communicate around the world.

After the Greeks came the Romans. They built and maintained an extensive network of roads so that places that were previously inaccessible became accessible. This greatly facilitated matters for the proclamation of the Gospel around the world.

Moreover, the whole world was part of the Roman Empire, which meant that national borders disappeared. Anyone was welcome in any country.

In a sense, exile also played a role in preparing for the coming of the Lord. Originally, the temple in Jerusalem was the only recognized place of worship for Jewish believers. During the exile, where people could not worship there because they were in foreign lands, the idea of setting up synagogues for worship began to emerge. This idea eventually spread worldwide, and if there were ten Jewish men in one place, a synagogue could be built.

During Paul's missionary journeys, he went to the synagogue in a city each time and

found a foothold in the gospel. From there it spread further to the gentiles.

But for the people of Israel, this preparatory work of the Angel of the Covenant was not easy: "But who can endure the coming of the Angel, who can endure when He appears?" asked Malachi.

This Covenant Angel had to do purifying work, and only a small handful of disciples eventually endured it. On the day of Pentecost, there were only 120 believers left, people who made it through the purification process. From this small core group grew the whole church of God. Already on the very first day it grew by a further 3000.

The Lord sometimes also does purifying work on me and you. As it was often a painful process for the first disciples, it is also usually painful for us. But accept the purification with great joy, for out of it only great things can grow. Work together when He points out sins in your life, and make work of them.

Prayer:

Lord, thank you for Your concern with me and considering me worthy for purifying me. Help me to accept it with joy.

Has God Changed?

Malachi 3: 6,7

The question arises: "Why are things going against us? Does the cause not lie with God? Did He not perhaps change? Maybe our dire circumstances, the economy, crime, petrol price, corruption etc. are precisely due to the fact that God is no longer the same!"

The Lord answers unequivocally in verse 6: "I, the Lord, have not changed." He conjures up this question that lies on many people's minds, not only today, but also in Malachi's time.

And then the Lord explains in verse 7 that for a long time they have not lived as He expects them to: "Since the time of your ancestors you have departed from my precepts and have not kept them."

If we go through the history books of Israel for a moment, we see that they had hardly

left Egypt, when the lamenting had already echoed through the desert. A few weeks after the exodus began, they were already building an idol, and that while Moses was receiving the law from God!

So small was their trust in this Almighty God, who gave them food daily from heaven, and performed numerous miracles, that they finally refused to enter the promised land! They did not trust God enough! As a result, God was obligated to let them wander in the wilderness for 40 years until they were finally ready to trust Him.

Then there was great joy when they were finally able to enter the land that God had promised them. But they had hardly settled down, when they already forgot about God again! They worshipped idols, and did whatever God had asked them NOT to do. Just read the book of Judges, and you will see the refrain in almost every pericope: "The Israelites AGAIN did what was wrong in the eyes of the Lord!" Over and over we read it. Then the Lord intervened again, and they

repented, only to lap into sin again!

The reign of the king came, and a David came and tried to lead the people in the right direction. But the lax came again, and the people just started doing all the wrong things again. Idolatry was the greatest evil. When there was a king on the throne who served God, he led the people on the right path, but time and time again it was only of short duration, and then they were far away from God again!

The incomprehensible thing is that God had repeatedly forgiven them and raised them up. God's infinite mercy for this rebellious people was immeasurably great!

So great is His grace that He finally chose this same rebellious people to be the place where His Son would be born to do His great redemptive work.

And from this very nation the first witnesses emerge who were to spread the gospel message throughout the world.

Could there be greater love? Could there be greater grace?

When Malachi speaks to the people, they are in trouble again as usual. And then they lament.

God's simple answer to them in verse 7 is, "Return to Me, and I will return to you."

The amazing thing is that God still never gave up with the people. After numerous calls to repentance, the Lord once again begged them to come back to Him. He so much wanted them as His own people. His unchanging faithfulness was clearly visible here.

"How should we return?" the people asked in astonishment. "Then why do we have to repent now?"

As astonishing as God's great grace and patience was, just as astonishing and incomprehensible was the people's response to God's call.

Isn't that often the way we react today? Do we not often ask the same question? Everywhere we go we are conditioned to get along without God. We work, and at the end of the month there is a salary that pays for everything we need. Without God's help? We entertain friends, and God is not for one moment part of our conversation or our merriment. We go on holiday, and leave God at home!

We have become insensitive to a close, personal relationship with the Lord. The codes of conduct of the community prescribe to us an ethical code that makes us completely respectable citizens of society. Everyone dresses like that. Everyone talks like that. These swear words have so become the norm of life, and everyone uses them, so why should I be any different?

Is it still necessary for us to repent? I believe in Jesus, isn't that enough? The Bible teaches that if I believe in Jesus, then I am on the right path. Then I can do as I please, as long as I do not kill and steal, because

that is really bad!

To believe in Jesus means to be in a living relationship with Him. When there is such a relationship, there will be a daily conversion! Not to receive forgiveness again every time, but because I have already been forgiven. Then I will do what He asks of me, not to escape punishment or to receive a reward, but because He loves me, and I want to live out my gratitude towards Him in love.

Prayer:

Lord I love You very much. Thank You for Your great mercy.

My Tithe

Malachi 3: 8-12

This morning Malachi is once again stepping on a very sensitive corn, the giving of tithes.

Perhaps we should first look at what it meant for the Israelites of the Old Testament to give tithes. According to Deut. 14: 22-28 they had to bring tithes of their wheat, wine and oil as well as the first-born of their animals to the sanctuary. There they rejoiced with their families and the Levites in the presence of the Lord.

Every third year they had to give a full tithe of the year's proceeds to the Levites, strangers, orphans and widows. There was also a third "levy" where a tenth of the land's proceeds had to be dedicated to the Lord for the maintenance of the staff of the sanctuary.

By bringing tithes and offerings, the Israelites actually confessed that their total income

came from the Lord. Everything actually belongs to the Lord. So when someone gave his tithe, he did not give up anything that belonged to him, but he told the Lord that the 90% that he could keep also belonged to the Lord. However, out of grace, the Lord gave it to him to use.

So it's not about the 10% I give at all, but the 90% I get for my use. So the Lord does not ask for 10% of my money, but He gives 100%, and for that reason He can ask for 10% back!

Now we can perhaps better understand why the Lord declares in verse 8: "May a man steal from God? But you are stealing from me!" They selfishly seized everything they received from the Lord without giving anything back. And then they still innocently ask the question: "How do we rob You?"

By robbing God in this way, the people also robbed themselves. Because they did not give to the Lord what was due to Him, they robbed themselves of the blessing of the

Lord, and they experienced cursing instead.

In verse 9, Israel is called "the nation." Usually they were referred to as the "people", and all the other nations are called "nations". This is a subtle way of equating Israel with all the other Gentile nations when they rob the Lord in this way.

But actually God did not want to take away that blessing at all, and even less did He want to curse. In verses 10 and 11 we see how the Lord was ready to pour out His blessing on the people. Today He still wants to bless much rather than curse you and me!

We see here that the Lord invites us to take risks with Him. He invites us to dare to place our full trust in Him. He wants us to start thinking differently about what we have accumulated over the years, and will see it as God's property that He lends to us - property over which He has appointed us so that we can manage it on His behalf. It is often asked: "How do I calculate my tithe? Is it before or after deductions and taxes?" If

we're still at that point, then we have not yet realized what it's really about!

When we then begin to manage the Lord's property differently, we will also begin to experience the blessing of the Lord. "Bring the full tithe to the storeroom so that there can be food in my house. Test Me in this, whether I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out abundant blessings upon you." (verse 10)

However, we must be very careful not to abuse this passage of Scripture. We must thoroughly understand that we can never manipulate God to impose His blessing on us. If we do, then we do not understand the true meaning of the passage at all. When I live in a true relationship with the Lord, I try not to force Him to do things for me!

If you turn to the Lord, it is not a business transaction in which you calculate how much profit you are going to make from this! However, it is a way of life where you give unconditionally to the Lord in a true love

relationship. When you belong to Him, you also receive His rich blessing, not because of your beautiful deeds, but because He loves you.

This blessing can come to you in many different ways. One of the most wonderful ways is surely to be able to have true joy of life, joy that transcends all understanding. But it can also come to you in many other ways, even financially!

In the time of Malachi, people saw the blessing of God as enough rain in their near-desert world. They saw it in good harvests and the pests and plagues that stayed away from their lands so that they could have food on their tables. Blessing was therefore to them the provision of the necessities of life and certainly not luxuries.

Today we want to see God's blessing in a shiny car (or two) and a luxury home, or even a luxuries like a holiday overseas! Shouldn't we perhaps start thinking differently and see the Lord's rich blessing in the things we take

for granted? It is often only when we lose everything, that we begin to appreciate the simple things like a loaf of bread and a roof over our heads and see it as God's blessing.

Prayer:

Lord, please teach me what it means to truly give my tithe to You, and to appreciate Your blessing.

Does God Even Care?

Malachi 3: 13-18

Is it even worthwhile to serve the Lord sincerely? What will I benefit from it?

Shocked by such a question? Well, this question is asked daily, often even by believers who have become disappointed. "Religion has completely lost it's meaning!" we often hear.

In this pericope, the Lord begins through the pen of Malachi to make an accusation against the people: "You have said terrible things about me!"

"What have we said to one another about You?" they asked innocently.

"You said, 'It is completely useless to serve God!'

Today we might say, "I'm discouraged! I do

not know why I am still trying so hard to live right. I read my Bible every day and pray and every Sunday I attend a church service. And what do I get for it? Just suffering!"

Do you possibly feel that way sometimes?

"I do not understand the Lord!" you might say. "Just look at how the people thrive who live in sin! Those who rob the country with their corruption live in luxury. They drive shiny, luxury cars and live in palaces. But me? I who obey the law live in a shack and my old scrap car is already falling apart. Is the Lord now really righteous?"

It seems that there is no guarantee that you will flourish if you bring your side to God. And on the other hand, the people who are indifferent to Him only experience prosperity! Why do good things happen to bad people? And the bad with good people? People who rebel against the Lord are actually those who are happy, and those who challenge God come off unscathed! How does the righteousness of God match the

unrighteousness of life?

These are all questions and utterances that you have probably heard often, or perhaps uttered yourself. I can surely say that it is extreme audacity on our part to make such allegations against the Lord!

However, the Lord does not turn a deaf ear when people ask such questions. These questions, which believers also often ask, do not just pass by the Lord. He listens to the questions with a sympathetic ear, and in verse 16 we see that He noticed it. He heard it!

It may sometimes feel to you as if your prayers are hitting the ceiling. However, the Lord does hear your prayer! Every believer's thoughts and supplications are very important to the Lord.

Through the pen of Malachi, the Lord also answers the believers in the people. He gives them new courage, not only for the present, but also for the future. The names of those

who reverence the Lord are recorded in the "book of remembrance."

The Lord is certainly not uninvolved! He knows exactly what's going on, and He is involved with every believer. He knows your hardships, your insecurities and even your sceptical questions that you sometimes ask. These things certainly do not pass by Him, and therefore this book of remembrance.

The Lord emphasizes in verse 17 that they are a precious possession to Him. Have you heard what the Lord is saying? You are not just a number somewhere in the millions. You, a believer who has reverence for God, you are His precious possession, His "personal property!" Thus saith the Lord Almighty!

Wow!

We can see this "precious possession" in the same light as a girl who receives a very precious engagement ring from her fiancé. She cherishes it and shows it to everyone

she meets. She's excited about it and it's the most precious thing she's ever received. And this is how the Lord feels about me and you.

We may be suffering now, but the Lord sees our suffering, and there will come a day when He will intervene, "The day when I act." (verse 17). Elsewhere in the Old Testament, reference is made to "the day of the Lord", the day of God's judgment. The Israelites believed that only the other nations would be judged on that day, and that they would be delivered from all the other nations.

Here, however, a somewhat different picture is painted: God's judgment is also on Israel! He judges only between the wicked and those who serve Him.

According to the New Testament, this means for us today that there will be judgment between those who believe in Jesus and the unbelievers.

From today's Scripture passage it is very clear that God loves us very much, like a

father his son (verse 17), and that He cares a lot for you and me. He hears every sigh of your heart, even if it sometimes does not feel like it. Remember what He said in Mal. 1: 2 - "I love you, says the Lord."

Prayer:

Lord, thank You that I can be comforted once again today by Your wonderful love. Thank you for caring for me.

The Day of the Lord

Malachi 4: 1-3

In Malachi 4:1 we read the disturbing words: "The day will come that all evil people will burn like straw!"

"Hell is a myth!" I have often heard this statement. Or they make frivolous jokes about "old Nick's place." Malachi describes the "Day of the Lord" as it is often called in the Old Testament. He tells of God's judgment but at the same time also of His salvation. In other words, good news for the believer but bad news for the unbeliever.

We mentioned in the previous devotion that the Israelites believed that the Lord would come on this day to deliver Israel from all their enemies. All the suffering would change when God came to intervene and condemn all the other nations.

But now comes the shocking news for this

people: "On that day they will burn up, and there will be nothing left of them."

Wow! What a shock! And they thought they were safe just because they were Israelites!

But what does this tell us today? This statement applies not only to Israel, but to every human being. And the day of the Lord is a reality. The punishment for someone who rebels against God is terrible! This is something no one ever wants to experience.

Now I already hear: "But I am not in rebellion against God. And I try hard to live right

Everyone knows John 3:16, which says that God so loved the world that He gave His Son so that people might have eternal life. In John 3:18, however, there are the shocking words: "He who does not believe has already been condemned because he does not believe in the only Son of God."

This judgment of which John speaks is the very same "Day of the Lord."

Many people might say, “But I do believe in Jesus! I have been taught of Him since I was a child, and I have been believing all these years.”

The Israelites almost all believed in God, but few of them would survive the Day of the Lord. Why? For exactly the same reason that Satan will not survive that day, even if he believes in God. He knows that God is a reality, but there is no question that he would ever have a living relationship with God. Exactly the same was true for many of the Israelites. Although they believed that God was a reality, they never got around to truly being in a relationship with Him.

Abraham was an example of someone who was truly in a relationship with God. Yes, he was also a fallible man with sins, but He knew God, and He lived in a relationship with God.

The same is true today for those of us who are in the “New Dispensation”. To simply believe that God is the Creator who made

everything and that Jesus died on the cross means absolutely nothing. There are many people today who make all the right noises. They are in church every Sunday and they give their tithes and read the Bible and pray. But they are still lost!

However, believing in Jesus is about having a living relationship with Him. There must be an encounter with Him where He comes into your life. When that happens, there is a total change in your life.

Malachi describes it so beautifully in verse 2, where he says that for such a person "the sun of righteousness will break through with healing in it's rays." And the reaction to this? "Then you will go out and leap like calves that were in the stable."

Have you seen all the exuberance of such a calf, early in the morning when the stable gate opens? There is no end to his silliness. Joy of life bubbles in him. He capers around exuberantly.

Exactly the same goes for someone who has experienced God's acquittal. His joy is bubbling. He simply cannot remain silent about what happened to him. An encounter with Jesus is surely the greatest thing that can ever happen to any human being.

However, that encounter is only the beginning, because now you are starting to build a relationship with Jesus. You have now received His acquittal, but you want to know more and more about Him (Bible reading) and you want to do things for Him (live out love) and talk to Him (prayer). It's exactly like in a marital relationship. You marry and your heart wants to caper and just pump chocolate. But it does not end there, does it? Now the real relationship begins, and you cannot get enough of each other, and you are looking for an opportunity to chat. And the love affair grows stronger as the years go by. Exactly the same thing should happen in your relationship with Jesus.

When that relationship with Jesus is in place, the "Day of the Lord" will not be a day of

terror for you, but one you look forward to with great longing.

Prayer:

Lord, I look forward to Your Great Day. My prayer is that everyone who reads this passage, and who have not yet met You, will be reconciled to You today.

Eli Will Return

Malachi 4: 4-6

The last pericope in Malachi begins where the Lord presses on the people to remember the law He gave to His servant Moses on Mount Horeb.

Here the Lord takes the people's thoughts back to the birth of the people of Israel. This nation had its origin the day Moses led them out of Egypt. And from day one, breathtaking things happened to the people here. There was the pillar of cloud and fire that protected them from the beginning and gave them guidance. After that, that epic journey through the Reed Sea where they could walk through dryfoot, and the Egyptians who pursued them, that all drowned.

Then came the big highlight, Horeb. At Mount Horeb, or Sinai, God gives Moses the law in the form of the Ten Commandments. Here too, the covenant with the people is

concluded, the contract with which the Lord has committed Himself to Israel.

However, the law, or "Torah", became much more than just the Ten Commandments. The word literally means: teaching or instruction. The Torah of Moses was therefore God's teaching to His people. Just as the pillar of cloud indicated the direction of the ancient Israelites through the wilderness, so the Torah also had to indicate direction to them in life. It was by no means meant to be a heavy burden to them, but rather a joy! That is why they had to meditate day and night according to Ps. 1:119.

However, it was much more than just thinking about or reciting the Ten Commandments by heart. It had to be lived out with joy.

The Torah was ultimately a voluminous piece of work that contained elongated lists of laws on sacrifices, feasts, and laws of purity. Most of these rituals were shadow laws that pointed to Jesus, and that were fulfilled with His coming.

With His coming, Jesus made the "New Torah" very easy for us today. He asks of us only two things: To love God and to love our fellow-man. So remembering the law today means that we will live these two things with joy with all our heart, soul and mind.

And if we may not quite know how to do that, then there are the numerous guidelines throughout the New Testament that spell it out for us. The best known of these is probably 1 Cor. 13, where Paul describes what love should look like.

Malachi closes the pericope by saying that the Lord declares that He would send Elijah before the Day of the Lord comes.

Why Elijah? You will remember that Elijah was the great prophet of whom we read in the books of Kings. Now he is mentioned here in the same breath as Moses. This is of great significance because there is great similarity between these two remarkable Bible figures of the Old Testament. Moses and Elijah both had an encounter with God

on Mount Horeb. Moses called the people together at Mount Sinai (Horeb). Elijah gathered the people together at Mount Carmel. Moses and Elijah both built an altar of twelve stones. In Lev. 9:23 we read how the fire of God burned the burnt offering of Moses, and in 1 Kings. 18 we read that the fire of God once again burned the sacrifices of Elijah.

When it is said here that Elijah would be sent, it does not mean that Elijah would return physically, but someone with the stature of Elijah. His great task would be to bring about reconciliation. The relationship with God and with each other had to be restored. We only see in this once again God's great, great mercy over His people.

Elijah also gains meaning in the New Testament when John the Baptist becomes this Elijah figure who comes to prepare the way for Jesus.

When we come to the end of Malachi, he sums up his book in a few words: Hold fast to

the Torah, the teaching of God, and live according to what the Lord teaches you in this.

Furthermore, he wants to emphasize for the last time that the Day of the Lord is definitely coming, and no one will be able to stop it. Be ready for it. How do you do that? By sticking to what is taught in the Bible, and living it out. In today's terms, it is to believe in Jesus. It means a living relationship with Jesus. However, a relationship only works when you are actively living it.

But Malachi also wants to emphasize God's great grace. Someone like Elijah will be sent to bring about reconciliation.

Jesus has already come to bring about reconciliation. Today we need nothing and no one else. However, the question this morning is whether you have already said "Yes" to Jesus? Have you accepted all of God's great grace and allowed Jesus into your life?

Many people have already written to me

asking how to get to Jesus. Maybe you, dear reader, are one of them. Or maybe you are one who is too scared to ask the question. Today may be your last chance

Prayer:

Lord, this morning I want to praise You for Your great love and grace. But I also want to plead that You will open the hearts of those who are still searching.

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